



Putting people at the heart of conservation since 1989.

RDP/LEADER 2014-2020 submission

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INTRODUCTION:

Just Forests welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government's LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme for the 2014-2020 programming period.

Through our membership of the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA), we assist the development education sector in Ireland to make a significant contribution to the delivery, reception and public understanding of Ireland's foreign policy, in particular with regard to issues of international trade and development and human rights. We also help to bring and encourage a development education perspective through our membership of the Irish Environmental Network (IEN).

The development education sector in Ireland plays a leading role nationally and in European development education. 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 education¹.

¹ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/nscentre/ge/DE_Watch.pdf Accessed 29/01/14

Rural Development Programme 2014-2020

“We need to make RDPs that can easily report on verifiable results, be better targeted towards rural territories’ real development needs, and properly integrated with all other funding. RDP programmers should also place a very high priority on reducing errors.”

Commissioner Dacian Cioloş

Just Forests believe in a world where all people will have access to natural resources as a means to improving their quality of life. To this end, I am reminded that while serving an apprenticeship with a Tullamore woodworking family in the early 1960’s I learned how to make wheels – wheels for ass’s carts, horse’s carts, pony traps and bog barrows. We got all our wood from Clonad Sawmills, outside Tullamore, which was run at that time by the Dunne Family.

We knew instinctively what woods to use for any particular job. Take the humble wheel for instance - three different locally-grown woods were used – each with particular characteristics that ensured the longest usage possible for that wheel and a quality piece of wheel-righting for the farmer or indeed townie who commissioned the work.

The hub (center stock) was made of elm. Elm has an interlocking grain structure that ensures it is for all intent and purposes relatively split resistant. The spokes were made of ash because of its flexibility- thus ensuring that shocks from hard knocks and heavy loads would be absorbed by the spokes rather than shattering them. Then you had oak for the felloes (rim). Oak is strong and durable. It is hardwearing and for the most part rot-resistant. It could withstand tough wear and tear. During my apprenticeship we also made lots of bodies for cattle lorries. The most common wood used in the floor and ramps of cattle lorry bodies was larch – a tough local-grown resinous timber with excellent hardwearing properties to withstand the hoofs and waste residues of transporting cattle.

So, considering that GOOGLE or FACEBOOK wasn’t heard of at that time where did we get all this knowledge about the inherent qualities and characteristics of each different wood? It was gained from centuries of tradition by craftspeople intimately engaged in their work and the knowledge was handed down to successive generations.

Today our elm, our oak, our ash and yes our larch also, are threatened by serious infestations that could possibly end any commercial exploitation of them going forward and may even cause their permanent exit from the Irish landscape. Considering the historic role Irish timber has made to the economic

development of the agricultural sector in our country their decline is nothing short of criminal and no one has been held to account. Now, somebody has to be responsible for their decline.

“RDP programmers should also place a very high priority on reducing errors,” (Commissioner Dacian Ciolos) and I would add that they should be held accountable for any further demise of the environment and natural resources considering the volumes of research that exists and the historical events that is driving the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which was agreed in December 2013 and now has *‘three long term objectives within which rural development is also situated.’* These include:

- Viable food production
- Sustainable management of natural resources
- Climate action and
- Territorial development

Again the old Irish lament Cill Chais – a gaelic song describing the aftermath of the destruction of Ireland’s forests in the 16th century, is a reality.

“Cread A dheanfaimid Feasta Gan Adhmad, Ta Deireadh Na Gcoillte Ar Lar.”

Today we are witnessing the demise of our most commercially viable and bio diverse timber species, the destruction of our bogs nature’s great flood barriers.

We must now ask ourselves what is “development” and who is it for? What have all the previous LEADER Strategies and Rural Development Initiatives failed to do that has brought us to a point where we brace ourselves for the ninth week of persistent rain and overflowing rivers that are causing unprecedented flooding across the country.

“Development” cannot be delivered from the outside, and “Poverty” is not merely a lack of money, food or shelter. To be poor is also to lack control over one’s life and resources, and “poverty” is not simply a matter of scarcity, but a matter of distribution of, and access to, resources. And “Development” is about reversing poverty and inequality, increasing the choices and opportunities available to poor people, and protecting their human rights. (Source: Economic growth and development – Does one lead automatically to the other?)

We live in an increasingly globalized society and everything we do today has local as well as global impacts. Sustained economic development cannot take place without attending to the *‘real development needs’* of society.

More people-centered and sustainable forestry and farming practices have never been more urgent. Natural renewable resources, environmental goods and services and the protection and responsible use of biological diversity are the real backbone of all economic development, social protection and environmental sustainability.

