

Rural Regeneration through Universal and Equitable Public Service Delivery



Report on the “Rural Renewal Pilot Programme: An Integrated Approach to the Provision of Public Services in Areas of Declining Population”

2001



**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
FOOD & RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Report on the “Rural Renewal Pilot Programme: An Integrated Approach to the Provision of Public Services in Areas of Declining Population”

by

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Each pilot project has published a report. Contacts can be made through the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, the author or with the leaders in each project area.

Réamhrá

D'ainneoin rath a bheith ar gheilleagar na hÉireann le blianta beaga anuas níl an tairbhe chéanna bainte amach ag gach cuid den daonra. Tá codanna den daonra i gcoitinne eisithe ó thairbhí eacnamaíochta agus sóisialta. Le blianta beaga anuas, táthar ag dul i ngleic le heisiámh sóisialta agus tá iarrachtaí a ndéanamh bochtaine a laghdú agus is rudaí iad sin a bhfuil fáilte rompu. Chuaigh na moltaí a bhí ann i dtuarascálacha éagsúla ar na cúiseanna le bochtaine i gcion go mór ar ullmhú Chomhpháirtíocht 2000 (1996) sa mhéid go luaitear i gcaibidil 4, lch.17, den doiciméad sin gurb é an bunchuspóir a ghabhann le straitéis chuimsitheachta sóisialta ná a chinntiú go ndéantar tairbhí an fhoráis eacnamaíochta, agus feabhsúcháin shóisialta ghaolmhara, a roinnt ar gach cuid de dhaonra na hÉireann.

I dtuarascálacha éagsúla uathu, tá béim leagtha ag NESC, ag NESF, ag an Roinn Comhshaoil agus Rialtais Áitiúil, ag an Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Forbartha Tuaithe, ag Roinn an Taoisigh, ag *Area Development Management Ltd.* agus ag an nGníomhaireacht do Chomhrac na Bochtaine ar an tábhacht a ghabhann leis na seirbhísí a sholáthraíonn an tseirbhís phoiblí i dtéarmaí chaighdeán na beatha atá ag daoine i gceantair thuaithe. Leagtar béim freisin sna tuarascálacha sin ar an tábhacht a ghabhann le rochtain chothrom ar sheirbhísí poiblí le linn aghaidh a thabhairt ar eisiámh sóisialta. I gcoitinne, táthar ar aon intinn sna tuarascálacha sin maidir leis na nithe seo a leanas:

- Tá rochtain choibhneasta ar sheirbhísí poiblí i gceantair thuaithe ag dul i laghad.
- Is fadhb ar leith í, i gcás daoine faoi mhíbhuntáiste agus daoine imeallaithe, easpa rochtana ar sheirbhísí poiblí.
- Ní mór beart a ghlacadh chun an treocht i dtreo rochtana laghdaithe ar sheirbhísí poiblí a chur ar gcúl.
- Ceann de na rudaí is suntasaí is cúis le míbhuntáiste agus imeallú is ea rochtain neamhdhóthanach ar sheirbhísí poiblí.

Sa Straitéis Náisiúnta Frithbhochtaine (NAPS) sainithníodh dul i ngleic le bochtaine thuaithe mar cheann amháin de chúig théama thábhachtacha. Tá béim láidir in NAPS ar dhul i ngleic le bochtaine trí chomhpháirtíocht leis an earnáil phobail agus leis na comhpháirtithe sóisialta. Tá sé ráite i dtuarascálacha éagsúla, mar atá luaite thuas, go bhfuil soláthar seirbhísí poiblí riachtanach i dtaca le laghdú a dhéanamh ar imeallú agus i dtaca le forbairt áitiúil. Tá sé ráite freisin go bhfuil comhtháthú seirbhísí riachtanach i dtaca le rochtain chothrom, inchothaithe agus uilechoiteann a bheith ar fáil ar sheirbhísí poiblí.

Ar an drochuair, d'ainneoin na tráchtairachta leanúnaí ar mhíbhuntáiste tuaithe, tá laghdú ag teacht i gcónaí ar an daonra i gceantair thuaithe, tá méadú tagtha ar chóimheasa spleáchais agus tá na brúnna ar inmharthanacht earnálacha táirgthe phríomha an gheilleagair tuaithe ag méadú i gcónaí. Is léir, sa mhéid a bhaineann le stop a chur le himirce ó phobail tuaithe, nár leor tionscnaimh náisiúnta maidir le forbairt dhúchasach tionscail agus seirbhíse, tacaíocht do nualaíocht tuaithe ná polasaithe chun pobail tuaithe a fhorbairt.

In "New Approaches to Rural Development" (NESC, 1994), tugadh suntas don ghéarchéim a bhí ann maidir le scaipeadh an daonra agus maidir le titim i gcumas saothraithe airgid ceantar tuaithe. De réir ceann amháin de chonclúidí na tuarascála sin, tá dúshlán ann d'inmharthanacht an tsoláthair seirbhísí poiblí do cheantair thuaithe a bhfuil an daonra ag titim iontu agus is dúshlán thromchúiseacha mhéadaitheacha iad.

Cé go bhfuil réimse doiciméad ann, tá ganntanas sonraí eimpíreacha ann maidir le riachtanais seirbhíse poiblí na n-áitritheoirí i gceantair thuaithe. Is ó shuirbhéanna áitiúla, ó iniúchtaí ceantair agus ó thaighde coimisiúnaithe a thagann na sonraí atá ar fáil. Aon bhearta a tionscnaíodh go dtí seo, is é atá iontu ná tionscadaíl phíolóta maidir le hionaid ilseirbhíse, tionscnaimh phobail atá dírithe ar dhaoine faoin tuath atá faoi mhíbhuntáiste nó imeallaithe, agus tionscadaíl trína mbaintear triail as úsáid na teicneolaíochta eolais a mhéadú. Tá toradh na dtionscadail píolóta sin luachmhar mar go gcuirtear leis an méid eolais atá ar fáil ar riachtanais na tuaithe agus ar mhúnlaí chun déileáil leis na riachtanais sin. Ach níl aon bheart comhleanúnach nó comhtháite polasaí ann fós chun déileáil leis an ngá atá ann seirbhísí poiblí a sholáthar ar shlí inchothaithe do phobail tuaithe agus ar bhonn cothrom, mar cheart de chuid an tsaoirnáigh i dtír dhaonlathach a bhfuil meas aici ar a muintir.

Go nuige seo, níl aon ghníomhaireacht, roinn nó eagraíocht ag glacadh ról ceannais i dtaca le múnla a cheapadh chun dul i ngleic le bochtaine agus míbhuntáiste tuaithe ar múnla é ina mbeadh tábhacht lárnach ag gabháil le soláthar seirbhísí poiblí. Táthar ag súil go dtabharfar aghaidh ar an bhfadhb seo trí phróiseas ullmhaithe agus foilsithe doiciméad polasaí ar Fhorbairt Tuaithe, ar Athchóiriú Rialtais Áitiúil, ar Aosoideachas agus ar pháirteachas na hearnála deonáí.

Is í an cheist is tábhachtaí i dtaca le soláthar seirbhísí poiblí i gceantair thuaithe ná: *an gcuireann rochtain neamhdhóthanach ar sheirbhísí poiblí le míbhuntáiste agus le himeallú? De réir na litríochta atá ann, is é cuireann freagra na ceiste sin. Dá bhrí sin, is í an chéad cheist eile ná: conas is féidir míbhuntáiste agus imeallú a laghdú? Ceann de na bearta nach mór a ghlacadh ná a chinntiú go bhfuil níos mó rochtana ar fáil ar sheirbhísí poiblí. Dá bhrí sin, is í an cheist atá ann anois ná: conas is féidir a chinntiú go bhfuil níos mó rochtana ar fáil, i slí inchothaithe, ar sheirbhísí poiblí?*

Is fadhb dheacair í a chinntiú go mbeidh soláthar sorochtana seirbhísí poiblí ar fáil ag gach duine. Tá srianta ann ar thaobh an éilimh de agus ar thaobh an tsoláthair de.

| Srianta Éilimh | Srianta Soláthair |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easpa eolais • Castacht na dteideal agus maorlathas • Mearbhall • Mianta neamhréadúla • Áiteanna ina bhfuil dian-mhíbhuntáiste agus dian-imeallú • Leithlisiú fisiciúil • Bochtaine • Easpa eolais ar ról seirbhísí poiblí i dtaca le caighdeán na beatha | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bealaí traidisiúnta chun seirbhísí a sholáthar • Eagrúchán cliarlathach agus córais ón mbarr anuas • Polasaí neamhdhóthanach • Easpa greasachta chun sársheirbhís a sholáthar • Srianta airgeadais • Easpa comhordaithe agus comhtháthaithe |

Le linn iarracht a dhéanamh múnla a fhorbairt chun seirbhísí poiblí a sholáthar ar shlí inchothaithe, tá aghaidh á tabhairt againn ar chóras stáit an-dochocht a forbraíodh thar

thréimhse fhada laistigh de chomhthéacs áirithe. Ina theannta sin, tá aghaidh á tabhairt againn ar dhaonra a bhfuil athrú bunúsach tagtha ar a gcuid mianta laistigh d'achar ama a-ghéarr ach ar daonra é a bhfuil dearcadh traidisiúnta ann fós ar ghníomhaireachtaí stáit agus ar sheirbhísí poiblí.

Is tasc an-dúshlánach é múnla a mholadh a thabharfaidh aghaidh ar na srianta thuas go léir agus a chumasóidh soláthar seirbhísí poiblí níos éifeachtaí laistigh de chomhthéacs ina bhfuil meas ar oilteacht, ar thaithí, ar riachtanais agus ar shriantachtaí na bpáirtithe go léir. Ina theannta sin, tá sé i bhfad níos deacra múnla a mholadh a éascaíonn comhtháthú na seirbhísí poiblí go léir i bpacáistí seirbhíse sorochtana agus a chumasaíonn rochtain chothrom uilechoiteann.

Sa tuarascáil seo, tugtar le fios go bhfuil taithí leordhóthanach ag soláthróirí seirbhísí láithreacha, go bhfuil forbairt leordhóthanach déanta ar struchtúir tacaíochta áitiúla, go bhfuil cumas leordhóthanach ann i measc na gcomhpháirtithe sóisialta i gcomhpháirtíochtaí forbartha áitiúla, agus go bhfuil muintir na hÉireann sách aibí chun gur féidir múnla cost-éifeachtach, nuálaíoch, inchothaithe a chur i bhfeidhm trína mbeidh seirbhísí poiblí sorochtana ar fáil go huilechoiteann ar bhonn cothrom. Is tráthúil an t-am é, nuair atá straitéisí forbartha contae á bhforbairt agus nuair atá comhtháthú na seirbhísí go léir ar siúl, chun an múnla seo a chur i bhfeidhm.

Sa tuarascáil seo, baintear leas as taithí a fuarthas le linn an tionscadail píolóta sin chun múnla a mholadh trínár féidir, ar mhodh comhpháirtíochta, a chumasú seirbhísí poiblí comhtháite a sholáthar ar shlí níos éifeachtaí. Tá mian aibí ann, ag an leibhéal pearsanta, ag an leibhéal pobail, ag an leibhéal gníomhaireachta agus ag an leibhéal oifigiúil an mionas a bhaint de sheirbhísí poiblí agus úsáid seirbhísí poiblí a spreagadh mar chéim bhunúsach i dtaca le forbairt phearsanta agus forbairt áitiúil. Is é an rud is tábhachtaí ná go bhfuil gá le hardleibhéal ceannaireachta polaitíochta agus ceannaireachta oifigiúla chun an tuarascáil seo, agus an réimse litríochta comhlántaí eile, a thiontú ina mbeart. Thairis sin, leanfar den tráchttaireacht gan ghealltanas trí thuarascálacha a fhoilsiú agus trí mhicrithionscadail pháilóta a thionscnamh.

