

Lot: Cork (18-1)

Theme: Engagement Strategies with SICAP Target Groups/Communities

Name of Case Study: Community Empowerment in Action

Setting the context on how the need was identified for the engagement.

IRD Duhallow promotes a 'bottom up' approach to Community Development. This grassroots development approach supports people to identify the local demands and the pressing needs of their own communities and aims to empower communities and target group individuals to play a greater role in addressing social inclusion and equality issues. Applying community development approaches to achieve the participation of disadvantaged and marginalised communities in the wider local development context is one of the horizontal themes underlying the delivery of SICAP. A community development approach underpins the engagement work of IRD Duhallow which involves individual and collective empowerment, enabling and supporting members of the community to work collectively, to improve the quality of their lives, their community and their region, developing stronger and sustainable communities. This approach is based on an understanding that those affected by rural isolation and/or disadvantage are often socially excluded due to lack of resources, skills, confidence, other underlying issues, discrimination and/or education. Utilising a community development approach provides communities with an opportunity to identify the core needs that SICAP actions delivered by IRD Duhallow, should be responding to.

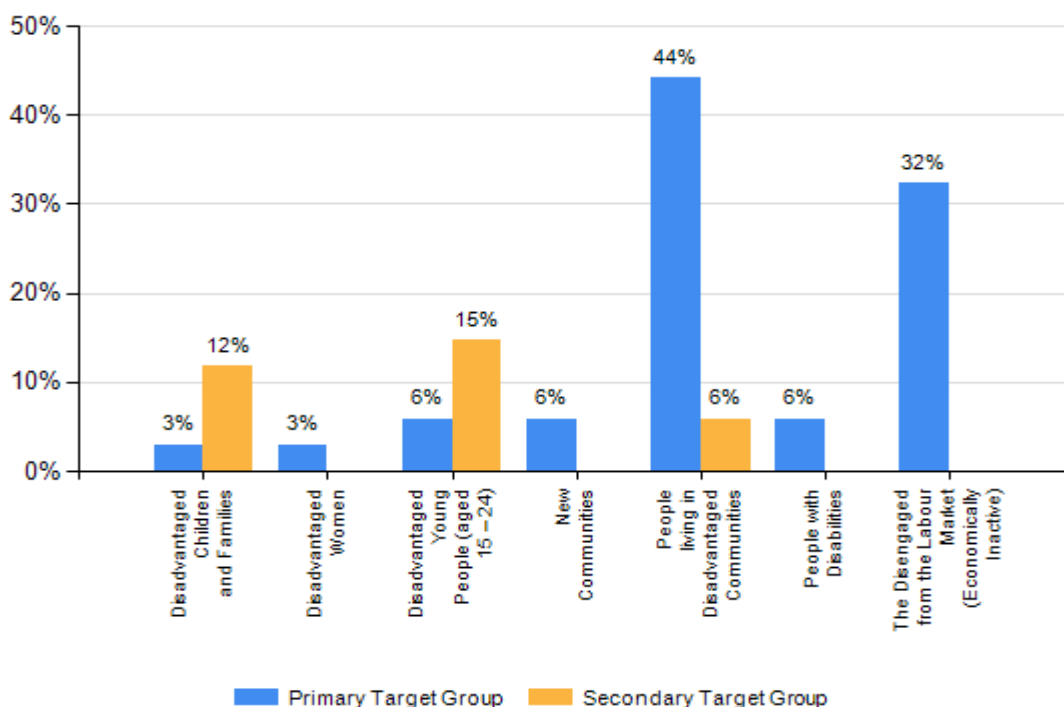
Forward planning is important for any venture and communities are no different. Without a 'road map' or a clear idea of the needs and current status of an area, it is difficult to prioritise particular projects and development plans. Providing local people with a real voice and real power in the development of policies and strategies that identify and seek to address their communities' needs is essential. The local ownership of projects which devise common solutions is often the strong driving force required for sustainable vibrant communities. IRD Duhallow is also acutely aware of the need for positivity in how we understand rural areas. Whilst not ignoring burning issues, it is important to reflect on the positive attributes of these communities and how this can be best supported into the future. The richness of this process is realised in understanding the challenges unique to a particular community and the act of recording helps make the case for action on this front. LCG planning helps to inform IRD Duhallow and other agencies of the supports, priorities and actions that should be undertaken in the area to best assist disadvantaged communities living in Duhallow. This ensures that IRD Duhallow continues to provide valuable services to SICAP target groups.

