



10/8/2008

Countryside and Community Research Institute response to: Rising to the land-use challenge: issues for policy-makers. A discussion paper prepared by Vicki Swales and Alan Woods for the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme

A seminar was held in CCRI to discuss the paper and nine members of staff were present. These comments reflect the individual views of those who attended the seminar. They are not intended to be representative of CCRI as a whole.

Overall all the document is coherent, in summarising and synthesising the range of Relu's research projects and the authors have done a good job in drawing out some key issues. However, we have questions about the style of the paper and the audience and would suggest that more information about why the discussion paper had been written, whom it was intended for and what it was trying to achieve, would have been helpful. We also sense that a lot of the ideas discussed are not particularly new; also that Relu's focus on interdisciplinary is not sufficiently highlighted or evaluated as a tool for addressing the challenge.

1. HOW DO WE ACHIEVE MULTIPLE OBJECTIVES FROM LAND AND WATER?

How do we get the balance of services right?

It is felt that this question cannot be answered unless the right balance of services is known. As such the question needs to be preceded by 'What is the right balance of services?' Only when this is known can the mechanisms for achieving it be considered. This balance will be different in different places suggesting the need for locally sensitive policies, both to determine and achieve this balance, rather than nationally ubiquitous ones. Any national framework should allow for local distinctiveness.

It is considered that there are (unstated) issues of governance, power and politics throughout the paper. There are unstated assumptions about who the policy makers and policy recipients are. For example in the statement in para 1.24, who are the actors (policy makers, enforcers, recipients?) who should legitimately be involved? In this sense there is concern that the paper was weighted towards centralised policy makers but neglects mechanisms for enabling grass- root actors to experiment and develop new responses to the challenges discussed. The nature of land-use challenges that society now faces are perhaps too significant to be solved by centralised policy-making institutions alone, and thus there is a real need for a new generation of policies that can enable and empower local action, in a variety of ways. There are also issues of participant ‘ownership’ or ‘buy-in’ which need to be considered, in any process of securing change. It is felt that there is too much bureaucracy and too many institutional barriers in current processes of land-use governance and policy design and delivery which constrain grass roots development. These need to be recognised and addressed, if we are to sufficiently transform the way in which we manage rural land and resources.

The general approach in the paper implies a linear model of decision-making, where research leads to a recommendation which then leads to a new or amended policy. It is suggested that an alternative approach - of trying things out or experimenting (piloting approaches) as a means of developing new policy, which has rather disappeared in recent years, could be usefully re-emphasised. England has a long tradition of rural policy development via experimentation (from the Peak District IRDP in the early 1980s, through the early agri-environment schemes, community forests and the national forest in the 1990s) and this approach could be particularly helpful in the years ahead, as we grapple with the challenges posed by climate change, peak oil, and global recession.

What mix of mechanisms do we need to tackle market failure?

Para 1.20 states ‘It is widely accepted that governments should intervene in markets only where there is ‘market failure’. In the real world, instances of market failure, to a greater or lesser degree, occur in many situations due to transaction costs, imperfect information, oligopolistic market structures, rigidities in factor substitution and uneven access to resources, leading to power imbalances. The current government chooses to intervene in some situations of market failure (eg public good concerns) but not in others, for example the dominance of large-scale commercial agriculture and supermarkets in governing food choices for consumers, and producer returns. In other areas of policy, issues of equity, social inclusion and quality of life help to determine our decisions about where, and how far, government should be acting to influence the provision of goods and services, and we see no reason why these considerations should not also apply in the realm of land use policy.. Arguably, other impacts of current agricultural change (e.g. the ‘hollowing out’ of farm sizes and thus loss of medium-sized family-run farms, and the potential collapse of traditional hill farming systems and culture, etc) could equally be a target for policy intervention, if these wider considerations were included.

In UK there is a strong tradition of private land ownership and therefore it is critical that landowners need to interact in a positive way with policy. Policies designed without

sufficient cognisance of the particular constraints and opportunities faced by rural landowners and managers will fail to deliver their desired ‘public good’ outputs, because of the interdependence of policy performance upon these particular actors. A number of recent CCRI research projects provide evidence to suggest that at the current time, one of the major challenges for rural land use is to re-establish a positive and constructive relationship between the public bureaucracy and those private sector resource owners and managers upon which policy goals ultimately depend. There is a widespread sense of disillusion with rural policy makers and the apparatus of rural delivery, among those who live and work in rural areas, and a feeling that the government no longer cares about them, or what they do. This may be a fundamental barrier to addressing many of the challenges discussed in the paper.

Relevant CCRI research:

Scoping study for the evaluation of cross-compliance (Dwyer et al, 2006) for Defra, which included a brief assessment of early farmer reactions to the cross-compliance system introduced in 2005 (with CSL).

ACEO external reports on the environmental implications of the 2003 CAP reforms in England: (*Dwyer et al, 2006* and *Gaskell et al, 2007*), which identified early signs of decline in upland and dairy sectors with potentially significant negative implications for government’s biodiversity and water quality goals.

Understanding and influencing positive environmental behaviour among farmers and land managers (Dwyer et al, 2007), for Defra, which highlighted how positive, local environmental initiatives are negatively affected by wider concerns that farmers are no longer valued or respected by government, and a relative weakening of social capital among farming communities.

