What do we do?

1. Inform policy-making through data analysis (e.g. employment, infrastructure)
2. Support sustainable development based on region’s resources (e.g. wood heat, creative)
3. Promote benefits of living, working & doing business in Western Region – LookWest.ie
4. Provide risk capital & micro-loans to SMEs & social enterprises through WDC Investment Fund

What is Rural? Outside towns 1,500+ pop.
Rural Areas...

► Have assets which provide opportunities for growth & development ... not solely based on traditional uses of natural resources
► Can develop to their potential to benefit those living or wanting to live in rural areas
► Contribute substantially to the national economy
► Have advantages in sectors where quality of location is important e.g. creative industries, high-end knowledge workers with home office

Critical Issues for Rural Areas

► Economic / Employment Structure
► Unemployment
► Age Profile
► Emigration and Population Decline
► Higher Education Levels
► Infrastructure / Access
Employment Structure

- 12.3% of rural residents work in Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing
- Employment Structure differs between urban & rural
  - Wholesale & Retail biggest employment sector in most areas, biggest in smaller towns & villages
  - Manufacturing more important in smaller towns & villages
  - Agriculture & Construction increase in importance in smaller/more rural areas
  - Knowledge intensive services very focused in cities, declines in more rural areas
  - Public sector very important source of employment across all areas

% Employed in each Sector 2011: Cities
% Employed in each Sector 2011:
Large Towns (10,000+ pop.)

% Employed in each Sector 2011:
Small & Medium Towns (1,500-9,999 pop.)
% Employed in each Sector 2011: Villages (from 50 houses to 1,500 pop.)

% Employed in each Sector 2011: Countryside
Rural Towns & Villages have higher Unemployment Rates

Rural areas have smaller shares of people aged 19-34 years
Rural areas have higher shares of people aged 65+

Map 1: Percentage change in the population of Electoral Divisions 2006-2011
Rural Counties have fewer with 3rd Level: % of population with a Degree or Postgrad
How can Rural Issues be Addressed?

- **Infrastructure**
  - Improving infrastructure will increase productivity of rural businesses & increase attractiveness for investment & tourism
  - Next Generation Broadband is key infrastructure. Rural areas need the same speeds & bandwidth as urban areas
    - Home working (tele-working, home business)
    - Knowledge intensive businesses
    - Online sales for all businesses
    - Video-conferencing
  - Other infrastructure – transport, energy, community

[www.wdc.ie](http://www.wdc.ie)  [LookWest.ie](http://LookWest.ie)
Innovation

► Innovation often associated with scientific & technological research, but not relevant for most rural areas
► Need to support adoption of innovations from elsewhere e.g. TechSearch, Innovation Vouchers
► Increased collaboration between Higher Education & rural enterprises – focus by HEIs on assets of their region
► Non-technological innovation (organisation, management, process) critical for rural enterprises e.g. use of social media to market, joint branding
► Soft supports to enhance innovative thinking in rural SMEs and micro-enterprises – isolation

3Es
Education, Enterprise & Employment

Enterprise

Create Jobs
Skilled Labour Force
Stimulate Entrepreneurship
Transfer Research & Knowledge

Employment

Education

Improve Employability
**Education**

- Raise educational/qualification level of lower skilled jobseekers & workers in rural areas
- Provide ‘right skills’ for jobs likely to emerge in future
- Specific programmes to reskill rural young men with low skills outside of construction, including community based ‘learning mentors’
- Need to address barriers to adult upskilling in rural areas
  - Transport (rural transport)
  - Broadband access (central provision, libraries)
  - Caring responsibilities
- Entrepreneurship & business skill education

**Enterprise**

- Need to diversify the enterprise base of rural areas & develop enterprises built around rural assets inc. skilled people
- Sole traders, micro-enterprises & SMEs are central
- Social enterprise – suited to rural areas with strong communities e.g. Dunhill Rural Enterprises
- Small rural start-up enterprises need support for
  - shared services (e.g. meeting rooms, book keeping)
  - networking
  - mentoring
  - space with infrastructure e.g. high speed broadband
Employment

- Growing exporting sectors critical BUT can’t fully solve unemployment challenge of rural areas
- Locally trading employment-intensive sectors e.g. caring, retail
- Higher levels of self-employment in rural areas
- ‘Necessity’ for some – want to live in a rural area but limited jobs in their sector e.g. software designer, how can they be supported to create their own job?
- To create jobs enterprises need improved access to finance, export markets & the right mix of skills
Some Rural Growth Sectors

- Green economy
- Agri-Food
- Tourism
- Knowledge services
- Creative sector
- Caring sector
- Home based micro-enterprises

Current developments

- Microfinance Ireland
  [http://www.microfinanceireland.ie/](http://www.microfinanceireland.ie/)
- Rural Commission
- Local Government Sectoral Strategy
- Rural Development Programme 2014-2020
- CEBs – LEOs
- Solas (FÁS & VECs)
- National Broadband Plan
Thank You

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