

## RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The AF2010 Committee was given the task of developing a strategy for the agriculture and food industries and therefore, while it touched on the issue of rural development in its report, it did not seek to deal with this matter in detail. However rural development forms an increasingly important focus of Government policy, and has important inter-linkages with the development of the agri-food sector, and therefore it is appropriate that this Plan of Action should address it.

The White Paper on Rural Development which was published in August 1999 sets out a vision and a framework for the development of our rural communities, and marks a new approach and commitment by Government to rural development. The policy debate on this issue has moved centre stage in recent years and, with increasing emphasis on rural development policy in the EU context, it is now regarded as an important pillar of the CAP.

The rural development policy agenda is defined in the White Paper as all Government policies and interventions which are directed towards improving the physical, economic and social conditions of people living in the open countryside, in coastal areas, towns and villages and in smaller urban centres outside of the five major urban areas. The agenda will, at the same time, facilitate balanced and sustainable regional development while tackling issues of poverty and social inclusion.

The overall strategy decided by Government provides for:

- balanced regional development to ensure that the benefits of economic and social progress are distributed throughout rural areas;
- investment in services and infrastructure;
- sustainable economic development;
- human resources development;
- a determined focus on poverty and social exclusion; and
- preservation of the culture and heritage of rural areas and protection of the environment.

A range of new institutional measures, including a Cabinet Sub-Committee, have been introduced to implement this strategy and rural proofing procedures are now in place for all national policies. The National Development Plan is the primary medium for bringing the aspirations in the White Paper to fruition in terms of practical policy actions. It provides for public investment of some £6.7 billion over the next seven years in actions which directly impact on rural areas. County Development Boards will be asked to bear in mind the objectives of the White Paper and its underlying strategy in preparing their own county strategies.

In recognition of the need for on-going review and analysis of the strategies outlined in the White Paper, allied to a comprehensive research programme to assist policy formulation in the future, a Rural Development Fund, to be administered by DAFRD, has been established. Some £6 million has been allocated to the Fund over the period of the National Development Plan to finance such undertakings as research, evaluations and pilot actions, where appropriate.

Looking forward, there are now clear signs of an accelerating drift from urban to neighbouring rural areas. This is creating new pressures and issues for such areas, which are radically different from the more traditional concerns of rural development in this country. Rural development policy therefore faces an evolving agenda which must be addressed. The new structures now in place will facilitate the formulation of policy to address these new issues.

## DEVELOPING RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

### COMMENT

*The Government's commitment is to provide the range of modern infrastructure in rural areas which will promote sustainable economic growth and maintenance of the rural population. All options will be explored to ensure that investment in infrastructure takes place, including joint initiatives between the Government and the private sector.*

### ACTIONS

Key actions related to infrastructure include the following:

- The **National Spatial Strategy**, currently being prepared, will enable the Government to plan for the balanced sustainable development of the country as a whole. It will contain a detailed blueprint for spatial development and will take two years to complete.
- Roads** - A total of £1.6 billion is provided for the development of the national roads network – both primary and secondary roads - over the period of the National Development Plan, comprising £0.7 billion on non-national roads in the predominantly rural BMW Region and £0.9 billion in the S&E Region.
- Telecommunications** - a provision of £120 million is made in the National Development Plan to promote investment in advanced telecommunications with two thirds of it in the BMW Regional Operational Programme.

## ENSURING ACCESS TO SERVICES

### COMMENT

*The White Paper underlines the Government commitment to providing essential public services in rural areas to ensure a proper environment for economic development, promote social inclusion and support dispersed, viable rural communities.*

### ACTIONS

A very wide range of actions will be implemented under this heading including the following:

- Healthcare** - £2 billion is provided in the National Development Plan to address the capital needs of the health services. Planned expansion of primary care services and IT training for GPs, together with a programme of development of new health centres and refurbishment/upgrading of existing health centres, will impact very positively on rural communities.
- Transport** - a specific provision of £3.5 million is proposed in the NDP for capital expenditure to encourage the development of pilot local or community based pilot transport initiatives in rural areas.
- Water and waste water services** - investment in rural areas will take place within the framework of the two Regional Operational Programmes. A total of £420 million has been allocated for expenditure on rural water measures.
- Urban and Village Renewal** – expenditure of £103m is being provided in the two Regional Operational Programmes of the

NDP for this measure which is aimed at improving the visual amenity of towns and villages and which should complement other investments in the NDP towards achieving the objectives of balanced regional development and the provision of rural infrastructure.

