

National Council of Rural Advisors:

A Rural Conversation: “Together We Can, Together We Will”

23rd July 2018.

The Consultation

The National Council of Rural Advisors are consulting in order to explore the opportunities Scotland’s rural economy presents and the potential recommendations for the Scottish Government stemming from these. They would like everyone to be offered the opportunity to take part and co-create this future framework for rural Scotland.

The Scottish Women’s Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

Women continue to face inequality throughout Scotland for a number of reasons. Due to the unique geographical makeup of the country, taking a one size fits all approach does not address the challenges women face from both a geographic and historical perspective. Women make up 51% of the population. Every piece of legislation that goes through parliament, both reserved and devolved, has a direct impact on women in a fundamentally different way to men due to persisting gender inequality. It is essential that this is acknowledged and scrutinised. Whilst inequality exists throughout Scotland in both rural and urban areas, it is acutely important to understand that these issues exist for a wide range of reasons that are different depending on location. The SWC stresses the need for regional analysis when facing the challenge of eradicating both gender and income inequality.

The Scottish Women’s Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to the issues set out below.

1. The development of relevant Scottish Government mainstream policies should consider the effect upon the Rural Economic Strategy and its consequent policies
• How should policy makers in Government make sure that the economic needs of rural Scotland are taken into account?

Women across Scotland undoubtedly benefit from legislation and practices which enhance the goal of economic empowerment. However, despite broad attempts at a national level, it is clear there are a number of specific barriers in relation to rural areas that must be overcome to enhance equality in economic and labour terms.

Through consultation with women, a number of issues have been identified that arise consistently in relation to the aforementioned in rural areas. These are interdependent and tend to coalesce leading to prevention of successful participation in employment due to factors out with women's control. Consultation with women in these areas in order to gauge what works best at a grassroots level is essential, not just at the beginning of the policy process, but also in order to monitor outcomes and best practices for specific areas.

In order to ensure a process which recognises the defining attributes of specific areas in rural Scotland that is distinctive and can help in defining policy objectives, the following should be looked at:

- Recognition that women in rural areas undertake the majority of part-time, low paid, low skilled work and the impact this has on economic activity.
- Awareness of the unpaid work that women do and the amount of money this saves the economy each year.
- The prevalence of in-work poverty and the resulting reliance on top-up assistance through social security for women.
- The lack of accessible, affordable, appropriate, flexible childcare and the barriers this creates to women's participation in the labour market.
- The unique difficulties in accessing employment in rural areas and contributing factors such as transport feasibility.
- Occupational segregation and gender streaming, particularly in training and education programmes.
- Clear cut strategies that recognise the importance of youth retention in rural areas, particularly for employment in terms of health and social care, to cope with future demands such as aging population and EU withdrawal.
- The prevalence of the gender pay gap and the difficulties in closing this, particularly in certain job roles.
- The importance of older women in the workplace and the value, skills, knowledge and experience they bring.
- Recognition of the prevalence of small businesses in rural areas and extra training that may be needed around best practices such as flexible working, parental leave, etc, to ensure women receive all opportunities available.
- Accessibility of local authorities and government for many women in rural areas.

2. Create quality job opportunities (that are well paid, flexible, and purposeful) to promote skills and opportunities, but also deal with inequalities in the rural labour market (such as the gender pay gap)
 - What employment opportunities do we need to meet the current and future needs of our changing rural economy? Where should these be? (Either by location and/or sector)

Whilst inequality exists throughout Scotland in both rural and urban areas, it is acutely important to understand that these issues exist for a wide range of reasons that are different depending on location. The need for regional analysis when facing the challenge of eradicating both gender and income inequality is of the utmost importance. National frameworks that encompass all of the country often fail to take note of specific and unique issues. Mainstreaming is of course a necessity, however local issues must be looked at, including the differences between those areas classified as rural, to ensure policy does not just assume a universal approach.

More must be done to ensure policy approaches recognise specific and unique rural barriers. For instance, the geography of rural Scotland makes it difficult for women to access childcare which is near to their place of work or study. They can be forced to undertake long journeys by public transport to get their children dropped off, then to get to work or college, before doing the same again in the evening. Many of the women who have to juggle these responsibilities are in low paid employment. Legislation must ensure that processes are streamlined, and do not focus on one specific policy goal at the detriment of the others.

Young Women in Rural Communities

Gender streaming begins from an early age and continues exponentially throughout a woman's life. Young women who choose to not follow an academic route are more often than not steered towards typically "female" roles such as hairdressing, administration and childcare, especially in areas with fewer opportunities. This leads to a situation where many young girls either choose these limited roles or move further afield to more urban areas to access increased employment.

