



Capacity Building in Rural Areas: A Context

A Working Paper to the RERC

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper is part of a research project that is being undertaken by the School of Public Policy at the University of Birmingham that is investigating rural capacity building as a contributory element to the Rural Evidence Research Centre (RERC).
- 1.2 The purpose of the research is to look at the role of the community and voluntary sectors in rural life and service delivery. Key issues that are being examined include:
- the development of our understanding of capacity building and how it relates to rural areas.
 - how to build capacity within rural communities.
 - how governance structures and mechanisms can help facilitate greater community engagement.
 - how to enable local communities and community-based organisations to have a meaningful voice in shaping the future of rural areas.
- 1.3 The central research question guiding the study is what are the components of rural community capacity that contribute towards effective and sustainable communities. Within this overarching question a number of supplementary issues are being examined such as what a sustainable community looks like, what interventions by public, private and voluntary institutions can help further engagement and what the key barriers to capacity development?
- 1.4 This paper sets the context for the examination of capacity building in rural areas. The intention is to develop a better understanding of the contextual dynamics that exist in rural areas that might aid and support, or indeed hinder, the development of community capacity building activities.

2. The Rural Strategy 2004

- 2.1 The Rural Strategy 2004 sets out a clear vision for bringing about sustainable rural communities. The vision highlights the Government's priorities for rural policy for the next three to five years and how delivery arrangements are going to be reformed. The Rural White Paper 2000 (DETR, 2000) had previously set out a positive vision of thriving local communities. This vision included communities having access to a high quality level of public services; a working countryside promoting economic diversity with high and stable levels of employment; and a protected countryside in which the environment is sustained and improved.
- 2.2 The final component of the vision is a vibrant countryside that could shape its own future and whose voice governments would hear at all levels. These priorities focus on tackling disadvantage, decision

making at both regional and local levels, and services becoming more accessible to citizens within rural communities.

- 2.3 These strategies set an important context for the delivery of rural capacity building initiatives. This context paper is divided into eight sections – the exclusive countryside, social exclusion, young people, community engagement, community capacity building and the voluntary sector, governance, modernising rural delivery and international comparisons. All sections focus on the situation at the present and the range of initiatives and policies in place to create such vibrant and sustainable communities. The final section offers a brief international perspective.

3. The Exclusive Countryside

- 3.1 Many rural areas are becoming exclusive because only the 'better-off' of society can afford to live there. The trend sees richer people moving into these areas and poorer people moving out. The fact that incomes are rising in these areas therefore needs careful analysing. There are similar proportions of people disadvantaged and socially excluded in rural areas, but these often go unnoticed because a perception of 'consensual idyllic rural communities' (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2000). In 2000 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) Rural Areas Programme looked at issues concerning social inclusion and regeneration in a number of rural areas and found rural areas were changing rapidly having different consequences for places and social groups.
- 3.2 This programme found rural areas undergoing rapid change because of the impacts of globalisation along with other social and policy changes. Economic restructuring and migration patterns have had major impacts on rural areas. Whilst some rural areas are growing faster than urban areas, some are still in decline. One key element to this decline is the penetration of local markets by global forces. However, rural areas have been part of the general shift towards a service-based economy, but the benefits have not necessarily been widely shared. The information and technology industries are bringing many opportunities to rural areas, but also threats.
- 3.3 'Gentrification' is evident in many rural areas – whereby better-off people have migrated to rural areas, which has often displaced the less affluent. This has been because of the scarcity of housing and the often-intense competition in this scarce housing market. Wealthier households will outbid poorer ones for scarce housing so then the situation is about spatial exclusion rather than social exclusion. Affordable housing is essential to the sustainability of rural communities and the life chances of people living in these areas.
- 3.4 Rural policies have attempted to respond to these forces but very often, wider macro economic policies and social policies have had

more of a significant impact on these areas. For example, European Union (EU) policies are particularly important to rural development in regard to agricultural policy. However, EU policy seems to be changing with Goodwin (2003) suggesting that a broader range of issues being included in rural policy-making is replacing its emphasis on sector specific policies. These issues are based on economic, social and cultural changes and policies focusing on development, conservation and lifestyle.