Evaluation of key factors that lead to successful agri-environmental co-operative schemes (Mills et al, 2008) for the Welsh Assembly Government, which showed how local, collective initiatives can successfully innovate and overcome institutional barriers to more sustainable land management solutions, when groups of farmers work together with local environmental NGOs and other partners.

2. HOW DO WE ACHIEVE MORE DEMOCRATIC AND ACCOUNTABLE DECISIONS?

The assumption is made that democratic decisions are preferred, but then there seems to be a further assumption that this somehow relates to stakeholder involvement. There is abundant evidence that ‘stakeholder involvement’, as often pursued by government, does not equate to enhanced democracy in decision-making. The stakeholding society is more concerned with local power relations than with any democratic process which, at the local level (for example the parish) is relatively in retreat. We would also suggest that issues of accountability are by no means clear – who should be accountable to whom? – when one is dealing with areas where the legitimacy of decision-making groups and processes is questioned or contested.

Attempts at stakeholder involvement always raise issues of equity and legitimacy, whether stakeholders are representative or not, who holds the powers of recognition of stakeholders, etc. This is recognised in the paper but the contested nature of many of these issues is underplayed. We are aware of numerous rural policy arrangements for stakeholder involvement which are seen as either exclusive, purely cosmetic and/or constrained by higher-level, prior political decisions so that they can deal only with minor issues rather than major concerns.

Para 2.3 states 'In particular, Relu projects suggest that much can be gained by involving 'non-experts' in policy-making'. Our own work within Relu shows that, whilst involving non experts can provide valuable insights, there should be prior consideration of whether they will always have sufficient capacity to be able to contribute in more technically demanding discussions. The benefits of expert knowledge should not be dismissed, particularly in seeking to resolve increasingly technical issues (in respect of climate change, epidemiology, water quality etc). There is a need to involve people with expertise who can interact directly with local actors and create a constructive and informed dialogue, if participation and consultation are the intention.

What more do we need to understand about behaviours?

This area of research has been a particular focus of CCRI activity in recent years, with an emphasis upon understanding the motivations and behaviour of the land-based sector, in particular. Many of the studies referred to in the list at the end of this paper are relevant to this theme. However, the whole notion of 'needing to understand behaviour' tends towards a very centralist perspective in policy-making, as discussed previously. We would suggest that an emphasis upon enabling more positive and more radical behaviour change at the local level, using policies which help to build capacities for action and provide a stimulus to achieving new and more sustainable ways of living and doing business, could be a more cost-effective way about learning about behaviours than simply commissioning more analytical work. The potential value of experimenting in this area is, in our view, considerable.

Are long-standing assumptions about land managers still appropriate?

Para 2.22 It is questioned whether we really do still have these assumptions. Much research at CCRI (e.g. *Understanding and influencing positive behaviour change in farmers and land managers, Dwyer et al, 2007*) has revealed that farmers are not a homogenous group, they are heterogeneous and this heterogeneity has implications for motivations, with social and cultural influences just as important as attitudinal and structural factors. The current paper on segmentation in farming styles, produced by Tony Pike for the Defra ACEO, draws heavily upon this body of work to give a much more up-to-date illustration of how modern farming can be depicted, and discusses the implications for more effective policy.

Relevant CCRI research:

Understanding and influencing positive behaviour change in farmers and land managers
for Defra 2007/8

<http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=14518>

Finally there is concern about the quality of the government's current knowledge base and access to knowledge to help in addressing these major rural policy questions/recommendations. In previous decades, longstanding government departments and associated research agencies and specialist NDPBs constituted a strong knowledge base to inform the key policy debates of that era. In parallel, a wide range of independent academic or other arms-length public funded institutions was active in land-use research and development. Today, it could be argued that the less experienced, more diverse, more recently-formed and/or less secure grouping of RDAs, CRC, Natural England and the most recent 'slimmed' Defra (following the October reshuffle) together have a much weaker collective knowledge base as regards land-use change and challenges. Thus they increasingly seek to rely on external institutions for expert advice. However, these external institutions are themselves reduced in number and in the range of land-use research that they can pursue, as a result of other changes in public funding for research. We believe that this situation is itself a potential major challenge for society, in seeking to identify effective ways to develop more sustainable land and rural resource use, for the future.

References

J Dwyer, J Ingram, J Mills and P Gaskell (2006) *OBS02: CAP reform – implications of farm level change for environmental outcomes*. Report to Defra Agricultural Change and Environment Observatory (ACEO), November 2006.

J Dwyer, N Boatman (2006) *OBS 04 Summary report: The environmental implications of the 2003 CAP reforms in England*. Report to Defra ACEO, November 2006.

J Dwyer, J Ingram, J Mills, J Taylor, K Blackstock, K Brown, R Burton, R Dilley, K Matthews, G Schwarz and R W Slee (2007). *Understanding and influencing positive environmental behaviour among farmers and land managers - a project for Defra by CCRU / MLURI*.

Gaskell, P., Boatman, N., Dwyer, J., Mills, J, Ingram, J, Short, C. and Turley, D. (2008) *Environmental Observatory update – the implications of the 2003 CAP reform for the environment in England*. A report to Defra's Agricultural Change and Environment Observatory (ACEO).

Mills, J, Ingram, J., Reed, M, R, Short C., Gibbon, D , Dwyer, J and Butler, A. (2008) *Evaluation of key factors that lead to successful agri-environmental co-operative schemes*. Report for Welsh Assembly Government.