



## **Roscommon LEADER Partnership's Submission on the National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022.**

### **Draft for Public Consultation**

#### **Introduction**

Roscommon LEADER Partnership-RLP (also known as Roscommon Integrated Development Company Ltd.) is an organisation that brings together key development projects including rural enterprise, development and social inclusion that work for the betterment of the people across Co. Roscommon. A member of the Irish Local development Network, the local development company delivers RDP LEADER, Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme, Rural Social Scheme, Tús, Local Employment Service, Jobs Clubs, Rural Recreation Programme, The Walks Scheme, Back to Work Enterprise Allowance and various other social enterprise programmes across the county of Roscommon. While these are the core programmes delivered by RLP, there are a range of other initiatives at national and European level that companies leverage funding from to support and enhance the development of their communities through enterprise, training, activation, educational and community supports.

#### **Social Economy in County Roscommon Pre & Post 2006**

During the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) 2000-2006 Local development Companies were very engaged with the roll out of the Fas Social Economy Programme. Joint Inter Agency Working Groups made up of personnel from Fas & LDSIP appraised Social Economy applications & recommended them for approval to Fas. Roscommon Partnership Company were very pro active in the Joint Inter Agency Working Group with Fas in Roscommon. A large number of applications & business plans were recommended for approval & sanctioned by Fas in County Roscommon prior to 2006. The applications approved covered a wide range of social enterprises that included social services, heritage, landscaping, organic gardens & tourism. In 2006 a number of these social economy programmes continued under the Community Services Programme (CSP). Roscommon Partnership Company supported the community promoters who delivered the CSPs through group & one to one training & mentoring in marketing , finance, HR & corporate governance. A conference entitled 'Community Resilience' hosted by Roscommon Leader Partnership Company was organised with a view to supporting CSP groups at the time of the economic downturn.

The key lessons arising from the close engagement of Roscommon Partnership in the promotion of the Social Economy Programme through the LDSIP are that the Local Development Companies had a central role in identifying social enterprises & the community promoters who had the potential to develop & grow them into sustainable & viable enterprises. They also had a key role in deciding where the funding programmes were most needed & had an important role in delivering the capacity building required by the local promoters. New government policy formulation should take into consideration the central role local development companies played in the past in the sustainable development of social enterprises.

In implementing this much needed policy, RLP will strive to support the government and indeed work with other social enterprise stakeholders to help raise awareness of social enterprise, social entrepreneurship and social innovation in Ireland. RLP welcomes this draft policy and believes it is a step in the right direction in terms of policy development. RLP have taken the approach to host focus groups and brainstorming sessions with their core staff to influence the basis of this review and play a central role in the submission of the recommendations suggested below

### **Policy Objective One: Creating Awareness of Social Enterprise.**

The type of policy initiatives which the Government could take through the Department of Rural and Community Development to help raise awareness could, for example, include:

- 1. Working closely with social enterprise stakeholders to develop an Awareness Strategy to raise the profile of social enterprise in Ireland.**
- 2. Identifying, with social enterprise stakeholders, best practice examples of social enterprises to improve public understanding of such enterprises and to highlight their contribution to society and the economy.**
- 3. Holding an annual Social Enterprise Forum for all stakeholders to participate in shaping policy, building understanding of social enterprise, disseminating information, and sharing best practice.**

#### **Questions for consideration:**

- Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of raising greater awareness of social enterprise?**

- Are there other actions the Government could consider to raise awareness of social enterprise, and if so, what are those actions?**

### **Roscommon LEADER Partnership's Feedback on the Aforementioned Questions**

- The development of a local Social Enterprise Managers network to support the sharing of local knowledge, and creating awareness and support.
- Pre-Enterprise Training Supports including 'Start your Social Enterprise' programme which is complemented by mentoring and advice.
- The branding of the sector would help the sector and individual social enterprises attract corporate support, including expertise and finance. This branding will also create awareness amongst agencies involved with public procurement
- The development of an Interagency Taskforce to promote Social Enterprise in each County including the relevant agencies; Local Development Company, Local Authority. :Local Enterprise Office and representatives of Social Enterprises
- Ensuring awareness/education courses surrounding the core modules of social enterprise is embedded at 2nd level through areas such as the TY Programme. At third level embedded through all course under the Umbrella of Enterprise/Business courses. Maybe a step further would be to organise through workshops/awareness days in colleges.