A clear description of what was done to achieve inclusion of the target group. Distinctive strategies, principles and approaches used to reach the most disadvantaged members of the community.

A series of 'on the ground' public consultation meetings were organised to empower local communities to become the authors of their own local plans and look at the existing assets, particularly the strengths inherent in communities and address social exclusion and equality issues. The aim from the outset was to strengthen the community voice in setting priorities, improving public and community services and achieving value for money, actively improving the lives of the people living in disadvantaged communities. The data collection techniques involved a 'bottom up' participatory process of collecting the views of a variety of LCG's. LCG's were supported to complete their annual SICAP support plans in tandem with this process. The LCG's were informed that the SICAP annual support plan aims to raise the levels and quality of participation at a local level and encourages LCG's to identify and address issues and concerns through the community planning process. The meetings were advertised through IRD Duhallow's newsletter, Facebook and local radio together with the assistance of the LCG's themselves in rallying people from their own communities to attend and get involved. Some LCG's have 'What's App' and text message groups which proved useful. A number of housing estates from designated disadvantaged areas were specifically targeted as traditionally these groups have been under-represented in activities relating to social inclusion and equality. Other stakeholders including the Gardaí, local County Councillors were invited to attend the meetings also. A number of the LCG's were met together as they were from the same geographic community.

IRD Duhallow engaged with 35 LCG's to date in 2019. Some of these groups originally registered in 2018 and reviewed their annual support plan in 2019 while others are newly registered LCG's. The LCGs represented multiple target groups who are in the most need and marginalised with 44% of the primary target group being people living in Disadvantaged Communities and 32% disengaged from the labour market (economically inactive).

Percentage of LCGs (KPI 1) by Primary and Secondary Target Group



Preparation Phase

IRD Duhallow's community consultation process was designed by Board and Staff drawing on the organisational experience in the area of community planning which spans over 20 years with reference to international best practice based on what is current in community planning literature. The workshops which were facilitated by staff and chaired by members of the board of IRD Duhallow were designed to be inclusive and open. In order to establish a strong foundation, Board and Staff undertook training to explore the needs and expectations of the community planning process and the many practicalities involved. The training included the application of participatory methods, community auditing, listening strategies, maintaining levels of engagement, prioritising community claims and determining agendas for action and working with diversity. The capacity and ability of different stakeholders to participate was teased out including 'Hard to reach groups' such as disadvantaged young people, older people, minority groups/ socially excluded groups. Staff and board were asked to explore and identify any potential barriers to the engagement process to ensure the design minimised any inhibiting factors e.g. Literacy and numeracy levels. The majority of the SICAP staff had already completed QQI Level 6 Training Delivery and Evaluation which equipped them with the skills and knowledge to run, manage and deliver effective training programmes and workshops.

Reusable posters were designed as data collection tools which could be used in a group setting to gather a large amount of responses. It was hoped that this approach would develop a greater in-depth understanding of the LCG's. An associated narrative for each poster was developed for staff to ensure that staff and board were prepared for the questions that they might encounter during the sessions. The staff and board training addressed equality issues as well as potential negative stereotypes and attitudinal barriers. Issues pertaining to LCG backgrounds, culture, language preference and disabilities were all considered in advance of the meetings. All meeting venues and meeting rooms used in the process of consultation were disability accessible. All

communication and advertising methods e.g. community newsletters, Facebook were jargon free and in plain English and provided in alternative language(s) as appropriate e.g. Polish. The timing of the community consultations was designed to ensure maximum participation i.e. after work hours.

The A1 sized visual posters were piloted with two LCG's before they were finalised to ensure that the process was accessible, relevant and easy to understand. It was decided that easy to understand language would be utilised for both the posters and the explanatory narrative. This was particularly important for people with intellectual disabilities, people with literacy difficulties and people whose first language is not English. Pictures and symbols were used on posters to make them easier to understand. The symbols were used to represent words, services and ideas. It was felt that people with disabilities and literacy difficulties may find illustrations and symbols a more effective form of communication. The feedback was extremely positive with a general consensus from the two pilot LCG's that the posters were suitable for all age groups, interactive and engaging and would help develop a common vision and generate relevant discussion.

