



nirwn
Northern Ireland
Rural Women's Network

**Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network
(NIRWN)
Response to
Department of Agricultural and Rural
Development (DARD)
consultation on the proposed role of the
Rural Champion and enhancement of the
Rural Proofing process.**

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network's (NIRWN's) core aim is strengthening the voice for rural women at a regional level.
- 1.1.2 NIRWN believes that Government policymaking and implementation should not disadvantage people because of where they may live and work. That rural areas are often higher need areas because of isolation and the nature of the work that is undertaken. The rural population is pragmatic and does not expect to access all services locally but is increasingly concerned that the most basic of services, emergency response, primary care and maternity care may not be available locally.
- 1.1.3 We are pleased to be offered the opportunity to respond to the Department of Agricultural and Rural Development's (DARD's) consultation on the concept of a Rural Champion. The consultation presents an opportunity for policy makers to understand rural concerns and take positive steps towards honouring the Programme for Government commitment on the Rural Proofing process. Currently policy planners rarely take rural women's needs into consideration. The fact that 35%¹ of the Northern Ireland population live in rural areas; the importance of rural areas to our economy and society, together mean that the obstacles that exist for rural people, should be the concern of policymakers and wider society.
- 1.1.4 Government policy making and implementation should take into account the potential implications for people living and working in rural areas. Internationally, rural women are considered to be a marginalised population² Rural women face dual discrimination in terms of their gender and their locality. In many cases, policy planners lack information about the important role that rural women play.
- 1.1.5 It is necessary that rural women's multiple contributions to the family, to democracy and to development be acknowledged and properly valued. The undervaluing of rural women's contribution to development and their under-representation in decision-making have increased their marginalisation. NIRWN through its work strives to highlight the inequalities that rural women face. Through our policy function we respond to many consultation papers from Government Departments and agencies, but often this is late in the process: it would be more effective if the rural and gender dimension were built in at the policy design stage. Rural organisations generally feel isolated from broader policy exercises.

¹ Census 2001

² UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, Nov 2007

Policies need to be designed and implemented that would ensure access by rural residents to Government services of equivalent quality to that enjoyed by urban areas. Ensuring quality access to education, training, infrastructure, employment, communications, health, funding, research and development and other important tools, is a vital precondition for rural dwellers to meet their economic and social development needs.

- 1.1.6 NIRWN believes that to achieve such a level playing field, it is not necessary to sharply increase Government spending; instead, a re-education for Government departments is required to incorporate equivalence for rural Northern Ireland.
- 1.1.7 Membership to NIRWN is open to all people who are interested in issues effecting rural women.

2.0 Method

- 2.1.1 NIRWN consulted with an array of rural women, to gauge the key concerns and issues that exist in their local areas, and how they feel the Rural Champion roles will offer opportunities to eliminate the inequalities that exist. As part of our response we have sought the view points of over 135 rural women.
- 2.1.2 In seeking to obtain what the roles of the rural champion should cover, it is important, as part of our response to highlight the salient issues for rural women in Northern Ireland. In order to ascertain a set of priorities that will alleviate the concerns and issues raised, we have sought the concerns of rural women from a diverse range of rural locations. What is noteworthy is that the concerns raised in South Armagh, were similar to those raised in Mid Ulster and in the North West. In the next section we have outlined what the key concerns/barriers are, and then we examine the Rural Champion roles. What was evident from all of our consultation exercises was the agreement on the interdependence amongst the six roles.
- 2.1.3 In addition to this feedback, wider web based research was conducted. This submission highlights the key issues that exist for rural women in Northern Ireland, and how the Rural Champion concept could seek to address them.