Introduction

While the Irish economy has prospered in recent years all sections of the population have not gained equally. Some sections of the general population are excluded from economic and social benefits. There is a welcome emphasis in recent years in tackling social exclusion and the alleviation of poverty. The recommendations of various reports on the causes of poverty have significantly influenced the Partnership 2000 document, 1996, to state in chapter 4, p.17 that “the primary objective of a social inclusion strategy is to ensure that the benefits of economic growth and related social improvements are shared by all sections of the Irish population.”

In various reports the NESC, NESF, Department of Environment and Local Government, Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Department of the Taoiseach, Area Development Management Ltd. and the Combat Poverty Agency have highlighted the importance of public service delivery to the quality of life of people in rural areas. These reports also highlight the importance of equitable access to public services in addressing social exclusion. In general all these reports agree that:

- Relative access to public service in rural areas is in decline.
- Lack of access to public services is a particular issue for the disadvantaged and marginalised.
- Action must be undertaken to redress the trend towards reduced public service access.
- One of the significant contributing factors to disadvantage and marginalisation is inadequate access to public services.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) identified tackling rural poverty as one of its five key themes. There is a strong emphasis in the NAPS on tackling poverty through partnership with the community sector and social partners. Various reports, as noted above, have argued that public service provision is essential to the reduction of marginalisation and to local development. It is also noted that the integration of services is essential for equitable, sustainable and universal access to public services.

Unfortunately in spite of the ongoing commentary on rural disadvantage, populations in rural areas have continued to decline, dependency ratios have increased and the pressures on the viability of primary production sections of the rural economy have continued to grow. National initiatives for indigenous industrial and service development, support to rural innovation and policies to develop rural communities have proved inadequate to stem the tide of emigration from rural communities.

“New Approaches to Rural Development” (NESC, 1994) highlighted the crisis of population distribution and decline in income earning capacity of rural areas. One of the conclusions of this report is that there are increasingly serious challenges to the viability of public service delivery to rural areas with declining populations.

While there is a wide range of documentation, there is a dearth of empirical data relating to public service needs of the inhabitants of rural areas. The data that is available comes from local surveys, area audits and commissioned research. Any responses initiated up to this point are pilot projects for one stop shops, community initiatives targeting the rural disadvantaged and marginalised, and projects to explore greater use of information technology. The outcome of these pilot projects is valuable as it does contribute more to the

knowledge base of rural needs and models of response. However, there is still no coherent or integrated policy response to the need for sustainable public service delivery to rural communities on an equitable basis as a citizen's right in a democratic country that values its people.

Up to now, no agency, department or organisation is taking the lead in devising a model to tackle rural poverty and disadvantage of which integrated public service delivery is an essential component. It is hoped that the process of preparing and publishing policy documents on Rural Development, Reform of Local Government, Adult Education, and Voluntary sector involvement will address this issue.

The key question in public service delivery to rural areas is: *does inadequate access to public services contribute to disadvantage and marginalisation?* The literature basically says yes. Therefore the next question is: *how can disadvantage and marginalisation be reduced?* One of the responses has to be to make public services more accessible. Therefore the question now is: *how can public services be made more accessible in a sustainable way?*

The accessible provision of public services to all people is a difficult problem. There are constraints from the demand side and from the supply side.

Demand and Supply Constraints to the Accessible Provision of Public Services

| Demand Constraints | Supply Constraints |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information • Complexity of entitlements and bureaucracy • Confusion • Unrealistic expectations • Pockets of severe disadvantage and marginalisation • Physical isolation • Poverty • Lack of awareness of the role of public service to quality of life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional ways of delivering services • Hierarchical organisation and top down systems • Inadequate policy • Lack of incentive to provide excellent service • Financial constraints • Lack of co-ordination and integration |

In attempting to develop a model for sustainable public service delivery we are addressing a very entrenched state system that has evolved over a long period of time within a particular context. We are also addressing a population whose expectations have changed radically over a relatively short period of time but which still has a traditional view of state agencies and public services.

It is a very challenging task to propose a model that will address all of the above constraints and enable the more effective delivery of public services within a context that respects the expertise, experience, needs and limitations of all involved. Further, proposing a model that facilitates the integration of all public services into accessible service packages and enables equitable and universal access is significantly more difficult.

This report suggests that there is adequate experience of existing service providers, adequate development of local support structures, adequate capacity among social partners in local development partnerships, and adequate maturity among people of Ireland to put in place a cost effective, innovative and sustainable model for universally accessible public services on an equitable basis. It is now very opportune, with the development of county development strategies and the integration of all services, to put this model into practice.

This report draws on the experience of this pilot project to propose a model that can, through partnership, enable more effective delivery of integrated public services. There is a mature desire at personal, community, agency and official level to demystify and promote uptake of public services as a basic step in personal and local development. Most importantly, a high level of political and official leadership is required to turn this report, and the range of other complementary literature, into action. Otherwise non-committal commentary through published reports and the piloting of micro projects will continue.

Achoimre ar an Tionscadal

Tá crosbhóthar sroichte i dtaca le hinmharthanacht cuid mhór ceantar tuaithe. De réir mar a bhí nuachóiriú á dhéanamh in Éirinn, d'fhág níos mó daoine ceantair thuaithe chun caighdeán níos fearr beatha a bhaint amach, is é sin le rá caighdeán níos fearr a ceapadh a bhí ann in áiteanna eile. Tá brúnna móra airgeadais ar fheirmeoireacht thraidisiúnta agus tá laghdú chomh mór sin tagtha ar a lán pobal tuaithe go bhfuil amhras ann faoina n-inmharthanacht mar phobail inchothaithe. I gcomhthráth leis sin, tá brú tagtha ar sheirbhísí stáit aghaidh a thabhairt ar riachtanais mhéadaitheacha in ionaid uirbeacha agus an tseirbhís is cost-éifeachtaí is féidir a chur ar fáil. Dá thoradh sin, mothaíonn pobail tuaithe go bhfuil laghdú tagtha ar an leibhéal rochtana atá acu ar sheirbhísí poiblí.

Sainaithníodh na nithe seo a leanas i roinnt foilseachán: na leibhéil leanúnacha bochtaine i bpobail tuaithe, meathlú pobal tuaithe agus cóimheasa méadaitheacha spleáchais i ngrúpaí áirithe tuaithe. I gcás a lán tuarascálacha sainaithníodh iontu go bhfuil rochtain neamhdhóthanach ar sheirbhísí poiblí ina ghné de bhochtaine leanúnach i bpobail tuaithe. Os a choinne sin, deirtear go bhféadfadh rochtain níos fearr ar sheirbhísí poiblí a bheith ina chabhair i dtaca le hathghiniúint tuaithe.

Tríd an tionscadal píolóta seo dar teideal “Clár Píolóta Athnuachana Tuaithe: Cur Chuige Comhtháite maidir le Soláthar Seirbhísí Poiblí i gCeantair ina bhfuil an Daonra ag Titim”, déantar iarracht scrúdú a dhéanamh ar mhúnla trína soláthraítear seirbhísí poiblí go héifeachtach do phobail tuaithe agus go háirithe dóibh sin ina bhfuil an daonra ag titim. Cuireadh an tionscadal i bhfeidhm idir na blianta 1996 agus 1999 trí leas a bhaint as sé cinn de thionscnaimh píolóta ina ndearnadh iarracht feabhas a chur ar sholáthar seirbhísí poiblí. Tá na nithe a foghlaimíodh ó na tionscadaí le léir cosúil lena chéile:

- Tá féidearthachtaí suntasacha ann maidir le comhtháthú a dhéanamh i leith eolas a sholáthar, ábhair a chur ar aghaidh agus roinnt gnéithe de sholáthar seirbhísí poiblí.
- Is ceart an taithí dhearfach ar chomhpháirtíocht idir an stát, an pobal agus na comhpháirtithe sóisialta, i dtaca le forbairt áitiúil, a leathnú chuig soláthar seirbhísí poiblí.
- Cuireann teicneolaíocht eolais a bhfuil tréithe daonna ag gabháil léi féidearthachtaí spreagúla ar fáil maidir le feabhas a chur ar rochtain ar sheirbhísí poiblí.
- Ní mór do phobail tuaithe cúnaimh a bheith acu ó oibríthe pobail tuaithe i dtaca le seirbhísí a chur chun cinn go gníomhaíoch agus chun caighdeán feabhsaithe beatha a chur chun cinn trí thionscadaí shaindirithe agus trí thionscnaimh forbartha áitiúla.
- I gcás próiseas comhpháirtíochta a bheith ann i dtaca le seirbhísí poiblí comhtháite ag leibhéal an phobail tuaithe, ní mór próiseas comhchosúil a bheith ann freisin i dtaca le comhordú idir-roinne ag an leibhéal náisiúnta.
- Ní mór do phobail tuaithe polasaí forbartha tuaithe an-chinnta a bheith acu ar polasaí é a thabharfaidh cóireáil chomhionann dóibh agus a spreagfaidh athghiniúint thorthúil ceantar tuaithe.
- Trí fheabhas a chur ar sholáthar seirbhísí poiblí is féidir dúshraith mhaith a leagan síos do phróiseas inchothaithe athghiniúna tuaithe.

Nuair a bhíonn rochtain níos mó le fáil ar sheirbhísí poiblí is amhlaidh a thagann feabhas ar chaighdeán na beatha i gcás sprioc-ghrúpaí áirithe, go háirithe daoine scothaosta agus daoine nach mbíonn in ann a dtithe a fhágáil, trí sheirbhísí poiblí riachtanacha a thabhairt

fad leo ar shlite nuálaíocha agus le tacaíocht ón bpobal. Go hindíreach, nuair a dhírítear ar sheirbhísí poiblí feabhsaithe tugtar spreagadh nua do mhuintir pobal tuaithe, tógtar comhpháirtíocht le gníomhaireachtaí poiblí agus cuirtear deiseanna ar fáil i gcomhair tionscnamh nuálaíoch i bpobail tuaithe. Má dhírítear ar sholáthar seirbhísí poiblí tugtar spreagadh freisin maidir le níos mó seirbhísí pobail agus seirbhísí príobháideacha a sholáthar do phobail tuaithe.

Ag éirí as an athbhreithniú ar thionscnaimh an tionscadail pólóta tá múnla ag teacht chun cinn maidir le comhtháthú agus comhordú feabhsaithe i dtaca le soláthar seirbhísí poiblí tuaithe. Léiríonn an múnla sin an gá le comhairliúchán, páirteachas, comhpháirtíocht le linn soláthair agus comhagallamh leanúnach ag gach leibhéal d'fhonn forbairt a dhéanamh ar sholáthar seirbhísí mar chuid de struchtúr lárnach comhtháite. Ní cinní nua iad sin mar go raibh daoine i gcónaí ag iarraidh fíor-thionchar agus páirteachas a bheith acu i dtaca le soláthar a gcuid seirbhísí poiblí.

Déantar múnla i gcomhair tacaíochta níos éifeachtaí do sholáthar comhtháite seirbhísí i bpobail tuaithe a chur chun cinn sa tuarascáil seo (féach lch. 51). Bheadh tionchar an-mhór ag an múnla seo ar mhuintir pobal tuaithe agus bheadh tairbhí eile ann ina dhiaidh sin i dtaca forbairt áitiúil agus athghiniúint tuaithe. Ina theannta sin, de réir mar a shaothraítear na deiseanna atá ann chun an múnla seo a thástáil beidh tuairim níos soiléire ann faoi oiriúnacht an mhúnla do riachtanais na ndaoine a bhfuil cónaí orthu i bpobail tuaithe. Mar an gcéanna, beidh tuairim níos soiléire ann faoin ngá atá ann go mbíonn soláthróirí seirbhísí poiblí ag forbairt seirbhísí de shíor d'fhonn freastal ar riachtanais.