A request for ethical approval from the board of directors of IRD Duhallow was received as it was deemed that sufficient assurance had been given that SICAP individuals and LCG's would not undergo any harmful effects as a consequence of taking part. Clear and transparent information about the purpose of the SICAP case study and how it would potentially influence future community planning was given to all who participated. All data collection procedures were carried out in line with GDPR requirements and in a consistent systematic manner to reduce the potential of biases.

The implementation Phase

A short Prezzi presentation was jointly delivered by board and staff to explain the rationale behind the community meeting, an outline of the topics which would be covered and an overview of the current SICAP supports and services available for individuals, local community groups, children and families and social enterprises. Small group work encouraged everyone to participate in the process. An information pack was provided for each person present at the meeting. 'Icebreakers' and 'energisers' were tools used at the start of each session to encourage interaction and encourage the community members to work cooperatively. Five posters were rotated between the small groups and postits were used by people to contribute their ideas, thoughts and local knowledge. Each poster was clearly defined and people were focused on the goal that required them to feed back to the whole group. Prior to the commencement of the small group work all participants were informed that there were no right and wrong answers.





Poster 1 is called the “**Relationship Circle**”. Here, the communities were asked to identify the specific role and objectives of their LCG and whether they have a social inclusion or equality focus and/or address the needs of disadvantaged community members i.e. SICAP target groups. Then, they were asked to identify which stage they resided on the community development matrix i.e. 1: Pre-development and group formation; 2: Capacity building and empowerment; 3: Strategic involvement in policy and decision making processes at a local, regional and/or national level. The community were supported to brainstorm other possible groups that they would like to see developed in their area.

Poster 2 – “What I like”

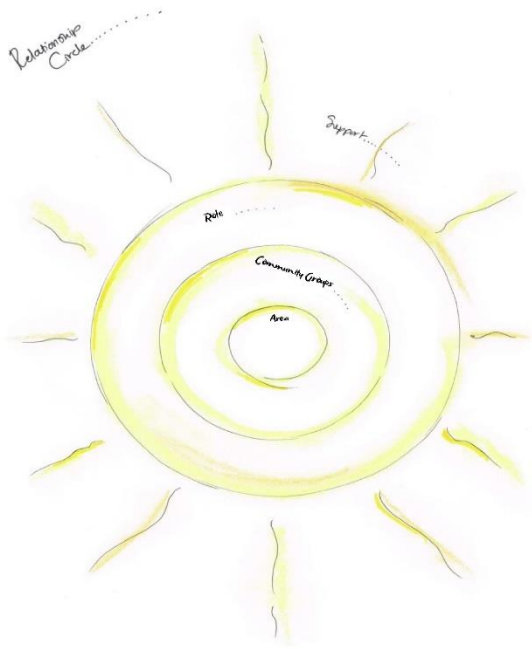
The Community were asked to identify things that they admire/like about their LCG. The key aspect of this poster is positivity, open-endedness and a strengths based approach to community development. Whatever is important to them about their community and LCG was highlighted.

Poster 3 – “What’s working, What Isn’t”, What could work?

