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Rural Scotland



RURAL SCOTLAND

Rural Scotland: An Overview

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Introduction

Rural Scotland is changing, and it is diverse. The goods and services it provides to the nation as a whole have changed, and so too has the composition of its people's livelihoods. Formerly an important source of farm and fishing produce, timber, labour for industry, and minerals, it is now to a greater extent a source of tourism and recreation, general services, specialised food and drink, biodiversity and renewable energy, and a chosen place of habitation of commuters and retired people. This is reflected in its changing employment and enterprise structure. The character of its communities, ranging from commuting villages that largely empty during the day, to functioning local economies more remotely located from the cities, has been transformed. There is even a debate about whether indeed rural communities can be thought of as at all separate from the cities. Rural demography has also changed in significant ways – from being a net supplier of people to urban and industrial areas, and indeed other countries, up until about 1980, rural Scotland beyond the commuting belt now has a higher crude death rate than birth rate, meaning that it needs annual net in-migration to maintain the population. That is the broad backcloth for this and subsequent chapters of this guide.

Defining Rural Scotland

The term 'rural' is filled with meaning – it is as sociologists say 'socially constructed'. 'Rural' is used in different ways: as a practical division of national space, as in the 'urban-rural divide'; to denote a different kind of society or culture which is more 'traditional', or 'communal', and less 'materialistic', having different values and beliefs; as a distinct kind of economy, usually 'agrarian', and as a different kind of environment such as 'wilderness'. We therefore usually think of rural communities as being 'different' from urban communities, even if the evidence about whether or to what extent such differences exist today is hotly debated.

Even if the rural-urban differences have diminished, most notably in the now much more extensive 'commuting zone' around our main cities, the interest of policymakers in rural issues seems to have increased. In 1980 it was hard to find a conference or seminar on 'rural development' in Scotland – rural development was seen as something that happened in the 'third world'! Today, hardly a week passes without some announcement or event concerning rural development in Scotland.

Yet rural Scotland remains hard to pin down. The only widely acceptable international classification of urban and rural territories is that of the OECD¹, based on population density at ward level, wards being defined as 'rural' if they have less than 150 inhabitants per sq km². The classification of wards is aggregated to the regional level, regions having over 75% of wards thus defined as rural being classified as 'predominately rural'. Those with over 75% of wards being defined as urban are thus 'predominately urban', and those in between as 'significantly rural' or 'intermediate'. In Scotland the predominately rural regions are the Highlands and Islands and the South West. However, the OECD definition takes no explicit account of 'peripherality' or distance from main markets, often regarded as a key criterion for 'rurality'. The logic of a double criterion of population density and distance from main markets is based on the idea that costs of transport matter for 'competitiveness', and that density of settlement and distance both affect the costs of delivering public and private goods and services.

Density of population has also been an important criterion in rural-urban delineations within Scotland. John Randall's definition was based on population density at district level, the cut-off being 100 persons per sq km. This was superseded in 2000 by the new Scottish Executive six-fold urban-rural classification for use in the analysis of the Scottish Household Survey, using settlement size and remoteness at the postcode unit as the two criteria.



The Scottish Executive, Scottish Household Survey 'Typology' of Rural and Urban Scotland

Area type	Postcode units in
'The four cities'	Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh (settlements sized over 125,000)
Other 'Urban'	Other settlements over 10,000 population
'Small, accessible towns':	Settlements 3,000-10,000 population and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more
'Small, remote towns'	Settlements 3,000-10,000 population and more than a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more
'Accessible rural'	Settlements less than 3,000 population and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more
'Remote rural'	Settlements less than 3,000 population and more than a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more

Using this classification of rural and urban Scotland, the distribution of population looks like this:- Population in Scotland's Rural and Urban areas, 2001

Area type	Population, 2001 census	% of Total Population, 2001
'The four cities'	1,972,466	39.0
Other 'Urban'	1,483,478	29.3
'Small, accessible towns'	527,748	10.4
'Small, remote towns'	133,615	2.6
Source: Social Focus on Urban Rural Scotland, Scottish Executive 2003		
'Accessible rural'	663,166	13.1
'Remote rural'	281,538	5.6

Depending on how we cut the cloth, then, the 'rural population' of Scotland is somewhat variable. How, for example, should we treat 'accessible' rural areas and 'small towns'? If we exclude both, then the rural population would be as low as 5.6% of the total, but if we include them both it would be 31.7%.