Tá buíochas mór tuillte ag na gníomhaireachtaí poiblí agus ag na hoifigigh phoiblí a bhí chomh toilteanach sin páirt a ghlacadh sa tionscadal pólóta seo, ag na pobail agus ag ceannairí na bpobal sin a chaith an oiread sin ama ag gabháil don tionscadal, agus a chuir a n-oilteacht ar fáil agus a bhí chomh díograiseach sin ina bhun, agus ag na ceannairí polaitíochta agus ag ceannairí na seirbhíseach poiblí i Roinn an Taoisigh agus sa Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Forbairt Tuaithe a thug an oiread sin cúnamh.

De réir na taithí atá faighte ón tionscadal seo, tá toil mhór ann i leith athghiniúna tuaithe. Tá soláthar seirbhísí poiblí ina ghné thábhachtach amháin d'athghiniúint tuaithe. Tá sé riachtanach anois go ndéanfar an taithí go léir atá faighte a phlé agus go ndéanfar na torthaí dearfacha a chur san áireamh i bpolasáí agus i geleachtas.

Report Summary

The viability of many rural areas is at a cross-roads. As Ireland has modernised more people have left rural areas for a “perceived” better quality of life. Conventional farming is under severe financial pressures and many rural communities have become so depopulated that their viability as sustainable communities is in question. Concurrently, state service agencies have come under pressure to address increasing need in urban locations and to provide the most cost-effective service possible. As an outcome rural communities have a sense that their levels of public services access have declined.

A number of publications have identified the continuing levels of poverty in rural communities, the degeneration of rural communities and the increasing dependency ratios among some rural groupings. Many reports have identified inadequate access to public services as a factor in the continued impoverishment of rural communities. In contrast it is argued that improved access to public services could contribute to rural regeneration.

This pilot project “Rural Renewal Pilot Programme: An Integrated Approach to the Provision of Public Services in Areas of Declining Population” seeks to explore a model for effective delivery of public services to rural communities and especially those with declining populations. The project was implemented between 1996 and 1999 through six local pilot initiatives seeking to improve public service delivery. The learning points from all projects are similar:

- There is significant potential for integration of information delivery, referral and some aspects of public service delivery.
- The positive experience of partnership between the state, the community and social partners in local development should be extended to public service provision.
- Information technology with a human face provides exciting possibilities for improving public service access.
- Rural communities need the assistance of rural community workers for pro-active service promotion and to promote improved quality of life through specially targeted projects and local development initiatives.
- A partnership process in the delivery of integrated public services at rural community level must be mirrored by similar inter-departmental co-ordination at national level.
- Rural communities require a very definite rural development policy that will provide equality of treatment and encourage productive regeneration of rural areas.
- Improved public service provision can provide a solid foundation for a sustainable process of rural regeneration.

Greater access to public services improves the quality of life directly for particular target groups, especially the elderly and house bound, by bringing essential public services to them in innovative ways and with local support. Indirectly, focusing on improved public services revitalises the confidence of rural communities, builds partnership with public agencies and opens opportunity for innovative projects in rural communities. Focusing of public service delivery also encourages provision of more community and private services to rural communities.

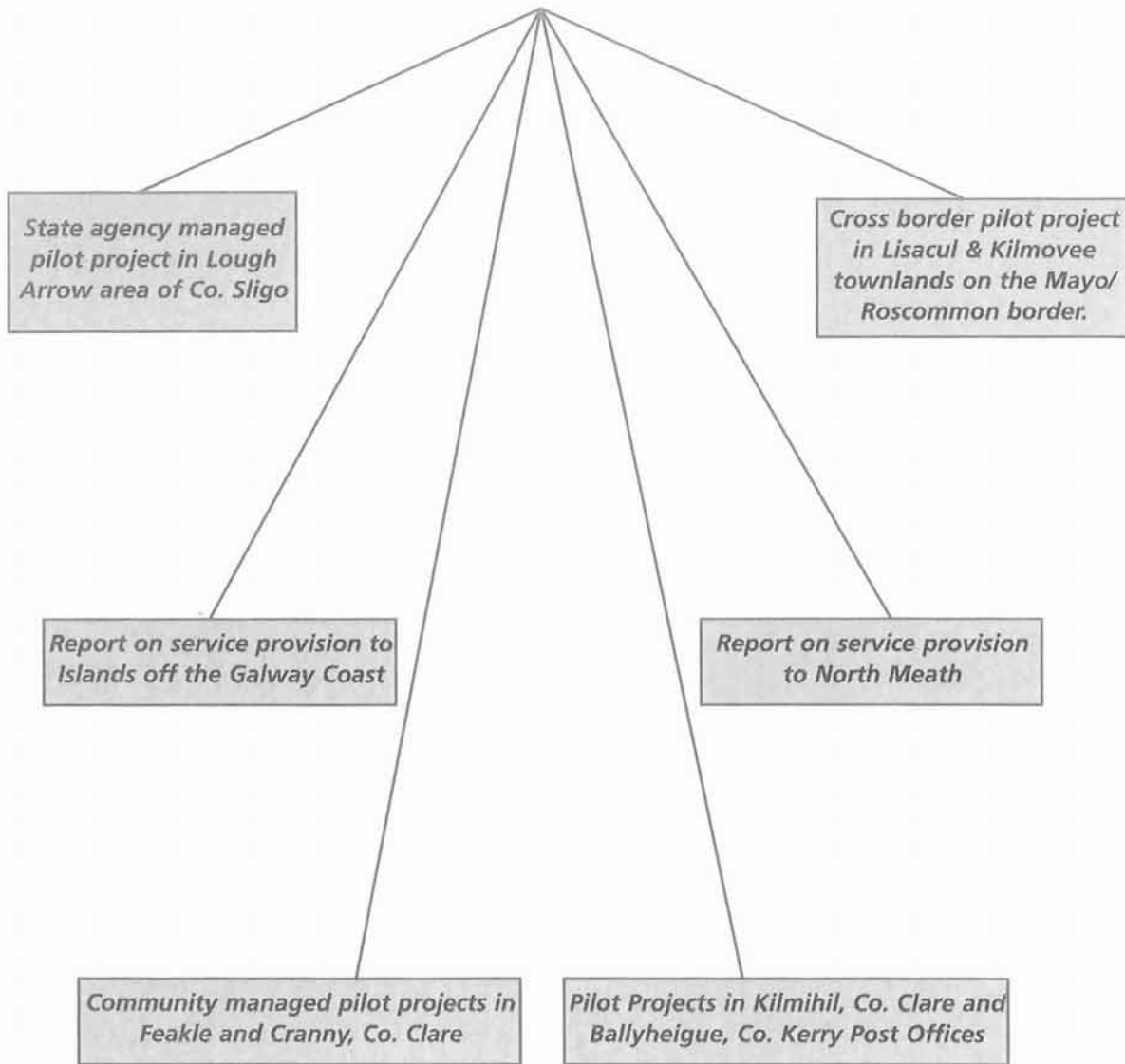
Arising from the review of the pilot project initiatives a model for improved integration and co-ordination in rural public service delivery is emerging. This model demonstrates the need for consultation, participation, partnership in delivery and on-going dialogue at all levels to develop service delivery within an integrated mainstream structure. These findings are not new, as people have always sought a real say and involvement in the delivery of their public services.

A model for more effective support for integrated service delivery to rural communities is presented in this report (see p.51). This model would have a very significant impact on rural community confidence and would have knock-on benefits in local development and rural regeneration. Further, as the opportunities for testing this model are exploited, the appropriateness of the model to the needs of those living in rural communities would become clearer. Equally, the need for public service providers to constantly develop services to meet need would become more evident.

Great thanks is due to the public agencies and public servants who participated so willingly in this pilot project, to the communities and their leaders who gave so generously of their time, expertise and enthusiasm and the political and public servant leaders in the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development who contributed so much.

From the experience of this project there is a great willingness to work for rural regeneration. Public service delivery is one key aspect in rural regeneration. It is essential now that all the experience accumulated is discussed and the positive outcomes are mainstreamed in policy and in practice.

Summary of Pilot Projects



Background

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in its report "New Approaches to Rural Development" (1994) recommended that "A unified location based approach to service provision should be actively explored. This could involve the establishment of 'service centres' in which a range of public facilities would be located in a single complex. The practicality of this should be examined on a pilot basis" [Section 4.9(11)].

In response to the recommendation by the NESC, the Minister for State at the Department of the Taoiseach, Mr. Donal Carey, T.D., established a pilot programme entitled "Rural Renewal: An Integrated Approach to the Provision of Public Services in Areas of Declining Population" in 1995. This programme seeks to identify models of improved integrated public service delivery through pilot initiatives or projects of service delivery. The key-words in the title of this pilot is "Rural Renewal" and "Integrated". The architects of this programme recognised that rural renewal, i.e. the regeneration of rural communities experiencing population decline, could be enhanced through effective public service delivery and that it was essential to promote models for integrated public service delivery.

A series of four public consultation seminars were held in Roscommon, Sligo, Galway and Clare during May to July 1995 to identify the issues in integrated public service delivery. As an outcome this consultation identified a range of services required for sustainable rural communities. The key services required were:

Key public services for sustainable rural communities
(as identified at public consultation meetings, 1995)

| | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Transport | Garda Services | Agriculture |
| Education | Social Welfare Services | Tourism |
| Post Office | ESB Services | Training Services |
| Health Services | Housing and Associated Services | Infrastructure |

The issues identified relating to each service were as follows¹:

| SERVICE | ISSUES |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. Transport | Isolation in areas of low people density. Commercial remit of public transport providers. Necessity and cost of car ownership. Mobile public service provision. Impact of increased mobility on rural communities. Under use of school bus and post van. Accessibility of islands. Limited access due to narrow roads. |
| 2. Education | Closure of national schools. School as a community focal point. Lack of educational materials in Irish. |
| 3. Post Office | Wider remit for post offices. Post office as a "single point of contact". Economic and social remit of the post office. More effective use of technology in post offices. |
| 4. Health Services | Distance from health centres and hospitals. Lack of services for physical and mentally handicapped. Access to emergency services. Partnership between the community and state. Lack of availability of services through Irish. |
| 5. Garda Services | Impact of closing Garda Stations in rural areas. Social cost of crime. Community linkages and community alert. |
| 6. Social Welfare Services | Accessibility of information. Accessibility of offices. Availability of services through Irish. Developments within the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs to make services more accessible. |
| 7. ESB Services | Commercial versus the social remit. |
| 8. Housing and Associated | Services Access to housing for young people. Refurbishment of derelict houses. Link between housing and employment. Support of rural settlement. |
| 9. Agriculture | Impact of milk quota leakage. Impact of LEADER programme. Teagasc and Offices of the Department of Agriculture as a network for service delivery. Department of Agriculture one stop shop facility. |
| 10. Tourism | Single points of delivery for tourist information. |
| 11. Training Services | Teagasc, FÁS and VEC providing a multi-skilling and integrated approach. Need for capacity building of people working in rural communities. Co-ordination of training. Gap between voluntary participation and paid participation. |
| 12. Infrastructure | Need for improved infrastructure services and facilities. |

¹ The content of this figure is drawn from a report by D & G Consultants, August 1995, which reflects the discussions at the four public consultation seminars prior to the invitation for pilot projects.