On the contrary, young men who wish to undertake training-based jobs will be given information on, for example, Modern Apprenticeships in what are traditionally seen as 'male roles' such as plumbing and mechanics. The wages which each of these gender stereotypical roles attract are subject to disparities. This problem is not specific to rural localities, apprenticeships in the likes of land management and production, however, are still typically seen as masculine, often making young women who do undertake these feeling uncomfortable at being the only female due to outdated gender stereotypes.

This is a pernicious problem and can often lead to situations whereby young women are forced to undertake more than one part time job in order to make ends meet. The difference in rates of pay dependent on age can make it extremely difficult for young women to enter into and sustain employment. Transport issues, as well as the high expenses incurred from car ownership mean many young women in rural areas struggle to access work with much of their wages being spent on this issue.

Older Women

The changing age structure of Scotland's population is indicative of the rest of the United Kingdom. Rural communities tend to have an older age profile than their urban counterparts for a number of reasons, such as younger people moving to cities for education or employment opportunities. The risk of social isolation for these women continues to grow, leading to numerous health problems. This will soon be a stark reality and all policies, including those dealing with economics and employment, need to adapt to ensure that this is mitigated.

There are many issues when older women are forced to continue in employment apart from the obvious health implications. Many often feel displaced and forced into retirement at the sake of younger people. This is a particular issue in jobs where they are on more beneficial employment contracts which offer greater pay and benefits such as increased annual leave. These women have the double problem: their retirement age is rising meaning they have to stay in work, despite the likes of health issues and caring responsibilities, whilst feeling pressure to quit.

This has contributed negatively to not just unemployment, but also underemployment by women. Many employers will sacrifice women over the age of 25 for a younger person simply because they can pay them less. Not only does this inhibit employment of those over the age range, it also ensures that women of 24 and under are being paid less money for doing exactly the same job as their counterparts.

Industries such as those reliant on tourism in rural areas often avoid hiring older women as they are seen as counter-productive, ignoring the range of skills and experiences they have. Given the very real problem that many older women were given no opportunity for further education when leaving school, employers tend to disregard other skills and abilities for those "on paper". Not only is this a major factor in under-employment within communities, it contributes heavily to the stigma attached to older female workers.

[• How do we tackle the inequalities we face in rural Scotland? i.e. challenges faced due to age, gender, socio-economic, educational and ethnic background](#)

In terms of the more rural areas of Scotland, there are still a vast range of particular barriers affecting women and blocking gender equality. The SWC holds a number of events throughout rural areas each year in order to hear first-hand from grassroots women how Scotland can strive for equal opportunities and allow them to feel empowered. The nature of this is championed by emphasising the differences in both geographical and historical terms of rural Scotland, including assessing how best to specifically target strategies to breakdown traditional gender stereotypes in rural localities.

Defining the interlinking between gendered poverty and rurality is also extremely important in identifying and supporting women in communities. Obstacles are often doubly hard in areas where structural gender inequality is pervasive, but reforms do not necessarily take into account the unique struggles of the geographical area.

A huge barrier to the inequalities faced in rural Scotland is equal representation. Specific consideration for women in rural areas is a matter that should be stressed continuously.

Whilst a number of issues affecting women are applicable to those living in both urban and rural areas, many are specific to and are more acutely felt in more remote parts of the country. There is a feeling that the specific issues and barriers are not fully understood across the Scottish Parliament overall. The idea of inequality is even more pronounced in the likes of disabled or BME women who often face even more barriers to accessing public life.

4. [Encourage future entrepreneurship by ensuring the Scottish Government's rural skills action plan meets the needs of the Rural Economic Strategy](#)
 - [What skills are required to have a vibrant rural economy?](#)

It should be a clear priority to take note of the loss of funding for investment resulting from EU Withdrawal and put plans in place to implement coordinated strategies to offset this. By starting this now, before complete departure, it will ensure that plans are appropriately in place to keep loss of employment to a minimum.

Further clarification is needed around the Brexit process, as well as specific issues about particular areas of policy and legislation and how this will be adapted to geographical areas within Scotland. Failure to take into account the diverse nature of rural Scotland means that the legislative and policy decisions affecting women in these areas ways cannot be foreseen. The impact on the rural economy of Scotland and what the loss of European funding will mean for many in these areas has, thus far, barely been raised at a parliamentary level.

A main contention is the fact that a one-nation approach does not duly justify the impact that Brexit will have on more rural communities'. The unique structural imbalances felt by these localities at a gendered level goes further than just enacting legislation in an attempt to correct these wrongs. In built attitudes and outdated concepts must change. Gendered inequality, already so pervasive, will fail to be rectified if this goes unchallenged. Failure to understand this from a Brexit point of view and the potential economic turmoil is not just a political and financial issue, it is a gendered one.

There is a persistent fear within communities that European funding which goes towards helping communities, particularly in more rural areas, will no longer be available. This can lead to a loss of attraction for investment, resulting in less employment uptake, which is already significantly harder for women in more localised regions within Scotland.