3.0 Key issues for rural women

3.1 Health needs

- 3.1.1 Barriers to access in rural areas are both physical and socio-cultural barriers. Women with young children, older people, those with a low social class, farming families, ethnic minorities and the disabled are most likely to face barriers to access and suffer the consequences of distance decay.
- 3.1.2 Rural health care is not just a health service in a rural location but rather health care in a complex matrix of socio-cultural constructions that each requires separate consideration. Difficulty in accessing health services within a reasonable time impacts on a community socially. People feel insecure and question their tenure in a rural area. This leaves communities vulnerable and weakened which conflicts with DARD's vision of strong rural communities.
- 3.1.3 A gendered approach needs to recognise the diversity of women and men due to other factors such as class, race, culture, poverty, sexuality, ability, and the special needs of women and men in rural and remote areas. Women and men differ in their specific health care needs throughout their lifetime which needs to be reflected and planned for accordingly.³
- 3.1.4 Respite care is often located at some distance from a rural person's home and is inadequate for the needs of the family or family member requiring the respite care. It is often just a stop gap measure.
- 3.1.5 Social exclusion and association to mental health problems is a major concern. Social exclusion may lead to or exacerbate mental health problems and/or disability due to their geographical status. We would suggest this leaves rural women with mental health problems and/or learning disability even more vulnerable.
- 3.1.6 The fear of stigmatisation in small rural communities is also a barrier to accessing health services. This is particularly true for the elderly, young people and the farming community, and in particular with regard to mental health services.
- 3.1.7 Distance contributes to a lack of awareness of available services of all types including preventative healthcare.

³ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, (2008), United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Report, Belfast

- 3.1.8 Distance excludes carers and users to social network groups and support groups that can provide a lifeline to families. An example is: a rural woman living with her 23 year old son, who has a learning disability. The lack of public transport and because she is unable to drive means, accessing support networks 'is just not an option'.
- 3.1.9 Those who suffer from poor transport are often those most in need of accessing services: older people, young people, women (often young mothers) living in one-car households, people living on low incomes and those with physical or mental health problems.⁴. (Research has indicated that in households that have access to one car, the man usually has first choice).
- 3.1.10 One source of increasing diversity is the change in immigration patterns in response to employment opportunities in rural areas. Historically ethnic women tend to be more economically disadvantaged and have poorer health outcomes than corresponding local women.
- 3.1.11 Perinatal mental health services in rural areas. Women are more likely to have a major psychiatric disorder, be referred to a psychiatrist and be admitted to a psychiatric hospital following childbirth than at any other time⁵.

3.2 **Transport**

- 3.2.1 Three areas of research that have largely been ignored are: gender, rurality and transportation. The lives of rural women are affected directly and indirectly by their access to accessible transport. Transport is indeed an important linchpin. The absence of public transport in most rural areas makes the vast majority of rural dwellers dependent on cars.
- 3.2.2 Lack of access to bus services is more acute in rural areas than in urban areas, but it is a much more serious problem in Northern Ireland than in Great Britain; 42% of rural respondents in Northern Ireland said there were no bus services which could take them to local shops and services, compared to just 16% of rural respondents in Great Britain⁶. Those without cars or without easy access suffer from mobility poverty. This has a knock on affect in accessing childcare, education, health services,

⁴ MIND, (2008)

www.mind.org.uk/Information/Factsheets/Rural+issues+in+mental+health.htm#Rurality__health_and_wellbeing

⁵ The Royal College of Psychiatrists, (1992). Postnatal mental illness report of a working party, Council Report No: CR28

⁶ Fawcett, (2002) Northern Ireland Life and Time Survey Research Update, Queens University, Belfast

employment and issues around social exclusion for rural women. Women with disabilities, women with young families, older women and the problems associated with social exclusion is more prevalent for rural women. Also women's trips are more likely to relate to caring and family responsibilities, while men are more likely to travel for business and leisure.

- 3.2.3 All of these differences suggest that the ways in which public transport is provided has a differential impact on women, requiring consideration of the key issues affecting them and their potential impact in the policy-making process.

3.3 Childcare

- 3.3.1 There is a general acknowledgement that the lack of childcare provision is a major barrier to women accessing other key services, education, employment, health. Responsibility of childcare lies predominantly with women. Affordability and availability were cited as the main problems in relation to childcare for working parents in rural areas. As a result, relatives and friends play an important role in providing childcare. However for those families that do have access to families and friends, it places huge restrictions on rural women.