- 3.5 Affordable housing is being addressed by the government's action plan for dealing with the housing crisis and housing shortages. *The Sustainable Communities Plan: Building for the Future* plan (ODPM 2003) addresses how to build better thriving sustainable communities in both urban and rural areas. It is an action plan developed by ODPM for dealing with the housing crisis in England. It outlines ways of tackling housing shortages in the South-East and the issue of abandonment in the North and Midlands and how to build more sustainable communities. A key issue in rural areas is a need for a range of housing provision that meets a wide range of needs, that enables local people, particularly the young, to satisfy their housing needs (ODPM, 2003).
- 3.6 The State of the Countryside Report 2004 chronicles the state of the contemporary countryside highlighting that despite relatively high levels of economic prosperity and low levels of social exclusion in rural areas that significant problems do exist in many rural areas. There are many deprived rural areas that have suffered poor levels of economic growth, experienced high levels of social exclusion and also include communities that have generally lower skills levels.
- 3.7 The Local Government Association's (LGA) has undertaken work on rural revival and its vision is for thriving, vibrant and empowered rural communities. This vision sees people achieving their aspirations by sharing a common goal of improved public services and a strong community based on a healthier economic well being in an enhanced and attractive landscape and environment. It was argued that local authorities were uniquely placed to achieve this (LGA, 2003).

4. Social Exclusion

- 4.1 Processes of social exclusion operate widely in Britain; with one in three people in rural Britain experiencing poverty at some time, this process may not be as visible as in urban areas. This lack of visibility means social exclusion is in many ways harder to address. Those experiencing social exclusion in rural areas are often dispersed and disguised amongst apparent affluence, rather than in concentrated areas as is more the norm in urban areas. This suggests that tackling social exclusion based on spatial areas is not sufficient in rural areas.

- 4.2 Although a lower proportion of people actually experiences low incomes in rural areas to that of urban, prosperity is far from universal. Inequality in rural Britain is centred on social class, gender, disability and age. The main groups affected are older people, young people, low paid people in work, self-employed people out of the labour market, the disabled, the homeless and women. The difficulties being faced by these groups have been acknowledged through both research and policy initiatives since the mid-1990s (Cloke, 1994; Shucksmith and Chapman, 1998).
- 4.5 Ethnicity is less apparent as a reason for social exclusion in rural areas. Not because it does not exist, but issues relating to black and ethnic minority groups are more under-represented in rural areas and consequently not well understood. This area is significantly under researched (Henderson and Kaur, 1999; JRF, 2000). But there is research to indicate that racism is alive and well in rural area. The 1992 Council for Racial Equality report "*Keep them in Birmingham*" provided clear evidence that racism was widespread throughout urban and rural areas of south west England (Jay 2002).
- 4.6 Blackburn et al (2003) make reference to a whole series of other research reports that clearly confirm racism is an issue in rural areas (Derbyshire 1994, Nizhar 1995, and Henderson and Kaur, 1999). Moreover, the Federation for Community Development Learning for Black and Ethnic Minority community workers see issues concerning ethnic minority groups in rural areas being ignored by the over concentration on urban policy. They argue that by and large the experiences of black and minority ethnic communities in rural areas are an invisible phenomenon (UBUNTU, 2004).
- 4.7 As in urban areas marital breakdown, loss of earnings, changing composition of households can lead to social exclusion in rural areas. However, other factors such as low pay, inadequate pensions, poverty in self-employment, low benefit take-up and fear of stigma in local communities have potentially more impact in rural areas leading to greater degrees of social exclusion.
- 4.8 These issues amount to the hidden and dispersed nature of poverty in rural areas, which can result in community development, or area based initiatives having very little impact. There is a high incidence of poverty amongst older households and this is often concentrated in the private housing sector. The low take up rate of benefits, often reflects the inaccessibility of information and services compounded by a culture of independence, which also leads to poverty. There are also different perceptions of poverty. Low pay in small workplaces is part of the rural economy, which goes some way to trapping people in a lifetime of poverty. Older people in rural areas tend to be detached from the labour market and are more likely to suffer from social exclusion as a result of poor mobility and the consequent difficulty in accessing both public and community services.