- Development of Idea Generation Workshops which would begin to explore the potential for social enterprise development and build allegiances within Communities for Projects and Initiatives
- Workshops within Transition Years to promote and create awareness of the concept of social enterprise within young people
- Development of recognition programme for Social Enterprises such as Social Enterprise Awards which will promote awareness and also recognise the contributions made by Social Enterprises to their local communities. A national awards process overall as a means of creating awareness in general and in particular recognising best practice in the operation of Social Economy projects
- RLP also suggest that in addition to the annual forum as described in the draft policy document there should be a policy that will ensure dissemination of international best practice as reported and verified by bodies such as the OECD LEED division and by the various EU organisations.

### *Initiating Social Enterprises*

**Building on a number of current initiatives around social entrepreneurship and social enterprises, in finalising this Policy the type of policy measures which the Government could take to increase social enterprise initiation could, for example, include:**

**4. Supporting social innovation and social enterprise start-ups through targeted programmes and initiatives.**

**5. Exploring the scope for further inclusion of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship modules in the education and training system.**

#### Questions for consideration:

- Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of increasing social enterprise initiation?
- Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?

6.

**Working with education and research bodies to further support the development of social innovation.**

### Roscommon LEADER Partnership's Feedback on the Aforementioned Questions

- Develop closer links with Education and Training Boards and offer Social Enterprise Training Modules across various programmes such as PLC business programmes and community education. This work should be designed and delivered in conjunction with the Local Development Companies who have the practical on the ground experience.
- Ongoing and dedicated support to Communities through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme, including the provision of more substantial and ring-

fenced budget under the Programme to allow for dedicated work with Social Enterprises, including the maintenance of existing social enterprises

- The development of a local Social Enterprise Managers network to support the sharing of local knowledge, and creating awareness and support and provision of peer support and mentoring
- Showcasing locally of models of good practice
- Specific Social Enterprises dedicated to the Employment of People with Disabilities which will allow for less hours of working required for people with disabilities whilst providing actual real and meaningful work and allow them integrate more fully into society through their social contributions
- Provision of dedicated pre- social enterprise training for groups
- Development of a guide/toolkit on “How to set up a social enterprise”, and link it to dedicated training.
- There is a need to create an ecosystem that supports new initiatives that will allow volunteers to work at their stated core objectives while the governance and regulatory requirements are managed centrally
- Provision of resources to local development companies to employ a dedicated “Advisor/ Mentor” to support the groups on an individual basis, with particular support to start ups
- Support the provision of social enterprises based on deficient demand in rural areas, where this may help increase the economy, provide jobs, training and volunteering opportunities whilst also providing a much needed service/resource to the area
- Provision of ongoing support to CSPs under SICAP

**In finalising this Policy, the type of measures which the Government could take to improve business and leadership supports for social enterprises could, for example, include:**

**7. Compiling and making available information on the various business supports available to social enterprises, along with details of the providers of those supports.**

**8. Identifying any gaps which may exist in business supports available to social enterprises and working to address those gaps.**

**9. Providing access to advice and supports to assist social enterprises and social entrepreneurs to develop their business proposals.**

**10. Providing tailored training for social enterprises to help them to improve their business potential as well as leadership and governance skills.**

**Questions for consideration:**

- **Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective?**
- **Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?**

### Roscommon LEADER Partnership's Feedback on the Aforementioned Questions

- The information must be accessible, and simple in format and centrally located in local settings
- Purposely devised and tailored training/mentoring for social enterprises in both new and existing categories
- Regional and local workshops boosting awareness of supports and confidence in the sector
- Again, a specific county interagency/network approach would make a real impact in terms of stakeholders working collaboratively and cohesively.
- The policy should differentiate between start-up enterprise and those already established and ready for scaling up and expanding.
- While Governance is widely recognised as a key attribute in the success of many Social Enterprises, mentoring and advice is key to creating a pipeline of viable projects from specialised mentors.

