

Chapter 1 The Donegal Community Audit – Introduction

'Unequal access to economic, social and cultural aspects of life distance certain groups and areas from society. Their inability to exert participation, inevitably causes disadvantage, disempowerment and exacerbates the level of inequality'.

(The Local Anti-Poverty Strategy, Donegal County Council, 2004. pg.43)

Judging from this, equal accessibility is a pre-cursor to ensuring the full participation of all persons who live and work in County Donegal. This now poses the question as to how accessible are services to different concentrations of the population and more specifically to the communities.

The focus of this project is to determine the accessibility of community infrastructure or community networks in County Donegal and how it can be measured. By determining the level of accessibility, it would provide for the first time, an in-depth understanding of:

- Where community and voluntary groups and community facilities are located and their contact details
- How far people have to travel to access community and voluntary groups or facilities
- How well the needs of the population are being served by the different types of groups
- The actual needs of the community and voluntary sector, for example, training and education, insurance, funding, staffing and strategic development needs etc
- Where linkages can be forged within the sector.

To achieve the above, the Donegal Community Audit developed a new framework to examine community and voluntary infrastructure and this culminated in the production of a series of infrastructure maps, two community and voluntary directories by geographical and sectoral remit and this strategic needs assessment. The novelty of this approach is that the mechanisms through which data is captured on community infrastructure can be easily updated over time and indeed can be applied to a number of other types of infrastructure (i.e.) economic, social and cultural, within the county. Another unique aspect of this project was that the capacity of a number of people from the community and voluntary sector was built upon and their skills were utilised to assist with the administration of the project surveys. Further details of the approach and methodology used are included in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 details the spatial analysis that was undertaken in the project, chapter 4 details how well the sectoral needs of the communities are being catered for, chapter 5 outlines key community development needs, chapter 6 presents the funding activity of the community and voluntary sector, while chapter 7 explores the distribution of community infrastructure from both urban and rural perspectives. Chapter 8 provides guidance as to the way forward in linking, building and bridging better and more sustainable communities. Chapter 9 presents the summary recommendations and conclusions.

Ultimately, by completing the Donegal Community Audit and incorporating its findings into various strategic policy and development plans, the community and voluntary sector and all its players are one step closer to achieving the vision of having “vibrant communities which participate fully in the life of Donegal” (The Community Development Sectoral Plan, An Straitéis 2002 – 2012).