How to deal with the 'commuting belt' is probably the key question here. Functionally speaking, these areas are mainly part of the urban core, even if residents prefer to think of themselves as living in the rural idyll! The economic and social circumstances of the 'commuting belt' are still very different from those in the rural periphery, where social and economic problems caused by poverty,

lack of economic opportunity and high costs of living and transport tend to be relatively severe. Such problems explain the very different demographic experience of 'proximate' and 'remote' rural communities – the former generally having a growing population which remains relatively young; the latter having a declining and ageing population.

The key idea is diversity. Rural Scotland is wonderfully diverse in people, communities, culture, landscapes, economies, density, remoteness, religion, and even language! 'One size' can never 'fit all' in this context!

The Scottish Rural Economy

One of the most important features of our rural economy has been the fall in employment in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, hunting, mining and quarrying. All of these activities have been important in different parts of rural Scotland. In 1950, the primary and extractive industries accounted for 10.7% of total employment in Scotland, and 23.6% of employment in the Highlands and Islands³. Today they account for less than 5% of employment in Scotland, and 8% in the Highlands and Islands⁴.

At the same time, many – if not all – rural communities have succeeded in transforming their local economies in ways that have sustained a viable population. Outside the main commuting areas, the main substitute for the primary sectors has been the complex ‘services’ sector, the important elements here being public sector services (especially education, health and public sector administration), transport and tourism and recreation activities⁵. In addition, there has been an important recent growth in renewable energy, especially wind farming and hydro power. The latter are obviously linked, with our important rural cultures, archaeology, history, landscapes, and natural environment including wind and water! Even if such ‘assets’ are often public goods, commercial activities have often been able to develop around them in our rural areas. It is often in such activities that we find innovation happening, even if we are frequently deluded into thinking that all innovation and growth takes place in our cities!⁶

A second changing aspect of our rural economies is that economic inter-relations and linkages between sectors have become weaker or ‘thinner’, implying that any consumption or investment expenditure in a rural community has a lesser economic impact than formerly. Economic ‘leakages’ are now much larger, because of a changing regulatory framework, cheaper transport, and centralisation and concentration in many industries such as food processing, retailing, building and construction, and financial services. Most often, the food grown in a Scottish rural area is no longer consumed locally, but travels to a large purchasing depot in the central belt, or a distant food processor. Local slaughterhouses, dairies and local public markets are generally things of an increasingly distant past. This is despite recent efforts to restore local food circuits (for example in Skye and Lochaber), especially linking the quality end of the growing tourism industry, but also through occasional farmers’ markets and ‘box’ schemes. Similarly, the building industry and related trades are less ‘local’ than they were, with contractors often travelling from the larger towns and cities, and even from other countries in the case of large scale projects. And of course retailing is dominated by a few supermarkets, located or around towns and cities and with global

sourcing of their products. The original ‘one-stop shop’ – the village store with post office and a petrol pump – is an endangered species in rural Scotland today.

This growing internal economic weakness of local rural economies has been compounded by centralisation of local government, health, education, and other social services over the past 20-30 years, to the detriment of people without personal motorised transport.

Rural Community Institutions

Alongside such changes, there has been a disappearance of many, if not all, former rural ‘social capital-building’ community institutions and practices, such as ‘neighbouring’ for harvesting, threshing, shearing, gathering, also usually a time for social events. The socialisation of the young, and the non-formal education of older farmers, through the young farmers clubs and the farmers clubs and associations has also diminished as the age structure of farmers has advanced, young people diminished and diversified their activities, and succession has become less certain. The role of the Churches has also weakened. It is nevertheless the case that volunteering is particularly strong in remoter rural areas.

The consequence is that rural communities are to a lesser extent than formerly places where people live, work and play together – people increasingly have to move to find work, consumption and investment goods, and recreational or cultural opportunities. Their radius of activity and interaction has widened. In an era of declining public transport provision (at least beyond the commuting belt of the larger cities), that means access to private transport, commonly the motorcar. Since rural participation rates for women as well as for men have increased in this period, this often means two cars in a household. In fact, car ownership is extremely high in rural Scotland, and necessity rather than prosperity is the reason.

