

Border Transition: Building Peace through Community-Led Climate Action

A Toolkit for the
Communities of Lough MacNea



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs



**Irish Central Border
Area Network**
The Cross Border Group for the Central Border
Region of Ireland/Northern Ireland



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Acknowledgements

This Border Transition project has been led by the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) in partnership with Think-Tank for Action on Social Change (TASC) and supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs' Reconciliation Fund.

The success of this project relied on the dedicated efforts of the communities of Belcoo, Blacklion, Cashel, Glenfarne, Killesher and Kiltyclogher. We are especially grateful to Sean Burns of Belcoo, Michael Fitzpatrick of Blacklion, Louise Leonard of Cashel, Sandra Cullen / Cllr. Sean McDermott of Glenfarne, Packie Drumm of Killesher and Ciaran Rock of Kiltyclogher. Sincere thank you too to the Cross Border Waters Stakeholder Group led by ICBAN including LAWPRO, DAERA, staff from Cavan and Leitrim County Councils, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, as well as Leitrim Development Company and the Cuilcagh to Cleenish Project for their formative guidance, and to the staff at The Rainbow Ballroom of Romance in Glenfarne, Co Leitrim, the Larganess Centre in Florencecourt, Co Fermanagh and at Cashel Community Centre, Co Fermanagh for hosting us on different occasions.

Thank you also to Mark Lydon, Governor of Loughan House, Co Cavan for your support of the project and to the staff and residents at Loughan House for sharing your stories with us. Also to Phil Wheal at the Organic Centre, Rossinver, Co Leitrim and to Marie Reynolds and Seamus Shanley, coordinators of the local Tus and Community Employment schemes in North Leitrim, who all facilitated access to their students and scheme workers as part of the various focussed group sessions, to whose participants thanks are also extended for their contributions.

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Finally, a sincere thank you to Robyn Deasy for producing the fantastic graphic harvesting works to inform this report and to Shane Campbell and Joanne Breen at ICBAN for their strategic and financial support of the project. At TASC, thanks are due to Dr. Shana Cohen, Kieran Harrahill, Sylvia Byrne, Louisa Mackenzie and John White. Finally, thank you to Caoimhe McGabhann, Anna Daly and Philip Markey for your support researching this project, and to Suzie Cahn and Seán McCabe for your ongoing guidance.

Border Transition is a relatively short project within a finite budget, working across a large geographic area and six different communities. As a consequence of this, almost inevitably, there exists the possibility of missing out on an individual, group or business during the project development phase, people who ideally, we would have wished to have included and consulted with before. If we have done so, we proffer an apology in advance, whilst welcoming the opportunity to talk with you at your convenience, and to include you further in what will be an ongoing process for the Lough MacNea area as a whole.

The Border Transition project was managed and authored by Andy Hallewell of ICBAN and Róisín Greaney of TASC.

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Foreword

Foreword by Councillor David Maxwell, Chair of ICBAN

On behalf of the management board of the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) Ltd. I wish to commend to you this 'Border Transition' project report for the communities of the Lough MacNea area, traversing the Council areas of Cavan, Fermanagh & Omagh, and Leitrim.



ICBAN is the cross-border network for the area known as the Central Border Region of Ireland / Northern Ireland. The members of the organisation are the eight local authorities who together make up the Region and ICBAN has been promoting cross-border co-operation in the area since 1995.

In 2021 ICBAN developed a regional strategy responding to the key challenges of Brexit, the pandemic and climate change. The issue of climate change is one that transcends borders, be they national, regional or the dividing lines between different communities. As such, the challenge of climate change is of an all-island scale and dimension. Border Transition is an example of a community response to the ambitions of the 'Greening our Region' theme from the '[Framework of Regional Priorities](#)' strategy.

The rural communities of the Lough MacNea area, as well as being cross-border and cross-community in nature, were chosen for this project as they contain a range of community development and climate change related issues.

Working in partnership, ICBAN and TASC have delivered a project based on [The People's Transition](#) methodology and which has brought together the six communities to identify what is best for their shared areas in addressing common challenges. The project has drawn on community development and transition models to help address local needs and priorities, through climate action. Transition describes the changes enacted by local communities to move towards a zero-carbon society.

This project has provided an opportunity to strengthen and renew vital community relationships, to further local development and positively impact on reconciliation and peace building in the cross-border area. This report provides a vision and a blueprint of solutions to these communities' shared challenges, which can next be advanced by the communities for development and funding.

I wish to record our thanks and appreciation to project partners, TASC, and particularly to Director Shana Cohen and to Róisín Greaney, Researcher and Community Engagement Coordinator – Climate Justice, for giving their expertise and commitment to the initiative. Also to our staff, our member Councils and everyone who has helped promote the project. This would not have been realised without the time and effort of all those community members from Belcoo, Blacklion, Cashel, Glenfarne, Killesher and Kiltyclogher, who completed the online survey, attended meetings and actively contributed. Many thanks to you all again. And finally, our sincere thanks to the project funders, the Reconciliation Fund of the Department of Foreign Affairs, without whose support we would have been unable to undertake this very worthwhile project.

[Councillor David Maxwell](#),
ICBAN Chair.

Foreword by Mike Jennings, Chair of TASC

It is a particular pleasure and honour for me, as Chair of TASC (the Thinktank for Action on Social Change), to be asked to write the foreword to this extremely important report: Border Transition: Building Peace through Community-Led Climate Action.



The unique importance of this report lies, not alone in the inherent significance of the challenge forced upon humanity by global warming, but also because it has long been well-recognised that there is little prospect of society working effectively to avoid the impending disaster if we cannot collectively build a consensus on how a "Just Transition" can be designed and implemented.

While there has also been a recognition that a "Just Transition" plan has no chance of emerging if there is an absence of a "buy-in" by local, regional and national communities, there has been a distinct lack of practical progress towards creating the conditions for such a "buy-in". This publication can, I believe, truly be described as a huge step forward in fostering the kind of community involvement which is essential if a "just transition roadmap" is to move from the realm of wishful thinking to everyday reality.

The Border Transition project began in January 2022 as a partnership between the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) and TASC. Enabled by the Department of Foreign Affairs as a peace and reconciliation response, the intention of the project was to listen to, and learn from, the community's needs and abilities in the Lough MacNea and design a number of solutions that benefit both people and the planet.

The "Lough MacNea Area" to which we refer, comprises six participating communities which we are proud to name individually and with pride and gratitude. They are: Belcoo, Cashel and Killesher in County Fermanagh, Blacklion in County Cavan, and Glenfarne and Kiltyclogher in County Leitrim.

In the pages to follow you will see that this "Border Transition team" succeeded in developing ideas relating to geothermal energy and anaerobic digestion as elements of a practical, workable, community-based and community-supported climate action.

The Border Transition project itself is underpinned by the People's Transition - a community-led development model for climate justice developed by TASC. It is TASC's intention that, over the next 3 years, with the support of AIB, we will work with more communities across the island of Ireland to bring the People's Transition to life. We hope, thereby, to highlight how paying attention to community will help the citizens who comprise these communities to engage productively and effectively in climate action.

We also believe strongly that climate action will succeed only if we simultaneously combat inequality, promote social solidarity and strive to improve the quality of life for individual citizens and their communities.

Mike Jennings
TASC Chair.

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The Border Transition project began in January 2022 and was delivered by the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) and the Think-tank for Action on Social Change (TASC), working with the communities of the Lough MacNea area which traverses Cavan, Fermanagh and Leitrim. Enabled by the Department of Foreign Affairs as a peace and reconciliation response with support from the Reconciliation Fund, the intention of the project was to listen to, and learn from, the community's needs and abilities in the Lough MacNea area and then begin to identify climate solutions that could address a number of the main development priorities of the community.

The project had a Preliminary Stage, a Dialogue and Engagement Stage, and a Solutions Stage. The preliminary stage aimed to map out and build a picture of the Lough MacNea area and the six participating communities: Belcoo, Cashel and Killesher in County Fermanagh, Blacklion in County Cavan, and Glenfarne and Kiltyclogher in County Leitrim. The key was understanding how people within the community could be included by assessing who was at greatest risk of being excluded. In addition to conducting a demographics analysis, the area was studied to understand the distribution of institutions and organisations, such as schools, churches and community groups, that play a significant role in the locality.

The preliminary mapping phase informed the roll out of the Engagement Stage. To gather inputs on community needs, priorities and strengths, the Border Transition team engaged with local volunteers, active community members and a number of harder to reach groups such as local residents participating in Tús, CE or RSS employment schemes, young adults in the area, women's groups, and prisoners at Loughan House open prison. Young people were engaged too, through an art competition on the theme of inclusivity. As the Dialogue and Engagement Stage came to an end, a survey was distributed to gather input from the wider Lough MacNea area and ensure that the emerging picture of the community was correct.