Following consultation the Minister established a National Rural Renewal Pilot Project Steering Committee² to oversee the pilot programme. The committee drew up criteria for the selection of pilot projects and publicly invited interested parties to submit proposals. Thirty seven (37) applications were received from which seven (7) pilot projects were selected. The Rural Renewal Pilot Project programme was implemented over the period 1996 to 1999. The local projects piloted are profiled in this report but fall into the following categories:

| Category | Number of Pilot Projects |
|---|--------------------------|
| A post office as a local centre for the integrated delivery of public services | 1 |
| A local community office as a local centre for the integrated delivery of public services | 2 |
| A county level steering committee as the facilitator of integrated public service delivery to local communities | 1 |
| The added value of information technology in the integrated delivery of public services | 2 |
| A pilot project to explore the potential of a co-ordinated approach to rural transport was also supported due to the centrality of addressing mobility issues as a means of service access. | 1 |
| Total number of pilot projects | 7 |

The aim of each pilot project was to develop, through a process of action research, a model of integrated public service delivery that would contribute to breaking the cycle of declining population and the consequent reduction in public service accessibility, resulting in further marginalisation and rural decline. This pilot project could lead to a model for the sustainable delivery of public services to rural areas and, ultimately, contribute to the overall process of rural renewal. These pilot projects were a very innovative initiative as it was the first time that integrated public service was addressed in the context of rural renewal with the full support of government.

² The members of the National Rural Renewal Pilot Project Steering Committee are listed in appendix 1.

The Pilot Projects

The following is a summary profile of each pilot project.

The pilot projects approached the challenge of exploring improved integrated public service provision from three perspectives.

- Community driven (Feakle/Cranny Pilot Project, Lisacul/Kilmovee Pilot Project)
- Agency driven (Sligo Pilot Project, Post Office Pilot Project)
- Information technology driven (One Stop Shop in North Meath, One-Stop-Shop for Local Service Provision on Off-Shore Islands)

One further project addressing the challenge of rural transport nationally was supported by the Pilot Project Steering Committee in partnership with ADM (Area Development Management Ltd.).

Feakle & Cranny Rural Renewal Pilot Project

Background: This pilot was proposed to explore the potential of community initiatives to meet the public service needs of rural communities. The project was proposed by a grouping of local development activists in County Clare. Two locations were proposed, Feakle in East Clare and Cranny in West Clare.

Feakle is a small village in a rural parish in East Clare, 14 miles from Limerick and 16 miles from Ennis. Within the pilot project area i.e. a 12-mile radius of Feakle village, the population is 6,419. Agriculture is the main source of income but many inhabitants who live in Feakle work outside the area. The population of the area has steadily declined (25% of the indigenous population over the last 20 years) as fewer people stay in farming. In 1996, following a joint³ submission, Feakle Community Council was chosen as one of the Pilot Projects and a Community Services Sub-Committee was selected.

Cranny is located in South-West Clare, approximately 17 miles from Ennis and 12 miles from Kilrush with a population of 800 people. Agriculture is the main source of income but many inhabitants who live in Cranny work outside the area. In 1993 the local post office was closed despite courageous efforts by the community to keep it open. A local committee remained active and in 1996 Cranny was accepted as a pilot project.

Actions

House Meetings: - The action plans of the two pilot project committees began by assessing needs through house meetings. In each pilot project area local leaders called informal meetings in private houses. This was a valuable, accessible and inclusive way of determining the demand for services in the area.

³ Feakle (East Clare) & Cranny (West Clare) community councils co-operated to make a joint submission

The service needs expressed in 1997 were:

Provision & Information

Access to information in a local central location. Information on entitlements, pension, tax allowances, legal and environmental matters. Tourism, agriculture and health information. Bus, electrical and telephone services. Services for the elderly.

Agriculture & Forestry

Agri-enterprise and alternative enterprise, farm forestry, farm safety, tourism development possibilities, optimising EU funding to agriculture.

Health Services

Facilities to alleviate the need for older people to attend hospital, day care centres, home help and carer respite, chiropody, physiotherapist and counselling services, support groups, drug abuse awareness, family support facilities.

Tourism, Transport & Communications

Regular public transport services, quality of roads, Garda presence, alert systems for the old, sick and isolated, use of the Internet for information and community services.

Enterprise & Employment

Provide opportunities for more families to live in the locality in quality housing, enhance educational opportunities, provide enterprise training, space and support services.

Community Offices: - In both areas a building was identified and a co-ordinator appointed during 1997. The office became the hub of the community with people calling for services and social contact. The offices were equipped with facilities to facilitate service access. While the office in Feakle had standard office equipment the office in Cranny had enhanced equipment to meet the range of services to be delivered. This included three computers, printers, photocopier, fax machine, Internet and e-mail facilities, laminator, scanner, dictaphones, blood pressure reading unit, surgical couch for acupuncture and aromatherapy. The Cranny office offered a wide variety of services including the sale of callcards, stamps and bill payment. The office also facilitated a pick-up and drop-off for sewing alterations, dry-cleaning and launderette services. The Feakle community services office was less commercial, focusing more on public and community services. A full range of secretarial services was available from both offices and a newsletter was produced each week.

State Agency workshops: - Two workshops were held in Feakle to give relevant state and voluntary agencies an opportunity to meet collectively with the local services group, to network between each other and to review progress. The response to this initiative was excellent with benefits to the community leaders and the agencies.

Agency Clinics: - Arising from the needs identified the project committees set up regular clinics for local people to meet state agency representatives in the local community services offices. Agencies involved were: Teagasc, Clare Co. Enterprise Board, Clare County Council, Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Department of Social, Community & Family Affairs, Clarecare, Clare Local Employment Services, Revenue Commissioners, Shannon Development, Mid-Western Health Board, FÁS, E.S.B., Bus Eireann, Telecom Eireann, the Garda, and local public representatives.

Social Care Group: - Arising from the first agency workshop the Feakle Social Care Group was set up for the care of the elderly and retired people and was officially launched in May 1997. The group is active in arranging a function every month, arranging outings and speakers from agencies and other groups for the elderly in the area.

Rural Bus Services: - Following a number of meetings between the Community Services Sub-Committee and Bus Eireann, the Feakle Rural Bus Services commenced operation in October 1997. The service offers a round trip from Scariff, via Flagmount and Tulla, to Ennis once weekly and is now being used by the whole community. It provides a vital link for the elderly (who travel free) and those without transport to the shops and services in the town of Ennis. The bus is driven by a local driver and there are seventeen pick-up and drop-off points along the route. The service is running very successfully with an average load of 32 people and is a very valued service for this rural community.

Private/Community Services: - Both the Feakle & Cranny projects responded to a strong demand for services from non-statutory providers. These services included computer classes for adults and children, Internet and E-mail services, adult education courses, office services, acupuncture, hairdressing, and supervised study. The office also acted as a valuable venue for meetings of local community organisations such as the I.C.A, community alert, social services committee, etc. The local offices supported local committees to initiate/expand a local festival in each area that has a very significant economic and social impact.

Outcome

The direct outcome was a renewal of local development in each area. Local needs were identified and responded to, local people could access public service agents locally, a wide range of beneficial services were provided and there was increased liaison with statutory and non-statutory service providers co-ordinated by the local committees. As a result there is a renewed interest in people coming to live in the area, in building up services and in starting small businesses in the area.

It should be noted that the state agencies did provide a high level of service on demand to these areas. This would not be sustainable on a wide-scale basis. In some cases the level of uptake was not as expected and it was not the most effective use of an official's time. In fact it became evident that the uptake of public agency services was affected by imminent deadlines. For instance, the Teagasc service would be high on demand particularly before the headage grant application deadlines.

The success of this model is also highly dependent on a strong local community leadership. In both cases there is a strong history and experience of voluntary community development. This experience combined with very dedicated volunteer leaders is the cement that holds this model together. This is a significant burden on the local leadership.

Viability

In this pilot project viability of the community was enhanced through greater service delivery. In the initial stages the viability of the community service office depended almost totally on grant assistance. However, if the pilot projects were mainstreamed within the context of a social economy business plan for public and community service delivery and community enterprise, the community service projects could become significantly self-funding within three to five years. Implicit with this plan, partnership between state agencies

and community groups for enhanced public service provision would have to be resourced from public funds.

| | |
|--|---|
| Feakle/Cranny Pilot Project Committee: Ms. Doirin Graham, Rural Resource Development Mr. Pat Shannon, Clare County Enterprise Board & Cranny Community Development Mr. Steve Walsh, Feakle Community Council | |
| Feakle Pilot Project Committee: Mr. Michael Daly (Chairperson), Mr. John Anglim, Ms. Mary McMahan, Mr. Ted Harrington, Mr. Jimmy Collins Co-ordinators: Mary Grogan (First co-ordinator, participated in the committee thereafter), Jackie Guilfoyle | Cranny Pilot Project Committee: Mr. P.J. Cleary (Chairperson), Mr. P.J. Meaney, Mr. Des Murphy, Ms. Kay McNamara, Mr. Pat Shannon Co-ordinator: Ms. Margaret O'Sullivan |

The Lisacul/Kilmovee (Aiséiri) Pilot Project

Background

The parishes of Lisacul and Kilmovee meet at the borders of counties Roscommon and Mayo. Agriculture is the main source of income of both communities but many work outside the area. The indigenous population of the area has steadily declined over the last 20 years as fewer people stay in farming. However, this trend has reversed since 1998 as people return to take advantage of the new economic opportunities developing in the growth centres of Mayo, Roscommon and Galway. The Lisacul/Kilmovee area, while very isolated and marginalised, has benefited from a number of local development projects funded through the EU (Horizon) and national (FÁS Community Employment, alarms for the elderly from the Department of Social, Family and Community Affairs) programmes.

The parishes of Lisacul & Kilmovee straddle a number of county and regional state agency boundaries. Both communities came together to make a request to the National Pilot Project Steering Committee through a local development agency, Enterprise Connaught/Ulster, for inclusion as a pilot project. A pilot project committee comprising representatives of the community councils in both Lisacul and Kilmovee and a number of state agency partners was convened and sought to develop an innovative method of integrated service delivery to an area that straddled administrative regions.

The area was serviced by a resource centre in Lisacul staffed by participants in a FÁS community employment (CE) scheme. The local community council in each respective area undertook a number of projects that greatly benefited the community such as installing alarms in the homes of elderly people living on their own. There was a local crèche and a recently completed community centre in Kilmovee also provided space for a local health clinic and part time library⁴.

Actions

The “Aiséiri” committee made a valuable contribution to sustaining the local community projects through the interaction of personnel from state agencies with local community leaders. The most significant outcome was to demonstrate that a local partnership grouping could add value and efficiency to existing services and could increase the speed of response to need for public service delivery. An example of this is the identification that residents of Lisacul travelled seven miles to the nearest dental clinic whereas the residents of Kilmovee in the adjacent county had to travel over twenty miles. Through informal contacts on the “Aiséiri” committee the process was rationalised so that the residents of Kilmovee could travel across the health board border to the same clinic as the residents of Lisacul, thereby significantly reducing travel.

Four local residents of the pilot project area undertook a review of public services to the two respective parishes. Through contact with a range of public service agencies administering both townlands the grouping found that there was not a relatively significant disparity in service provision to each and that the greatest need was for more services particularly to the isolated elderly and to children. Public service agency representatives on the “Aiséiri” Pilot Project committee did respond. Examples include Roscommon County Council who initiated discussions for more local authority houses in Lisacul, and the Department of

⁴ The detail of this work is available in the final report of the Aspire project (EU Horizon Project) delivered in the Lisacul Kilmovee area with support from a range of government departments.

Social, Community and Family Affairs who provided extra resources to ensure that every elderly person living alone had a personal security alarm. From discussion on the committee local people took the initiative in consultation with Bus Eireann, the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and a local private transport operator to provide a regular bus service from these rural parishes to the town of Ballaghaderreen and other onward connections.