Nevertheless there has also been a growing use and inventive application of digital communications in rural and remote areas of Scotland since the early 1980’s⁷. We are now assured by politicians of ubiquitous potential access to high speed ‘broadband’ telecommunications. This technology is also one of the keystones of the new University of the Highlands and Islands, with its decentralised structure linking existing colleges and learning centres scattered throughout the region, and beyond. It is also playing a role in the provision of medical services to remote areas, and in the training and continuing education of doctors and nurses.



Rural Poverty and Deprivation

Rural poverty has sometimes been described as ‘invisible’ because of the dominant idea of a ‘rural idyll’. However, most empirical work has demonstrated the existence of significant poverty in rural areas, especially those beyond the ‘commuting belt’⁸. This poverty is not always reflected in social security uptake because, as Shucksmith and others demonstrated, uptake of benefits is lower in rural areas.

‘Rural disadvantage’ and how to measure it is controversial. There are varying approaches to devising indicators and developing appropriate intervention strategies. More recently, the development and the adoption of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) has given cause for concern amongst rurally located agencies for two main reasons: Firstly, because it fails to take into consideration ‘dispersed poverty’ in rural areas – for example, 90% of the income deprived households in the Highlands live outwith the 15% most deprived areas; secondly, because SIMD is being used to allocate resources. Key issues in rural disadvantage revolve around housing and access issues. Housing is a question of availability, affordability and property rights, the latter being highly skewed in rural Scotland because of traditional patterns of landownership in most areas. Accessibility to key public and private services has become an increasing issue because of the general trends towards centralisation, the costs of fuel and associated costs of car ownership and the lack of public transport. Poverty and disadvantage are concentrated in certain groups of the rural population – especially the elderly on limited pensions; and single mothers.

Land Ownership

The ownership of land and natural resources has been a source of conflict and disadvantage for people living in rural Scotland, where ownership has been highly concentrated in a few, often absentee, hands⁹ (MacEwen, Whiteman). Recently, as a result of prior campaigning and the work of the Land Reform Policy Group from 1997-99, the issue of ownership of land and natural resources that often underpin local rural economies has come to the

forefront of policy in Scotland. Two important examples are the place of local community ownership within the Land Reform legislation – the community right to buy – and the involvement of public development agencies in the ‘community land unit’ and the ‘community energy unit’. With the help of the Scottish Land Fund, rural Communities now own over 5% of all Scottish land¹⁰.

Government and Governance

I understand ‘government’ to be about the organisation, structures, powers and functions of the State, and ‘governance’ to be about the way that public decisions are made, which also often involves non-State bodies (civil society, interest groups, etc). Both have changed markedly in recent years, and these changes have had particular rural implications.

From a rural point of view, and leaving out Scottish devolution itself, the most important changes in government concern the reforms of Scottish local government in 1974 (the ‘Wheatley Reforms’) and 1994. The Wheatley reforms abolished town and county councils, and replaced them with regions and districts with variable shared responsibilities. While Districts often had the same or similar boundaries to old counties, their powers were diminished. The main exception was the western isles which gained new all-purpose islands authority (the islands were previously shared between the counties of Inverness-shire and Ross and Cromarty). The stated rationale was functional efficiency, based on arguments of economies of scale, but in practice the reform was highly political, and certainly driven by urban concerns, particularly those in the declining industrial area of the west central belt.

The second reform was also deeply political, and equally driven by urban concerns, although once again couched in the logic of functional efficiency, although arguably even less convincingly than in 1974. This time it was the massive political power of the labour dominated Strathclyde region that was the main target, on this occasion of a Conservative government. Now districts



were abolished, and the larger regions like Strathclyde and Grampian divided into a smaller number of all-purpose authorities. The islands remained as before. However, the mainland rural areas now faced a huge diminution of local political representation and of local authority jobs, especially in the decision-making areas. As the evidence of the DORA research project clearly identified, rural people in now abandoned former counties like Caithness and Sutherland in the Highlands and Islands, and Wigtown in the South-West felt marginalised by this reform.¹¹

In addition to local government reform, yet more powers were steadily transferred from at least nominally democratic local government to new centralised unelected 'Quangos', for example powers over water and the environment, and housing.