3.4 Education and development

- 3.4.1 Education is a key concern for rural women. A recent report on Women's Centres' Community Based Education⁷ highlighted a number of barriers to women in education:

- Childcare
- Care (Elder and Dependent care provision)
- Personal development
- Time and cost of classes
- Transport and location
- Negative experiences.

- 3.4.2 Community education in Northern Ireland provides accessible learning at a number of different and important levels. It is geographically accessible. It is financially accessible, often free at the point of entry.

- 3.4.3 Pre-training courses in personal development, confidence raising and basic skills allow women to discover their own strengths and abilities in a supportive environment before moving on to more vocationally-oriented

⁷ Women's Centres Regional Partnership (2008), Women's Centres' Community Based Education Report

training programmes. Such courses are often the genesis of networks of mutual support and practical action. NIRWN, The six Rural Women's Networks, The Rural Women's Centres and Rural Women's Groups have delivered accessible training to thousands of rural women to date. Courses include confidence building and accredited courses, leading to further opportunities in education, employment, and playing an active role in local communities, through sitting on decision making boards and committees. Feedback received from courses has been extremely positive. However the current arrangement of piece-meal funding threatens the future of community education and development courses, placing huge restraints on the rural women's infrastructure to continue its important work in this area.

3.5 Employment

- 3.5.1 The viability of taking up low-paid, low quality jobs when services such as transport and childcare are scarce and expensive, is an issue that depresses the possibilities of people in the most disadvantaged areas accessing employment. Quality employment opportunities are few and far between in many rural areas. Increasingly, only temporary or part-time jobs are available. Part-time jobs may suit some women, particularly those with young children, but in general there is a call for employment with better conditions and opportunities for rural women.
- 3.5.2 Farming women in agricultural. It is a fair assumption that gender is rarely taken into consideration in project designs and most planners, decision-makers and policy-makers within DARD have no background in gender planning. The lack of gender awareness and the absence of gender-disaggregated information have been identified as the main problems in recognising farming women's contribution to the agricultural sector. At first glance it may seem inappropriate to gender proof agricultural policy and services, given that they are concerned with animals, seeds and vegetables. However as Shortall (2001) rightly highlighted in Western Europe most farms are operated by farm families. It is in terms of the women and men involved in farming and living in rural areas that gender proofing becomes important⁸.
- 3.5.3 Given farming women's invisibility and their limited access to agricultural resources, it is not surprising to find that farm women are also disadvantaged compared with farm men in terms of their participation in the public sphere of agriculture. As far as the agricultural media is concerned the public face of farming is masculine. Women are seldom

⁸ Shortall, S and R Kelly (2001) Gender Proofing CAP Reforms Rural Community Network

represented in the farming press, and, if at all, typically in domestic roles or supportive positions.

3.6 Funding rural women's infrastructure

3.6.1 The six rural women's networks (Fermanagh, Mid-Ulster, Omagh, Newry & Mourne, Roe Valley, South Armagh) are membership based organisations established by local women to articulate the voice of rural women across different areas of Northern Ireland. Many of the networks have had to shift from being development organisation to project-based, due to the lack of available funding. This has had serious implications for the long term sustainability of the networks and their work in supporting and working with local women. The important work that rural women's groups and networks carry out needs to be reflected in a sustainable funding programme from Government. A funding programme, that mirrors the valuable work and services (often provided with little/no funding) of the women's groups/centres/networks, and the community/voluntary sector as a whole.

3.6.2 The services that are provided are often the first point of contact for women, particularly those facing discrimination, where they can find information, support and a signposting service. The supportive environment of a women's group/centre provides a forum for women in crisis to confide, share and receive support. Therefore investment in a long term sustainable approach for sustaining regional, sub regional and local rural women's infrastructure is required.

3.6.3 There were a number of problems for women's community groups in accessing funding opportunities. Some experienced trouble getting information they needed to identify funding opportunities; the funding criteria sometimes specified population levels that limited ability of rural areas to participate; process too lengthy, cumbersome and unclear; funding came with too many restrictions; difficult application process had to be repeated. It was felt that there was insufficient human resource and structural capacity to fundraise: Urban organisations have more: professional staff, systems and structures in place to facilitate fundraising; efforts made by rural voluntary organisational staff to manage perpetual funding crunch time are found to be extremely energy-consuming; few organisations used info technology to access info from the Government about funding opportunities, reflecting a potential structural barrier to financial capacity.