Participating communities stressed the need to be included in, and have ownership over local development opportunities. Almost every participant spoke about the strength of their local community, the beauty of the surrounding landscape, and the threats facing the local environment. The out-migration of many young people in the area and the need for sustainable local employment in order to keep young people from having to leave to find work, was a common topic of conversation. There is a strong appetite for increased cross-border and cross-community collaboration to tackle shared challenges in the areas of sustainable tourism and local development. The community also spoke about the need for better connectivity, both physical and digital, the lack of sufficient housing provision, difficulties regarding planning permission, and the importance of including all members of the community, particularly young people.

Based on the Dialogue and Engagement Stage, the Border Transition team shared a number of potential ideas for solutions with the community at an event at the end of June. Participants on the night expressed enthusiasm for the idea of a community energy project focussed on geothermal energy and ideas regarding sustainable tourism. The community deliberated on the ideas put forward by the Border Transition team and proposed ideas of their own, such as an anaerobic digestion cooperative and the concept of Social Farming.

Following the event, the team spent time researching the various ideas and met with a number of experts and stakeholders who shared their thoughts on how these solutions could be progressed. Due to a number of factors, including funding opportunities and the increased emphasis on the decarbonisation of the heat sector as a result of the ongoing energy crisis, the Border Transition team have developed the geothermal energy solution in more depth than some of the other identified solution areas.

These solutions should not be considered as the only possible collective climate initiatives that could be undertaken by Lough MacNea communities. Others, looking at the same set of needs and priorities, may land on different climate solutions. However, it is hoped that the process, as much as the proposed solutions, provokes thought as to how the investment in climate action can address, rather than perpetuate, existing development needs.

1. Introduction

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The background

Recent years have seen relations and dialogue in the border region of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland affected by Brexit, the Protocol, and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. As the pandemic and the restrictions surrounding it begin to ease, peace and reconciliation both in the cross-border and cross-community contexts remains an important driver of collaboration and local development in the region.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we now face our greatest challenge yet — keeping global temperature rises below the safe limit of 1.5 degrees celsius. With profound implications on peace and security at both national and international levels, tackling climate change requires urgent and unprecedented action in communities all around the world.

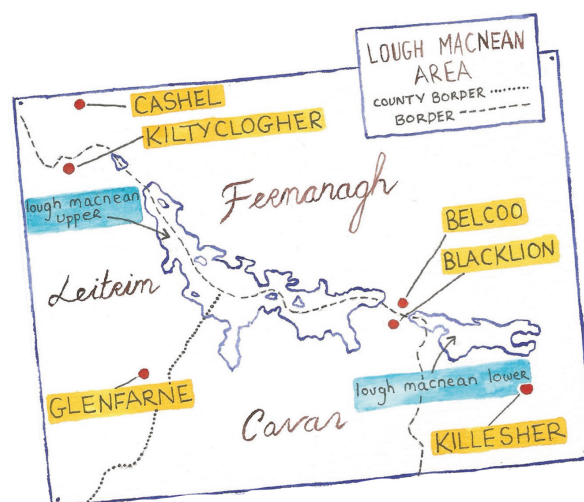
Named Border Transition, this project supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs' Reconciliation Fund, is an innovative, intergenerational project that brings together rural communities from both traditions and both sides of the border to engage in peace building through community-led climate action.

The Border Transition project is underpinned by the People's Transition - a participative decision-making model for climate action developed by TASC. It views climate action as an enabler of local development, giving people and communities ownership of the transition to zero carbon societies. The model seeks to deliver a bottom-up approach to transition that builds local wealth, enables local ownership of climate action and empowers local people. Over the next 3 years, with the support of AIB, TASC will work with more communities across the island of Ireland to bring the People's Transition to life.

Since January 2022, ICBAN has been working in partnership with TASC (the Think-tank for Action on Social Change) to implement the Border Transition project in the Lough MacNean area.

The Lough MacNean area

Two cross-border lakes, Lough MacNean Upper and Lower, were selected as the focal point of the project. The Lough MacNean area reflects many of the challenges facing rural border regions on the island of Ireland including a declining population and the out-migration of young people stemming from a scarcity of sustainable local employment. Six communities located close to Upper and Lower Lough MacNean took part in the Border Transition, they are Belcoo, Cashel and Killesher in County Fermanagh, Blacklion in County Cavan, and Glenfarne and Kiltyclogher in County Leitrim.



While the Lough MacNean area has its challenges, it is an unspoilt and truly beautiful landscape, home to a number of active and tight-knit communities that have a desire to revive the local area and collaborate both cross-border and cross-community to do so. The Border Transition Project began in the community in January 2022 and ran until November 2022.

About the project

The project had a Preliminary Stage, a Dialogue and Engagement Stage, and a Solutions Stage, leading to the co-creation of solutions that address the needs of the community. The preliminary mapping stage made use of existing geographical and census data to outline the groups of people that live in each of the six communities, giving particular attention to vulnerable groups and identifying challenges and opportunities for climate action. This information was used to design an extensive engagement phase, through which ICBAN and TASC (the Border Transition team) engaged directly with the community to understand the needs and priorities of different groups and individuals and build cross-community and cross-border development capacity amongst the Lough MacNean communities.

The solutions outlined in the report are the response to a thorough analysis of community needs and priorities identified in the Preliminary, and Dialogue and Engagement Stages. The solutions have been co-designed with key stakeholders and the Lough MacNean communities. The solutions identified and researched in detail are a geothermal energy cooperative and an anaerobic digestion cooperative. The report also sets out a number of other ideas raised relating to sustainable tourism and sustainable agricultural practices. All identified solutions provide opportunities for the local communities to have a say in, and ownership over local development.

These specific solutions are designed to meet the need for climate action, whilst also being realistic and beneficial for the people living in the Lough MacNean area.

About the report

This report presents the findings of all three stages in a narrative which aims to take the reader through the People's Transition process to illustrate why it is important to consider climate action from a people or community-centred approach. By listening first, and ensuring that all voices are heard, it is hoped that climate action will benefit from greater social approval and thus will be in higher demand.

2. The Preliminary Stage: Desk-based Research and Community Mapping

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This phase of the project—from January 2022 to April 2022, saw the Border Transition team work together to build a picture of the Lough MacNea area, its anchor institutions and local decision makers. This would assist in developing an inclusive engagement plan that aimed to build local capacity across the six participating communities.

Landscape and stakeholder mapping

The Preliminary Stage aimed to build a picture of the communities surrounding Upper and Lower Lough MacNea. The large freshwater lakes sit on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and span 3 counties; Cavan, Leitrim and Fermanagh. Although the Lough MacNea area is not a defined geography, for the purpose of this project, it takes in 6 communities located close to the lakes; Belcoo, Cashel and Killesher in Fermanagh, Blacklion in Cavan, and Glenfarne and Kiltyclogher in Leitrim.



An area was mapped to identify anchor institutions. These institutions are important since they make a strategic contribution to the local economy and society on a long-term basis (McCabe 2020). Anchor institutions hold the potential to play a significant role in a locality by making strategic contributions to the local economy. They generally have strong ties to the geographical area in which they are based through invested capital, mission and relationship to community members. While there aren't many in the Lough MacNea area, Loughan House Open Centre — a low security prison for males — is a large anchor institution close to the border in Blacklion, County Cavan. Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark is a second prominent anchor institution that spans both sides of the border across Fermanagh and Cavan and is jointly managed by Cavan County Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

Alongside Loughan House and the Cuilcagh Lakeland Geopark, there are a number of active organisation and community focal points that were identified during the Preliminary Stage, including the Cashel Community Centre (Fermanagh), The Organic Centre (Leitrim), Ballroom of Romance (Leitrim), Killesher Community Development Centre (the Larganess Centre – Fermanagh), Gortatole Outdoor Recreation Centre (Fermanagh) the Kiltyclogher Holiday Centre (Leitrim), the Kiltyclogher Heritage Centre (Leitrim) and Blacklion Market House (Cavan).



This information gave an idea of some of the places where the community is already meeting, and institutions that might be involved in a plan for community-led climate action.

In addition to the institutions, organisations and focal points identified above the team also reached out to, and received input from organisations, including Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Leitrim and Cavan County Councils, Leitrim Local Development Company, the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO), the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland, the Fermanagh Trust, the EU Catchment Care Project, RoI Public Participation Networks, Public Participation Networks, NI Community Planning Partnerships, and local political representatives.