Despite the rhetoric, there has therefore been a period of considerable centralisation of government, and its removal from the democratic arena. Thus 'rural communities' – parishes (Parish Councils did exist in Scotland until 1929!), small towns, even counties – do not now have the kind of democratically elected local government taking decisions about local matters that is present almost everywhere else in Europe, including England, as well as in countries as diverse as the USA and India. In fact, in this respect at least Scotland is somewhat unusual among countries normally regarded as 'democratic'.

The vacuum has been partly filled by the 'community trusts' that have sprung up since the pioneering acts of the communities of Assynt and Eigg in the early 1990's to acquire their own land. But, although such Trusts sometimes look like democratic bodies, with locally elected directors, and proper voting procedures, they are not regarded as part of local government under the Local Government Acts. More such organisations seem likely to emerge in future.

The fragmentation of powers across space and agencies in Scotland and the lack of an adequate local government system compound the governance problems arising from the shift from 'agricultural' policy to 'rural development' policy within the European Union generally. Whilst the relationship between the sectoral interests (represented mainly by the Scottish National Farmers Union) and government (SEERAD, formerly DAFS in Scotland) was fairly clear, the shift to engagement of wider rural interests involved in 'rural development' policy as a territorial project has thus far largely failed to occur in Scotland¹².

Conclusion

Rural communities still matter to Scotland, even if they are hard to pin down! They are important for our economy and its transformation in a globalising world, and equally important for our identity and quality of life. They will underpin our renewable energies of the future. They are sources of innovation and new ideas. Yet, although the keys to the future are to a large extent in their own hands¹³, they cannot realise all of their potentials without appropriate political and policy support. As they look inwards, they must simultaneously look outwards, seeking new allies in the cities and global networks of solidarity and knowledge.

Please refer to page 8 for a full set of References accompanying this article and the following article.

RURAL SCOTLAND

Addressing Disadvantage in Rural Scotland Philomena de Lima

Introduction and Background – Making Rural Deprivation Visible

The definition and measurement of concepts such as disadvantage, poverty and social exclusion are highly contested. While much has been written about these terms, including the similarities, differences and associations between them, this has mainly taken place within the urban context. However, from about the late 1980's the romantic myth of the 'idyllic rural countryside' and the strong tendency to perpetuate predominantly 'romantic' and homogenous views of rural communities was increasingly challenged. Evidence suggested that by emphasising a 'romantic' idea of rurality there was a danger of endorsing the urban/rural dichotomy and creating an impression that people in rural areas do not face many of the same difficulties as those in the wider society. (Milbourne 1997; Shucksmith et al. 1996).

Two key issues emerged from the work undertaken by academics such as Shucksmith et al (1996) which continue to be salient in present discussions on rural disadvantage. Firstly, that despite the evidence that a high proportion of rural dwellers fall within the standard definitions of 'poverty', many reject the 'objective assessment' of their position, emphasising the advantages of rural life in terms of 'crime free environment and good communities'. (Rural Forum (Scotland) 1994, p70) Secondly, indicators of deprivation used to allocate resources by government agencies fail to capture the dispersed nature of rural disadvantage which characterises rural communities.

Consequently, research has consistently highlighted that 'area based' approaches do not reflect the complexities of rural disadvantage. The view expressed by Shucksmith et al (1996), and which continues to be echoed, highlighted the problems in attempting to pinpoint specific rural areas that appear to be suffering from disadvantage:

'The use of urban derived indicators is inadequate to the identification of rural disadvantage. Moreover rural disadvantage tends not to be concentrated, in the manner of urban disadvantage, but dispersed. Indeed one of its dimensions is frequently that of social isolation. This makes rural disadvantage less visible and less obviously tractable.' (Shucksmith, 1996, p27-28)

Definitions and Concepts

Bearing in mind the contested nature of concepts such as poverty and deprivation/ disadvantage, it is nevertheless widely acknowledged that:

'Deprivation is a multi dimensional concept, concerned not only with material goods but also with the ability to participate in social life. It is a relative concept where standards are defined in relation to social norms or expectations. Poverty and deprivation are interlinked as cause and outcome.' (Bailey et al. 2003, p.2)

Furthermore, writers such as Shucksmith et al (1996) have argued for a preference to use 'rural disadvantage' on the grounds that:

'The term 'deprivation' has become associated with emphasis on individual's own failings , rightly or wrongly, in contrast to the notion of disadvantage , whereby individuals or households are seen as systematically disadvantaged by economic and social restructuring and by the exercise of power in society.' (Shucksmith et al 1996, p 8)

As Shucksmith et al (1996) have argued, trivial though these distinctions might appear, the emphasis on one or the other suggests not only different attitudes but also the potential for different interventions. The use of a term which emphasises individual failings may not only result in stigmatising those who are deprived, but also likely lead to policies which withdraw support to those labelled as 'un-deserving'. By contrast terms such as 'disadvantage' draw attention to the ways in which social, economic and political factors interact to create barriers whereby some individuals and groups are unable to access the same opportunities and quality of life as those available to the majority. It is much more closely associated with the term 'social inclusion' drawing attention to the multi-dimensional aspects of disadvantage and the importance of context.



Measuring Deprivation: The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

Another continuing source of debate has been the methodologies for measuring disadvantage, and the pros and cons of developing an index of deprivation (Bailey et al. 2003; Shucksmith et al 1996; UHI PolicyWeb April 2005). These discussions take on a particular significance when decisions are made to target resources at specific areas based on an index, which research has shown has favoured urban areas and led to a neglect of rural deprivation. (Shucksmith et a. 1996)

The SIMD is the official measure of area deprivation at ward level in Scotland (UHI PolicyWeb, April 2005). In 2003 SIMD was based on five domains or aspects of deprivation. (Bailey et al 2003) In 2004, this was increased to 31 indicators in the six individual domains of current income, employment, housing, health, education, skills and training and geographic access to services and telecommunications, and to 37 indicators in seven domains, with a new crime domain in 2006. The SIMD is presented at data zone level, and data zones, which have a median population size of 769, are ranked from most deprived (1) to least deprived (6,505) on the overall SIMD and on each of the individual domains, presenting a picture of relative area deprivation across Scotland. (Scottish Executive, 2006a)

Although taking as their starting point Townsend's concept of multiple deprivation, the Scottish Centre for Research on Social Justice (SCRS), who were commissioned by the Scottish Executive to produce a long term strategy for measuring deprivation, emphasised deprivation and its measurement in narrower terms and recommended: '... that poverty or lack of financial resources is the central cause of deprivation and that both should be captured in deprivation measures'. (Bailey et al., 2003, p v)

This definition of deprivation combined with the emphasis on including indicators which could be established as 'causes of deprivation', resulted in Bailey et al (2003) rejecting suggestions that factors affecting rural areas such

as economic decline, or out-migration should be included within the index. Whilst recognising diversity within both urban and rural categories and deprivation as affecting both urban and rural areas, they argued that the basic dimensions of deprivation across Scotland were the same and recommended the application of a single measure in the form of the SIMD. (Bailey et al. 2003, p18)

Another principal recommendation emerging from their work, which has not been implemented and which may have helped to address one of the main criticisms of the application of SIMD in rural areas was that the Scottish Executive in addition to the 'area-based measures' should also develop a measure of deprivation at the 'individual level' which would assist with making '...comparisons between individual, group and area deprivation, exploring the extent to which different deprived groups are more or less concentrated into particular locations'. (UHI PolicyWeb April 2005, p5)

The overview of deprivation based on the SIMD 2006 report published by the Scottish Executive suggested that while Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire, and South Lanarkshire experienced relatively large decreases in their share of data zones in the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland, Fife, Aberdeen City, Highland and Inverclyde experienced relatively large increases in their share of data zones in the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland between the SIMD 2004 and SIMD 2006. Local authority areas with the largest national shares of the 15% most deprived in Scotland were mainly in the Central belt (e.g. Glasgow City North Lanarkshire, City of Edinburgh and South Lanarkshire). Local authority areas with the largest local share of the 15% most deprived in SIMD 2006 were Glasgow City, Dundee City, West Dunbartonshire, Clackmannanshire and North Lanarkshire. By contrast, Eilean Siar, Moray, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands were reported as having no data zones in the SIMD 2006 15% most deprived, it was acknowledged that this did not mean there was no deprivation in these areas but that it was 'not concentrated in small areas'. (Scottish Executive 2006a and b)