A number of initiatives to improve integrated public service delivery targeting this area were discussed by the pilot project committee. The most innovative was the LAR concept. The LAR (Local Access and Referral) centre concept is a pro-active and mobile inter-agency partnership service facilitated by local community leaders to make contact with citizens on a regular basis. The LAR centre would advise them on their service entitlements and refer them through personal appointment or distance connection (via mobile phone, computer conferencing or other means) to the appropriate agency. This concept would be very valuable in rural areas particularly for the isolated and disabled. Unfortunately, the concept was not progressed sufficiently to qualify for action research funding by the National Pilot Project Steering Committee.

Outcomes

This project made a valuable contribution to exploring the potential of developing action plans for integrated public service delivery through local partnership committees. This project has also demonstrated the value of local knowledge, the range of creative initiatives that could come from local people and the importance of strong local leaders for local development. This project also demonstrated the importance of state agency support to deliver more integrated public services locally and the increased effective response to need when public service managers meet locally regularly. The LAR concept is innovative and deserves further development.

Lisacul/Kilmovee (Aiséirí) Pilot Project Committee

An tUasal Seosamh MacGabhann, Kilmovee Community Council, (1st Chairperson)

Mr. Michael Carty, Lisacul Community Council, (2nd Chairperson)

Mr. John Baverstock, Lisacul Community Council

Mr. Frank Murray, Community Care Administrator, Western Health Board

Mr. Gerard McGarry, Enterprise Connaught/Ulster

Mr. Barry Kennedy, Regional Manager, Department of Social, Community & Family Affairs

Mr. Pat Conway, Director, FÁS Midlands Region

Mr. Gerry Lavelle, Roscommon County Council

Ms. Tess Regan, Kilmovee Community Council

Mr. James FitzGerald, Lisacul Community Council

Ms. Patricia Madden, Kilmovee Community Council

Ms. Breege Moran, Lisacul Community Council

Sligo Rural Renewal Pilot Project

Background

The Sligo Rural Renewal Pilot Project was initiated by the public service agencies in Sligo through a steering committee. The steering committee invited A.C.E (Arrow Community Enterprises, located in the Lough Arrow region), to be a community partner in the pilot project. This was a unique partnership seeking to build links between the providers and users of public services. The steering committee set out to test the hypothesis that the integrated provision of public services will promote rural renewal by:

- Identifying service needs in the Lough Arrow Region
- Enhancing information provision
- Establishing an ongoing liaison between the local community and state agencies
- Developing special public service provision projects for target groups.

Actions

House Meetings for Needs Identification: - A series of house meetings was held to facilitate a general discussion on public service needs within the area. A general questionnaire was prepared to facilitate this discussion. The pilot project co-ordinator acted as a facilitator to the meetings to promote discussion and interaction. In all, during February and March of 1996, 220 people (almost 10% of the population) attended house meetings. Arising from these meetings, it was felt that the primary gaps in public service delivery were care for the elderly within their own home and transport.

Information Provision and Liaison with state agencies: - The Sligo Rural Renewal Pilot Project established an information centre within the ACE offices in Castlebaldwin. The office held information on all services provided by state agencies including information leaflets, booklets and application forms. A newly compiled database from the National Social Services Board (N.S.S.B), which provides information on all state agency services, was installed in the office. This database received nightly updates via the Internet.

A full-time pilot project co-ordinator was appointed to support liaison between members of the local community and the state agencies who are delivering services to the area but are based in Sligo town.

A number of advisory clinics were held in the Castlebaldwin office modelled on the experiences of Feakle and Cranny and a public service information day was held in the local community centre. A wide range of agencies including the Department of Agriculture, Food & Rural Development, Department of Social, Community & Family Affairs, the Garda Síochána, Sligo County Enterprise Board, Sligo LEADER Partnership Co., North-Western Health Board, FÁS and Sligo County Council attended the information day and clinics.

Video linkages: - Developing a video-link between the ACE office and offices of state agencies was explored but not implemented due to local fear of using information technology and the high cost of installing ISDN lines.

Special projects to target gaps in public service provision: - The development of special projects was centred on issues arising from needs identified and the types of information being

sought by local people. The "Quality of Life Project" began in September 1997. This project sought to provide personal services to members of the community within their own homes, targeting the elderly living alone in particular. This project employed seven people part-time and was funded by FÁS and the Sligo Partnership Co. with guidance and training provided by the North-Western Health Board. The "Quality of Life Project" developed a book of 35 clients of whom 90% were living alone and 70% were in receipt of no assistance up to that point. There has been a huge positive response to this project, which is ongoing.

The second special project that developed was the Local Transport Initiative within Co. Sligo. This initiative is being led by the Sligo LEADER Partnership Co. and aims to develop a county-wide transport provision strategy. The first step, compiling a resource audit of all transport provision within the county, was initiated during the pilot project and has progressed to developing targeted transport services to isolated areas.

Liaison with State agencies: - One of the very interesting and innovative actions of this pilot project was to focus on the information and referral process deficits of the Sligo based state agencies. The steering committee, through the co-ordinator, brought front line information providers from all relevant state agencies together to explore opportunities for integrating public service responses. This proved very beneficial, as these people were able to get to know each other, understand the services that each provided and develop a relationship through networking. The grouping organised a seminar on the Freedom of Information Act and prepared joint training on more effective public service information delivery.

Outcomes

In general, uptake of the information service in the pilot area⁵ was slow. It emerged that those in the community who were mobile preferred to go into Sligo town for information and services. There are a number of reasons for this including habit, expectation and confidentiality. However, the group most in need of information and public services are the elderly living alone. This group are not fully aware of their entitlements, need assistance in completing application forms and accessing services. There is nobody who formally plays this role within the community. Most rely on the public health nurse, a family member, or a member of the community. Timing of information provision proved to be very important. The clinics provided by the Department of Agriculture, Food & Rural Development prior to the headage scheme application deadline had a great response from the community.

This pilot project identified the potential of joint initiatives between state agencies and community groups to contact marginalised people in the local community. Through the local community group (ACE) the pilot project was able to get information to a wider section of the community on a need to know basis. The development of special projects did provide needed services to targeted groups in an integrated and socially sustainable way. Further, joint initiatives did bring the providers of public services at a local level together resulting in very practical exchanges of information and more effective integration. This work did identify that there is a significant level of informal networking among local providers. However, it is important for this level of networking to be recognised, supported and promoted for more effective integrated public service delivery particularly in areas of lower population densities and disadvantage.

⁵ The A.C.E. (Arrow Community Enterprises) area surrounding Lough Arrow

This pilot project did successfully engage with the public service agencies that provide information and services to the public. Firstly, through the pilot project steering committee, state agencies were committed to regular meetings. At these meetings state agency staff found opportunities to develop synergies by linking services that, up to then, were delivered separately. Secondly, they identified the need to update the information providers in their organisations on the needs of the public and, further, the need to exchange information between the front line staff of public service agencies. This gave rise to common briefing, in-service training and education events for front line information providers.

This pilot project also identified the limitations of information technology and video conferencing. It became evident that there is a significant section of the population, particularly the elderly, who are techno-phobic. They will not access public services through information technology channels. They want person to person contact. As an outcome it is clear that though information technology offers great opportunities for better access to information and services the “high tech” approach must be complemented by a “high touch”⁶ approach. If government seeks to provide public information and service predominantly through information technology it will exclude the majority of those who most need the service.

Viability

This pilot project did not address the issue of viability directly. It would take a longer pilot time frame to demonstrate the complete viability of integrated public service provision. However, as the pilot progressed it became evident that the integration of public service delivery had benefits for public service agencies and for the public. The formation of inter-agency “steering” committees would promote public service integration. Appropriate use of information technology and common briefing and training of front line information and service providers would enhance integrated service provision.

Sligo Rural Renewal Pilot Project Committee:

Ms. Eithne O’Sullivan, Senior Executive, Community Care, North Western Health Board, (Chairperson)
Mr. Joe O’Donnell, Department of Social, Community & Family Affairs
Supt. Jim Sheridan, Garda Síochána
Mr. Joe McHugh, Sligo County Council
Maura McManus, Arrow Community Enterprises
Mr. Christy Leonard, Sligo Community Enterprise Board
Mr. Michael Quigley, Sligo LEADER Partnership Co. Ltd.
Mr. Tom Kelly, North Western Health Board
Mr. Pádraig Leydon, FÁS
Mr. Martin Henry (replaced Mr. Pádraig Grey) Teagasc
Ms. Anne Kelly, National Rehabilitation Board
Maureen Cooney, Department of Agriculture

Co-ordinator: Ms. Sinead Barrins, Ms. Grace Doyle

⁶ Have informed trustworthy persons facilitating the client or citizen to access the optimum level of public service available through the technology

Post Office Rural Renewal Pilot Project

Background

The national post office network has the advantages of tradition, community acceptance and an extensive network to assist in the pursuit of its aims which include promoting local development, enhancing the quality of life, facilitating commercial activity and social cohesion. The National Pilot Project Steering Committee received an application in 1996 from the Irish Postmasters Union (IPU) in association with An Post to participate in this pilot project. Four local post offices were included in the pilot project: Ballyheigue, Co. Kerry; Kilmihil, Co. Clare; Loughglynn, Co. Roscommon; Ventry (Ceann Trá), Co. Kerry. The Ballyheigue and Kilmihil Post Offices have participated in this project since its inception in October 1996 with Loughglynn and Ventry Post Offices added in 1998.

Ballyheigue & Kilmihil Post Office: - Ballyheigue is a busy rural area in NorthWest Kerry that benefits from a large passing tourist trade in the summer, while Kilmihil is a small rural village in West Clare where farming is the principal activity.

The central concern of the post office pilot project was to explore the role of post offices in the provision of public services to rural communities and through this to underscore the central role of the post office in the life of these communities.

Actions

The pilot post offices, Ballyheigue and Kilmihil, formed a local committee to consult on the services most needed by the rural communities. Information provision, comprehensive bill pay, banking services and information technology access were identified as key needs. Further, the groups emphasised the highly valued role of the postmaster/postmistress as confidant, advisor and valued voluntary assistant to disadvantaged people in the community and particularly the elderly. This outcome identifies a very important informal and unrecognised role that the independent post office owner has given to his/her community for a long time.

The following actions were implemented on a pilot basis following agreement with the pilot project committee.

Information display: - Both post offices designed, erected and maintained a comprehensive information display of all public and community services. As a result the public could see at a glance a wide range of services, read leaflets and take information/application forms. For those requiring assistance the postmasters and staff in both post offices had adequate information to advise and refer people to relevant agencies. There was a very significant uptake on display information. While the postmaster would not be aware if people actually did take up services the level of enquiry indicated that there was increased uptake. It was noticeable that turnover in the post office increased when the display was opened. Other information regularly used included: bus and train timetables, details about local areas of historic or scenic interest, general tourism and community information.

Information technology services: - The pilot post offices provided fax and photocopy services to customers. These services were in regular demand by individuals, businesses and local organisations. The pilot post offices also responded to the demand for public access to computers and computer accessories. In both pilot project post offices customers use

computer and scanner heavily at a fixed cost per hour. Customers increasingly use e-mail but video conferencing was little used. The post offices developed a library of educational and self-teaching software that was used regularly. Internet linkage via a coin operated phone, was available for general use thereafter.

Other Services: - The experience of the pilot project post offices increased awareness among the independent owners of post offices of the importance of being dynamic in meeting customer needs. The pilot post offices introduced a full array of bill pay options but were unsuccessful in extending bill pay to all bills or in introducing limited banking services. Each post office introduced other services on demand e.g. money exchange in Ballyheigue and instant passport photography to complement the An Post passport service in Kilmihil.