Community mapping

More detailed information on the communities themselves was gathered using 2016 census data from the Republic of Ireland and 2011 census data from Northern Ireland. Up to date census data for both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is due to be released in 2023. Analysis of this data helped to identify potentially underrepresented groups so that inequalities in participation could be better addressed during the engagement phase. Analysis of the demographics of the six communities also helped to identify potential barriers that people might face to participate in climate action.

Age breakdown in the Lough MacNea area

Census data showed variations in age groups across the six communities. In the Lough MacNea area, almost 20% of the population are over the age of 65 while the national average in both NI and ROI is much lower, indicating an ageing population in the area. 16% of Lough MacNea community members are retired on average, with the highest instances in Glenfarne and Kiltyclogher.



There is also evidence of out-migration locally with young adults in the 25-44 age group making up just 23% of the population in the Lough MacNeane area. Again, this is much lower than the national average in both NI and RoI.

Young people under the age of 19 make up a quarter of all those living in Belcoo, Blacklion, Cashel, Glenfarne, Killesher and Kiltyclogher. Being cognisant of this, extra efforts were taken to include young voices in the Dialogue and Engagement Stage of the project.

Population of the Lough MacNeane area broken down by age

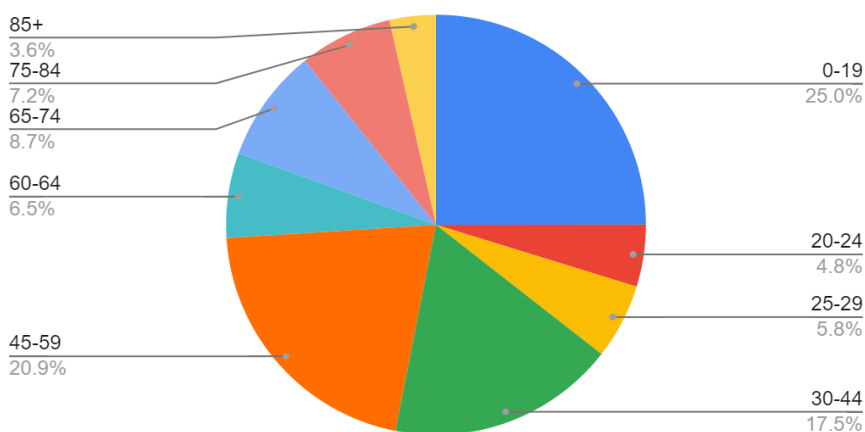


Figure 1. Population of the Lough MacNeane area broken down by age group

Employment and employment industries in the Lough MacNeane area

6% of people in the Lough MacNeane area are unemployed, with Kiltyclogher experiencing the highest level of unemployment at 13%. Carers and those looking after the home and family make up 7% of all residents across the six communities, against an 8% average in RoI and a 5% average in NI.

Community mapping also highlighted the importance of skilled manual labour in the area. In the Lough MacNeane areas within RoI, 14% of the population work in manufacturing industries, 9% work in agriculture and a further 9% work in building and construction, all of which are higher than the national average.

The Preliminary Stage highlighted information that was the foundation of the Dialogue and Engagement Stage. An understanding of the community dynamic, including anchor institutions, vulnerable groups and demographic data, allowed the Border Transition team to design a participation plan that was inclusive and built on existing community relations and frameworks. The Dialogue and Engagement Stage set out to understand the needs and priorities of the community, thereby taking steps towards identifying suitable community-led solutions to meet societal needs.

3. The Dialogue and Engagement Stage

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Community Outreach

At the outset, the Border Transition team promoted the project in the Lough MacNea area. A promotional flyer outlining the aims of the project and inviting people to get involved was sent out to all six participating communities and previously identified key stakeholders. In addition, a press release was distributed and picked up in local newspapers, the project was promoted extensively across social media channels, and the Border Transition team secured interviews on local radio stations and the podcast *Across Divides* – a series focusing on cross-border collaborations on the island of Ireland.

In addition, the team held community meetings with each of the six participating communities from January to March 2022 to garner support for the project. Most community members had not met with each other in person since the onset of the pandemic in early 2020 and interaction between community groups during that time whether online or in person, was minimal. Highlighting the need and appetite for community engagement and participation in the Lough MacNea area, the Border Transition team received 31 expressions of interest from community members who wished to get involved in the project.

Once community members had been recruited to participate in the project, the next phase of the Dialogue and Engagement stage involved listening and distilling out the needs and challenges of the communities in the Lough MacNea area.

Focused Group Meetings - 25th & 26th April 2022

The Border Transition project set out to be intentionally inclusive and for a number of reasons, such as the inhibitive cost of childcare or competing priorities, it can be more difficult for some people to attend community gatherings than others. Recognising this, the project team designed an engagement plan



that sought to engage different community groups in different ways. Community gatherings were held with those who volunteered to be involved and others who became aware of the project through its publicity. In addition, conversations were held with harder to reach groups and an art competition was developed to include the views and aspirations of younger generations in this project. The methods of engagement used are explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

Interactions with members of the community and analysis of census data highlighted a number of groups at risk of exclusion from the project such as carers, people with disabilities, students, women, young people, older people and people at a distance from employment or participating in local employment schemes.

To ensure the voices of these groups were included, the Border Transition team reached out to, and met with a number of harder to reach groups. The Border Transition team met with prisoners at Loughan House open prison located in Blacklion, students at The Organic Centre in Leitrim, women's groups, groups representing older citizens, young adults in Blacklion, and local residents of the wider Lough MacNea area participating in Tús, CE or RSS employment schemes.

The aim of these conversations was first and foremost, to listen. Listening to the lived experiences of a diverse community allowed the project team to begin to build a picture of the challenges facing people in prison, younger people and people at a distance from employment.

Community World Café Event - 28th April 2022

Alongside meeting harder to reach groups and involving young people in the project, the Border Transition team held a community gathering at the Cashel Community Centre, Co Fermanagh on the 28th of April 2022 at 7:30pm to distil out the needs and priorities of those who had signed up to be involved in the project and those who had been contacted through public promotion.

Community Survey - 25th May to 10th June 2022

Building upon what had been heard during the Dialogue and Engagement Stage thus far, the team launched a community-wide survey with the intention of truth-grounding the needs and priorities that had been uncovered. Digital and hard copy versions of the survey were promoted and distributed as widely as possible with support from the network that ICBAN has in the local communities.

Young Voices - June 2022

The Border Transition project is an intergenerational project and climate change is an intergenerational issue. The decisions and actions we take now will have implications on current and future generations. A quarter of all people living in the area are under the age of 19. To include the voices of young people in the Border Transition project, the team held an art competition with local primary schools, where pupils were asked to envision what might make their community more welcoming for people and for nature.

What we heard – needs, priorities & strengths

A sense of community and the natural beauty of the area

Those involved in the project valued two things above all else in the Lough MacNea area, the sense of community and the beauty of the landscape that surrounds them. Words like 'idyllic', 'peaceful' and 'scenic' were commonly cited in the community survey along with 'community' and the 'people'.

“Our otters, our crayfish. Now we have curlews on our sand. Our deltas that are hidden in the forests everywhere and tiny pristine lakes that no one has ever seen... and I’m walking to them thinking, I wish everyone could see this.”

While there is a strong sense of place and attachment to the local area there is also a strong appetite for change. 72% of participants in the survey thought that changes are needed in the Lough MacNea area, while the remaining 28% thought that change might be needed. No one thought that change is not needed in the area.

The importance of coming together

Inclusion of all members of the community is essential to achieve a fair and just future for current and future generations. There is a strong appetite for cross-border development and cross-community collaboration in the Lough MacNea area regardless of background or location. Participating in the Border Transition project was the first time many participants had met in person since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. For some, it was the first time meeting fellow community members from the surrounding villages.



Collaboration needs to be facilitated

The appetite for collaboration extends to Loughan House open prison also. The pandemic affected how the open prison interacts with the local community. Usually, an open gate — and home to the only car wash in Blacklion village and a community cafe — Loughan House was forced to close its gates to the public during the pandemic.