- 4.9 The Countryside and Community Research Unit (CCRU) at the University of Gloucester (2005) found that Parish Plans and Market Town Health checks provided a snapshot view of the main social exclusion issues for local residents in rural areas. The Unit found similar issues being raised such as inadequate public transport, inadequacy of specific village services, housing, road traffic, and the inadequacy of facilities for young people.
- 4.10 The CCRU found that affordable housing was the key issue for the more remote parishes and traffic issues were of greater concern in the more accessible parishes. Whether or not there are marked distinctive regional profiles of parish level issues is questioned. In the case of the Market Town Health checks particular issues were also raised. These included road traffic, inadequate public transport,¹ inadequate facilities ranging from a decline in locally delivered services for young people, a lack of recreational and leisure based facilities, poor range and quality of local shops, poor quality of employment and the lack of affordable housing.
- 4.11 In the case of the larger small towns road traffic was a major issue, while in the smaller small towns inadequate local services was more of an issue. The main conclusions of the CCRU research into Parish Plans and Market Town Health checks were as follows:
- each parish and small town having its own distinctive issues and policies based on place-specific seemed to be appropriate, with plans of action locally generated, being the right path to follow. However, having identified place-specific issues for appropriate plan of actions these concerns can be used to identify a range of concerns and issues felt across rural England.
 - overall road traffic issues concerning road congestion, excessive speed, road safety and environmental nuisance were the main concern of both parish and small towns combined. Issues concerning the local environment and local service provision specifically the needs of young people and affordable housing together with concerns for the local economy were raised by market towns.
 - initiatives for the regeneration of parishes and small towns being placed under the control of bodies such as local authorities, Rural Community Councils and Local Strategic Partnerships are seen to enhance this regeneration. The Parish Plans and Market Town Action Plans programme has provided valuable information for not only rural regeneration but has created a

¹ Transport generally emerged in many studies as a major contributor to social exclusion in rural areas. People without a car in rural areas have difficulty accessing employment and services.

'start-of the-century snapshot' of local concerns within smaller rural settlements. These action plan programmes have focused on bottom-up consultation and involvement exercises and in doing so have continued to secure the support of the Countryside Agency (CCRU, 2005).

5 Young People

5.1 Young people are an important target group for capacity building activities. Young people from rural areas tend to be separated into two labour markets the national (distant well paid with career opportunities) and the local (poorly paid, insecure, unrewarding and with fewer prospects). Young people from rural areas access national job opportunities the same way as young people from urban areas through education and social class. However a lack of further education and training opportunities in rural areas will potentially keep young people with less educational qualifications in the local labour market, preventing any increases in life chances, which are open to young people in urban areas (JRF, 2000).

5.2 The vital connection between employment, transport and housing will impact on how and where a young person lives. A young person in a rural area, earning low wages is more likely to need a car to get to work and this coupled with less availability of affordable housing can prevent a young person living independently. It tends to be a vicious circle: a job is needed to buy a car, but a car is needed to secure a job – help could be given to break this circle (JRF 2000).

5.3 It was recommended by the JRF (2000) that:

- a youth unit should be set up in rural areas to develop a clearer strategy for young people in rural areas and a co-ordination of national and local services.
- there needs to be improved access to further education and training with more flexibility in the New Deal initiative similar to Scotland. More joint working with smaller organisations giving work experience but unable to provide training with education. Training then needs to be available and given in alternative settings.
- increased mobility needs to be encouraged. Driving licences are seen as vital and its is suggested that driving lessons should be provided either at school or through the New Deal scheme. Schemes that offer a formalised system of arranging lifts could be a policy initiative.
- there is a voice for young people. Young people living in rural areas are often seen as a threat or a nuisance to the rest of the

rural community and as a group set apart. It was suggested that efforts should be made to involve young people in decision-making and activities so that they have their own voice and space.