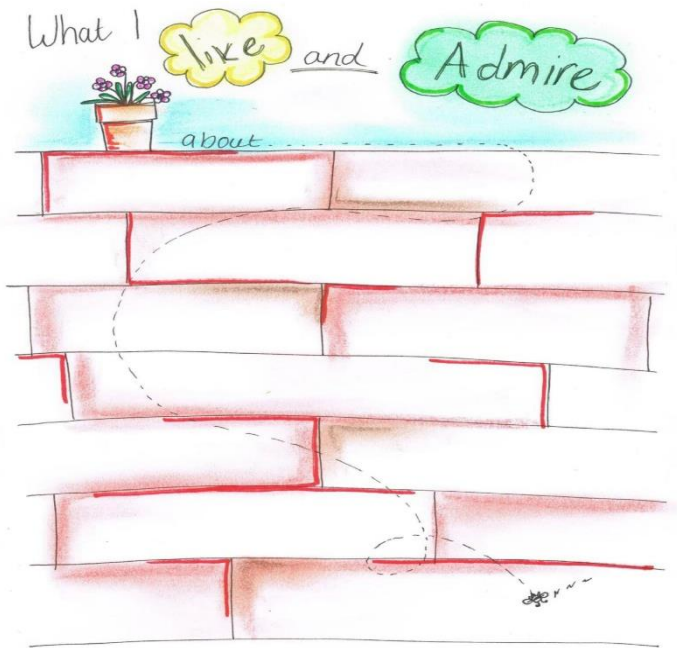
Here, people were asked to identify what’s working in their community (e.g. social enterprises, mens shed etc) and what’s not working (e.g. lack of employment opportunities, rural isolation, limited resources). This poster supported the LCG’s to identify issues/problems within the community as well as recognising what’s already successful. The aim here is to explore constructive strategic responses based on analysis of the social inclusion/exclusion issues and needs identified by local communities themselves.

Poster 4 – “Services”

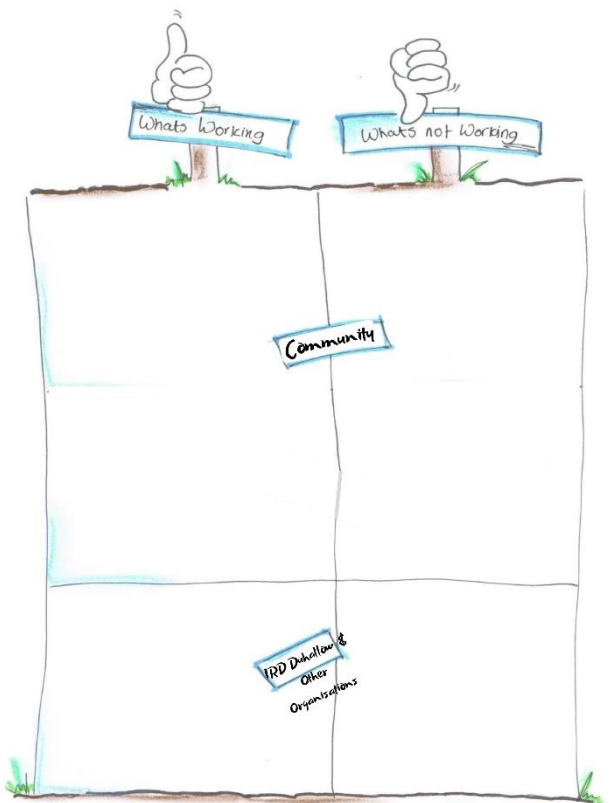
Here, LCG’s are asked to outline what services exist in their communities and what services exist in nearby communities that they use on a regular basis. There were icon prompts at the top of the page which helped to generate a starting point for conversations. They were also asked to suggest what future services they would need in their community and in nearby communities. Particular attention was paid to appropriate services for acutely disadvantaged families and individuals which should be regarded as central to the work of SICAP rather than as additions at the margins.