Loughglynn & Ventry Post Offices: - Both these post office were in phase two of the pilot project and replicated the advantageous use of the post office for information dissemination, advice and referral. Each post office had an information display and the use of computer links developed with public service agencies and voluntary groups in the area. The extended services were publicised by an information evening and a leaflet campaign. The photocopier and fax machines were in use and computer classes for the public were held in association with local agencies.

Outcomes

The extended range of services in the post office was added at minimal cost and created a more self-sufficient rural community. The post office benefited through greater community custom and increased turnover.

Through this pilot project the post office promoted information access and technological innovation in rural communities. However, it is important to note that the valued role of the post master/mistress as confidant, advisor and assistant was still vital and continued. Interested post masters/mistresses requested briefing from public service agencies on the method and content to advise local people correctly. Post offices see their place in the rural community as ideal to facilitate public service agencies and increase their contact with the public. The post office operators had a range of innovative proposals that were not yet tested to increase access to public services. These included a dedicated public free-phone facility to state agencies from post offices and a dedicated information officer who would receive all queries from the post office to advise people on public services. The post masters/mistresses also suggested that as information technology becomes more accepted, there could be a tele-conference link from the post office to the relevant public service agencies/Departments to deal with queries and consultations.

Given the success of the pilot project post offices, other post offices intended developing their services on this model.

Viability

During the period of this pilot project all the services referred to above were stand-alone services where capital investment was provided through the pilot project and ongoing costs were absorbed by the pilot post office. The provision of the range of public services did contribute to retaining business in the locality and to the social fabric of the rural community. It is important to consider the significance of a younger population using the post office in this way. This is a new departure and adds to the social role of the post office

as a fulcrum or service hub for the local community. However, there are a number of issues to be addressed, for example:

- the mandate of the post office network as an access point for public services,
- the legality of post masters/mistresses giving sensitive advice,
- the confidentiality of the public service customer and
- the real cost to the post office of providing limited public service information advice and referral services.

The post office is a business and the postmaster/mistress is a businessperson. The post office business cannot absorb the cost of public service provision on an ongoing basis without some form of payment. This model cannot mature without addressing this issue and the other issues noted above.

Post Office Pilot Project Committee:

Ms. Vera Hogan, General Secretary, Irish Post Masters Union, (Chairperson)
Mr. Tom Coyle, An Post
Mr. Gregory Fitzgerald, Postmaster Kilmihil
Mr. Brendan Moriarity, Postmaster Ballyheigue

One Stop Shop for Local Service Provision in North County Meath

Background

Meath County Council commissioned a report in February 1998 to devise a model for quality public service delivery in the North Meath area following approval from the National Pilot Project Steering Committee. The target area is naturally, economically and socially served by the town of Kells, Co. Meath. Meath County Council commissioned consultants to review the perceptions of people living in North Meath regarding public service provision, to consult state agencies regarding their method of service delivery and to propose a One-Stop-Shop model for enhanced and sustainable public service delivery to the area. The report produced is the culmination of six months extensive research.

This report is an excellent practical document to guide the planning and implementation of a rural based One-Stop-Shop for the delivery of public service and local information/services.

Report conclusion

The development of a local service centre, or One-Stop-Shop, provided an opportunity to define services according to the needs of the community it serves. Rather than just a new office location providing the same services that were always available, it provided the opportunity to develop a valuable resource centre and a forum for ongoing assessment and co-ordination of local services. The consultation process showed a readiness on the part of service providers and the community to work towards such an area-based public service delivery process.

Re-assessment of public service needs would ideally be an on-going process including all service providers and the local community to produce an integrated strategic plan for efficient use of resources. Informal networking was already taking place among agencies but formalising the process would consolidate it and channel resources to it. In this way the One-Stop-Shop could facilitate an up-dating of the way services are delivered to the community and play a vital role in integrated and sustainable development.

While there was a great variance in competency and understanding, in general local community leaders already had a capacity for developing innovative local development strategies. This is a very valuable foundation for a new partnership in public service delivery in the 21st century that could empower local people, enhance agency effectiveness and provide opportunities for greater cost-efficiency. A One-Stop-Shop would be a pivot for such a strategy and would support a team approach based on integrated and co-ordinated service delivery. It could facilitate the development of a partnership of service providers that is both effective and sustainable.

Report Recommendations

The following is a summary of the report recommendations.

- An inter-agency committee be established to set up the One Stop Shop
- An inter-agency forum be established to look at and develop models of integration of public service delivery in areas such as joint needs assessment, consultation and strategic planning

- Service provision agencies should adopt a common planning process, producing five year public service plans based on a common and integrated assessment of needs in each local area
- All public service agencies should commit to convening and attending co-ordination meetings on integrated service delivery at county and local level
- A partnership model (public agencies, social partners and community representatives working together) for public service delivery be adopted at area level, through a One-Stop-Shop, and then at local community level based on an area plan
- The One-Stop-Shop be established as a single point of contact in a central location for the integrated provision of general and specific information on public and local services with a follow-up targeted referral service
- To facilitate networking, joint training days be arranged for staff from all agencies to increase awareness of each agency's focus and services
- Staff from all agencies to attend customer care courses together.

The report also recommends that in the One Stop Shop:

- All referrals should include a contact name
- A service knowledge base should be maintained with all queries logged and answers updated with keywords so all staff have access to quality and up-to-date information
- Clear responsibility must be allocated so that information sites are maintained
- An on-going customer feedback mechanism (satisfaction surveys) should be put in place
- To increase service provision to all members of the community it is vital that the issue of transport is investigated
- Hold discussions with other development agencies to develop common information technology systems to further enhance information and service delivery throughout North Meath.

The report, published by Meath County Council in 1998, was a valuable contribution to the one-stop-shop model for public service delivery. It provided a good practice guide for the organisation of integrated public service delivery from a single point of contact.

Pilot Project Study Steering Group:

Mr. Danny McLoughlin, County Secretary, Meath County Council
Mr. Michael Kenny, NUI, Maynooth

One-Stop-Shop for Local Service Provision on Off-Shore Islands

Background

Representatives from the Galway Islands, Department of Arts, Heritage, Culture and the Gaeltacht, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Coiste Gairmoideachais Co. na Gaillimhe, FÁS, Telecom, G-Com, Comhdhail na hEireann formed the steering committee to draw up a plan for public service provision to the Islands as one of the Rural Renewal Pilot Projects. A consultant was appointed in 1998 to carry out the study of the issues.

The aims of the study were as follows:

- Identify precisely the range and priority of public service needs of the communities on the Galway Islands.
- Explore how best these services could be delivered in the context of technology available.
- Identify service providers who would be willing to become partners in support of service delivery using information technology.

The preparation of this report was supported by the Rural Renewal Pilot Project.

The report is a contribution to the development of improved services to spatially isolated communities. It encapsulates the issues and a range of responses for improved public service access and provision. It is therefore, an excellent base for developing a one-stop-shop on islands and other physically isolated places.

Report conclusions & recommendations

The report highlighted the difficulties faced by customers in obtaining information, entitlements and services from state agencies, local authorities and others. Such difficulties include:

- Confusion in understanding the maze of public services, schemes or support systems they are entitled to or best fits their needs
- Frustration in getting access to information and services because of the complexity and departmentalisation of systems
- Lack of confidence by citizens that they will get their full range of entitlements, that they will get reasons for refusal or that discretionary benefits or services will be granted sympathetically or sensitively.

The report recommended the following:

- Creation of a single point of contact to act as a gateway to all public services and to facilitate the sharing of information, cross-reference and referral
- A single contact point where people can get information and advice on the full range of public services, submit claims or applications for such services, and receive the services required
- The efficient provision of high quality services to the public in an integrated, customer oriented manner

- Use of information technology (I.T.) to support the delivery of public services closer to the customer and in improving the quality of service
- Develop the island resource centres as Information Resource Centres (IRC) to facilitate the efficient, effective and integrated provision of public services using the best practice experiences of service delivery to the islands and from other projects
- With the assistance of the public service providers, provide information databases to the island resource centres containing full information on the agencies and their services
- Encourage networking of information providers
- Produce a directory of all public service providers pertaining to the islands
- Organise training courses in information provision as required
- Build on the experience of the G-Com Telepromise project. This project is developing a multi-media public access information network for regions which have lost traditional services due to the movement of people from rural to urban areas.

Pilot Project Study Steering Group:

An tUasal Seán De Cleir, Aonad Forbartha Pobail, Údarás na Gaeltachta
Mr. Michael Kenny, NUI, Maynooth

The Challenge of Rural Transport Services

Background

The responsibility for issues that impinge on transport range across six Government Departments, with no Department having an overall co-ordinating responsibility. This is one of the major constraints to developing a co-ordinated and integrated response to rural transport needs. However, the issue of rural transport has received increasing national prominence through the NESC document "New Approaches to Rural Development", and the NESF document "Rural Renewal - Combating Social Exclusion". Also as a result of the momentum generated by increased networking between local groups and agencies addressing rural transport there is a greater awareness of the impact of inadequate transport on rural isolation and disadvantage.

In September 1997 two seminars were staged as a joint initiative between the Rural Development Working Group of Area Development Management Ltd. (ADM) and the Rural Renewal Pilot Projects Initiative. The format, content, outcomes and recommendations of these seminars are documented in a published report "Rural Ireland: Waiting for a Lift", 1998. The seminars were in response to community transport needs identified by rural partnerships and community groups when drawing up local action plans for the implementation of the Local Development Programme.

Arising from the deliberations of these seminars the National Rural Renewal Pilot Project Steering Committee agreed to co-fund a rural transport co-ordinator to work with the ADM to implement the recommendations of the "Rural Ireland: Waiting for a Lift" seminar report.

Actions

Rural communities themselves are clear that the lack of adequate transport facilities is posing significant barriers to the economic and social progress of large parts of rural Ireland. Through the years, a number of isolated attempts have been made to develop community-based responses and many of these are very successful. The seminars provided the first networking platform for activists in rural transport. As a result, during 1998/99 a number of partnerships and community groups completed feasibility studies and/or initiated further pilot transport initiatives, using a variety of approaches and funding sources to resolve local transport needs.

In addition to local networking, there was recognition at the seminars of the need to establish vertical and horizontal linkages across the wide spectrum of agencies and bodies that impact on access and mobility in rural Ireland. To remedy this a National Rural Transport Advisory Group was put in place in December 1997. This partnership grouping working through a sub-committee of ADM is now actively pursuing needs identified by the seminars, including further development of a number of community-based pilot transport initiatives. The aims of the group are to monitor and support, in whatever way possible, a variety of approaches, and to observe and promote lessons of 'good practice', with a view to mainstreaming successful and sustainable initiatives. A rural transport co-ordinator works closely with the advisory group, relevant agencies and in particular with communities and groups pursuing local transport initiatives, to develop models of good practice in rural transport provision lessons.

Outcome

A national committee, composed of public and private transport providers, government departments and local development agencies, is working together to unblock the constraints on rural transport provision. The group has developed a constructive team approach that has resulted in national and inter-national networking with community based transport organisations. Two area based innovative pilots⁷, and a support service to individual groups and agencies seeking to address rural transport needs⁸ has developed. Most importantly the National Rural Transport Advisory Group, through the national rural transport co-ordinator, is exploring possible legislative and procedural changes that would enable accelerated development of rural transport services.

Viability

There is a perception that rural areas are not viable for public transport provision. A number of community and/or partnership driven rural transport initiatives (e.g. Feakle, Lisacul/Kilmovee, Westmeath, and Wicklow) have demonstrated the opposite. The need is there, it can be quantified and there are appropriate models of rural transport provision that could address a significant level of need. It is imperative to explore ways of integrating the transport needs of various state bodies such as Health Boards, FÁS, etc, to further increase effectiveness and viability in rural transport provision. But in the absence of integration, co-ordination and flexibility on the part of Government Departments concerned directly or indirectly with transport, rural transport projects will be too difficult to implement or sustain.