6 Community Engagement

- 6.1 Community involvement is now a fundamental element of regeneration, local government modernisation and local governance. The rationale for community involvement is based on local people being best placed to identify their own needs particularly in rural areas, where there is a strong sense of community but significant diversity between local areas.
- 6.2 Partnership working at the local level has increased the emphasis on community engagement and 'bottom-up' initiatives. Ray (2003) discusses governance and what he terms as the neo-endogenous approach to rural development. In his discussion Ray looks at a territorial-participative approach to community involvement and a concentration on a bottom-up approach to engagement but where extra local players can make important contributions. Ray (2003) also discusses the concept of cultural capital, which he sees as a range of features, which makes one territory different from another.
- 6.3 There is also a suggestion that the sense of community and the voluntary and community network in rural areas is under threat because of people's attitudes and the changing nature of people's lives. A lack of community engagement could further lead to a decline in locally delivered services.
- 6.4 Community capacity is seen as a goal in itself and there is evidence to suggest that the higher the social capital in a community the higher the democratic engagement and civic action. The degree of social capital in the rural context is linked to specific rural issues such as access to services, isolation and public transport.
- 6.5 The Urban White Paper confirmed that community involvement and engagement were central features of governance (DETR, 2000). Subsequently, Chanan (2003) identified six principles or purposes that underpin this approach that fall into three broad categories (Blackburn, et al, 2003):

Governance

- Involvement is people's right
- Involvement helps join up different contributions to development
- Involvement helps sustainability

Social Capital

- Involvement overcomes alienation and exclusion

- Involvement makes the community stronger in itself

Service Delivery

- Involvement maximises the effectiveness of services and resources

- 6.6 Surprisingly it is difficult to find links between guidance on community involvement and literature analysing urban and rural change. Any kind of literature around community involvement tends to deal with this involvement in general, often showing how communities suffer from disadvantage but ignores how this disadvantage affects the capacity to become involved.
- 6.7 According to the Urban White Paper it is clear that any kind of disadvantage obstructs participation. This is as true in rural areas as it is in urban. The poor conditions of the local voluntary sector or local community will in itself be a component of disadvantage and some proportion of local people will struggle to improve their local community. Yet, authorities would not be able to address the decline of localities without these local people.
- 6.8 People's willingness to be involved tends to be based on their social capital e.g. attachment to a place, relations with other residents. Strengthening social capital needs to be a policy objective in itself because strengthening basic social capital underlies and underpins participation policies (Chanan 2003). Community development has a key role in developing involvement, but community development strategies and procedures need to be better coordinated. The lack of solidarity in community involvement in policy-making and programmes is often seen as a lack of measurement. However, there has been a search for appropriate indicators over the past few years.
- 6.9 The ODPM document *Searching for Solid Foundations* (Chanan, 2003) examined community involvement and urban policy and recommended to the ODPM that in consultation with the Active Communities Unit a statement of objectives for community involvement across local government (including housing, neighbourhood renewal and urban and regional development) should be produced. But also stressed the importance of including Defra in this consultation process to ensure the inclusion of the rural aspect.

7. Community Capacity Building and the Voluntary Sector

"A healthy voluntary sector and community sector is essential to the effective functioning of society - urban and rural" (DETR, 2000).

- 7.1 *Firm Foundations* (Home Office 2004) is the Government's framework for community capacity building. This framework defines community capacity building as:

“Activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of their communities.”