3.7 Social exclusion

3.7.1 This lack of visibility means social exclusion is in many ways harder to address. Those experiencing social exclusion in rural areas are often

dispersed and disguised amongst apparent affluence, rather than in concentrated areas as is more the norm in urban areas. This suggests that tackling social exclusion based on spatial areas is not sufficient in rural areas.

3.8 Lack of representation

- 3.8.1 Women's contribution to local and community development is significant, but rural women everywhere are in a minority in decision-making and planning, particularly at regional and national levels. This is in part due to women's multiple roles and workload, but is also due to the persistence of traditional views about women's and men's roles in society. The low level of participation by women in decision-making inevitably leads to biases in the priorities and policies pursued by development organisations. A balanced participation by women and men in decision-making is important for local democracy and for the quality of decisions taken on developments that affect the life and future of rural communities and economies.

3.9 Multi identities of rural women

- 3.9.1 Rural women are not a homogeneous group. They have different roles and occupations, on farms and in family businesses, in employment and in community activities. Their needs and interests differ too, particularly from one age group to another, and depending on the size and composition of their family and age of their children. The economic and social changes that rural areas are undergoing do not affect all women in the same way: offering opportunities to some, to others they bring difficult challenges.
- 3.9.2 Rural women straddle two sectors, gender and location. The added isolation, exclusion and discrimination of rural women who are lesbian, disabled, non-national, older, from the travelling community, face a number of inequalities. Elderly rural women's health care needs are a growing concern. A lesbian who lives in a rural context faces the same challenges of heterosexual rural women, however added to this are the challenges of stigma attached to their sexual orientation and isolation from their family and friends. This isolation can exacerbate the endemic loneliness of women and rural life, impacting on women's mental health.

4.0 Ease of access to services

- 4.1 Ease of access to services; shops, healthcare, schools, plays a big part in sustaining rural communities. But other social and community needs should not be forgotten: leisure activities, the internet and entertainment. These can help to maintain the rural population and attract back young

people and families, as well as providing opportunities for generating income and employment.

- 4.1.1 Rural post offices. The general feedback we have received is that rural Post Offices are a lifeline, providing far more than just a postal service. Many rural women, especially pensioners use their Post Office as a 'one-stop shop' to access their pension and benefits, pay their bills, get advice and information, and meet and socialise with others. We are concerned that the number of closures, and potential of further closures leave many people increasingly financially and socially excluded.

4.2 Crime and policing

- 4.2.1 Domestic and sexual violence. The social exclusion that rural women face, often inhibits them to seek the resources and help needed. Women who live in rural, often remote communities face additional difficulties when confronted with acts of sexual and domestic violence. Problems are exacerbated by rural factors; poverty, lack of public transportation systems, shortages of health care providers and decreased access to many resources such as advanced education, job opportunities and adequate childcare all make it more difficult for rural women to escape abusive relationships. Only in rural communities do these preconditions exist in total. All of them need to be considered if the Northern Ireland Government departments are to be more responsive to the needs of rural women.

- 4.2.2 While popular constructions of rural as friendly, safe and largely crime free endure, there was a recognition amongst rural women of the growing problems surrounding personal safety, especially for the older generation of rural dwellers. Resource and capacity constraints of the police compounded with geographic isolation and a lack of infrastructure were cited as the top concerns of rural dwellers. The fear of crime amongst rural older people was also a key factor. The relationship between social exclusion and the fear of crime were recognised as mutually reinforcing. This demonstrates the importance of opportunities to social networks and links within rural communities.

4.3 Housing

- 4.3.1 Rising demand for rural housing and current constraints (due to current planner policies), within the context where the costs of housing provision are relatively high, have raised the cost of access to housing markets, presenting particular problems for local people on lower incomes.

