Integrated Rural Development Programme Manorhamilton Rural District

I.R.D. – ONE YEAR ON

A year of rewarding hard work has passed since I.R.D. first took root in North Leitrim. What started out as a concept has given way to real action and tangible results within the framework of an Integrated Rural Development Programme. Closely observed by the Government and the European Commission, the Manorhamilton Rural District, together with eleven other pilot areas in the Republic, is rising to the challenge of local decision-making and self-generated development. Thanks to the commitment and hard work of many communities, I.R.D. is becoming synonymous with wide-ranging initiatives occurring in places as far apart as Inishowen, the Inny Bsin and the offshore islands.

In each I.R.D. area, the Programme commences with the appointment of a Co-Ordinator and the formation of a Community 'Core Group', comprising some of the individuals and representatives of voluntary organisations who are anxious to develop the area and willing to make the efforts necessary to bring this about. By late November 1988, the Core Groups had gathered at a Workshop where they presented a profile of their areas, outlined the local potential for development and listened to contributions from various resource development specialists.

Since the promotion of rural enterprise was a shared objective, it then fell to each Core Group to select Priority Projects for its area which it would help to advance during the two-year pilot phase of the Programme. Throughout the Manorhamilton district meetings were held with local communities to raise awareness of I.R.D., listen to development proposals and provide encouragement in the face of the new challenge.

By March 1989, priorities for development had been established and a set of initiatives selected on the basis of criteria such as the resources of the area, the needs and aspirations of local people and the socio-economic benefits expected. There was no shortage of ideas, only of human resources available to realise them. The hardest lesson for everyone was accepting that some fundamental changes were needed in North Leitrim before it could benefit properly from the I.R.D. support network. Amongst these changes was the activation of interest groups and enterprising individuals to whom assistance with projects could be given. Notwithstanding these difficulties, directions for development were agreed and presented by the Manorhamilton Core Group at the second I.R.D. Workshop in mid-March 1989.

That you will agree, was not so long ago. Yet within a matter of months it is possible to report on the following I.R.D. achievements and plans:-

TOURISM

Development of Tourist Accommodation, Catering and Services.

(a) Dromahaire Tourist Information Centre: operating on a voluntary basis since June 1989 with plans for a FÁS Social Employment Scheme.
(b) Agri-Tourism Seminar in July 1989 for existing and intending Bed & Breakfast operators.
(c) Agri-Tourism course taking place during Autumn/Winter, 1989/'90.
(d) Kiltyclogher Courthouse Project: provision of tourist accommodation by Kiltyclogher Community Council.

Promotional Tourist Literature

(a) 'Dromahaire Invites You': Tourist brochure launched in May 1989 by the newly-formed Dromahaire & District I.R.D. Committee.
(b) Visitors' Guide to Manorhamilton Area: planned by the recently established Manorhamilton Community Council.

Angling Development

In recognition of North Leitrim's enormous potential as an angling centre, moves are being made to devise and implement local angling development plans.

INTEGRATED RESOURCE CENTRE WORKERS' CO-OP LTD.

I.R.D. provides practical support to this emerging local group whose current projects are:

(a) **Siamsa Samhraidh:** highly successful show of traditional entertainment during July/August 1989 in the Central Hotel, Manorhamilton, with plans to run again in Summer 1990.
(b) **Cultural Exchange Programme:** a North Leitrim-based programme scheduled for Summer 1990.

ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

I.R.D. is facilitating a number of potential enterprises including:

(a) **Stuffed Mushrooms:** being examined for feasibility as a chilled food product.
(b) **Machine-Knitting Enterprise:** local knitters receiving training during Autumn 1989 with a view to commercial activity.

EDUCATION/AWARENESS PROGRAMME

Ongoing programme of specialist inputs designed to complement existing initiatives and stimulate new ones.

Achieved

(a) FÁS Community Enterprise Programme, Module A, Manorhamilton, April/May 1989.
(b) Dinghy sailing classes on Lough Allen with Cobh International Sailing Centre, July 1989.

Planned

(a) Schools: Can Collection/Recycling Project; Tree Awareness Campaign; and Post Primary Enterprise Competition. 1989/'90.
(b) Specialist talks on Farming and Forestry, Tidy Towns and other subjects. 1989/'90.
(c) Establishment of windsurfing and sailing club at Lough Allen, including purchase of boats and provision of instruction.