Despite the improvements in relation to SIMD there continue to be concerns that the size of data zones are not sensitive enough to the dispersed nature of rural disadvantage: 'The SIMD does not capture or reflect the scale of the problem within rural areas. The index itself shows that in Highland 90% of income and employment deprived people live outwith the areas where deprivation is concentrated.' (Scottish Affairs Committee, 1 December 2006, EV57)

There have been initiatives taken in different parts of Scotland to address the weakness in SIMD and to develop a better understanding of rural disadvantage. For example Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership (CPP), commissioned a study to develop more effective ways of measuring deprivation by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. (Bailey et al 2004) Shetland Islands Council also undertook research in 2006 'to develop understanding of social exclusion and deprivation in Shetland, and other remote rural areas'. (Shetland Islands Council, 2006) The research combined quantitative and qualitative methods to build on the SIMD 2004 domains by adding additional statistical indicators. One of the main conclusions of the study (also supported by the Argyll and Bute study) was that focusing on spatial measures alone does not give an accurate picture of rural disadvantage:

'There are higher numbers of deprived individuals in the more remote areas of Shetland and spatial pockets of deprivations discernable within the concentrations of local authority housing. Nevertheless deprived individuals and households are fairly even distributed throughout Shetland, indicating factors beyond location in operation'. (Perring, Spring 2006, p59)

Who are Disadvantaged in Rural Areas and Why?

Despite the on-going debates on definitions and measurement, research has consistently shown that some groups are more vulnerable to deprivation than others. These include older people living alone; the self employed; low paid workers (and increasingly in this context migrant workers who are taking up much of the low paid employment in rural areas), notably in agriculture and tourism; individuals with no access to private transport even in households with a car; and 'those detached from labour markets' for a variety of reasons, including those formally unemployed or those registered as longer term sick or disabled. (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006; Rural Poverty and Social Inclusion Working Group, 2001; Shucksmith 2000)

Whilst recent monitoring reports have acknowledged that there has been some progress made on poverty generally across the UK, it is also recognised that the risks of poverty for adults of working age in both working and workless households have increased in the past decade. For those in work low pay was identified as a key factor. In addition low pay was reported to be most prevalent in Dumfries and Galloway, Moray and Clackmannanshire. (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, December 2006). Although not extensively researched, it is also acknowledged that gender and ethnicity also impact in varying ways on the extent to which individuals may feel disadvantaged in rural contexts. (de Lima, 2001; de Lima 2002; Perring, 2006)

Research has also consistently highlighted a number of factors giving rise to disadvantage in rural areas (Chapman, et al 1998; Shucksmith, 2000, Commission for Rural Communities 2006). These include:

- > Low pay associated with limited employment opportunities generally.
- > The predominance of small work places, as well as low wage sectors such as agriculture, food processing, and the tourism/hospitality sectors seasonal employment.
- > Low take up of benefits reflecting a combination of poor access to advice and information, 'different perceptions of poverty' and concerns about stigmatisation and 'a culture of independence', as well as issues of eligibility as individuals move in and out of seasonal employment.
- > Changing demography and the growth in the older population in particular, who are considered to be at risk due to lack of support – either because they have recently moved into an area, or because the younger members of their families have moved out of the area, resulting in isolation and little or no access to support.
- > In addition, it is widely acknowledged that issues of access (e.g. transport, Information Communication Technologies and child care amongst other services), affordability of housing, visibility (the desire not be conspicuous) and the hidden nature of rural poverty combined with a tendency towards a 'culture of independence', all serve to compound the inequalities experienced by those living in rural areas.

Conclusion – Role of the Church

This chapter has sought to briefly illustrate the contentious nature of the discourses on rural disadvantage as well as some of the implications of their use. It has also attempted to reflect the debate around the development of a single measure of deprivation that is being applied to rural and urban contexts, and which research evidence has consistently shown has failed to capture the dispersed and diverse nature of rural disadvantage. These issues are relevant for faith groups and Churches to take into account when allocating resources to rural communities.