- 7.2 The framework sees community capacity building as enabling social capital and cohesion, whereby, communities develop a common vision and a sense of belonging, enabling community self-help by encouraging the delivery of local services based on local needs, and enabling participatory governance and sustainable involvement by increasing the involvement of citizens in the decision making process.
- 7.3 The Active Community Unit in the Home Office had a budget of £93 million over 3 years from 2002/3 to 2005/06 to invest in community capacity building within the voluntary and community sector (Countryside Agency, 2003a). In order to increase community capacity building in rural areas four key components are essential for community level infrastructure (Defra, 2003).
- one representative and inclusive forum or network i.e. tenants and residents association, a parish council, a development trust all with a majority of community representatives
 - one Physical ‘hub’ or base for individual collective community activity i.e. church hall school, community centre
 - access to generic community capacity building workers i.e. long-term community development workers.
 - access to small grants to encourage grassroots community activity
- 7.4 This level of infrastructure at village or parish level is seen as necessary to encourage capacity building while a wider voluntary sector can engage at a more strategic level with local authorities, primary care trusts and others to address wider needs (Defra, 2003).
- 7.5 One of the key issues raised in the Rural White Paper was the proposal to enhance the role of voluntary organisations and volunteers. Local volunteering should be supported in rural areas, so every member of their community could take an active role in working together to improve a quality of life for everyone. This support for the voluntary sector it was argued should promote an inclusive cohesive community. Defra recognises a voluntary sector needing to be equipped and relevant to the countryside’s social needs in the 21st Century (Defra, 2003; also see Yates & Jochum, 2003). The Government’s commitment to voluntary and community action was reinforced by the Treasury cross-cutting review of the Voluntary Sector’s Role in Service Delivery (HM Treasury, 2002).
- 7.6 Support for volunteering should where possible build on existing patterns of provision and partnerships, which then can be mainstreamed

into provision, provided by government and local public bodies. A literature review quoted in Defra (2003) reinforces the importance of social capital and voluntary and community activity for the well-being of rural areas. (Blackburn, et al, 2003).

- 7.7 Volunteering work is particularly important in rural areas, but an ageing population in rural areas puts this need in jeopardy (Countryside Agency, 2003). There are concerns that an ageing population will require more volunteering hours along with volunteering hours being reduced because of an ageing population.
- 7.8 National voluntary organisations provide important support services to rural as well as urban areas (e.g. The Samaritans, Age Concern, etc). Countryside Agency research conducted in 2000 suggested that national voluntary organisations did not change their approach when dealing with rural areas. Consequently these organisations were viewed as urban organisations having no relevance to rural issues. For example, the Samaritans are under used in rural areas and research showed that this was due to people viewing them as urban-based volunteers, who would not understand the problems of rural residents. As a result of this finding the Agency have developed new approaches to service in rural and has worked with a number of national organisations i.e. Development Trust Association and Age Concern (Defra, 2003)
- 7.9 Work by the Community Development Foundation suggests that the isolation of professional community workers is particularly acute in rural areas. There is also a need to strengthen training for rural volunteers along with paid staff. It is essential that this need be addressed to build human and social capital (Chanan, 2003).

8. Governance

- 8.1 Parish and town councils is the first tier of local government. The importance of this grass-roots level of working with local communities has continued to be recognised by both central and local government as a means to effective local democracy. The White Paper *Modern Local Government: In touch with the people* (DETR, 1998) saw parish and town councils as an essential part of the structure of local government.
- 8.2 A recent seminar concerning parish and town councils and neighbourhood governance looked at urban parish and town councils and their contribution to regeneration. The recommendations raised were a result of a number of case studies (Newman, 2005). These recommendations reiterated the important role of local governance structures in local policy making. Rural White Papers have also stressed the importance of first tier councils in the development of rural policy. Rural parishes and town council have a long tradition of

providing services and working with community groups in rural areas. The 2000 Rural White Paper recognised the importance of parish councils supporting effective local community action.

