

A Charter for Rural Communities

“Developing Vibrant Rural Communities”

National Ploughing Championships 2007
Thursday, 27 September, 11.30am

Éamon Ó Cuív TD, Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

A chairde,

I am grateful to you all for the invitation to launch the Carnegie Commission’s Charter for Rural Communities. I welcome this Charter from the Carnegie Commission for Rural Development because in my view, documents such as this inform and aid our decision-making process. However, reports and charters cannot be a substitute for engagement by the people themselves in the policy-making process. We must accept that we live in a democracy and that Governments are elected by the people to do a job based on the policy mandate approved by the people at election time.

We all know that there are many challenges to the goal of developing vibrant rural communities both within rural Ireland itself and coming from outside. Government is well placed to meet this challenge having a solid foundation on which to build our plan of work.

European Union policy as articulated in 2005 is about: *“improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural economy.”* At home, the Government’s own White Paper on Rural Development is: *“committed to ensuring the economic and social well-being of rural communities, to providing the conditions for a meaningful and fulfilling life for all people living in rural areas and to striving to achieve a rural Ireland in which there will be vibrant sustainable communities...”*

According to the new Programme for Government, *“Vibrant rural communities are vital to the future of our nation.”* This is the clear work-plan and democratic mandate within which this Government and I as Minister must operate.

As I said on appointment as Minister for Rural Development, probably the most accurate measure of rural decline is population loss. To deliver on our work plan, the only possible long-term approach to rural development and halting rural decline worldwide, is to develop diverse, multi-sectoral, local rural economies. Such local rural economies should have a mixture of both local enterprise and access to public jobs. A sensible and well-delivered policy of decentralisation of public jobs has a key role to play in developing rural life and releasing the congestion strains on our main urban areas.

There was recently a headline in the Irish newspapers that said that for the first time ever, more than half of the world’s population live in cities. It said that the people were continuing to flee the countryside into our cities. This is socially and economically not a good thing and the maintenance of balanced population structures and population stability is desirable. The Irish Government believes so. Some people will say that these policies are built on a kind of idealistic view of green fields and frugal living and that such a policy is economic madness. I believe, however, that there are very cogent arguments that show that the maintenance of

rural populations and ensuring that the growth of cities is not at the expense of rural communities not only makes economic sense, but also makes social sense.

Having accepted the desirability of rural development, the next questions that obviously arise are:

What policy measures should be pursued to achieve the objective? and

Have policies to date been adequate to the purpose?

Amongst the focused measures that we in Government have pursued to achieve the rural development objective have been the work of our CLÁR Programme tackling physical and social infrastructural disadvantage, the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines, Decentralisation, rural proofing of Government policy, the LEADER and rural development programmes, the Rural Transport Initiative, and the Rural Social Scheme. Of course, all organs of the State also have an obligation to ensure that the Government policy of rural development is taken into account in their decision-making.

The issue of population is at the very core of developing life in rural Ireland. In the mindset of some planners, there is only a hierarchy of cities, towns, hubs, and gateways and a disregard for the holistic approach of Government policy and the National Spatial Strategy's commitments to rural communities. Let's be clear about this: when we talk of rural Ireland, we are referring to dispersed rural communities, not cities, major towns, hubs or gateways. Let's be clear about this also: gateway cities are intended to be development nodes guiding the way in to broader regions, not cul-de-sacs beyond which no other development shall go. Hub towns are intended to be the lungs of a broader body, not vacuums to suck the life-breath out of their catchment areas. Driving rural people in droves out of the countryside into cities and towns benefits neither rural nor urban communities.

Rural communities themselves strongly recognise another hierarchy of place - that of townland, parish, county and province, but planners consistently ignore this hierarchy. Much of this hierarchy goes back many centuries in rural Ireland, to even before the Flight of the Earls and was never broken right up to the present day. It is a brave or foolhardy person in rural Ireland who would ignore the attachment to this hierarchy of place and parish. There are many Cork and Kerry neighbours who know all about this attachment to place as manifested itself on the Gaelic football field in recent weeks. There are also many Limerick and Tipperary rugby supporters who can tell you what loyalty to the Munster provincial rugby team means to them. It is our belief that in terms of Government priorities, these two spatial hierarchies can live in an uneasy equilibrium.