Developing a picture of disadvantage is complex given its multifaceted and dynamic nature. Whilst some people may be disadvantaged over a long period of time, there are others who may move in and out of being disadvantaged several times during their lifetime (Chapman et al 1998; Commission for Rural Communities, 2006). Factors such as demography, economic growth levels, transport and accessibility issues and housing are some of the key drivers in rural areas, as well as factors that have an impact on rural disadvantage (Commission for Rural Communities, 2006). Addressing rural disadvantage requires solutions at different levels – from fiscal changes at the UK level to local level initiatives. With regard to the latter, there is a need for more joined-up working, so that the issues faced by those considered to be disadvantaged can be addressed holistically rather than in ‘silos’ (Rural Poverty and Inclusion Working Group, 2001; Scottish Executive, 2002).

There has been acknowledgement of the important role that the voluntary sector plays in the ‘wellbeing’ of rural residents and in developing ‘holistic’ approaches to service delivery (Rural Poverty and Inclusion Working Group, 2001; Scottish Executive, 2002). However, with the exception of the Shucksmith et al (1996) study there appears to be a dearth of literature on the role that faith groups/churches play in relation to supporting individuals and groups who are disadvantaged in rural communities. The Shucksmith et al (1996) study on rural disadvantage found that the role of the church and how it was viewed among rural residents

varied across Scotland, and depending on historical context, it was viewed as either an integrating force or divisive force. However, overall the presence of the church in rural communities was seen as ‘the last of the in situ service providers’ who were very much involved in assisting rural residents in coping with ‘many aspects of “hidden” rural disadvantage’. In addition to their formal roles and duties, increasing demands were being placed on rural Ministers, especially for their social work skills, as they were being called upon to take on an increasing wide range of ‘informal social work’ roles. Respondents in the study:

‘...suggested that individuals facing difficulties viewed the local Minister as the only high profile ‘service provider’ who could be approached in an informal way, for help or advice, and Ministers in all areas were being used increasingly as a first point of contact to assist rural residents with personal, financial or social difficulties.’ (Shucksmith et al 1996, p 404)

More recently, there has been growing evidence of the ‘informal social work’ role played by faith groups, ministers and priests in relation to migrant workers in rural areas (de Lima et al., 2007 forthcoming). Despite the important role played by faith groups and the churches in rural communities, they are rarely mentioned or are visible in local authority /regional initiatives such as the Community Planning Partnerships or Community Regeneration initiatives in rural areas. Indeed it would seem there is little acknowledgement of their role and work in supporting individuals who may be disadvantaged in rural communities. If rural disadvantage is to be tackled ‘holistically’ and not in institutional ‘silos’ it is important that the role of faith groups and churches is acknowledged and that they are more visibly engaged in local initiatives established to address disadvantage in rural communities.

References: Rural Scotland: An Overview -

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- 1 OECD, Paris (1994, 1996) Territorial Indicators of Rural Development and Territorial Indicators of Employment are the core documents.
 - 2 John Randall (1985). Randall then worked in the Scottish Office, and later became Director of the General Registers Office for Scotland (GROS).
 - 3 Alexander, 1984:217.
 - 4 The figures are for 2003 and come from the Scottish Executive Report 'Social Focus on Rural Scotland, 2003' and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise Website. Note that the boundaries of the 'Highlands and Islands' initially defined as the 'seven crofting counties'; which became the area covered by the Highlands and Islands Development Board at its inception in 1965 have been widened to include Moray.
 - 5 See Atterton and Bryden, 2001, and more generally Bollman & Bryden 1986.6 The 'city regions' idea that has become so prevalent, and which lies behind the current Scottish Executive and Scottish Enterprise emphasis on the development of our Cities.
 - 6 For the earlier period see Bryden & Fuller, 1986 and, later, Bryden, Fuller and Rennie, 1996.
 - 6 Most notably by Shucksmith et al in Scotland, and Cloke et al in England.
 - 6 See the pioneering for of John McEwen (1976) based on Millman's earlier maps, and the updates by Andy Whiteman.
 - 6 See Bryden & Geisler (2007)
 - 6 Bryden and Hart 2004
 - 6 The farmers' interests are still consulted, but the gap in rural community representation is largely filled by urban based environmental lobbies.
 - 6 see Bryden, 1994, Moseley, 2003,, and Bryden & Hart, 2004, for example.
 - 7 For the earlier period see Bryden & Fuller, 1986 and, later, Bryden, Fuller and Rennie, 1996.
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