4.4 Fuel poverty

- 4.4.1 Defined as when the individual household has to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel to heat the home is coming more into focus as a result of the rapidly and continual increase in fuel costs including oil, coal and gas. This fairly recent development has increased the possibility and indeed the probability that families living in rural areas will soon be or perhaps are at the present minute making a life-style choice of “eating or heating.”
- 4.4.2 Rural areas also do not have the same options in terms of choosing their preferred and most economical heating method for heating their homes and businesses. Most rural areas are reliant on oil.
- 4.4.3 It should be recognised that the definition of fuel poverty does not include the higher fuel costs, that have to be met by people in rural communities. Rural dwellers need fuel to access work and/or services, or where fuel is a key element to allow their work to continue, ie within the farming community. The cost of cutting an acre of ground for winter fodder now costs over £90 and the cost of grain and feeds nearly doubled in the last year and continues to rise⁹. Electricity costs in Northern Ireland may rise by as much as 30% this year.¹⁰

⁹ South Antrim Rural Network (2008) Can you afford to be rural? conference

¹⁰BBC NI (2008) http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7364976.stm

5.0 General comments

5.1 Rural definition

The consultation does not consider what constitutes rural, but outlines that this will be an important aspect of the Rural White Paper. Accessible rural areas and remote rural areas need to be considered and understood across all Government departments. We look forward to contributing to the Rural White Paper, as we anticipate that it will be the most significant public assessment of rural policy in Northern Ireland.

5.2 Ownership and responsibility

We agree that the Rural Champion roles cannot belong to one person, organisation or Government department. A collective responsibility is required involving Government departments, local councils, rural stakeholders, the business sector, community and voluntary sector and rural dwellers is required. However within this broader picture, an active leadership role is required to ensure a sustainable vision for rural Northern Ireland.

5.3 Review of Public Administration

With the introduction of community planning to council structures, the issues of rural proofing needs to be considered at a regional, sub-regional and local Government level. We anticipate with local council structures receiving more powers, that responsibility for delivery should be directed downward, to a level where policy and funding can be joined together to take account of local circumstances. Bringing decision-making closer to those it affects.

6.0 The Rural Champion roles

6.1 Rural Advocate

- 6.1.1 An Advocate by definition is one that speaks on behalf of another. Therefore in order to carry out such a role, it is very much linked to the other roles outlined; Listener and Advisory roles particularly.
- 6.1.2 Part of our consultation discussion revolved around whom or what should carry out such a function. It was agreed that the role could not be carried out by an individual. The current consultation exists because the Government departments do not have a comprehensive understanding of rural needs. Rural advocacy is needed across a wide spectrum of Government departments and officials.
- 6.1.3 We agree with the three tier system of regional, local and community level advocates. The linkage amongst the three tier system needs closer examination, to ensure that at the heart of the process is a "bottom up" approach to advocacy. It is, therefore, central to this debate about the key components of a sustainable rural community, that we acknowledge the critical role of the private and voluntary sectors. Without them in the mix, the community might simply wither on the vine.
- 6.1.4 In terms of the Interdepartmental Committee for Rural Policy further information is sought on the detail and functions of the Committee. It is our understanding that the Committee have already met. What is the Terms of Reference for the Committee?
- 6.1.5 We would welcome further discussion on how DARD proposes to increase linkages. NIRWN strongly believes that a "bottom up" approach is a considerably more appropriate strategy than one which is "top down". The issues on the ground, have to be reflected in the policies at the top. It will only be through a partnership approach that a rural renaissance can be achieved. However this raises questions of accountability and responsibility.
- 6.1.6 Accountability and responsibility need to be factored into such a structure, to provide a clear picture of who does what. Otherwise it is at risk of becoming a blurred process, with a wide range of rural stakeholders and Government departments, responsible for regional policy making and delivery. Responsibilities may become indistinct, with democratic input and accountability lost in the complex process.

