Case Study - Socio Economic Action Planning Case Study

Communities on a national basis are experiencing changes and many communities do not have a forum to facilitate the overarching co-ordination of activities or a structure where new issues or difficulties are taken on board. Our evidence confirms that regeneration and revitalisation is more sustainable and effective when the community come together to develop a plan for their area, take a lead role in making their plans in partnership with agencies and have an inclusive community structure to oversee implementation of actions and monitoring of their plan.

Socio-Economic Action Planning provides a facilitated process where the community/geographic area creates a vision for the community with specific realistic actions to achieve the vision which are based on available resources, from within the community and brokered from other agencies. Other reasons for completing community socio-economic plans include:

- Building a sense of community: The process of working together and of achieving clear results creates a sense of community
- National and local governments do not have sufficient resources to solve problems in all areas: The available resources and brokerage of resources are optimised if communities know their priorities
- Accessing funding: Many grant giving sources require community consultation and committed community involvement before offering assistance. A community planning process is the blueprint from which communities can apply for funding assistance
- More appropriate results: Actions that are developed and designed with community involvement reflect what is needed and wanted in an area.
- Build social capital; the process harnesses new energy in an area enabling positive solutions to emerge at a speedier pace than waiting for someone else to come in and do something for the community.
- Feed into Local Area Plans(LAP): This is the most effective where the socio-economic action plan takes place 12-18months before the LAP
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Ballyhoura Development has facilitated the development of socio-economic action planning in 5 Towns and their hinterlands, 36 communities and 6 estates. The communities own and lead the implementation of the plans.

Socio-Economic Action Planning Process:

Pre-development animation: Significant pre-development work is undertaken in order to ensure that members of the target groups together with the broad based groups are supported to participate in the process. This includes meeting specific groups and individuals and outlining the process and its value while in other cases it may include capacity building initiatives to support the participation in the process by some groups. Data is collected and analysed collaboratively with community members.

Pre-planning meeting: Community representatives and organisations are made aware of the planning process and asked if willing to engage in it. Advertising and PR takes place in local community – Radio, local papers, parish notes etc. All committees are written to and invited to participate in the process. Groups or sectors not represented are identified and individuals present agree to give personal invitations to the next meeting.

- **Meeting One:** Introduction to the community of the process and a preliminary discussion of the issues at the "heart of the community". Identify groups and individuals who are not at the meeting and who agreement on who should invite them to the next meeting

- **Meeting Two:** Consultation meeting including an overview of the process, mapping of the area that is the community, presentation of relevant data and facilitated workshops to analyse same including a SWOT analysis to document issues by sector that need to be addressed. The meeting also identifies other persons in the community with skills/interests in the identified sectors and agreement on who will invite them to the next meeting

- **Meeting Three:** Summary of outcomes from the previous meeting followed by facilitation of sectoral workshops on each issue to identify possible solutions. Organisations/agencies that could support the implementation of the solutions are identified and sub-groups of the participants are created to meet the relevant agencies at the next meeting.

- **Meeting Four: Agency Night (**At least 6 weeks after Meeting 3)**;** Relevant agencies and LA members are encouraged and invited to participate in this meeting to liaise with the community at a local level. This ensures that the community engage with agency officials and also the agencies are afforded the opportunity to experience firsthand any issues, concerns or queries that communities have. The Sub-groups of the community meet with representatives of the agencies and discuss the actions /issues (as relevant to the specific agency) to identify if solutions can be agreed. Following meeting 4 and inclusion of the feedback, draft 1 of the plan is presented to participating agencies to get agreement on wording and actions. Draft plans are also on display and available to groups for 4 weeks prior to Meeting 5.

- **Meeting Five:** Presentation of draft plan to the community, discussion and agreement.

Ballyhoura Development Ltd as the local development company in the area has the skills and personnel to facilitate a community planning process. The process differs given the nature of the particular community. Development Officers are the lead facilitators of the process and other staff within the company co-facilitate the process with other staff attending the Agency Night if specific supports are required e.g. tourism, enterprise, employment.

Each community that participates in the Community Socio-Economic Planning process receive hard copies of their plan which includes a profile of the community and the actions to be undertaken. This ensures that all are aware of a co-ordinated approach to managing the future growth of their

communities and a strategic plan is in place. The process speeds up the pace and scale of development in addressing community based social inclusion, socio-economic, social and environmental issues.

Provision of training in response to needs and other supports, including the streghening of communtiy structures is also undertaken by the LDC; this supports implementation of actions by the community