



women's
RESOURCE & DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Supporting Women's Groups and Networks across Northern Ireland

**Consultation – EU Programme for Peace and
Reconciliation (Peace III) 2007-2013
from Women's Resource and Development Agency**

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Introduction

The Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) is a regional organisation whose mission is to 'advance women's equality and participation in society by working to bring about social, political and economic change'. The organisation was established in 1983 and continues to focus its efforts on working with and through women and community organisations located within disadvantaged and/or divided communities.

By strengthening the role and position of women in their own communities, it is anticipated that wider community change will be brought about, leading to the advancement of the broader vision for peace, reconciliation and social inclusion.

The WRDA has obtained funding from Awards for All to deliver a series of policy consultations, in addition to developing an e-consultation facility on its website. The response to this consultation is the result of a consultation event organised in partnership with the Training for Women Network. Fifteen attended, including WRDA, TWN, Women's Support Network, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network, Shankill Women's Centre, Newtownards Women's Group, Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid.

General comments

There was great concern at the lack of any gendered understanding underpinning the programme. Women cannot be simply added on, along with youth and marginalised groups, as is currently the case within the draft operational programme. For example, women are also victims, ex-prisoners, members of interface communities and their equal involvement in all activities is essential. Women's roles as peacebuilders across segregated communities has been acknowledged by many sources, for example, the Department of Foreign Affairs declared that the benefits of involving women in conflict resolution to be 'clearly evident in Northern Ireland, where women played and continue to play a pivotal role in building peace and are essential contributors to the ongoing process of fostering reconciliation' (Council of Europe December 1 2003). Yet such recognition is absent from the draft Programme. The new Peace Programme must have specific provision for women's development and empowerment, so that this work can be continued and developed further.

We would draw the attention of the SEUPB to UN Resolution 1325 (2000) on 'Women, Peace and Security', which mandates all member countries to ensure the equal representation of women in all institutions set up to facilitate countries coming out of conflict. 1325 must be an underpinning principle of the Peace III programme.

The EU Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities reported on the implementation of the Council Recommendation of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process (4

December 2000), making the case for women's participation enriching the political culture. The paragraph below considers some of the advantages of women's participation in decision-making. This presents a cogent argument for gender parity within countries emerging from conflict, so that the value interests represented by women can be an integral part of all public discourse:

Women's historical exclusion from politics and their confinement into the private domain has led to gender differences in values and interests. In any democratic society political decisions should reflect the interests and values of all the people. Women's contribution accounts for a particular concern for justice, dialogue, an ethical dimension of politics, a talent for setting priorities, an awareness of the value of consensus, a facility for agreement due to a higher sense of social solidarity and a higher concern for future generations.

Women expressed concern that their lack of representation within local government structures and the difficulties many community groups have with regards their local council would have an adverse impact on access to Peace III funding, and this is not addressed by the Draft Programme. How will the likely reduction in women's representation as a result of the impact of the RPA be mitigated by the implementation of Peace III?

Q1

What are your views on the description of the Region and the main evaluation findings and lessons from the previous Programme as presented in this section of the Operational Programme?

No reference is made to the gendered impact of the conflict and in particular the differing impacts on women from rural and urban areas.

A gendered analysis of the situation of victims of the conflict reveals hidden issues such as mental health needs of women, their increased use of prescription drugs. The evidence is that the pressures of living in a society in transition from conflict contributes towards women's mental ill-health and over-use of prescription drugs, yet such subjects are rarely raised by researchers or by statutory agencies. The British Household Panel Survey (2002-2004) assessment of those in N.I. developing a risk of mental illness found women to score higher in all categories in the employed, unemployed and long-term sick. Women are under-represented in many areas of the workforce, concentrated in part-time and low-paid employment and may need special training to enable them to access the labour market.

The under-representation of women in public life and more particularly in bodies concerned with post-conflict reconstruction means that the official discourse surrounding representations of the Troubles ignores the varying roles played by women and discounts the important role that women within families have played

in maintaining community cohesion. The under-representation of women in decision making processes and structures throughout the island of Ireland 'severely limits the potential role of women in peace building and reconciliation work' (Crawley and O'Meara: Gender Issues in the Peace and Reconciliation Programme (Peace II): NDP Gender Equality Unit, 2002).

The effects of demilitarization on women and men are different and this needs to be taken into account. The release of prisoners has had an unacknowledged impact upon families and much of the strain involved in adjustment has been borne by women as wives and mothers. There has been pressure on women's resources exerted by men in local neighbourhoods and a need to protect women's spaces and work for women.