6.2 Rural Watchdog/Mainstreamer

- 6.2.1 There already exists a glossy guide for Government departments that outlines the needs and processes of rural proofing, produced by DARD. Broadening the scope of rural circumstances into policy amongst Government departments is the essential component of rural proofing. There is recognition that the rural proofing process is not being effectively implemented. This raises a number of fundamental questions. Is it due to the presence of bureaucratic and departmental boundaries? Is it the different cultures, aims and incentives of Government departments? Or a combination of both? We would anticipate that the Rural White Paper would examine the underlying questions as to why this process has not worked in more detail.
- 6.2.2 In terms of who or what should carry out this function, the consensus reached from our consultations was that the role of Watchdog, needs to be independent of Government. That rural proofing should become a statutory function which is monitored and audited by an external appointment, who had powers to name and shame. It is time that detailed rural impact assessments of all policies in the same that section 75 impact assessments are carried out was legislated. This will ensure that rural issues are addressed more robustly and equitably through realistic, non-idealistically driven policies and legislation that are appropriately funded and are able to be implemented in such a way that all targets are achievable.
- 6.2.3 We believe that the Interdepartmental Committee at Government level should be a strong influencer and guide. However in terms of monitoring and auditing policies, this function should sit outside of Government. We would envision that the role to champion regional rural issues would be a key function of the Interdepartmental Committee.
- 6.2.4 Given the intricacy of rural issues and the complexity of ensuring a bottom up approach to ensure effective policy design and delivery, we would advocate the need to develop the three-tier system, to ensure that a collection of views input to the highest level.
- 6.2.5 Also the term 'rural proofing' needs closer examination. Rural Northern Ireland is not a homogenous area. A 'one size fits all' approach does not work for rural areas, this is illustrated in a number of Government policies namely PPS 14. With the devolvement of powers to local councils through RPA we would envision that local councils would be in a position to have a clearer picture of rural circumstances and needs.

6.2.6 NIRWN would also advocate for the need to gender proof policies also, there are many distinguishes between men and women, and these should also be proofed as part of the process. There are many economic, democratic and social differentials, identified in section three, unique to rural women, which need consideration as part of policy design stage.

6.3 Rural Listener

6.3.1 The role of Listener is very much about building community development in rural with emphases on strengthening relationships and working together. NIRWN very much advocates this approach, the most effective community development in the future will result from cooperation, sharing and building alliances.

6.3.2 There is an obvious interdependence amongst all of the roles outlined. The listener role as outlined has a number of key functions, to find out what the concerns are, to build necessary relationships and to feedback actions taken. This is very much linked to the bottom-up approach discussed earlier. We would welcome further discussion on the revitalization of The Rural Stakeholder Forum. It is valuable for Government departments and policy planners to have access to individuals and organisations with specific rural expertise. However the obvious question arises in relation to why this Forum fell to the wayside in the first place. What will be different?

6.3.3 It is important that a Rural Stakeholder Forum is representative of all of the key rural sectors, including, women, young people, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and those working within the community and voluntary sectors.

6.4 Rural Advisor

6.4.1 We feel that this role should sit within DARD. There is a wealth of good practice and research available, collecting it into a central evidence hub is essential, through a process of asset mapping. Evidence and research should explore how policies on the economy, health, transport, education, housing, crime, agriculture, energy efficiency and planning will support sustainable rural communities in the future. Suggested areas of research include:

- Exploring the linkages between economic failure and social exclusion, and the consequent need to target resources on those areas and people with the greatest needs

- Emphasising the importance of the countryside as an economic asset, and the links between attractive, high-quality rural areas and successful economic activity.

6.4.2 Historically DARD as well as other Government departments have not considered women in policy formulation. The issue of visibility, access to agricultural resources, and involvement in decision making needs to be key in future policy design and delivery. NIRWN would envision a key role in identifying areas of research pertinent to rural women relevant to all Government departments.

6.5 Rural Initiator

6.5.1 An important aspect of this consultation is that the end result delivers actions on the ground. To enable rural dwellers and communities to realise that their concerns and issues have been listened to and acted upon. A clear line of responsibility and accountability is needed to ensure that responsibility is not deflected. Deciding who the Co-ordination role should fall to in order to ensure that issues and concerns are not missed, needs further examination. We have highlighted the key concerns brought to NIRWN as part our response. NIRWN has a key role to play in highlighting gaps and needs to key Government departments.