Poster 1



Poster 2



Poster 3



Poster 4

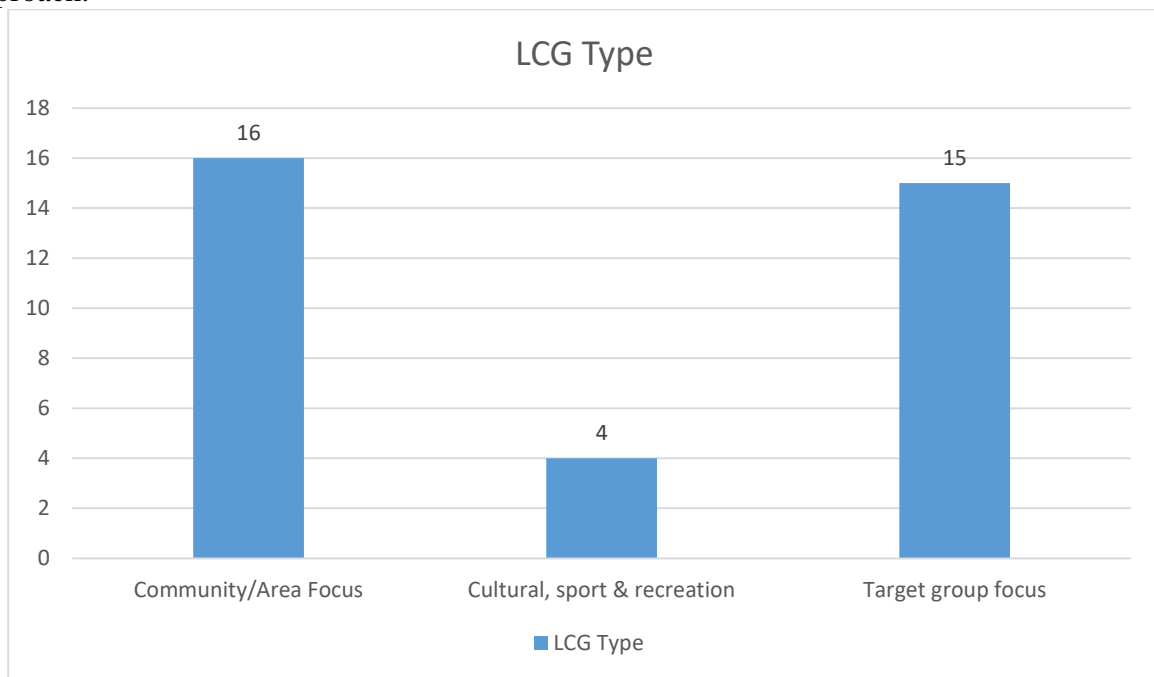
Data Analysis

All posters were pictured before the posits were removed at the end of each session and carefully recorded. A rigorous thematic analysis took place which involved codes being assigned to the data according to the ideas arising from within it. Once all the coding was completed on a spreadsheet, codes which were identical or similar were grouped together to form themes. In turn, the emerging themes were explored to build a description. The title of each theme was chosen on the basis of its content. This helped to ensure that the key findings were captured.

Findings

Local Community Groups (LCG's)

46% of the LCG's were community and area focused, with a further 43% being target group focused and 11% cultural, sport or recreation focused. It was established that all LCG's had either a social inclusion or equality focus before proceeding. IRD Duhallow takes a dual approach to targeting disadvantage and social exclusion by targeting communities in need through an area-based approach, and individuals in need by taking an issue-based approach.

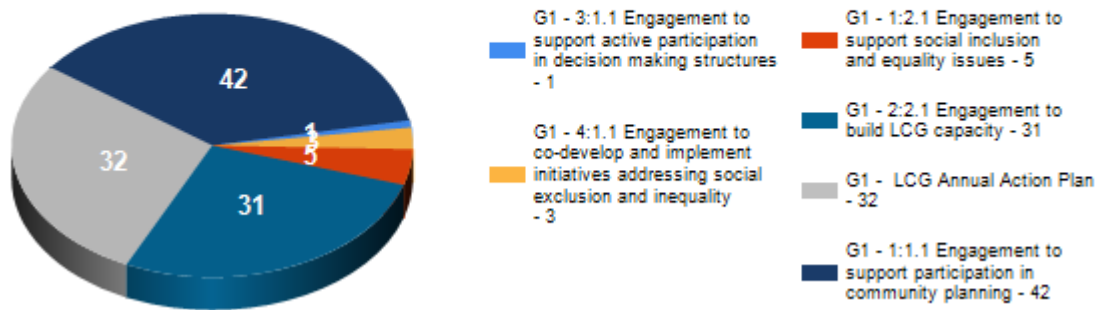


28 of these LCG's were engaged with through this community planning process and 44 interventions were supported by IRD Duhallow Staff.