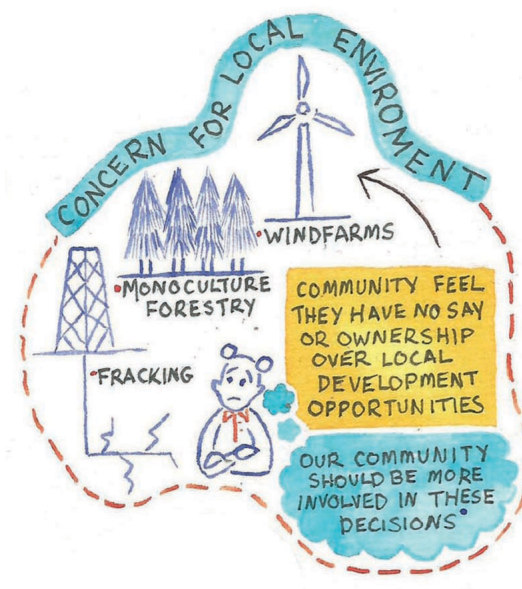
“If you open the gate, that’s a start. You’d have the car wash up and running and the coffee shop. The local community would be mixing with the community here. That’s the first step, introducing both the communities to each other.”

The Lough MacNea area is a welcoming place. 76% of participants felt there should be more ways to include people who are new to the community. Paving the way in this respect, residents of Kiltyclogher village spoke of an appeal issued in 2017 to attract people to move to Kiltyclogher in a bid to reverse the trend of depopulation in the area.

Having a say in, and ownership over local development opportunities

A sense of concern for the local environment and sustainable development of the area was common amongst all 6 communities participating in the project. While there was widespread agreement that the beauty of the Lough MacNea area and natural landscape are important assets, residents are acutely aware of risks to the local environment in the face of human activities and climate change. Community members highlighted threats of mining and fracking and expressed unease about water quality levels, biodiversity loss and the scale of monoculture forestry prevalent in the area.

Barriers to meaningful participation in local development was evident across all 6 communities. Exclusion of the community from local development was also the biggest challenge reported by survey participants. 75% of respondents said not having a say in, or ownership over local development projects was a big challenge for them. One example of this is an upcoming wind farm planned near to communities in Glenfarne and Kiltyclogher. Community members spoke about having a lack of input with regard to the location of the project and expressed concern that its current planned location could have negative impacts on the sensitive local environment.



Creating decent local employment opportunities

A lack of decent local employment in the Lough MacNea area has led to the out-migration of many of its young people. Most people involved in the project spoke about the need for local jobs to bring people back to the area and 78% of survey respondents felt that changes are needed in relation to local employment opportunities. There is a strong sense of connection to the Lough MacNea area amongst young adults living locally but equally, there is a sense of loss for those of the same age group who have emigrated and not yet returned.

"It's sad, my brother had to emigrate to Australia. He'd love to come back, that's all he wants to do, but there is nothing here. It is such a beautiful area, like if I was to stay anywhere I'd want to stay here."

Agriculture, building and construction, and manufacturing account for almost 35% of all employment in Glenfarne, Kiltyclogher and Blacklion. Unfortunately, comparable data was not available from Northern Ireland datasets but residents from both sides of the border highlighted challenges relating to the need for off-farm income and the reduction in local construction work as a result of it being outsourced to firms in bigger cities such as Dublin.



“Of all the people I went to school with there is only me and two other lads left. Between England, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and America, the big five. They aren’t going to leave Dublin either with the money”.

Residents of Loughan House open prison discussed the challenge of ‘being employable’, a need for training opportunities while in prison, and their aspirations and concerns for the future as they conclude their sentences at Loughan House.

“In a country short of electricians and engineers. They could run courses like they do in the midlands where 800 or so people can walk out partly or fully qualified and ready to work.”

The need for decent local employment opportunities reflects similar issues facing the wider border region. While the region has many place-based strengths, it also faces a number of challenges, not just from Brexit, but from the centralisation of economic activities in urban regions, which is leading to outmigration of young people. ICBAN’s work in the Central Border Region over the last number of decades points to a number of priority areas that could support the generation of local sustainable employment. They are: upskilling the local population, retaining and attracting workers, an accelerated rollout of broadband and public transport to improve both digital and physical connectivity, alongside an overall emphasis on ecological tourism in the area.

From community needs to community solutions

Building upon what was learned during the Preliminary, and Dialogue and Engagement Stages, the Border Transition team worked with a number of stakeholders to flesh out solutions for climate action that address community needs and priorities. Understandably, not all needs identified by residents could be addressed through community-led climate action, so it was necessary to hone in on a number of pertinent issues.

It must be stressed that this is not an exact science, and others, looking at the same set of needs and priorities, may land on different climate solutions. However, it is hoped that the process, as much as the proposed solutions, provokes thought as to how the investment in climate action can address, rather than perpetuate, existing development needs.

The extensive engagement process with local communities and harder to reach groups shone a light on several clear issues that interlink with climate action. For instance, the desire to have a say in, and ownership over local development opportunities featured heavily during the Dialogue and Engagement Stage of the project. So did concern for the environment and the need for decent local employment opportunities. This pointed to the potential for a socially inclusive climate action through the creation of a community energy cooperative developed to address these priorities. This would facilitate local ownership of, and meaningful participation in renewable energy generation – crucial to the transition to zero emissions in the Lough MacNea area.

The need for off-farm income, and the diversification of farming practices in the face of the climate crisis coupled with concern for the local environment and an appetite for local ownership development opportunities, forms the basis of the anaerobic digestion solution proposed by community members at a gathering in Fermanagh.

A third set of solutions, based on ideas around Social Farming, Slow Food Tourism and adding value to future planned Green Infrastructure for the area, is also explored in this report.

By adopting an intentionally inclusive approach and foregrounding groups whose voices are not often heard, the Border Transition project has sought to enable the creation of solutions grounded in expanding the capabilities of community members. In this way, the project hopes to be a catalyst for community-led local development in a way that works for the communities of Belcoo, Blacklion, Cashel, Glenfarne, Killesher, and Kiltyclogher.

Fundamentally, climate action based on rights, equity and dignity is most likely to proactively build social approval.

4. The Solutions Stage

4. The Solutions Stage

Having completed the Preliminary, and Dialogue and Engagement Stages of the project, the Border Transition project team worked with community members, stakeholders and experts to identify potential solutions for the community that would address local needs and priorities, build community wealth, and accelerate climate action.

At a community event on the 30th of June in Florencecourt, Co. Fermanagh, the Border Transition team shared a number of potential ideas for solutions with the community. The ideas presented ranged from community renewable energy and hemp farming, to ideas relating to Slow Food Tourism interlinking local expertise in sustainable food production to the desire for cross-border collaboration on sustainable tourism projects. Those present on the evening expressed a strong interest in the three ideas presented and were particularly disposed to those relating to community geothermal energy. During the deliberation discussions, the groups also proposed new ideas such as an anaerobic digestion cooperative and the concept of social farming as a way in which to diversify farmer incomes, transition to sustainable farming practices, and address social inclusion issues in tandem.

The Border Transition team spent time following the event researching the various ideas and met with a number of experts and stakeholders who shared their thoughts on how these solutions could be progressed. Due to a number of factors, including funding opportunities and the increased emphasis on the decarbonisation of the heat sector as a result of the ongoing energy crisis, the Border Transition



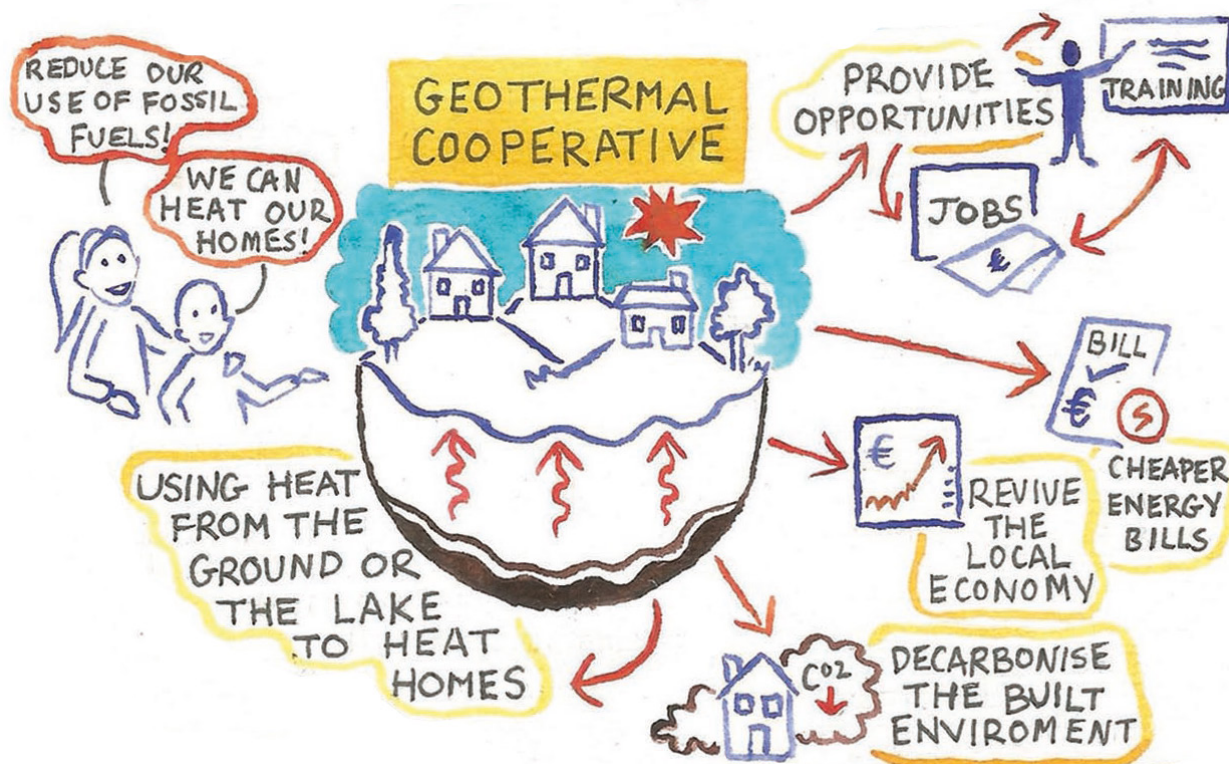
team have developed the geothermal energy solution in more depth than some of the other identified solution areas.