It is our belief also that rural development does not have to take place at the expense of the rural environment. The protection of the landscape and water quality matters to rural communities most of all, because they're the people who live in the countryside every day of the week in family homes.

Amidst the important debate about preserving the heritage of our countryside and the value of its traditions, music and culture, the point is often missed that without our people, these cease to exist. For traditional music, dance and games to survive in a rural area, it needs a new generation to renew them and to pass them on.

In essence then, drawing the main strands of the clear and rational rural policy objectives and the binding ties of rural Ireland together, the main point is that if you want to develop life in

rural Ireland, you need people there. Therefore you need jobs, community and social facilities, homes and a social life.

In Ireland, the situation is that a large number of rural areas are now in a period of rapid growth but these are mainly peri-urban areas within 30 or 40 miles of the major cities and towns. The population in the rural areas outside the influence of major cities and towns is still stagnant or in many cases, in decline, and until it is reversed, our policies will not have achieved their goals. We are making progress and our policies are working. Population change maps can show us that while some rural areas still suffer population decreases, many rural areas have continued to show an increase in population in the period from Census 2002 to Census 2006. As you know, this year, we commemorate the Flight of the Earls from Ireland at the start of the 1600s. It took Ireland a long time to recover from that drain of human resources. Now, we enjoy previously unparalleled opportunities. With the human, economic and technological resources that we have at our disposal today, surely we have the wherewithal to develop vibrant rural communities, rather than draining them of their lifeblood – their people?

A Charter for Rural Communities

The final report of the Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development

The work of the Carnegie Commission for Rural Communities is now complete; their final report '**A Charter for Rural Communities**' was presented to media and stakeholders in London on Wednesday 20th June. The report includes the Commission's Ideas for Action. The Commission sees central and local government, landowners, the Social Investment Bank, the Lottery distributors, Third Sector agencies, trusts and local communities working together to deliver these actions. These include:

- * A major expansion in community ownership of local assets
- * An enhanced role for parish and community councils
- * A Centre for Excellence supporting rural community development policy and practice on the ground.
- * Encouragement and assistance for local communities to develop and manage their own services and to engage in community planning

A Charter for Rural Communities. pdf 1.94 MB

<http://rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/files/rural/A%20Charter%20for%20Rural%20Communities.pdf>

Asset Based Approaches to Rural Community Development

Literature Review and Resources

Asset Based Rural Community Development has emerged globally as a rejection of deficit regeneration models, where communities have to demonstrate all the things they lack in order to win resources. A community that inquires into problems will keep finding problems. A community that attempts to appreciate what is best in itself will discover assets. Asset Based Rural Community Development takes as its starting point these existing assets, particularly the strengths inherent in community based associations and social networks, and mobilises these, alongside tangible assets such as land and buildings, to create new economic and social opportunities.

Carnegie UK Trust commissioned the International Association for Community Development (IACD) to undertake a literature review and to collect case studies of Asset Based Rural Community Development as it is used in different contexts around the world. Forum for the Future was commissioned to undertake a parallel review in the UK and Irish context, examining in particular those approaches that can be used at both a local and a strategic level.

Asset-based approaches-IACD.pdf 814.48 KB

<http://rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/files/rural/Asset-based%20approaches%20-IACD.pdf>

[http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/Democracy and Civil Society](http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/Democracy%20and%20Civil%20Society)

The Carnegie UK Trust Democracy and Civil Society programme aims to influence policy and practice through research, public debate and enabling the active participation of people of all ages and backgrounds.

<http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/>

Creative Philanthropy

The Carnegie UK Trust's Creative Philanthropy programme explores the role of philanthropy in contributing more effectively to social change.

<http://philanthropy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/>

Rural Community Development Programme

We examine and promote ways in which rural communities across the UK and Ireland can be empowered to shape and influence change and work to ensure that rural priorities are fully recognised by decision makers.