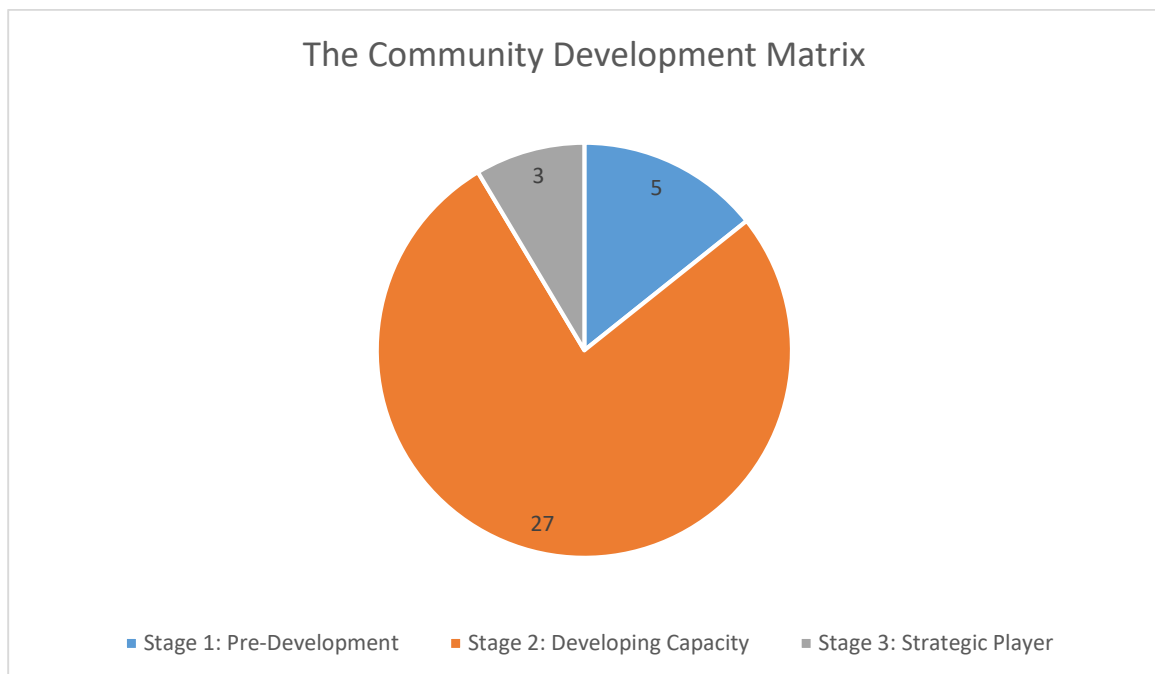
Thematic Area: G1:1 - Promote community engagement and stronger communities

Outcome	SICAP Indicator	No. of Beneficiaries	No. of Interventions
G1 - 1:1	G1 - 1:1.1 Support participation in community planning	28	44
G1 - 1:1	G1 - 1:1.1 Support participation in community planning (Non-caseload participants)	10000	
G1 - 1:2	G1 - 1:2.1 Support social inclusion and equality issues	3	5

Number of LCGs (KPI 1) Interventions by support type



27 out of the 35 LCG's were identified as being at stage 2 on the Community Development Matrix. Successive social inclusion programmes has allowed IRD Duhallow to develop strong local community groups involving target groups with the capacity to manage and deliver community projects. This support has increased the LCG's capacity to support its target group/members. 3 of the LCG's which fall under the umbrella of IRD Duhallow's working group structures and are therefore influencing local, regional and national development strategies and initiatives by feeding into local and national policy agendas (stage 3). 5 of the LCG's are at stage 1 with no strong community development structures in existence and low levels of target group involvement. They have little primary activity and IRD Duhallow is currently building capacity on the ground by targeting key individuals and forming groups.



All LCG's identified that they felt a strong sense of pride in their own LCG citing that the structure provides much needed support and encouragement for activity within the community which generates a powerful sense of attachment and belonging. No LCG was either homogenous or mono cultural anymore and it was reported that in recent years LCG's have become more visibly multi-cultural. This is reflected in the diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds that are now represented on these groups. A number of common themes were

In one estate, residents felt that episodes of anti-social behaviour and crime have caused a tarnished image of one of the estates. Environmental safety concerns were expressed quite strongly. LCG's raised major concerns over existing and proposed windfarms. The objections include the proximity of the wind farm to homes, the potential health risks and impacts caused by noise and shadow flicker, the potential impact on quality of life, the devaluation of property and the potential visual impact on communities.