These solutions should not be considered as the only possible collective climate initiatives that could be undertaken by Lough MacNea communities; these were the initiatives which the team felt could be most feasible and implementable at the time. Three other ideas relating to Social Farming and sustainable tourism – particularly Slow Food Tourism and the Arney/Lough MacNea cross-border canoe trail – were deliberated upon and are briefly explored in this section.

The concept of hemp farming was also researched and met with broad support at the event in June, however the Border Transition team made the decision not to develop the solution further due to a lack of necessary infrastructure on the island of Ireland to process hemp on a large scale. It is expected that over the coming years, this processing infrastructure will be available, at which time the community may want to build upon the seeds sown in this project. While not all ideas could be explored in detail, the Border Transition team can continue to provide support to the community to develop these ideas.

All identified solutions have the potential to reinvigorate the cultural heritage and local economy and link to Upper and Lower Lough MacNea and the long history of farming and food production in the area. Each idea provides opportunities for climate action and a transition to zero emissions that is fair and just.

Solution 1: Geothermal energy



Policy Context

Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have set legally-binding targets, committing a target of net-zero emissions by 2050 and a reduction in emissions of 51% by 2030 in the Republic. A major challenge to achieving these targets relates to how we will decarbonise older residential and commercial buildings across the island (Climate Action Plan 2021, 2022).

Homes in the border region are heavily reliant on oil for home heating with 70% of people in Cavan and 64.7% of people in Leitrim relying on oil as their primary source of heating (Central Statistics Office, 2016). In Northern Ireland, 68% of homes use oil for their central heating according to the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey of 2016/2017 (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, 2018).

Not only is oil a particularly dirty fuel in terms of its climate impact, it is subject to significant price volatility. While all types of home heating fuel have seen various price increases since the energy crisis began, in the Republic, oil has seen the highest increases with prices in July of this year up more than 82% on the same time last year (Sustainable Energy Authority, 2022).

As a result of the ongoing energy crisis, energy poverty — currently defined as households that spend more than 10% of their income on home energy services — was at its highest recorded rate in June 2022 at 29% in Ireland (Economic and Social Research Institute, 2022). In September 2022, The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) estimated that this figure is closer to 43% in the Republic (RTE, 2022). Low-income households are disproportionately impacted as they spend a larger share of their income on energy than middle- and high-income households (Sweeney and Storrie, 2022).

What is geothermal energy?

The Geological Survey of Northern Ireland defines geothermal energy as a source of renewable energy "stored in the form of heat beneath the Earth's surface" (Raine and Reay, 2021). This type of energy has been used to heat and cool homes around the world and is commonly used in relation to district heating (Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, 2020).

While geothermal energy is increasingly used in many parts of Europe, it remains at an early stage in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (Raine and Reay, 2021). Governments on both sides of the border have recently developed policies to support its development on the island of Ireland.

Northern Ireland's energy strategy published in December 2021 - *The Path to Net Zero Energy* - acknowledges the importance of geothermal energy for Northern Ireland and a Geothermal Advisory Committee has since been established to provide guidance in the area of geothermal as an opportunity to decarbonize the heat sector. In its corresponding action plan (2022), The Department for the Economy has committed to developing a 'geothermal demonstrator project'.

In December 2021, the Department for Environment, Climate and Communications in the Republic of Ireland published a Draft Policy Statement on Geothermal Energy for a Circular Economy (2021). It emphasises geothermal energy's potential to support the decarbonisation of the heat sector in Ireland. Importantly, the policy statement highlights the role that geothermal could play in future community energy projects, providing renewable energy to houses and community buildings.

This renewed interest in geothermal energy across the island of Ireland is reflected in the €20M allocated to geothermal projects as part of the 2021-2027 Peace Plus programme (2021) — a cross-border EU funding programme which aims to promote peace, prosperity and social inclusion across the border counties of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Geothermal energy and its potential for the Lough MacNea communities

The Peace Plus programme also points to the border area and Northern Ireland as having clear geothermal energy potential and highlights the necessity for cross-border collaboration to bring demonstration projects to life.

In 2004 the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland commissioned a study to identify and map areas with geothermal energy resources in Ireland. Of the energy systems examined, an open loop system that takes heat from a groundwater source using a heat pump is described as 'highly suitable' and 'suitable' for a large area surrounding the Lough MacNea Upper and Lower.

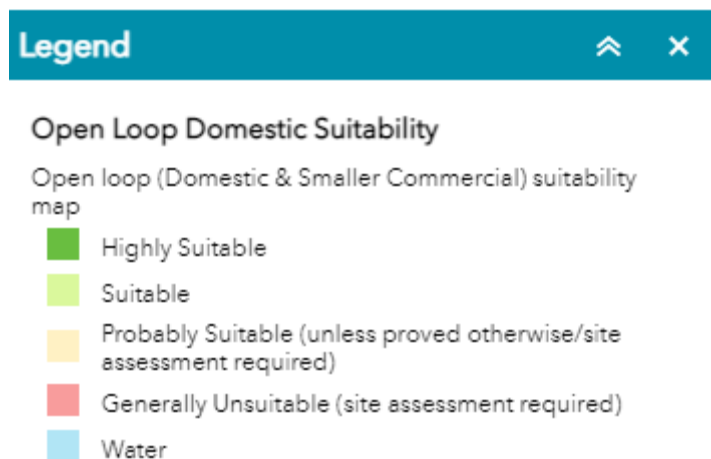


Image 1. Image of Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) Geothermal Suitability legend

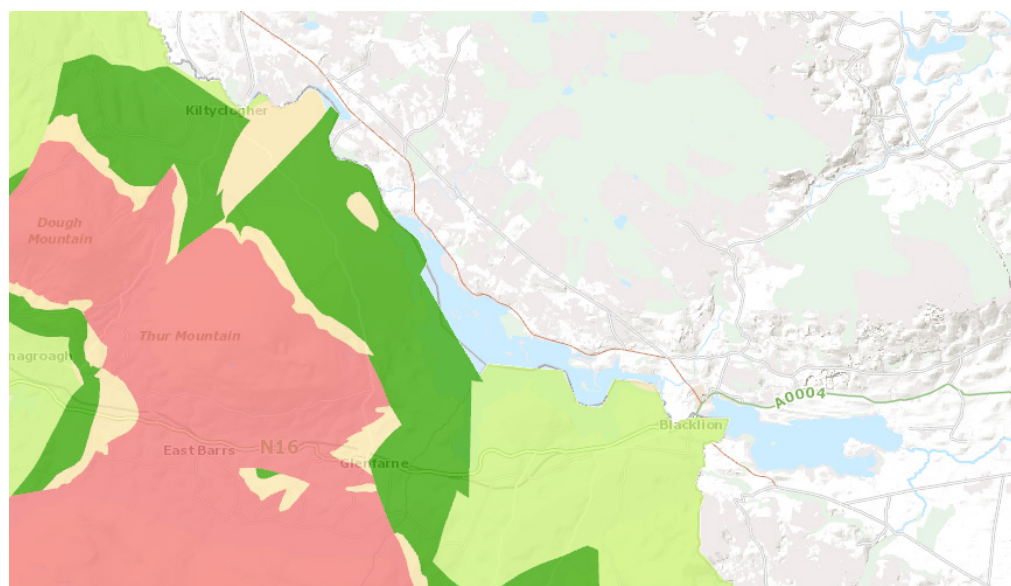


Image 2. Image of open loop domestic geothermal suitability in Ireland (GSI, 2021).