### *Access to Finance & Funding*

**In finalising this Policy, the type of measures which the Government could take to improve access to finance and funding for social enterprises could, for example, include:**

**11. Cataloguing and disseminating information on financing/funding schemes available to social enterprises at national and EU levels.**

**12. Identifying gaps in financing/funding schemes and working to address those gaps.**

**13. Exploring the potential for new innovative funding schemes for social enterprise.**

**14. Seeking to improve alignment of funding schemes to support the objectives of social enterprises, whilst avoiding any displacement of existing supports for Community and Voluntary organisations.**

- **How could current government funding streams be improved to support social enterprises?**
- **Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?**

#### Questions for consideration:

- **Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of improving access to finance and funding for social enterprises?**

### Roscommon LEADER Partnership's Feedback on the Aforementioned Questions

- Provision of supports to groups to draw down funding and business plan development. The policy should examine the possibility of providing funding for Social Enterprises realistically at start-up stage. It is essential that some seed finance be made available to the sector to cover items such as insurance and indemnity for volunteers.

- Working with banks/lending institutions to initiate special terms and rates for lending to social enterprises
- RLP believes policy should support education and training particularly in the area of finances and the role of debt in the development of new enterprises.
- The Credit Unions especially should be centrally involved in terms of improving access to finance as they are at the heart of communities and similar to social enterprises, they too re-invest their profits so as to increase additional service provision. Credit unions operate on the basis of a co-operative model which is somewhat not too dissimilar to the social enterprise approach.
- Donations in the form of tax relief to companies to give over empty space/premises to assist start-up social enterprises would reduce the burden of initial investment stage and promote positivity amongst the market
- Explore the possibility of giving preferential treatment to social enterprises in the tendering process & in the procurement of public contracts to enable them to become more competitive & more sustainable in the delivery of services to those in greatest need.
- The development of less cumbersome regulatory procedures for the social enterprise sector in tendering for public contracts
- That the LEO's remit would widen their financial mechanisms to include a dedicated Business Supports Model for social enterprises that is different from LEO's suite of supports for private enterprise & tailor-made for social enterprises that have the double bottom line of both economic & social impacts.
- The establishment of dedicated County Social Enterprise Expert mentoring panels by LCDCs/LDCs in the areas of Finance/Legal/HR/design & planning/Social Media/IT services etc
- Reduced burden of rates in the form of "rates subsidies"

### *Enabling Market Opportunities*

In finalising this Policy, the type of measures which the Government could take to improve access to markets for social enterprises could, for example, include:

**15. Supporting capacity-building for social enterprises in relation to procurement processes through workshops and training.**

**16. Working with stakeholders to identify how to improve opportunities for social enterprises in the business-to-business supply-chain.**

**17. Helping policy makers to better understand how procurement can be used to facilitate the advancement of social policy objectives within appropriate and structured public procurement guidelines.**

#### Questions for consideration:

- Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of improving market opportunities for social enterprises?
- Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?
- What should the Government's priority be in working towards achieving this objective?

### Roscommon LEADER Partnership's Feedback on the Aforementioned Questions

- Provision of Market Research, Marketing and Market Development Supports for Community Groups who are in pre start up and Social Enterprises
- RLP believe that the policy should support the adoption of the new EU directives that provide for beneficial procurement criteria to charities or not for profits when competing with the private sector.
- Ireland's national procurement policy should mirror the best international practice on the procurement of social services including services that the private sector deems as not viable. The procurement of certain Social Inclusion Services to be confined to the not for profit sector as is done in many EU countries
- Support to groups to explore diversification and scaling up, growth models
- Specialised marketing expo's for social enterprises to network and collectively share knowledge and information.