Rural Renewal Pilot Project on Rural Transport Steering Committee:

Ref. The chairperson, ADM Rural Development Working Group

Co-ordinator: Ms. Erin Cotter

⁷ North-West Cavan/South Fermanagh and Navan, Co. Meath.

⁸ A national rural transport co-ordinator

Lessons from the Pilot Projects

The “Rural Renewal: An Integrated Approach to the Provision of Public Services in Areas of Declining Population” pilot projects was introduced on a pilot basis to explore “a unified location based approach to service provision”. Each pilot project proposed underscored the following:

- Adequate public service is essential to sustain rural community life
- Rural communities are seeking means to improve quality of life through greater and more efficient access to public services
- Resources allocated to delivery of public services could increase the viability of local community resource centres
- Rural communities want to partner state agencies to increase the effectiveness of public service delivery
- A unified location based approach through a partnership of agency providers and local leaders is potentially very effective in integrating public services with community services, and essential private services. This approach would also be very effective in identifying synergy between the range of services and the range of public service agencies
- Emerging technologies can enhance universal access and add significantly to effective public service delivery
- Public service agencies are very open to methods of integrating their respective services and to exploring ways of responding more effectively to the needs of the citizen.

- It is noticeable that, even though the period of the pilot was relatively short, the outcome of each pilot has had an impact on rural community renewal. Examples of this are:
 - The pilot post offices are retaining their public notice boards and information technology facilities
 - The community offices are being retained with local funding and are continuing to facilitate public service delivery
 - Public service agencies continue to liaise closely for more integrated public service delivery
 - One-stop-shops for public service delivery with the best practice in information technology are being established, e.g. Meath County Council
 - There is a greater awareness that access to public transport is a major constraint to rural development and more communities are developing local transport services.

Further, the pilot projects are being consulted by leaders in rural development for replication and best practice ideas⁹.

⁹ The community and post office pilot projects have received visits from community groups and other interested parties.

The following are ten general lessons emerging from the Rural Renewal Pilot Projects:

- (a) Partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors enhances access to and delivery of public services
- (b) Through community structures public service agencies can consult with communities and target groups most in need of basic services
- (c) Community based resource centres are important catalysts in rural renewal. Support by public service agencies enhances the viability of local resource centres.
- (d) Collective briefing, training and regular meetings of public service agency staff enhance the integration of public services.
- (e) Dedicated clinic time by public service agencies organised in association with community leaders increases access to services significantly
- (f) Targeted services to the most disadvantaged is more effective when there is a partnership of state agencies and community leaders followed up with co-ordinated delivery
- (g) Information technology can increase effectiveness of public service delivery but requires personal contact to optimise its impact
- (h) Functional and departmental structures of public service agencies limit potential integration in public service
- (i) Coherent targeted policy, backed by resources, is required to enable the renewal of disadvantaged rural communities
- (j) Best practice of pilot projects must be mainstreamed to secure real progress in service delivery.

The following are the specific lessons arising from each pilot:

Feakle & Cranny Rural Renewal Pilot Project

- Community groups welcome the opportunity to work with statutory public service agencies.

The Lisacul/Kilmovee (Aiséirí) Pilot Project

- Local working groups can identify practical ways of increasing local access to public services when agencies have flexibility in the implementation of their services and when local communities have skilled local leaders.
- Integration of public services requires regular collective briefing, training and working meetings of all providers.

Post Office Rural Renewal Pilot Project

- A comprehensive network exists in rural Ireland, for example the post office network, to host local service points for public service delivery. With adequate resources these networks could provide proactive equal and universal access to public services.

One Stop Shop for Local Service Provision in North County Meath

- Information technology has enhanced the feasibility of one-stop-shops for the access, referral and limited delivery of public services. However codes of practice, human intermediaries and adequate funding is vital for optimum impact.

One-Stop-Shop for Local Service Provision on Off-Shore Islands

- Public service complexity and departmentalisation plus remote bureaucratic Departments reduce people's confidence in accessing public services particularly when the language and culture differs from that of the service client.

The challenge of Rural Transport Services

- Greater deregulation of transport services, co-operation and integration of responsibilities of relevant Departments and a partnership approach with community organisations would significantly increase rural transport services and increase access for people disadvantaged by impaired mobility.

Recommendations arising from the Pilot Projects

The pilot projects have clearly underscored a number of issues relating to integrated service delivery in rural areas. The following are four key recommendations arising applied to policy makers, public service providers, local development organisations, and community leaders/groups.

Recommendations to Policy Makers

Arising from the action research of “Rural Renewal: An Integrated Approach to the Provision of Public Services in Areas of Declining Population” pilot project the following are recommended:

- Locally accessible integrated public service provision is a fundamental step in the renewal of rural communities that have suffered population decline. Prepare area based rural development plans, integrating all stakeholders through partnership and integrated delivery models, with adequate resources to renew targeted rural areas
- Adopt a code of practice for public service providers that focuses on pro-active provision, automatic entitlement and targeting of disadvantaged communities
- Adopt a proofing model for all public services discrimination, disadvantage, rurality and poor service quality
- Optimise integration in planning, administration and delivery of public services
- Implement a one-stop-shop model for public and local service provision through cost effective localised public service centres with centralised support but decentralised decision making
- Adopt partnership models of public service provision that ensures equality of access and delivery.

Recommendations to Public Service Providers:

- Make the equitable and universal access to public services one of key impacts of local government reform
- Make the integration of public services, from integrated information provision to common staff customer care training, a foundation for the county development strategy¹⁰⁰ for each county
- Form working partnerships of public service providers and community leaders at local, area and county level to maximise the efficiency of service delivery
- Monitor and evaluate the relative success of public service delivery on a regular rolling basis
- Proof all public service provision to achieve universal equality in access and delivery.

¹⁰⁰ Each county, through the county development board (CDB), will prepare a development strategy during 2000/01 for implementation in the following 10 years.

Recommendations to Local Development Organisations:

- Facilitate the development of working partnerships of public service agents and community leaders at local, area and county levels
- Place quality public service delivery at the centre of all local development plans and provide resources for innovative partnerships
- Adopt innovative means to support local resource centres & community offices that facilitate the delivery of public services, especially to the most disadvantaged
- Utilise information technology for more effective networking, communication and information provision
- Prioritise rural renewal in communities of static or declining populations.

Recommendations to Community Leaders & Groups:

- Act on behalf of the disadvantaged by promoting best models of integrated public service delivery
- Assess needs and target those most in need of service delivery
- Form working partnerships with local deliverers of public services to optimise integration, targeting, efficiency and resources
- Maintain an active presence in all rural communities through a local resource centre or office
- Educate people in the community on their entitlements and how they can access public services.

The Model for More Effective Integrated Service Delivery in Rural Areas (See Fig. 1.)

Outline of Model

The proposed model for More Effective Integrated Service Delivery in Rural Areas set out hereunder is based on the following principles:

- Needs driven and person centred
- Delivery at the most local level
- Co-ordination of all services potentially required by the target community
- Partnership of the state with the community sector and the social partners
- Maximum use of existing infrastructure
- Team approach
- Flexibility and effectiveness
- Innovation and sustainability
- Confidentiality
- High quality service delivery
- Optimum use of technology

Delivery of public services is a complex process involving three distinct phases:

- Information
- Referral
- Delivery

Phase 1 is information provision. This is best done in an integrated, comprehensive but “need to know” basis. Effective provision of information is a complex process whose success is determined by many of the same factors that determine marketing success.

Phase 2 is referral. Referral is essential so that people can act on information. Referral is the link between information and delivery. The combination of phase 1 and 2 ideally involves a high level of horizontal and vertical integration so that a comprehensive range of information and referral is available to the person seeking to meet a need.

Phase 3 is delivery. Delivery of a service, particularly a specialised service, requires a single function approach. The best-specialised expertise is required for effective delivery of essential services. While there are opportunities for integration, there is greater opportunity for co-ordination, rather than integration, of services.

Most debates of public service delivery have noted the importance of information provision but have focused on delivery mechanisms. As an outcome of this pilot project it is evident that there is very significant potential for integration of information and referral services but delivery remains a functional process that could be co-ordinated more effectively as a result in integration in phases 1 and 2.

From the experience of the pilot projects this report recommends that the “One-Stop Shop” or “Single Point of Contact” concept for integrated public service provision will work, but for information provision, referral and services co-ordination only. From the experience of the pilot project the following model for integrated public service provision, especially to areas of declining populations, is recommended:

Office of Public Information

- Set up of an “Office of Public Information” that would be a single point of contact for all-public information provision nationally.

The Department of the Taoiseach would be the most suitable Department to host the Office of Public Information and to monitor its effectiveness. The Office of Public Information, through an Inter-Departmental Committee, would take on the responsibility for the dissemination of information relating to all Government Departments. The committee would have the authority to recommend the best presentation of information from each Government Department and consequently the bundling of this information to make it as accessible as possible for the general public.

The Office of Public Information would assume, in law, four roles:

- determine citizen information needs
- implement effective information dissemination mechanisms
- dialogue with Departments and service delivery agencies for co-ordinated and integrated service delivery
- monitor the effectiveness of information dissemination, service uptake and consequent service delivery.

The Office of Public Information would work with each County Development Board¹¹ to develop the most appropriate local information mechanisms for quality information dissemination.

County Development Team for Public Service Provision

- Establish a “County Development Team for Public Service Provision” to bring together all agencies and organisations involved in public service provision to draw up a countywide strategy.

The proposed model is organised on a county basis accepting that, though not always the most logical or efficient, it is the recognised organisational and administrative structure in Ireland. Under the proposed changes for Local Government the County Development Boards (CDBs) will draw up a strategy to meet the developmental needs of each county by December 2001. In this model it is recommended that each CDB propose a “County Development Team for Public Service Provision” bringing together all agencies and organisations involved in public service provision.

¹¹ County structures established in the year 2000 as part of the Government policy for local government reform

Local Services Co-ordination Committee

- A team of public service agencies, social partner and local development agency members would form a “Local Services Co-ordination Committee” to represent all agencies delivering public services into an area with a critical population mass of approximately 20,000 people.

The county unit may be too large an area to enable public service delivery to be sufficiently close to people. Therefore this model of public service provision proposes a population of approx. 20,000 people¹² as a desirable base that is sufficiently large for viability but sufficiently small to be person and community centred. In this model it is proposed that a team of public service agencies, with representation from all agencies delivering into that critical population mass (20,000), would form a “Local Services Co-ordination Committee”. The committee would also contain social partner members and local development agency members modelled on the area based partnership boards.

This committee would assume responsibility for drawing up a strategy for the most equitable, accessible, universal and sustainable method of integrated public service provision to that population base. The committee would promote integration of service delivery between agencies and integration with community and private sector service delivery to achieve the greatest level of sustainability. However, the essential aspects of person centredness, confidentiality and caring would underscore any strategy drawn up. Strategies would be discussed with the County Development Team for Public Service Provision in each county who would co-ordinate the strategies adopted by each Local Services Co-ordination Committee. The County Development Team would in turn liaise with the Office of Public Information through the Department of the Taoiseach. While the county strategy would seek to optimise the use of existing resources additional funding would be provided through the Inter-Departmental Committee under the Department of the Taoiseach.

Multi Service Access Centre

- Establish a “Multi Service Access Centre” within each Local Service Co-ordination Committee area to provide integrated information on all services, give specific referral, make appointments, and where appropriate, deliver a level of service.

In this model the Local Service Co-ordination Committee would create a Multi Service Access Centre where all information on services are accessible at the 20,000 population level, where specific referral would be given, where appointments would be made and, where appropriate, a level of service could be delivered.

Integrated Public Service Outlets

- Each Local Service Co-ordination Committee would also establish local “Integrated Public Service Outlets ” to enable people access public services as locally as possible.