In summary we ask the **RDP 2014-2020** to take due regard to the following food/agricultural related concerns of Just Forests:

- Soils all over the world have been degraded at a rate of 10 times faster than nature can restore them
- Intensification of farming/food production is harming the environment
- Population growth will lead to greater demands for food
- Independent and credible food labeling is needed for consumer confidence
- 'True cost accounting' -the RDP must account for the real costs of food, or sustainable food systems will never break through to the mainstream.
- Herd and food health is a serious problem as antibiotic/pesticide residues enter the food chain

Human values are at the heart of our work with a particular focus on the following.

Food MATTERS.

Just Forests calls on the RDF Programme to take greater account of unsustainable food production practices that are very evident everywhere.

The global population has just passed 7BILLION. Globally we are producing enough food to feed 11BILLION people but almost 40% of this food is wasted. This is an appalling situation as so many of the world's children and adults go to bed hungry every night.

Unsustainable farming systems/practices by big corporates that churn out vast quantities of food only to sit on supermarket shelves in shiny packaging must stop.

This is seriously undermining the work of small and local (sustainable) food production that cares for the environment and stimulates social cohesion while boosting local jobs.

A new insect-resistant maize, developed by DuPont and Dow Chemical, is presently being considered for approval by the EU's General Affairs Council. In relation to this matter Just Forests fully supports the Afri position on GM crops.

'Afri contends that given the scientific uncertainty around the risks to human health from GM crops, as well as the possibility of contamination, and the consequences for biodiversity, that this proposal should be opposed. Greenpeace has claimed that would be "utterly irresponsible" as the EU's own tests suggest the maize is "harmful to butterflies and moths". (11th February, 2014)

With global populations set to soar to 9.3BILLION over the next number of years the need for sustainable food/farming systems has never been greater. Ireland's current industrialized farming practices are contributing to climate change.

Between sheep, our national dairy herd, horses and beef cattle we now have more farm animals in Ireland than people. The methane gas expelled by our national (collective) herds is significant and must be curtailed if critical life support systems such as fresh water and fresh air are to be maintained in pristine condition.

It is way past time to factor in the true costs of food production.

Funding MATTERS

Just Forests wants to see a larger portion of the allocated funds given to member groups of the Irish Environmental Network (IEN). Many groups in the IEN have done outstanding work over the years with very small budgets. The public trusts environmental groups to spend their funds wisely compared to statutory bodies that often get paid huge salaries and pensions.

Basic hands-on education for sustainable development is urgently needed. Adequate funds for environmental training and education must be increased without delay.

Education for sustainable development (ESD) MATTERS.

Standing forests should be more valuable than cleared forestland. Stewardship of forests natural resources and services such as soil enhancement, flood prevention, carbon sequestration and fresh water provision by practicing sustainable forestry should be more profitable than clear-cutting an Irish woodland or tropical rainforest for that matter. Preserving wetlands and grasslands should provide far more long-term benefits to society than parking lots, or construction sites full of houses that no one wants.

At Just Forests, we endeavor to change the economic mindset that fails to value natural ecosystems and ultimately results in nature being wasted or consumed by inefficient developments.

David Meredith's presentation from the RDP/LEADER consultation event that took place in the Tullamore Court Hotel on Thursday 6th February, 2014, states that:

- Youth unemployment in Ireland currently stands at 30%
 - It was 9% in 2007
 - Ireland has one of the highest rates of young people who are not in education, not in employment and not in training (NEET) in the EU at 21%.
 - These figures suggest a need to develop alternative pathways to education outside of the current formal third level structures.

Just Forests recommends a return to apprenticeships informed by Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Development Education (DE). In September

2013, Just Forests made a submission to the Minister for Education and Skills' *'Request for submissions to inform the development of a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Ireland'*.

(<http://www.justforests.org/news/just-forests-welcomes-ministers-call-for-national-esd-strategy>)

Creating economic value in our natural ecosystems is one of the most powerful motivators for sustaining them. Once we start thinking about ecosystems as assets, environmental sustainability can become part of the economic fabric of our society.

Conservation will be embedded in business activity – leading to an economic model that supports growth in a way that also is in harmony with nature. Such a paradigm shift of incentive – away from degrading natural ecosystems to recognizing the value in maintaining them by putting people at the heart of conservation – is the mission of Just Forests and we hope the driving force of the RDP 2014-2020.

Wood MATTERS

Ireland is the least forested country (apart from Iceland) in the EU. We are also the largest per-capita consumers of tropical wood in the EU.

In summary we ask the **RDP 2014-2020** to take due regard to the following forestry/timber related concerns of Just Forests:

- Ireland needs to be less dependent on imports of timber from developing economies
- Ireland needs to plant more trees to help deal effectively with flood waters
- The EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) which came into force in 2013 to deal with imports of illegally-logged timber must be seen as an opportunity to increase our own forest area
- Establishing more forests in Ireland will help sequester our carbon emissions and at the same time increasing our own timber resources
- All local authorities in Ireland must have a 'responsible timber procurement policy'
- All government departments/agencies must have a 'responsible timber procurement policy'