**In finalising this Policy, the type of measures which the Government could take to improve better policy alignment for social enterprises could, for example, include:**

**18. Developing a better understanding of the interaction between social enterprises and relevant policy areas across Government to ensure closer alignment with social enterprise and enabling social enterprises to increase their contribution to delivering on policy objectives.**

#### Questions for consideration:

- Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of achieving better policy alignment for social enterprises?
- Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?
- Are there specific areas of Government policy which are causing difficulty for social enterprises, or which could be improved?
- What should the Government's priority be in working towards achieving this objective?

**19. Ensuring that Ireland engages closely on social enterprise policy developments at international level so that Ireland can influence international Social Enterprise policy development and, where relevant, social enterprises can benefit from international supports.**

### Roscommon LEADER Partnership's Feedback on the Aforementioned Questions

- Expand the target groups that are eligible to participate
- Ensure that the requirements under CSP for traded income does not negate the inclusion of projects centred on deficient demand
- Explore the inclusion of Newly resettled refugees into the programme
- More flexibility in terms of the hours required to be worked by people with disabilities
- The need for sharing of good practice from EU

In finalising this Policy, the type of measures which the Government could take to improve better policy alignment for social enterprises could, for example, include:

**20. Improving data collection relating to the extent of social enterprise and the areas in which social enterprises operate.**

**21. Developing mechanisms to measure the social and economic impact of social enterprises across the full spectrum of social enterprise.**

**Questions for consideration:**

- Are there other actions could the Government consider to establish a reliable evidence-base for social enterprises?
- What should the Government's priority be in working towards achieving this objective?

**Roscommon LEADER Partnership's Feedback on the Aforementioned Questions**

- Ensure consideration is given to both the Economic and Social Impact of Projects
- Consideration of GDPR is of huge importance
- The policy should be expanded to express the desire that policy alignment should include matching and benchmarking against the best in Europe and align with OECD LEED recommendations.
- Detailed and up to date online directory of social enterprises in Ireland
- Promotion of the use of Pobal Maps/ censuses and how they can form the basis of a needs analysis for potential social enterprises in communities. Identifying the needs and gaps early can provide the foundation for success to a particular social enterprise
- Ongoing profiling of case studies/best practice social enterprise models. These can often show the means as to replication in other geographical areas and how they can be tailored to specific target audiences/groups.
- Data protection measures may need to be re-visited.

**Concluding Remarks by Roscommon LEADER Partnership**

- We welcome the publication of the government's Draft Social Enterprise Policy, the state's first such policy which has the potential to underpin and significantly develop a key sector in Irish economy and society.
- We welcome the policy's building on the 2013 Forfás report and the ILDN/UL report on 'Creating an Enabling and Supportive Enterprise for the Social Enterprise Sector in Ireland'.
- Local Development Companies such as Roscommon LEADER Partnership are well-placed to support the implementation of actions arising from the Policy, given their delivery of LEADER and SICAP (both with SE elements), their management of the state's main labour activation work schemes, their current provision of business, marketing and governance supports for enterprise (through Social Enterprise and BTWEA programmes) as well as their direct management of social enterprises.
- Social enterprises are especially important in cases of low demand, market failure, low spending power of consumers, for groups struggling to participate in a conventional or competitive labour market. LDC's already work with each of these groups already through existing programmes and we see a strong SE policy as a core tool for social and geographic inclusion.



- The Policy is silent on Social Clauses and we believe that the implementation of these as core instruments of policy is required.
- RLP believes that the national policy should clearly outline the need for the sector to come together in a single entity for the purposes of ensuring that the voice of the sector is cohesive and comprehensive.
- RLP believes that Department Policy should consider existing organisations such as ourselves as a LDC as the driving vehicle for change. LDC's are best placed to represent the Social Enterprise sector as they already have active members and staff in every part of rural and urban Ireland. These Local Development Companies, based on partnership structures, have full country coverage and understand the challenges and opportunities for Social Enterprise from directly supporting the establishment, development and growth and governance of social enterprises.

Finally Roscommon LEADER Partnership welcomes the publication of the government's Draft Social Enterprise Policy and is happy to meet with the Department to further discuss the above suggestions.