<http://rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/>

Civil Society Inquiry launches futures reports

The Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland launches the findings of the 'futures' reports.

What is Civil Society?

We realise there are many definitions of civil society. The working definition of civil society used to inform the work of the Inquiry has three dimensions:

* Civil Society as associational life. Civil society is the 'space' of organised activity not undertaken by either the government or for-private-profit business. It includes formal and informal associations such as: voluntary and community organisations, trade unions, faith-based organisations, co-operatives and mutuals, political parties, professional and business associations, philanthropic organisations, informal citizen groups and social movements. Participation in or membership of such organisations is voluntary in nature.

* Civil Society as the 'good' society. The term civil society is often used as a short-hand for the type of society we want to live in and can therefore viewed in normative terms. It is often assumed that civil society is a good thing, but this is not necessarily true. For example, civil society associations can help strengthen democracy and improve the well-being of deprived communities as can they undermine human rights and preach intolerance and violence. The Inquiry is therefore especially concerned about the strength of civil society

associations as a means through which values and outcomes such as non-violence, non-discrimination, democracy, mutuality and social justice are nurtured and achieved; and as a means through which public policy dilemmas are resolved in ways that are just, effective and democratic. A 'good' civil society needs to have constructive relationships with government, statutory agencies, the business sector and media. The actions of civil society associations alone cannot achieve a 'good' civil society.

* Civil Society as arenas for public deliberation. Civil society is an arena for public deliberation and the exercise of active citizenship in pursuit of common interests. It is the public space in which societal differences, social problems, public policy, government action and matters of community and cultural identity are developed and debated. These public spaces might be physical in nature, such as community centres, or virtual, such as blogs. We may never share a common vision about what a 'good' society might look like and how it might be achieved, but can be committed to a process that allows people of all ages and backgrounds to share in defining how the different visions are reconciled.

To summarise, civil society is a goal to aim for (a 'good' society), a means to achieve it (associational life), and a framework for engaging with each other about ends and means (arenas for deliberation).

Power and Influence

The Democracy Initiative is planning to take forward an action and research programme *on the theme of power and influence in the UK and Ireland.*

We aim to design a practically applicable work programme, designed to inform public policy debate and shape practice to enable citizens and civil society groups to understand and have more influence over decision making processes.

In the first instance will focus on:

- * how the distribution of power and influence might shape and strengthen the nature of democracy now and in the future;
- * how power and influence impacts on the lives of citizens in the UK and Ireland, in particular those that are less advantaged;
- * how citizens, through civil society organisations, can be more influential and recognise where the levers for power and influence are in a range of policy influencing settings.

The distribution of power in relation to democratic renewal is already a widely debated concern. The Carnegie UK Trust supports the findings of the *Power Inquiry*, which has argued that power has become too concentrated at the centre, and that large sections of our society feel increasingly alienated from the formal political process. In response to this, the *Power Inquiry* has made a series of recommendations to increase participation by devolving greater decision-making authority to the local level.

The Carnegie UK Trust proposes a further examination to get a deeper understanding of the different forces in society which shape decision making. This means going beyond the political realm, and looking at how power is exercised in areas such as the distribution of wealth and assets, control over the economy, the role of the media, the judiciary, the military, the role of celebrities, the influence of civil society organisations, and the impact of international factors, such as the EU and the World Bank.

To discuss this aspect of our work further, email raji@carnegieuk.org

Futures for civil society. Summary.pdf *651.6 KB*

<http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/files/Futures%20for%20civil%20society.%20Summary.pdf>

The shape of civil society to come.pdf *1.52 MB*

<http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/files/The%20shape%20of%20civil%20society%20to%20come.pdf>

Scenarios for civil society.pdf *1.51 MB*

<http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/files/Scenarios%20for%20civil%20society.pdf>

Toolkit - using scenarios and futures thinking.pdf *179.35 KB*

<http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/files/Toolkit%20%20using%20scenarios%20and%20futures%20thinking.pdf>