- Education** – in addition to such measures as Breaking the Cycle and the School Development Planning Initiative at primary level, and the Stay in School Initiative at secondary level, special assistance is being made available to one-teacher primary schools and to isolated secondary schools.
- Post Offices** – the Government is committed to the retention of the post office network and to its use for the delivery of the most comprehensive range possible of State services to all citizens. A European Commission ruling on the assignment to An Post of certain functions is currently pending.

## ENCOURAGING THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Section 18.4 of 2010 Report refers

### COMMENT

*Balanced regional development is a central theme of the White Paper on Rural Development and is a specific objective of the National Development Plan. One of the aims in the NDP, and reiterated in the PPF, is to deliver more than half of all the new jobs from future green field projects into the BMW Region. The NDP provides differentiated grant rates for job creation depending on the region involved: 40% grant rates in the BMW region; 20% in the Mid-West, South-West and South-East; 18% in the Mid-East; and 17.5% in Dublin.*

### ACTIONS

- Enterprise Ireland will establish specialist regional development services during 2000. The services will include building networks and company clusters to facilitate marketing, human resources development and e-business. The regional offices will also offer advice to companies on staff recruitment and retention.
- In addition to Dublin, Cork, Limerick/Shannon, Galway and Waterford, the NDP recognised other emerging urban centres throughout the country as having the potential to become gateways. A key component of regional policy will be the focused development of a limited number of strategically placed centres as regional gateways. A detailed study will be undertaken to establish the best location for these gateways as part of the National Spatial Strategy. To ensure extended regional impact, a number of medium-sized hub towns will be supported as locations for smaller scale industry and enterprise.
- Off-farm employment will be facilitated by the operation of the EU LEADER+ Community Initiative and the national LEADER-type programme. Some £117 million of national and EU funding will be available for these measures in the 2000-2006 period.
- The operation of the Western Investment Fund of £25 million from the year 2000 by the Western Development Commission will also encourage off-farm enterprise.
- The policy of directing job creation support towards areas of greatest need will be followed in areas affected by rationalisation in the primary food processing sector.

## TACKLING RURAL POVERTY

Section 18.3 of 2010 Report refers

### COMMENT

*The rural poverty target in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) is:*

*'To ensure that strategies are developed for the provision of services in rural areas, especially those concerned with educational disadvantage, unemployment and income adequacy, so that the overall targets of the NAPS are achieved in rural areas'.*

*The recent assessment of the NAPS by the Combat Poverty Agency criticised the target on rural poverty for being non-specific and on which it was difficult to measure progress. It recommended the re-setting of the rural poverty target based on disaggregated national data and additional local data.*

### ACTIONS

- The Combat Poverty and Agri-Food 2010 recommendations will be addressed in the review of the NAPS required under the PPF. DAFRD will be the lead Department in reviewing the rural poverty target. The aim is to complete this element of the review by 1 November 2000.
- The work of the Area Based Partnerships and the ADM Community Groups in delivering Social Inclusion measures will continue to play an important role in rural development.
- A fund of £200 million has been provided under the National Development Plan in a special sub-programme for Social Inclusion to be administered under the auspices of the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation.
- The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs will monitor the operation of the Farm Assist scheme to ensure that it provides effective support to low income farm families.
- Under the Social Welfare Act, 2000, some enhancements of the Farm Assist scheme will take effect from 1 October 2000. These increase child income-related disregards and reduce the percentage income from the farm or other self-employment in assessing entitlement to the scheme's benefits.