While directly comparable maps to those in the ROI are not yet available, over the last 40 years, research has shown that Northern Ireland has suitable geological conditions for geothermal energy (Palmer et al., 2022). A recently published report prepared by Queen's University Belfast for the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland entitled Net Zero pathways: Building the geothermal energy sector in Northern Ireland, highlighted the potential of Northern Ireland's geothermal energy in decarbonising the heat sector but points out that the sector is at an early stage. In addition, the report recommends that local communities should play an important role in the development of the sector in Northern Ireland.

Throughout the solutions research phase of the Border Transition project, the team became aware of a second type of district heating model which may also be suitable for Lough MacNea communities. It would involve taking heat from a lake or river as opposed to taking heat from below the surface of the ground.

While the Border Transition team was able to conduct initial research and speak to a number of key stakeholders in relation to geothermal energy and open loop water source energy, a full feasibility study of the Lough MacNea area would need to be conducted to understand what approach would be best suited to the area and the local communities living there.

Challenges and local priorities

As geothermal energy demonstration projects are developed in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, it is vital that deployment of geothermal energy and district heating models involve communities in a meaningful way. The Government of Ireland's policy on Geothermal Energy for a Circular Economy (2021), highlights the role that geothermal energy could play in community energy projects particularly in relation to the suitability of geothermal for heating multiple homes and communal buildings.

The communities of Lough MacNea have both a strong appetite to collaborate cross-border and cross-community. In addition, exclusion from local development and concern for the local environment are core priorities to the people living there. A community owned renewable energy scheme would offer an opportunity for the communities surrounding Upper and Lower Lough MacNea to take ownership over the transition to zero emissions locally and build community wealth in the process.

A community energy perspective - Edenderry, South Belfast

The potential for community-owned heating systems is being illustrated by a group of active citizens in the village of Edenderry, located in South Belfast. In 2021, the community group set up a first of its kind community heating system cooperative under the name of Edenderry Village Energy (EVE) with the idea of taking heat from the nearby river Lagan and using that heat in surrounding homes in Edenderry village. In collaboration with Northern Ireland Community Energy (NICE), EVE were successful in securing a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to finance the undertaking of a feasibility study.

The feasibility study assessed a number of options for Edenderry village and the river Lagan including open loop geothermal and open loop river/water source options. The study has shown the open loop water source system to be the most favourable option, given it has a smaller spatial footprint on the area and the high potential of the river to deliver the necessary flow rates.

The completed feasibility study presents options for both centralised and semi-centralised systems and factors in the use of solar arrays to offset extra electricity needed if the community decides not to retrofit the existing housing stock in Edenderry Village.

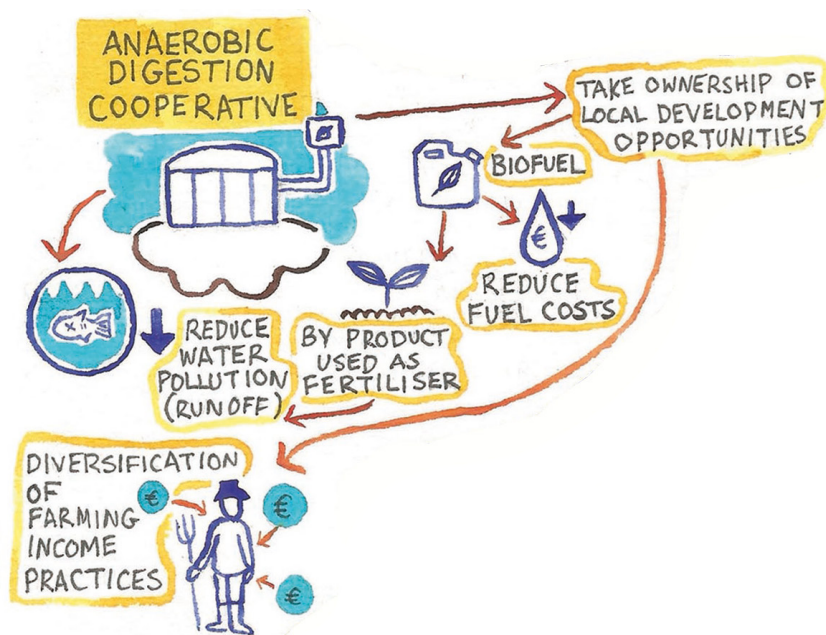
The use of an open loop water source system may also be relevant to the Lough MacNea area given the proximity of the two significant cross border water bodies - Lough MacNea Upper and Lower.

Solution 2: An Anaerobic Digestion Cooperative

Agriculture is the largest emitting sector in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, contributing to 37.5% and 26.6% of emissions respectively (Environmental Protection Agency, 2022; Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency 2022). A just transition for farmers across the island of Ireland will be essential if we are to meet our decarbonisation goals and play our part in ensuring a safe future. Anaerobic digestion is seen as being related to the concept of a just transition, due to its potential to diversify the income streams of farmers and create rural employment.

The anaerobic digestion industry is more advanced in Northern Ireland than it is in the Republic of Ireland. Since the onset of the energy crisis in early 2022 and the agreement of a 25% reduction in agricultural emissions by 2030, the Government of Ireland have signalled increased support for anaerobic digestion (Government of Ireland, 2022). Government policies in both NI and ROI have signalled increased support for injection of biomethane into the gas grid.

The proposal of an anaerobic digestion cooperative was raised directly by the community members at the Border Transition event held in June. The idea is to set up a farmer-owned anaerobic digestion cooperative where farmers can bring their sludge and slurry at any time of the year. Participants on the night spoke about how farm run-off is contributing to the pollution of the Lough MacNea lakes. The initial idea for the Border Transition project itself came about as a result of community concern regarding rising levels of water pollution in the area.



What is anaerobic digestion?

Anaerobic Digestion (AD) uses organic materials to create energy. It is a process whereby, in the absence of oxygen, biomass feedstocks such as slurry, sludge and silage are broken down or digested to produce two outputs, biogas and a by-product known as digestate.

AD feedstocks in NI and ROI usually come from agricultural or food industry waste. Organic farm materials found on farms such as manure, slurry, silage or hay can all be used as feedstocks in the anaerobic digestion process. In order to produce high yields of biogas, other feedstocks in addition to manure and slurries would need to be incorporated (SEAI, 2020). A feasibility study of the Lough MacNea area would need to be conducted to build a picture of the feedstocks available locally.

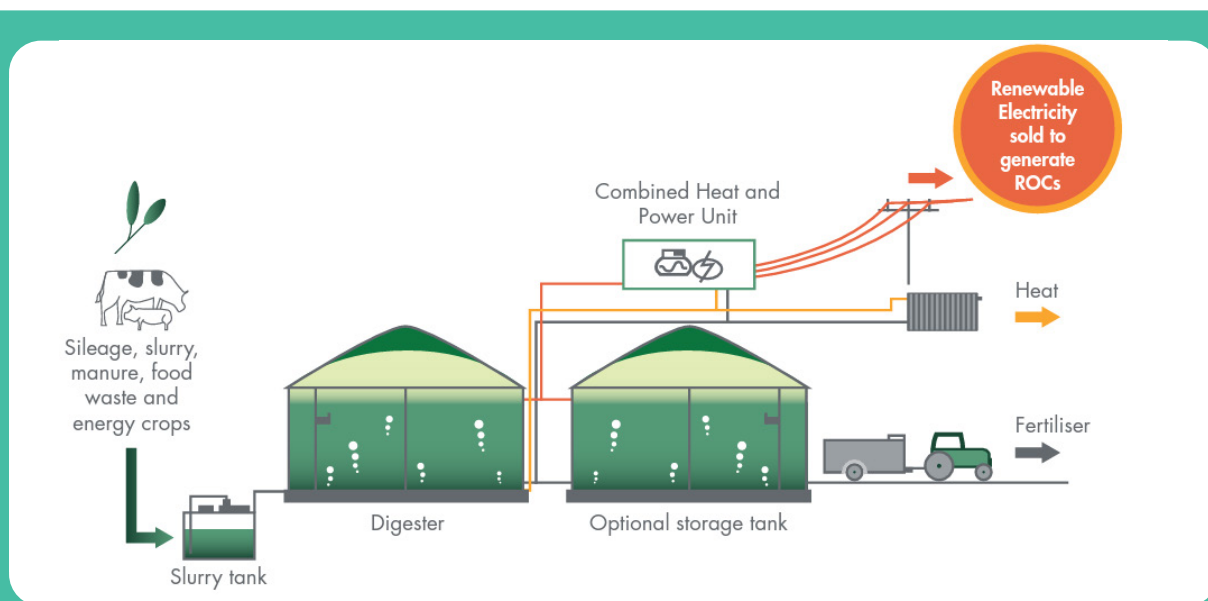


Figure 2. Image of the Anaerobic digestion process (Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2020).