I.R.D. Core Groups *at a Twinning Meeting in Manorhamilton.*
Back row, left to right: Gabriel Miney *(Manorhamilton),* ***Robert Carey*** *(Inishowen),* ***Michael Heaney*** *(Inishowen Co-Ordinator),* ***Sean Clancy*** *(Manorhamilton),* ***Sinéad McLoughlin*** *(Inishowen).*
Front row, left to right: Ina Keane *(Manorhamilton),* ***Róisin Williamson*** *(Inishowen),* ***Fionnuala Meagher*** *(Manorhamilton Co-Ordinator),* ***Paddy O'Donovan*** *(Inishowen),* ***Tommie Sweeney*** *(Manorhamilton),* ***Larry Murphy*** *(Inishowen).*
Photo: Marie Eames.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT

Environmental enhancement is being encouraged throughout the area.

Achieved

Through tremendous local voluntary effort, a riverside walk has been created at Fowley's Falls, Glenaniff, with plans for further amenity development. To raise awareness of the scheme, an Open Day and Duck Derby were held on 20th August, 1989.

Planned

(a) Promotion of Tidy Towns initiatives in every town and village, especially those not yet participating in the competition.
(b) Promotion of waste recycling projects.

One of the distinguishing features of I.R.D. is the principle of shared learning i.e. that no area is left to develop in isolation from the others involved in the Programme. In the first place, individual Core Group members learn from their interactions with fellow-members. Then, each of the Pilot Areas is 'twinned' with another and the Co-Ordinators and Core Groups of the twinned areas have regular meetings, on a "home and away" basis, for the purpose of discussing problems, examining solutions, identifying potential resources and assessing each other's progress. The Manorhamilton Area is twinned with Inishowen, Co. Donegal, where the range of successful community development initiatives provides valuable experience from which North Leitrim can draw.

The Workshops are the next step in the shared learning process since they create an arena for the Core Groups to outline their plans and hear the views of their colleagues from other areas. Four Workshops will take place over the two year period of the Programme: two have been held; the third, in November 1989, is concerned with monitoring progress on projects; and the fourth, in Summer 1990, will concentrate on the assessment and evaluation of the process undergone.

It stands to reason that by providing structures to promote information exchange, forward planning and practical support, the quality of development is enhanced and the rate of change accelerated. Experience to date in the Manorhamilton Area would certainly bear this out. The availability of a full-time Co-Ordinator means that information is disseminated, agency support secured, linkages established and funding schemes availed of to a greater extent than would otherwise be the case. Numerous agencies have co-operated and liaised with I.R.D. over the past year and expressed their commitment to the ongoing development of the area. These agencies include FÁS, the I.D.A., the International Fund for Ireland, Leitrim County Council, Leitrim County Development Team and Teagasc.

One of the effects of I.R.D.'s liaison with such agencies is the confidence instilled in the local community and the awareness raised amongst those who have the means to facilitate socio-economic progress in the locality – both essential to the creation of a better future in North Leitrim.

Now that the integrated rural development process has begun, the main objectives for the year ahead are to help and involve a wider section of the community and to sustain and build on the achievements so far. At community level, this will require committed involvement and effort: having seen, at first hand, the jobs created by voluntary groups in Inishowen, we know it is possible once the will is there.

But private enterprise has a major part to play. There are local people with ideas and skills which could be put to work with a little help. There are local businesses which could be rejuvenated, expanded or diversified with a little imagination. There are also the many emigrants from North Leitrim, both in Ireland and abroad, who have the means to do something worth-while for the area by setting up a local industry, investing in a badly-needed facility or marketing the region for tourism. It is important to remind our emigrants that when they leave, they take with them the skills and ability needed to bring about change. We would like to create the kind of conditions which would allow them to return, but we cannot do it alone. Why not get in touch with I.R.D. if you would like to help the area in some way?

Anyone seeking or offering assistance or requiring further information may contact Fionnuala Meagher, the I.R.D. Co-Ordinator, at the Teagasc (formerly ACOT) Offices, Sligo Road, Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim. Tel: 072-55614.

Alternatively, contact one of the I.R.D. Core Group members who are:- **Joan Haslette** (Manorhamilton); **Ina Keane** (Tarmon); **Paddy McGowan** (Kiltyclogher); **Gabriel Miney** (Manorhamilton); **Eithne O'Connor** (Glencar); **Sean Sweeney** (Manorhamilton); **Tommie Sweeney** (Dromahaire).