From both a social and economic perspective, it emerged that volunteers are tremendously important to people in Duhallow. If properly harnessed, increased volunteerism has the capacity to reap important benefits for the community including increasing social capital. It was reported that volunteering is mutually beneficial for both the LCG volunteer as well as the added-value to service and activity provision in the region. LCG members outlined the unique social benefits they receive from volunteering including the positive feelings prompted by helping people and the sense of purpose which it provides. Loss of status after retirement was commonly reported when discussing the motivation and pathway to becoming a volunteer. A culture of volunteerism has evolved in Duhallow whereby people actively seek new ways to donate their time and expertise. Volunteering has bridged the gap between full time employment and retirement allowing individuals to remain active whilst also giving back to their community. The voluntary nature of LCG's is an important element of social capital which Duhallow reaps. Some of the LCG members work full time jobs but actively contribute their time, experience, knowledge and expertise to their group. IRD Duhallow supports these community members in areas such as dealing with state agencies, strengthening existing linkages, communication and promotion/advocacy of their group. Some communities reported that "time rich" volunteers and younger volunteers are becoming more increasingly difficult to attract. It was suggested that future recruitment of LCG volunteers should include an understanding of motives for volunteering highlighting the positive aspects of volunteering. For example, an actively retired older person may want to become more involved or maintain links in their local community making a meaningful contribution or a short term unemployed individual may wish to gain experience in a particular area of the organisation. A more targeted approach may help increase the number of volunteers getting involved in LCG's and therefore create a more effective volunteer support infrastructure in communities.

It is felt that Duhallow's population is suffering "a lost generation" as people aged between 20 and 35 years drift away from the region to find work elsewhere. It is perceived that this human capital deficit is a contributory factor in the region's difficulties in attracting more companies and business development. It results in persistently higher rates of underemployment and 'brain drain' in the region. Early school leaving continues to pose a problem in Duhallow and this has unfortunately manifested into youth unemployment. Those who work in low-paid precarious or seasonal employment reported that their wage is not adequate to cover the basic costs of living for themselves and their families and they are therefore experiencing hardship as a result of having low household income levels. This also included low income farmers who are in receipt of Family Income Supplement or Farm Assist and whose livelihoods are continually threatened. Others reported being dependent on social welfare payments, whether because they are elderly, unemployed, carers, a lone parent, or have a disability or long-term illness. Unemployment was linked to the loss of individual social networks and self-esteem. The positive effects of self-referral to activation schemes such as Tus was reported with a dual benefit for both the unemployed individual and the community where the individual was placed.

The LCG's spoke about the closure and loss of important local services in recent years including post offices, banks, local schools. There was strong feelings of neglect expressed by LCG's. Inadequate childcare and youth provision was commonly reported with long waiting lists for childcare facilities and little or no youth club activities in a number of LCG areas. On a positive note, there were many examples of community support services for acutely disadvantaged households e.g. meals on wheels, community laundry etc, but unfortunately these are not extended into the mainstream social services system and are therefore struggling to stay viable with large overhead costs. Housing Issues generally mentioned lack of availability, issues of long commuting distances and lack of adequate sewers. Broadband and Mobile Coverage were again a widespread concern amongst LCG's and it is possible that more vulnerable individuals are less likely to access vital services without greater online information provision.

The Follow Up Phase

The follow up phase is still ongoing and will ensure that the individuals and communities engaged and followed up with. Data gathered will also aid the development of activities for the 2020 SICAP annual plan.