The biogas created is composed mostly of methane and carbon dioxide and can be used to generate heat and electricity. That electricity can be used locally or fed into a gas grid. If the biofuel is upgraded by separating the methane content from the carbon dioxide and other trace gases present in biofuel, it can be used in place of natural gas. The nearest gas connection point to the Lough MacNeen area is Enniskillen (Gas Networks Ireland, 2022). In addition, the digestate can be used as a fertiliser to replace artificial fertiliser on farms.

Environmental benefits

The emissions reductions potential of the anaerobic digestion process is threefold:

- capturing of methane that may otherwise be released into the atmosphere (as methane combusts it is converted to carbon dioxide, methane is much more polluting in the short term than carbon dioxide)
- the emissions saved from not purchasing and burning new fossil fuels
- the creation of an organic fertiliser that reduces farm reliance on more polluting chemical fertilisers (SEAI, 2020)

Addressing farm run-off

The latest water quality report published by the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) has shown that just over half of surface waters in the Republic of Ireland are in 'unsatisfactory condition' (EPA, 2022), and that water quality in RoI continues to decline. According to the EPA, one of the main causes of this damage is due to run-off of pesticides, nutrients and sediment from farms and agriculture, with 63% of impacted water bodies affected by agriculture and 13% of impacted water bodies affected by urban wastewater (EPA, 2022).

In both their 2019 and 2020 assessment reports, the EPA noted that water quality in Lower Lough MacNeen is deteriorating. According to Ulster University and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, the main determinant of the current 'poor' and 'bad' water quality status of the two loughs can be partly attributed to the high levels of phosphorus recorded as being present in the water. Not naturally

occurring in high concentrations within the internal sediments of the loughs, it has been deduced that lake phosphorus levels are mostly attributable to external factors, including run-off from agricultural and forestry practices and wastewater impacts from human activity. While the Upper Lough is predominantly affected by agricultural and forestry practices, the Lower Lough is affected by agricultural inputs as well as wastewater inputs.

During the process of anaerobic digestion, the by-product created contains mineral compounds similar to those present in chemical fertilisers. As such, the digestate can be used as a fertiliser in place of chemical fertiliser. According to the SEAI's guide to anaerobic digestion for on-farm uses (2020), using the fertiliser by-product from an anaerobic digester in place of regular farm fertiliser can reduce the risk of run-off into surface waters. This is because the fertiliser by-product has lower viscosity than slurry meaning that it can permeate the soil more easily.



While there are many benefits to anaerobic digestion and biogas, there are also a number of challenges that communities should be cognisant of.

Challenges

Organic materials absorb carbon dioxide as they grow. When burned as a biogas, this carbon dioxide is emitted. What differentiates this process from burning fossil fuels is that the burning of fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide that has been stored in the ground for millions of years. As such, anaerobic digestion needs to be carefully managed to ensure that the process does not lead to a net increase in emissions (SEAI, 2020).

Biogas is often described as 'renewable' given that waste will continue to be produced in food and agricultural processes. However, scaling and intensifying this process could result in the creation of feedstocks with the sole purpose of serving the anaerobic digester, a process which has implications on land use change, climate and the community. There has also been debate about whether growing energy crops on a large scale with the sole purpose of creating biofuels could risk displacing food production (Röder, 2016; Styles et al., 2014) The impact of such a monoculture crop on land use change could cancel out the emissions reductions achieved during the anaerobic digestion process (Styles et al., 2015; Hamelin et al., 2014).

A number of community members raised concerns relating to monoculture afforestation during the Dialogue and Engagement Stage of the project and it appears this concern is being felt most acutely in Leitrim. In Northern Ireland, there is evidence of public opposition to anaerobic digestion, largely in relation to larger scale anaerobic digestion facilities (Pike, 2021).

A cooperative endeavour

In a 2021 research paper discussing the potential for Irish farmers to engage in anaerobic digestion for energy production, 58% of participants (all cattle farmers) indicated a willingness to get involved with

a cooperative anaerobic digestion scheme that involved two to five farmers (O'Connor et al., 2021). In addition, findings from the research indicated that farmers were attracted to both the economic and environmental benefits of anaerobic digestion.

An anaerobic digestion feasibility study conducted as part of the Dingle Peninsula 2030 project concluded that a cooperative structure was the most appropriate model in order to provide employment opportunities for the local community and benefit from public support. The study goes on to recommend that potential financing could be sought through community shares (XD Consulting, 2020).

Similarly, the Cork Chamber of Commerce (2021) also advocated for a cooperative approach to anaerobic digestion whereby gas could be sold back to co-op members, the community for heating and electricity or injected directly into the grid.

Other ideas explored during the Border Transition project

A number of other ideas relating to hemp farming, social farming and sustainable tourism – particularly Slow Food Tourism and the Arney/Lough MacNeaen cross-border canoe trail – were raised and discussed at the 30th June meeting and are briefly explored in this section.

Social Farming

At the community event in Florencecourt on 30th June 2022, participants discussed the future of local farming. Issues were raised in terms of threats to livelihoods, the need to diversify farm activities and income streams, as well as the intergenerational challenges of passing ongoing concerns to the next generation of farmers.

In this context, the potential for social farming in the Lough MacNeaen area and other rural border regions was given some consideration. Social Farming began as a cross-border project *Social Farming Across Borders* (SoFAB) which ran from 2011 – 2014 and is currently administered by Leitrim Development Company. According to Social Farming Ireland, Social Farming offers people who are socially, physically, mentally or intellectually disadvantaged the opportunity to spend time on a family farm in a healthy, supportive and inclusive environment (Social Farming Ireland, 2022).



Social Farming presents an opportunity to support a just transition for agriculture in both ROI and NI. Recognising the potential for Social Farming to enhance social inclusion locally and at the same time providing diversified income streams for farmers, a social farm with an emphasis on sustainable food production is an idea being explored by the Border Transition team. This includes determining, where, how and by what means future social farming initiatives might be developed in the Lough MacNeaen area.

Cross Border Canoe Trail: Arney River – Lough MacNeans

Plans and delivery for a cross border canoe trail from the Arney River in Co. Fermanagh to Upper Lough MacNean and beyond are now well advanced. Infrastructural works are already in motion on the Fermanagh stretch and discussions are ongoing as to how the remaining extent of trail on the ROI side of the border could be resourced and implemented.

The conversations with the communities on 30th June touched upon how this cross-border trail might in the future be enhanced, interpreted and animated for the greater benefit of users, be they local people, visitors or tourists.

One emerging idea, is the concept of a digital app that canoeists on the trail could access in order to understand better a range of relevant information including logistics as to where to embark and disembark, weather and water quality information, which islands to visit and how, details on local amenities and tourist attractions, eateries, overnight accommodation, built and natural/cultural heritage etc.



Potential funding sources could include, but not be limited to, Peace Plus programme, Shared Island funds, UK Regional Development funding, National Lottery funding, and the rural development programmes within each jurisdiction.

Slow Food Tourism in the Lough MacNean area

The potential of slow food tourism initiatives in the Lough MacNean area has long been one that ICBAN and the local authorities of the area have appreciated and sought to develop in partnership with local communities and stakeholders. During the public engagement events at both Cashel and Florencecourt, the latent and realised potential of this area was referenced by community members.



The Lough MacNean area already contains a number of areas of cultural heritage and natural beauty that would lend themselves to further linkage and added value, through for example the development of a Slow Food Trail across the region. Such a trail would also provide complementarity to the eventual realisation of the Sligo-Enniskillen Greenway which is planned to be routed through the villages of Glenfarne, Blacklion, Belcoo and Florencecourt.

A number of key stakeholders have been engaged through the Border Transition project and their influence and expertise could be called on again in the promotion of future initiatives.

As with the cross-border canoe trail above, such an initiative ties into green infrastructure opportunities. Potential funding sources could include, but not be limited to, Peace Plus programme, Shared Island

funds, UK Regional Development funding, National Lottery funding, and the rural development programmes within each jurisdiction.

Looking forward

While this phase of the Border Transition project has come to an end, the Border Transition team can continue to provide practical inputs to the community where possible in relation to the solutions outlined in this report.