- 8.3 The role and capabilities of parish councils has been improved. The Parish Plan Scheme has been launched. The QUALITY Parish and Town Council Scheme is being pursued by ODPM and Defra in conjunction with National Association of Local Councils and the Local Government Association to strengthen councils to take on a wider role in developing town and parishes. The Quality Parish Initiative is now beginning to make changes in the way town and parish councils work. The National Training Strategy for parish and town councils has been developed. Every county has a training partnership and people are getting involved with the new AQA Certificate in Local Council Administration.
- 8.4 Town and Village Plan grants have been launched as part of the Countryside Agency's Vital Village programme thus giving communities a role in shaping their own development of councils and principle authorities, this charter is designed to accommodate a variety of arrangements. However, these arrangements are not binding on principle authorities so many parishes find it difficult to establish any kind of responsibility and parish plans are often not well linked to other local and community planning frameworks.
- 8.5 Defra needs to maintain effective channels of communication and representation between community action at grassroots level and its own regional and national policy and decision-making processes (Defra, 2003)
- 8.6 Shire district councils are recognised as being relatively close to their local communities and the people they serve. These shire district councils will also have close contact with the town and parish councils in their areas along with LSPs. However, there are 150 or more rural shire districts with populations of below 100,000 which means support could be there but spread very thinly which would make it difficult to achieve an infrastructure of providers which would be effective. There seems to be an issue about whether to provide and support infrastructure at county or district level and there is debate on which is preferred (Defra, 2003)
- 8.7 The Rural Development Commission and the Countryside Agency (RDC and CA) have commissioned several reports all confirming that Rural Community Councils do achieve value for money, however they are said to vary in effectiveness and in their capacity to work throughout their counties. These councils focus on rural community issues, they have encouraged partnerships and built an infrastructure of different bodies including CVS and volunteering bureaux as a result of this they currently engage with an average of 30 –40 partnerships per county (Defra, 2003)

- 8.8 The 2000 Rural White Paper ‘Vibrant Countryside section’ recognises the need for a vibrant country, which can shape its own future and whose voice government hears at all levels. This Rural White Paper sees the need for a strong community focus involving a better understanding of the needs of local people particularly those who are most vulnerable. Rural-proofing has been widely implemented within government and this approach has spread into the wider public sector. The Rural Affairs Forum for England has been established with active regional Rural Forums.
- 8.9 At a regional level the role of Government Offices and Regional Development Agencies have developed while local authorities have increased joined up working with other local delivery agencies through Local Strategic Partnerships. The role of the parish council through the Parish Plans Scheme has increased rural development. Community development is recognised as essential to the social dimension of sustainable rural policy, and the principles of rural proofing fits in with sustainable development principles.
- 8.10 Many changes in rural local governance is part of wider government activity therefore measures in the Rural White Paper must be seen in relation to wider policies and issues. LSPs are increasingly playing an important role in delivering services to local rural areas. However, there are concerns about the effectiveness of such partnerships outside of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund areas (which do receive additional support to build support for such partnerships). Defra has been considering ways in which partnership working within LSP’s can be improved. The Best Value framework said to encourage better service delivery in rural areas only applied to larger parishes. However, rural issues are integrated into the fresh initiative of the Comprehensive Performance Assessments in 2005.

9 Modernising Rural Delivery

- 9.1 ‘Natural England’ announced by the Secretary of State in March 2005 witnessed an Integrated Agency made up of English Nature, the Countryside Agency and Defra’s Rural Development Services. All organisations will be working together under a common vision and purpose – for people, places and nature (Defra, April, 2005).
- 9.2 In line with Modernising Rural Delivery the Commission for Rural Communities was launched on the 9 March 2005. This Commission will act as a rural advocate, rural advisor and independent watchdog for rural communities and will focus on rural disadvantage. The Commission will also be part of the statute within the proposed Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill (Defra, April, 2005).

- 9.3 On the 14 March 2005 Rural Pathfinders were launched. Rural Pathfinders are specific areas identified to increase innovative approaches to local service delivery. These eight areas will play an important role in Regional Rural Delivery Frameworks and to devolve delivery closer to rural communities and this should be achieved alongside Local Area Agreements. (This initiative recognises that local communities and people are best placed to identify local needs and local priorities). There is a commitment to devolving resources so that they can be effectively targeted. The eight chosen pathfinders will set the standard. They will reflect the issues that most matter to rural communities such as affordable housing, post offices, local transport and support for local business. The Bill establishing Natural England and the Commission for Rural Communities has now completed its pre-legislative scrutiny (Defra, April, 2005)

10 International Comparisons

- 10.1 The concept of capacity building has become an international phenomenon. The Australian Government has set up the Co-operative Venture for Capacity Building (CVCB) as an online resource for information and current research on capacity building and innovation in rural industries in Australia. The CVCB have defined capacity building as:

“externally or internally initiated processes designed to help individuals and groups associated with rural areas to appreciate and manage their changing circumstances, with the objective of improving the stock of human, financial, physical and natural capital in an ethically defensible way” (CVCB)

- 10.2 The Government of Canada has set up the Canadian Rural Partnership with rural teams in each of the provinces. A Canadian Rural Information Service and a website support this network of rural partnerships. The Nova Scotia Rural Partnership Team has identified a number of areas that need to be addressed by the federal government that could help to improve community capacity. These include:

- promoting effective leadership, empowerment and civic participation and that the government should focus on meeting the needs of communities rather than making communities conform to its own requirements.
- that capacity building needs to be built on better planning and careful examination of specific local issues. This would allow both communities and federal government to gain a better understanding of what the community has to offer and what its needs are.

- communication was seen as critical as it makes rural communities feel less isolated and promotes the sharing and exchange of information.
 - access to education and technology was sparse in many smaller rural communities and that funding was required to address this.
- 10.3 The way forward identified by the Partnership were that significant changes were required in terms of governance, empowerment, equity and diversity. There was a feeling that the federal government had deserted rural Canadians and that it must improve the way it listens to the communities. There was also a need to focus on the youth and that the federal government should make more effort to ask young people living in rural areas what they need. It was also felt important for the Government to be flexible and community-specific with its programmes.
- 10.4 Reducing poverty and creating jobs was seen as important and as well as developing community economic activities (e.g. dollar value on volunteering, co-operatives, etc). Other key priorities for Government were to improve education delivery in rural areas, to improve dialogue and communication and increase the flow of resources down to the community level.
- 10.5 The Rural Development Programme in Northern Ireland saw capacity building as key element in rural regeneration to ensure that rural communities were strong, diverse and fully representative. A focused programme of support was therefore set up to help rural communities become successful and self-sustaining and to engage as broad a range of participants as possible in the process.
- 10.6 The EU project Dynamics of Rural Areas (DORA) makes a useful European comparison of capacity building involving Germany, Greece Sweden, Scotland (Bryden & Hart, 2001). In the case of Sweden the lack of provision and services in sparsely populated areas do not exist because of Sweden's commitment to a continuing importance of a welfare state and equality of services. The most sparsely populated areas continue to have the same level of service provision of those densely populated rural areas.
- 10.7 The local government structure is the bedrock to this system – those municipalities with a low revenue base are compensated by richer municipalities (Bryden & Hart, 2001). Those who incur higher costs of provision are also compensated for these higher costs. This system of compensation is a result of Sweden policy to assure everyone no matter where they live to a good basic standard of democratic living and public services. Sweden has developed a system of institutional mechanisms supporting territorial equality.

- 10.8 Sweden also has a history of regional policy that has continued to emphasise support for the more peripheral areas. It remains one of the EU member states with a higher than average per capita income while having one of the narrowest differentials in income per capita between regions. However, this dependence on the public sector alongside economically weak regions has left the private sector weak and the institutional structure unable to create co-operation.
- 10.9 Like Sweden, Germany has a fiscal system, which aims to redistribute revenues from richer to poorer states. There is joint federal state funding arrangements for regional policy incentives. The German and Swedish cases contrast in respect to regional and local devolution, fiscal powers and autonomy when compared with Scotland and Greece, which are more constrained in these areas. In Scotland this is partly due to local government and fiscal reforms. Greece has always been highly centralised. Greece is the poorest member state in the EU, therefore any rural area in Germany is very different to any rural area in Greece (Bryden & Hart, 2001).

11 Conclusions

- 11.1 This paper has attempted to provide an identification of some of the broad contextual issues that impact on capacity building activities in rural areas. It has focused on some of the key issues that have emerged out of the rural literature that will have an influence on the development and practice of capacity building activities. Capacity building activities do not occur in a vacuum it must relate to local circumstances and be context specific. Clearly one area for development would be to examine experiences elsewhere. The international dimension could help identify some good practice or spark ideas that would inform the development of rural capacity building activity in this country.

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