Historic underfunding within rural communities, although beginning to be rectified, is still at an early stage for a range of different issues as opposed to city funding. Loss of EU funding exacerbates this problem and it is unclear how this will be replenished post-Withdrawal. For instance, specialist services in place to aid victims of Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) will have limited provisions due to a loss of European funding. The value of these services is undeniable. The provision of refuge accommodation, as well as assistance with applications for housing, welfare benefits and other support mechanisms allow women to recognise, survive and exit abusive relationships.

[• How do we best ensure that people of all ages, genders, areas, socioeconomic, educational and ethnic backgrounds receive appropriate support?](#)

When discussing inequality in economic terms, women have noted that this can often be relayed back to a number of root causes. This includes: lack of flexible working; inadequate return to work programmes and the absence of opportunities for older and disabled women.

Scotland's geographical lay out is extremely important in terms of employment for people in all walks of life. Many rural areas have lower wages on average due to the nature of the work undertaken. Highland and Island areas often attract more seasonal work than in the central belt and south. However, this problem is particularly acute for rural women for a number of reasons stemming from structural gendered inequality. It is crucial that policies take into account the complexities of rural areas.

Seasonal work is undertaken via precarious contracts, with a definitive toll on women and their personal finances. Often clustered within summer months when children are on extended holiday periods means higher costs of childcare. Persistent gender streaming ensures that the majority of women within Scotland tend to be found in jobs known traditionally as "women's work" such as domestic employment. Women often undertake low paid, low skilled jobs on a part-time basis, with little opportunity for training and development. Not only does this contribute to the gender pay gap, but more often than not pays poorly and is looked on as of very little value.

5. [Develop opportunities for the businesses of urban and rural Scotland to share ideas and work together](#)

[• How do you think we could do this? \(for example through schools or membership organisation groups\)](#)

Workplace practices must adapt to women's needs. This should also include business workshops on the benefits of diversifying the workforce, including the advantages of setting up programmes such as flexible working strategies. Adaptable and adjustable practices as well as the promotion of highly valuable jobs such as caring must be underscored and incorporated into policy making.

Specific strategies to augment gender streaming in education from an early age throughout all subjects are crucial. These must include a focus on political representation and gender issues for young women in rural areas. This could include educational programmes in schools extolling the values of rural employment and apprenticeship programmes for young women as well as mentorships.

6. Help ensure there are the same opportunities and access to services between urban and rural areas

- For people living and working in rural areas there are often big differences compared to urban areas in what services might be available (things like broadband, childcare, transport, community development etc.) What do you need to enable you to choose to live and work in rural Scotland?

Socialisation, lack of legislation around key areas and a host of other factors continue to ensure that women miss out on many of the same opportunities faced by men at all stages of life. Oftentimes, this can be as simple as analysing the structures unique to the classification of urban and rural, with little analysis of the defining factors that are unique to some areas. Issues that continue to come up in consultation with women include:

Transport

Continued improvement of transport infrastructure throughout Scotland including increasing access to affordable transport for women, particularly in rural areas is crucial.

A pivotal issue severely impacting on all manners of life for rural women within Scotland is the inadequate nature of much of the transport system, particularly in comparison to cities and large towns. The complete lack of “joined up” conditions creates a major barriers for women in rural Scotland. Many who come off a train will have to walk to a bus stop to continue their journey, which can compromise their personal safety and may lead to them having to wait for a certain time for services.

Much of the transport in rural locations is centred on serving tourists, rather than people who live and work in the area. Journey times can also be a major issue. A bus journey may take a number of hours, whereas by car it is less than half the time. This leads to a reliance on private transport, especially in more remote areas, where a car is seen as a necessity and not a luxury.

For instance, in many rural localities, there are few buses after 6pm or on Sundays, meaning those who work unsociable hours such as the hospitality industry are at a severe disadvantage. Many of the jobs available to women are part-time shift work, which can be difficult to get to and from when there is little to no transport provision.

Social Security

The cost of living rurally is often higher than urban settings. The likes of Islands, for example, often have a much higher proportion of living costs in comparison to the mainland. This, coupled with lower than average wages and precarious employment, often leads to a reliance on social security for many women. Fuel poverty is particularly acute in rural areas due to colder weather, this is especially harrowing as rural localities tend to have older communities, resulting in risks to many women within these areas health. There are a number of additional consequences in rural localities, not least inaccessibility of the likes of job centres and higher costs of living.

Rural Healthcare

Convincing rural problems into being seen in a vacuum with a “one size fits all” approach is a major issue with a heavy impact on a variety of other issues. For instance, negative impact of social isolation and the centralisation of hospital services in certain areas results in an unequal gendered distribution problem given that women tend to need access to services more than men. Lack of public transport for these journeys impact detrimentally on those further down the income scale, resulting in disadvantaged living and health. This centralisation is often exacerbated for the likes of cancer treatment which may require even further travel to urban localities.

