



**A submission to
the Department of the Environment, Community and
Local Government**

on the draft document

***Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and
Community Development in Ireland***

April 2015

Contributed by Just Forests

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Introduction

Just Forests welcomes the public consultation and call for submissions on the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government's draft document *Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland*. As a member of civil society concerned with the promotion of local and global justice, Just Forests in association with the development education¹ sector in Ireland makes a significant contribution to community development in Ireland.

Just Forests is a member of the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA). IDEA members represent a spectrum of civil society and NGO actors. The sector has been recognized by European colleagues as a strong example of good practice in development education². With membership of 75 organizations in addition to 37 individuals, IDEA represents a significant voice within Irish civil society devoted to building public understanding of active citizenship and local - global approaches to shared challenges.

Development education and community development

Just Forests welcomes the draft policy's vision of 'vibrant, sustainable, self-determining communities that have the social, cultural and economic well-being of all citizens³ at their core' and the document's emphasis on community development processes as a means to achieving this vision. We believe that development education can play a key role in the community development processes described in the policy.

There is a strong synergy between development education, community education and community development. They share a number of common and complementary core principles, such as social cohesion, inclusiveness, equality, justice, empowerment, participation and active citizenship. There are also close links in terms of methodologies.

The development education sector envisions a world based on solidarity, equality and sustainability. Community-based development education can empower us to create this world, through enhancing active global citizenship and learning for our interdependent local-to-global communities.

¹ There is no single standard definition for development education. However for the purposes of this submission, it is helpful to refer to Irish Aid's definition: 'Development education is an educational process aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live. It seeks to engage people in analysis, reflection and action for local and global citizenship and participation. It is about supporting people in understanding, and in acting to transform the social, cultural, political and economic structures which affect their lives and others at personal, community, national and international levels'. (*Irish Aid and Development Education*, 2003).

² http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/nscentre/ge/DE_Watch.pdf Accessed 29/01/14

³ 'Citizens' here be rephrased so as to emphasise the inclusion of all residents in our communities, not just Irish Citizens.

Since our founding in 1989 Just Forests has always insisted that local actions can and do have global consequences. The roots of local issues are often located outside the community in broader national and increasingly international economic and political contexts, for example in changing patterns of employment and economic development. Therefore a framework for local community development needs to be underpinned not just by active local citizenship, but by global citizenship as well.

Objective One: Engaging with Communities

Development education is particularly relevant to Objective One of the draft framework, 'Engaging with Communities'. This objective sets out how the framework will 'provide 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.' Development education can help achieve this by contributing to the knowledge, skills, values and action dimensions of community development:

- *Contributing to Knowledge:* Development education facilitates an understanding of how local and global issues affect our own lives. Development education enables participants to make connections between communities, and encourages us to bring global awareness, solidarity, inclusiveness and resilience to local issues.
- *Building Skills:* Development education builds critical thinking, creativity, communication, intercultural awareness and acceptance, political and economic literacy and media literacy. It enables people to see issues from different perspectives and to engage with those who have different needs and priorities.
- *Strengthening Values:* Development education can strengthen core values of community development, such as equality, justice, empowerment and participation. Development education also strengthens individual and collective abilities to understand and challenge the effects of social inequality and educational disadvantage on communities.
- *Promotes Action:* Development education enables people to explore and analyse a range of possible responses to community issues and concerns. It aids understanding of how change happens and how power structures can be constructively challenged.

Development education empowers people to effectively plan and carry out targeted actions, and builds and engages an active citizenry at local, national and global levels.

Given the qualities of development education as outlined above, we feel that it is essential to include a development education dimension in a strategy for local community development. This should include:

- Prioritising representation of development education organisations and practitioners in Public Participation Networks (PPNs)
- Specific inclusion of development education, and integration of development education practice into all Local and Economic Community Plans (LECPs),
- Including development education organisations in the delivery of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

Just Forests has been extremely active for the past 25 years in community education and community development projects across Ireland. We believe our participation in the further development and implementation of the draft framework should be supported, as our input could significantly strengthen and enhance delivery of local and community development.

Some of Just Forests past activities compliments the above

For over 25 years Just Forests has engaged with numerous sectors of Irish society in enhancing local development and includes:

- Just Forests organized and hosted the first [Conference](#) in Ireland on *Independent Forest Certification and Responsible Timber Sourcing*
- Just Forests identified and brought key players together and set in motion the framework that led to the establishment of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in Ireland- this initiative led to Coillte becoming FSC certified
- Just Forests are responsible for ensuring [Woodies DIY](#) ceased buying cheap imported plywood and replacing it with Irish-made panelboard that supports Irish jobs
- Just Forests steered Offaly Co Council to become the first Local Authority in Ireland to formally adopt a 'responsible timber purchasing policy'
- Just Forests has planted the seeds of community engagement in the minds of thousands of Irish children through their engagement with our very popular [Wood of Life travelling exhibition](#)

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