Analysis of obstacles, challenges and failures

Whilst the community meetings undertaken with the LCG's was time consuming, it was an extremely valuable tool to ensure that the consultation was truly embedded in the local community. It was important to directly consult LCG's in order to learn from their first-hand experience and present them with an opportunity to contribute to the future development of their LCG as they are best placed to articulate the needs of their peers. In a follow up phone call, it was noted by one of the LCG's that they felt a sense of empowerment and it had also encouraged them to increase their political engagement. Some staff members commented that disadvantaged individuals may be less inclined to provide a true picture of their circumstances as they feel embarrassed and/or they have lowered their expectations due to their experiences of inequality and powerlessness. It was thought that they may have also feared negative ramifications, especially if they gave details which might offend another member of the LCG. In one or two instances, the small group work was dominated by the more articulate and confident individuals but staff carefully intervened where appropriate on these occasions. There were a number of unrealistic ideas generated which would not be possible to implement. Time constraints effected the number of LCG's we were able to meet with and the depth of analysis possible. The unpredictability of funding and reduction to SICAP budgets was cited as a major challenge for LCG's. There is a widespread feeling that LCG's in Duhallow are under resourced from the state. In the majority of instances LCG's do not have the capacity to generate it from within and the limited resources are being spread very thinly. LCG's feel that public funding assistance is somewhat bureaucratic and cumbersome. There is a myriad of differences between and within the areas with the greatest concentration of disadvantage as per the Pobal HP Deprivation Index. It emerged quite strongly that some low income households living in these areas are more disadvantaged than others. It was also apparent that some low income households outside of these designated areas were equally if not more disadvantaged.

An analysis of the outcomes of this process and how this work contributed to the horizontal principles of community development and equality.

The community consultation meetings allowed both Staff and Board to foster a greater understanding of the essence of LCG's which often cannot be accurately captured through the community support plans. The meetings were also a great way of building a positive rapport with communities. It also allowed for a greater insight into dimensions of community life which are often excluded on the basis that they don't necessarily fit within the constraints of the prescribed SICAP community support plans. The meetings uncovered the opinions and feelings of groups representing people who are often socially excluded and whose voices are not heard and the posits gave everybody the chance to provide their opinion. This was particularly important for people who have a fear of public speaking or lack the confidence to express their opinions in an open forum. This person-centred approach not only gave an insight into what is working well and what is not working well but also served to highlight the resource shortfalls of LCG's. The non-technical approach of using posters strengthened the capacity of staff to collect and analyse data and proved very accessible for all target groups attending the meetings. Furthermore, the posters added variety to the consultation and assisted in engaging with SICAP target groups who might not otherwise get involved. This process has helped to strengthen Local Community Groups and aided them in recruiting and retaining members. Traditional formats can limit community contribution and lead to conflict in some instances. Interaction with those who are directly involved in the LCG lent depth and clarity to the issues which were discussed. The welcoming environment and active participation not only produced interesting results but also included people who are not normally encouraged to define issues of concern to them, for example older people and individuals with disabilities. The consultation allowed these individuals to voice the issues that affect their daily lives which will hopefully contribute to empowerment and improvement of services within their community and increase participation in social, cultural and civic activities. Furthermore, new LCG's have been formed and previously inactive residents are now taking part in community activity. It is also hoped that this consultation process will lead greater individual engagement from SICAP target groups in SICAP programme activities as well as a greater uptake of more

intensive individualised interventions and supports under goal 2 because barriers to participation have now been communicated. It is envisaged that it will also aid the development of SICAP activities in response to the identified needs.

The LCG consultations has created a body of evidence which emphasises the crucial role IRD Duhallow provides in the landscape of rural Duhallow. IRD Duhallow plays an important role in assisting LCG's to access funding and to handle the complex administrative tasks that that funding gave rise to. This involves the interfacing between LCG's and agencies of the state including the Local Authority, HSE etc. The data will help to inform and address the needs of the socially excluded in Duhallow and it has already promoted greater dialogue around social inclusion and equality issues. Diverse challenges face local communities and it is quite evident from the community consultation that a 'one size fits all' solution is not appropriate. However, this process has allowed IRD Duhallow to respond accordingly to the hybrid of issues and assist groups in the strategic planning of their projects, providing information for future planning to optimise benefits and minimise costs. Input from individuals is vital to determine the type of supports, actions and interventions that should be provided through SICAP and to respond to the most common emerging needs during the consultation process. Community consultation should be a fundamental concept of LCG support planning to help maximise local support, tap into local resources and knowledge and ensure a focused and a targeted approach. It helps to foster community resilience and capacity building; and enhance a community's capacity to maintain or invest in the revitalisation of initiatives/projects that are of importance to them. Networking with other LCG's should be encouraged to share ideas, experience, practice and maximise impact of projects where applicable. These consultations have aided in strengthening LCG's and in turn, this should aid the development of stronger and sustainable communities, improving the lives of those living in these communities in Duhallow.