TASC will continue to work with communities across the island of Ireland over the next three years to bring the People's Transition to life. As part of this work, TASC has established an advisory committee made up of representatives from academia, government, industry and the NGO sectors from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to provide feedback on, and support the implementation of identified solutions. TASC will bring the solutions identified during this project to the committee for their perusal and continue to consider the needs and priorities of the communities of Lough MacNea as other community-led solutions are identified and developed over the next three years.

As set out in the 'Framework of Regional Priorities' (FRP), ICBAN's strategy for the Central Border Region to 2027, the organisation will continue to promote the social and economic advancement of the region, and to promote the opportunities for its member councils, communities and stakeholders. Within the FRP, the 'Greening the Region' Pillar is envisaged as playing a central and core role in the region's development. ICBAN will continue to lobby for the advancement of solutions and improvements across the Central Border Region, including these and other potential opportunities for the area of Lough MacNea.

Next steps

Feasibility studies

Both the geothermal energy and anaerobic digestion cooperative ideas have similarities regarding possible next steps for the community. At the final community event — due to take place following the publication of this report — the six communities, TASC, ICBAN and a number of key stakeholders will come together again to further discuss and prioritise the identified solutions, build capacity and connections, and develop a shared vision for the future of Lough MacNea.

Both solutions would require an in-depth feasibility study to determine a way forward that benefits local communities. In the case of a geothermal cooperative, a feasibility study would need to be conducted to understand the suitability of the Lough MacNea area to various energy systems such as open loop geothermal, closed loop geothermal, or an open loop water source. It would also seek to compare a range of pathways, ownership models, financing models, and develop an implementation plan based on the most suitable energy source identified.

In the case of an anaerobic digestion cooperative, a feasibility study would support the research of what feedstocks are available in the Lough MacNea area and could look at both agricultural waste and municipal organic wastes in the vicinity. Following feedstock identification, the consultant conducting the study could work with the community to examine the scale that may be appropriate, alongside conducting an analysis of the various technological options available and the viability of each for the communities of Lough MacNea.

Funding for a feasibility study for either solution could be sought from organisations like the Northern Ireland National Lottery who run community project grants from £300-£10,000 and up to £500,000, or the DAF Scaling Fund for Social Enterprises a scheme supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development that has a specific strand of funding for feasibility studies of up to €10,000.

Engaging with others

Alongside conducting a feasibility study, the Lough MacNea communities should put together a local group tasked with engaging relevant stakeholders on both sides of the border, including those referenced and engaged through the Border Transition: Edenderry Village Energy (NI), Northern Ireland Community Energy (NI), The Geological Surveys of Ireland and Northern Ireland, Cuilcagh Lakeland Geopark, the local councils, the Leitrim and Cavan local development companies, local universities, Nationwide Community Energy Ireland (RoI), SEAI, Waterways Ireland, the Department of Economy (NI), The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NI), and the Department of Environment, Climate, and Communications in the Republic of Ireland.

Regarding stakeholders relating to anaerobic digestion, community members could reach out to the Agri-food & Biosciences Institute (NI), IrBEA (RoI), the Dingle 2030 project (RoI), Talamh Beo (RoI) the Catchment Care project, the SEAI, Cavan County Council, Leitrim County Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, the Leitrim and Cavan local development companies, Waterways Ireland, Teagasc, Department of Economy (NI) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (NI) to name but a few.

These lists are not meant to be exhaustive but instead are intended to give a flavour of some areas where support and possible funding opportunities could be found.

Having a say in, and ownership over local development

Cooperatives often rely initially on the hard work of their founding members, and it is important to anticipate the investment of time and effort that will be required by the core team setting it up (ICOS, 2012). A group of people that already have strong working relationships with one another will be more likely to persevere and succeed.

It is often difficult for cooperatives to get support from government agencies and investors since the necessary frameworks are not always in place. An overall lack of awareness of cooperatives by grant funders, legislators and other organisations that might be in a position to provide support, is a challenge that must be navigated. This might be done with the support of cooperative networks that can share information and experiences with those who are just getting started.

Governance support can be obtained through organisations like The Irish Cooperative Society (ICOS) and Nationwide Community Energy (NCEI) in the South or Cooperative Alternatives and Northern Ireland Community Energy (NICE) in the North.

5. Conclusion

5. Conclusion

The Border Transition project has brought together rural communities from both traditions and both sides of the border to engage in peace building through community-led local development. It has included people and communities in the design, implementation and ownership of climate action solutions so that communities would begin to see the benefits of sustainable development in their lives. It also recognises that the public investment in climate action, if directed towards community-led initiatives, could provide an enormous boost for local development and could address issues of inequality that exist on the island.

But theory is one thing and practice is another. Thanks to the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs, ICBAN and TASC have been able to work with the Lough MacNea communities to bring the Border Transition to life. The communities of Belcoo, Blacklion, Cashel, Glenfarne, Killesher and Killyclogher have many engaged and dedicated actors, many of whom are already working on local development issues or issues of inequality, and this helped the Border Transition project find roots.

There are some key enabling factors, particularly an active and dedicated group of local actors who were able to steer the development of the project and guide the Border Transition team. In addition, support from Loughan House Open Prison, the Organic Centre and coordinators of Tús and CE schemes were invaluable in helping the Border Transition team understand the challenges faced by harder to reach members of the community. Finally, the willingness of experts in a variety of fields to engage with both TASC and ICBAN on the development of solutions, was central to our research.

The solutions themselves have been met to date with broad support, helped along by the positive disposition of the community toward cooperative and community ownership models. It is our hope that the community can now advance the solutions as they see fit and that funding to further explore the solutions could be obtained from the new funding opportunities due to come online over the course of the next few years.

It is also hoped that the experience of engaging with the project will have been a valuable one for participants. Seeking to realise a participative process in a community where some members have significantly developed capacity for active citizenship and others do not feel part of a community at all, poses significant challenges.

Thanks to the kindness of the local communities and the relationships that ICBAN has been building in the Central Border Region for more than 27 years, the Border Transition team was met with a very warm reception and a willingness in all quarters to participate in the process. It is hoped that the learnings from the process will contribute to the advancement of cross-border and cross-community collaboration, reconciliation, and community-led local development that has social, environmental, and economic benefits for all living in the Lough MacNea area.

We hope this report is what you imagined it to be!



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6. Bibliography

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7. Annex

7. Annex

Key Terms

Climate action

Political, collective and individual action on climate change can take many forms. Climate action means stepped-up efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-induced impacts, including climate-related hazards in all countries; integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning; and improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity with respect to climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning. There are other challenges that intersect climate action and environmental protection such as enhancing biodiversity and improving water quality.

Community Wealth Building

Community wealth building or local wealth building is a new people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. Community wealth building is a response to the contemporary challenges of austerity, financialisation and automation. It seeks to provide resilience where there is risk and local economic security where there is precarity.

Anchor Institution

An anchor institution is one that, alongside its main function, plays a significant and recognised role in a locality by making a strategic contribution to the local economy. Anchor institutions generally have strong ties to the geographic area in which they are based through invested capital, mission and relationship to customers and employees. These institutions

tend to operate not-for-profit. It is much simpler for private businesses to move, so there is no guarantee they will continue serving the local community in the long-term. However, there are examples of for-profit organisations playing the role of an anchor institution.

Local Development

Local development is the identification and use of the resources and endogenous potentialities of a community, neighbourhood, city or equivalent. The local development approach considers the endogenous potentialities of territories. Economic and non-economic factors influence local development processes. Among the non-economic factors, social, cultural, historical, institutional, and geographical aspects can be decisive in the process of local economic development.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient future for people and planet. For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonise three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected, and all are crucial for the well-being of individuals and societies.

The Border Transition project began in January 2022 and was delivered by the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) and the Think-tank for Action on Social Change (TASC), working with the communities of the Lough MacNea area which traverses Cavan, Fermanagh and Leitrim. Enabled by the Department of Foreign Affairs as a peace and reconciliation response with support from the Reconciliation Fund, the intention of the project was to listen to, and learn from, the community's needs and abilities in the Lough MacNea area and then begin to identify climate solutions that could address a number of the main development priorities of the community.



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs



Irish Central Border Area Network

The Cross Border Group for the Central Border Region of Ireland/Northern Ireland



Celebrating
21 Years



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



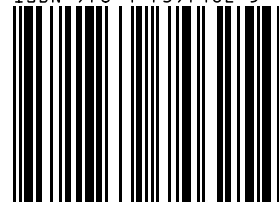
government supporting communities

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