6.5.2 A good practice model is the Rural Childcare Forum, progressive work in this area and in particular the work on developing a Rural Childcare Strategy provides a good model on how to best deal with specific rural issues.

6.6 Rural Exemplar

6.6.1 DARD through this consultation has started a very important discussion on how to best champion both rural needs and benefits. We very much agree that this is a collective responsibility of all Government departments, Local Councils, Rural Organisations, Community and Voluntary groups, Local Action Groups, and rural dwellers. We all have a role to play. There already exists some good practice on the ground, a key function in the future will be parading good practice models. In terms of gathering evidence through the Initiator role, and through the Forum of a Rural Stakeholder Forum, are two potential examples of how we could best share and demonstrate good practice.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 The Rural Champion consultation must place a strong emphasis on developing strong partnerships between public, private and voluntary sector bodies. Clarity and accountability amongst the key stakeholders is required. For rural areas, recognition is needed that such partnerships are vital, and that they take time and resources to develop effectively. Long term sustainability needs to be factored into partnerships and (where possible) funding decisions.
- 7.2 We would welcome information relating to the resources allocated and timeframes for the fulfilment of the rural champion roles.
- 7.3 NIRWN advocates the need to take this opportunity to consider the issue of gender equality as part of this rural champion process. We do not expect specific policies related to gender but rather a strategy that includes the rural and gender dimension in the design and delivery of policies. We would envision that DARD in partnership with NIRWN would lead in championing to address rural women's inequalities through advocating to Government departments their responsibilities to its international commitments under the Beijing Platform for Action¹¹ and the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)¹².

¹¹ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action www.un.org/womenwatch/daw.

¹² UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations>

8.0 Summary of recommendations and points for clarification

- 8.1 A three tier system of regional, local and community level advocates is required. The linkage amongst the three tier system needs closer examination, to ensure that at the heart of the process is a “bottom up” approach to advocacy. It is, therefore, central to this debate about the key components of a sustainable rural community that we acknowledge the critical role of the private and voluntary sectors. Without them in the mix, the community might simply wither on the vine. Accountability and responsibility need to be factored into such a structure, to provide a clear picture of who does what.
- 8.1.1 It is necessary that rural women's multiple contributions to the family, to democracy and to development be acknowledged and properly valued. The undervaluing of rural women's contribution to development and their under-representation in decision-making have increased their marginalization. There are many economic, democratic and social differentials identified in section one, unique to rural women, which need consideration as part of policy design stage. Therefore we advocate the need to gender-proof policies.
- 8.1.2 In terms of the Interdepartmental Committee for Rural Policy further information is sought on the detail and functions of the Committee. It is our understanding that the Committee have already met. What is the current Terms of Reference for the Committee?
- 8.1.3 There is recognition that the rural proofing process is not being effectively implemented. This raises a number of fundamental questions. Is it due to the presence of bureaucratic and departmental boundaries? Is it the different cultures, aims and incentives of Government departments? Or a combination of both?
- 8.1.4 Rural proofing should become a statutory function which is monitored and audited by an external appointment, who has powers to name and shame. It is time that detailed rural impact assessments of all policies was legislated in the same way that section 75 impact assessments are carried out.
- 8.1.5 The process of monitoring and auditing the rural proofing process is carried out independent of Government.
- 8.1.6 The Interdepartmental Committee at Government level should be a strong influencer and guide in the rural proofing process. We would envision that the role to champion regional rural issues would be a key function of the Interdepartmental Committee.

- 8.1.7 We would welcome further discussion on the revitalisation of The Rural Stakeholder Forum. It is valuable for Government departments and policy planners to have access to individuals and organisations with specific rural expertise. However the obvious question arises in relation to why this Forum fell to the wayside in the first place. What will be different?
- 8.1.8 The Advisor role should sit within DARD.
- 8.1.9 A clear line of responsibility and accountability is needed to ensure that responsibility is not deflected. Also in terms of deciding who the Co-ordination role should fall to, in order to ensure that issues and concerns are not missed, needs further examination.
- 8.1.10 We would welcome information relating to the resources allocated and timeframes for the fulfilment of the rural champion roles.