The aim of this model is to provide integrated public services in the most person centred and local way. Therefore, the Local Service Co-ordination Committee strategy would seek

¹² However in exceptional circumstances, such as off shore islands, peninsulas, or areas with very low density of population, this crucial mass figure need not apply

the best combination of Integrated Public Service Outlets to enable people to access services as close as possible to their home. In this strategy the post office may be used as an outlet. Similarly, local development offices, local community centres and local health centres are locations where a rural person could access a sustainable level of provision of a wide range of public services.

The strategy would use a combination of the foregoing, depending on factors such as location, willingness to provide a wide range of services, quality of service, openness to learning, acceptance at community level, and sustainability, to put in place a network of "Integrated Public Service Outlets". The Local Services Co-ordination Committee would fund initial familiarisation and training, the capital investment required and ongoing costs where deemed necessary.

However, it is critical in this strategy that the target community take an active ownership of the "Integrated Public Service Outlet" by their participation in its design, part funding and ongoing involvement in its operation. It is essential that the strategy would be innovative to find the most appropriate means of bringing public service provision in an integrated way to people in rural locations.

Local Services Team and Local Services Co-ordinator

- Convene a "Local Services Team" to integrate and co-ordinate the provision of public services locally for rural renewal.

The pilot projects have shown that a team approach in local service provision is the most effective model. So for each Integrated Public Services Outlet a "Local Services Team" would be convened. The "Local Services Team" would mirror in composition the Local Services Co-ordination Committee as a local partnership of state, community and social partners. The "Local Services Team" would review the service needs of the community and respond through a team approach in the most co-ordinated way. This would overcome the diversity of services, the multiplicity of deliverers and the confusion among the public as to where to access services. The "Local Services Team" would be promoted through the local community networks and would work from the most sustainable base in the community. The team would seek ways of making service provision as accessible as possible and would promote outreach/mobile services.

- A "Local Services Co-ordinator" would be appointed in each Local Services Team to assist the team co-ordinate the provision of information, referral and feasible public service delivery to the area.

Each local service team would have a "Local Services Co-ordinator". This person would, on a full or part-time basis, co-ordinate the provision of information, referral and public service delivery to the area. The model of the Local Service Team and the Local Service Co-ordinator would be replicated under the direction of the Local Services Co-ordination Committee. In this model, each population base of approximately 20,000 people would foster a number of Local Service Teams with Local Service Co-ordinators and Local Service Outlets.

As a result there would be:

- Greater integration and co-ordination of service provision
- More effective outreach services
- Integration of private and community services which are in demand
- Services which are more needs led.

Principles and Impacts

The principles underlying this model for integrated public service delivery include:

- The provision of information and service as a human right
- An excellent model of local information delivery, response, and referral for every citizen
- A quality co-ordinated and integrated method of local public service provision
- Responsive monitoring of provision, referral, and delivery
- Pro-activity
- Targeting of information and services to disadvantaged, marginalised and the most isolated.

The impacts would include:

- Significant investment in integrated public service provision
- More effective use of community resources at local level
- Greater uptake of public services
- Job creation potential
- A sustainable and systematic model
- Potential to optimise the use of technology.

Ultimately, this model will improve the quality of life in rural areas, re-generate rural communities and be instrumental in changing the attitude from rural decline to rural regeneration. As the model matures more excellent initiatives for service delivery, like the rural transport and the services for the isolated elderly, will emerge thereby giving better quality cost-effective services.

This model is also in keeping with the increasing trend towards more effective local government and the creation of a number of strategy management positions in service agencies e.g. the Health Boards and the development of sustainable strategies under the County Development Boards (CDBs) and Specific Policy Committees (SPCs). This model seeks to support the trend towards integration of services and, as directed by the Government's Strategic Management Initiative (SMI), more effective service delivery. Further this model also has an in-built capacity to be adapted into the emerging structures for better local government and co-ordination of local development.

Conclusion

All citizens require the services of the /state or public agencies at one time or another. Some citizens require the state services on an ongoing basis while others only require them at critical times. Access to public services is a citizens right.

Access to public services has become more difficult for people in rural areas especially those with sparse or declining populations. Significant research in recent years has identified poor access to public services as a factor contributing to poorer quality of life for people living in rural areas and especially for the disadvantaged. These reports recommend that a model for more effective delivery of public services needs to be developed and resourced. In particular single points for the provision of integrated public services is recommended.

This pilot project sought to test the model of a single point of contact for the integrated delivery of public services in rural areas. Through seven projects the initiative identified a number of lessons that would contribute to more effective delivery of integrated public services to rural areas. Each project was different but did present a number of common lessons and some particular lessons.

Collectively, the pilot projects have constructed the framework for a model of integrated service provision. When this framework is linked to the policies for Better Local Government and the White Paper on Rural Development an integrated model emerges.

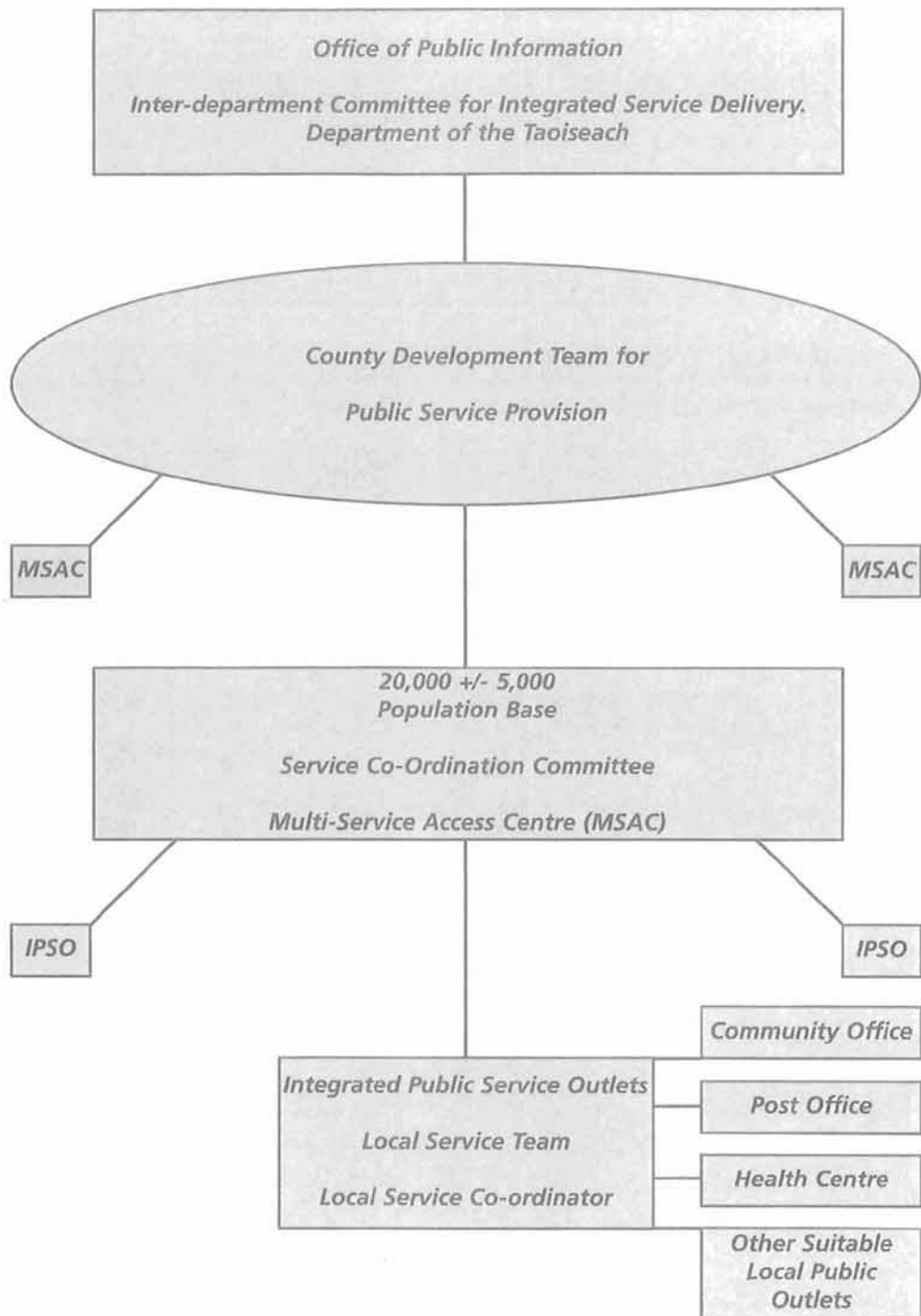
This report presents a summary of each project and the lessons arising. It also presents a model for public service delivery to rural areas that seeks to complement the strategic directions indicated in rural development and in local government reform policies.

The viability of some rural areas is in question particularly in this time of the Celtic Tiger. Ireland is a relatively small country. There is no logical reason why rural communities with valuable resources should be threatened with serious decline leaving the remaining residents in severe disadvantage. In fact, the renewal of these rural communities could ease the pressure on the areas that are experiencing rapid urbanisation. The development of a model for the provision of quality integrated public services is an important basic step in rural renewal.

With resources and a partnership approach it is feasible to renew many rural communities that are in decline and it is possible to significantly improve the quality of life of the isolated and disadvantaged for whom these communities are their home.

The work of the leaders in these pilot projects and in the national steering committee is very valuable as is the vision of the former Minister of State, Mr. Donal Carey T.D. and the Minister, Mr. Noel Davern T.D. It is critical that the lessons from these pilot projects are implemented in mainstream programmes.

Fig 1: The Model for More Effective Integrated Public Service Delivery in Rural Areas



MSAC = Multi-Service Access Centre
 IPSO = Integrated Public Service Outlets

Appendix 1: Members of the National Steering Committee

The members of the National Rural Renewal Pilot Project Steering Committee when the pilot projects were the responsibility of the Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach:

Ms. Mary Doyle, Principal Officer, Department of the Taoiseach (Ms. Doyle was replaced by Ms. Mary Butler, Principal Officer)
Mr. Seamus O'Callaghan, Advisor on Rural Development to the Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach
Mr. Richard Holland and Ms. Grainne Maher, Department of the Taoiseach.
Mr. Michael Kenny, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

The members of the National Rural Renewal Pilot Project Steering Committee when the pilot projects were the responsibility of the Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development:

Mr. Tony Burke, Principal Officer, Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (Mr. Burke was replaced by Mr. Frank O'Donnell, Principal Officer)
Mr. Colm Ó' Cribín, Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development
Mr. Séamus Ó' Flaherty, Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development
Mr. Michael Kenny, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Appendix 2: Recommended Reports and Publications

Better Local Government: A Programme for Change, Government Publications, 1996

Building the Social Economy, A Policy Document from the Partnerships for Local Action Network (Planet)

Devolution Commission Report, Government Publications, 1997

Ensuring the Future- A Strategy for Rural Development in Ireland a White Paper on Rural Development, Department of Agriculture & Food, August 1999

Island Development, A strategic framework for Developing the Offshore Islands of Ireland, Government Publications, 1996

New Approaches to Rural Development, NESC, 1994

Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness, 1996

Population Distribution and Economic Development: Trends and Policy Implications, NESC, 1997

Poverty in Rural Ireland, A Political Economy Perspective, Combat Poverty Agency, 1996

Report of the Rural Development Policy Advisory Group, Government Publications, 1997

Rural Ireland: Waiting for a Lift, ADM, 1998

Rural Renewal: Combating Social Exclusion, NESF, 1997

Sharing in Progress - The National Anti-Poverty Strategy, Government Publications

Strategic Management Initiative, Delivering Better Government, Government Publications, 1996

Task Force on Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems Report, Government Publications, 1998