The budgetary scope of NHS funding and the way it is allocated is crucial to rural localities throughout Scotland. The geographical lay out of the country can cause significant inconsistencies in health and social care provision. Hospitals, and other services, including mental health care as well as GP and dental provision have all been reduced at a local level. Services are often centralised to main towns and too many community services have been withdrawn. This is of particular concern to women, who are often the main users of healthcare amenities, be it for themselves or for those that they care for.

Childcare

In a number of remote, rural and super sparse areas, it is extremely difficult for women to access formal childcare. Where there is a nursery or a childminder available, they often do not offer flexibility. Wrap-around childcare - which often means before 8.30am and after 3.30pm - is limited. Similarly, provision is not always near to a place of work or study. As a result, women can be forced to undertake long journeys by public transport in order to get drop their children off, then to get to work or college, before doing the same again in the evening. Many of the women who have to juggle these responsibilities are in low paid employment.

“It’s a catch 22. If you go back into work you have to try to balance that with a family life. If you don’t go back to work you feel as if you’ve wasted your education or are not fulfilling all of your potential. It’s so hard.”

Many women in rural areas rely on childminders to provide their childcare. They are likely to be able to offer more flexible hours than, for example, nurseries. As a result they are in high demand due to the lack of formal provision across the geographical area. Difficulty in accessing services means there is a significant reliance on informal provision from friends and family. In some circumstances older women in local communities have offered to look after other people’s children as they have recognised the need for the assistance.

“By the time you pay for the bus and pay for the childcare, what’s the point in working when wages are so low?”

Housing

Funding to further increase social housing builds, alongside increased budgetary

commitment to alleviate the problem of homelessness for women is crucial for rural Scotland. Lack of quality, affordable homes whether for rent or to buy is a major issue. Whilst many have commended the SG for its commitment within budgetary requirements to continuously strive to build more social housing, they have also raised a number of issues such as increased funding for temporary accommodation for women and a strategy that focuses on tackling homelessness with specific reference to rural areas as well as gendered issues.

Approaches to housing must ensure a correlated strategic framework that can be adapted to specific settings and take into account specific issues within an area including socio-economic disadvantage and prevalence of employment, childcare and transport.

7. [Make sure Government policies, regulations, planning and support mechanisms help local businesses](#)

- [What types of policies, regulations, planning and business support need to be strengthened or removed to help a wide variety of small and micro businesses in rural areas?](#)

The acknowledgement of some of the most valuable jobs within our society remains low. Nowhere is this more starkly seen than jobs within the care sector. It is extremely difficult to get people to take up formal home caring jobs in rural areas. While these positions are advertised, they are low paid and offer little in the way of flexibility of hours. The majority of those who do work in this field are women, who are not adequately valued for the important role they carry out. Those who work as carers are often expected to travel significant distances in order to look after the people who rely on their support and assistance. Much of their work requires travel to areas which are not as accessible, which often means driving down dark farm roads in difficult weather.

- [Can you think of any problems in transport, housing, social care and digital infrastructure that prevent economic growth for your industry sector, business or community?](#)

The lack of flexibility shown by employers can have a detrimental impact on women's future potential. This can be damaging for prospective earnings, as well as having the knock on impact of diminishing skills and making career progression even more difficult. As a result, many choose not to return to their previous job, but instead seek part-time employment which fits around their family and other responsibilities.

High speed broadband connections are not always available in many rural areas. Small, remote enterprises with poor transport links need to rely on internet services to promote and conduct their business. Some areas of rural Scotland have no access to broadband, resulting in restricted opportunities for trading. In areas where there is internet provision, there is often little competition between providers, meaning those in rural parts of the country pay more than those in more urban settlements. This has a knock on effect on a number of issues relating to women which often go unnoticed including:

Online forms are the most common way of applying for jobs. It is, therefore, extremely difficult for those with poor or non-existent broadband to carry out what are taken for granted

as simple tasks by many employers. Oftentimes, the most accessible way of completing the likes of social security is through online processes.

Within education, subjects are heavily reliant on the internet. Many families still do not have internet access within the home, however, schools tend to assume that all people do, meaning that many young women have to stay behind at school to catch up or simply lose out in a number of subjects, particularly traditionally “masculine” options such as computing. Lack of internet at home can also have an impact if the school is unexpectedly closed. In these instances, teachers can use the server to put work up online but do not factor in what could happen if there is no computer or internet there.

Conclusion

Women in Scotland undoubtedly benefit from legislation, policy and practices which enhance women’s economic empowerment. Despite these advances, however, it is clear that a number of barriers must be overcome in order to create equality in the world of work. The SWC welcomes the opportunity to comment on and have women’s voices heard in relation to furthering gender equality in rural localities throughout Scotland.

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