Evidence from many conflict zones reveal an increase in domestic violence as paramilitary and military structures are stood down and former combatants demobilised. There has been a 36% increase in domestic violence levels in 2005-2006 from 2004-2005 and rape statistics, while under-reported, reveal yearly increases since 2000/01 (PSNI Central Statistics Unit). A gendered understanding of the nature of violence is important, as is the inclusion of gender-based violence within Peace III.

There is no reference to the hidden issues behind women's unemployment – statistics need to be disaggregated to reveal the gender issues of women's concentration in low-paid and part-time work. The need for affordable childcare remains a crucial issue for society.

Q2

What are your views on the overall objective and the strategic objectives of the Programme? Is this the correct focus for the Peace III Programme?

We support the two main priorities of 'reconciling communities' and 'contributing to a shared future'. The cross-cutting theme of Equality must be applied when defining objectives. This is important in consideration of what 'shared space' will mean. There is a danger that private developers promising shared developments could win over the provision of more segregated social housing if equality is not an imbedded consideration in all shared future projects.

Will the voluntary sector have a role in Priority 2? In 'creating shared public spaces' the emphasis appears to be on capital investment and new building rather than encouragement to share and transform existing facilities in towns and villages. We would urge greater focus on encouraging people to come together to work for regeneration and shared space, and would emphasise the importance of rural areas in this work. The approach in developing 'key institutional capacities' appears to imply that public bodies will receive Peace III funding for work. We recommend that such funding be directed to community and voluntary groups to provide training and capacity building.

Q3

What are your views on the Programme's approach to the five cross-cutting themes?

Gender must be explicitly stated as part of the equality theme. This will entail a minimum requirement of 40% women (EU recommendation) in all structures set up for the implementation and monitoring of Peace III programmes.

We recommend that the cross-cutting themes form part of the application and assessment process.

Q4

What are your views on the Programme's approach to project selection including the targeting of named areas and groups and the development of strategic projects?

Under 'named areas' attention needs to be paid where there are specific pockets of deprivation, where communities are suffering and where women within such communities are doubly disadvantaged.

Named groups need to include carers as well as victims; to include women specifically within ex-prisoners; older women; people marginalised due to sectarianism and racism as well as conflict.

There is a concern regarding themed calls leaving little room for innovation and project development. Will there be a centralised approach which will decide what is needed and then invite organisations to compete to provide this. What happens to local people identifying local need?

Gender awareness training needs to be made available to groups as a means of challenging the male culture of organisations and agencies which prevent women from rising above the so-called 'glass ceiling'.

Q5

In your opinion what role, if any, should small grants play in the new Programme?

A small grants programme must be included within the new programme. Small grants are considered vital lifelines to small local groups working on a voluntary basis. Small grants keep rural women's community-based groups alive. IN many instances these are the only cross-community efforts in rural areas where there is isolation and separate community activity linked to churches and/or cultural organisations.

Any small grants scheme needs to be simple to apply for and easy to access. Complex monitoring requirements will prevent smaller groups from accessing funds.

Small grants need to allow groups money to pay rent, electricity etc as well as programme costs. Grants for programme costs alone are a problem for smaller organisations.

There needs to be flexibility, enabling groups to apply jointly, to maximise the impact of the money.

A separate body dealing with the delivery of small grants would allow for greater flexibility and sensitivity to the needs of smaller organisations rather than the proposal that this be the work of the strategic partnerships.

Q6

What are your views on the content of each priority?

Priority 1

- Training and education are vital
- Pre-development capacity building work is still needed in cross-border projects to get people to a stage of confidence where they can access resources
- Gender analysis is needed under the cross-cutting equality theme.

Priority 2

The Partnership element needs to be strongly embedded. Money should not go into training people in government departments to perform what they should be doing under their Shared Future obligations. This should be directed at the voluntary and community sector.

Priority 3

This requires more attention in the consultation process. More thought needs to be given to such issues as definitions of victims, open calls, the gender composition of committees.

Q7

What are your views on the indicative budget proposals? These are presented as a potential range of budgets. In your view, what is the correct funding balance between the two main priorities?

Priority 2 monies for shared space needs to be re-allocated to Priority 1.

Concern was expressed at money being given to taking down peace walls, with no reference to the need to work at the pace of communities who may not be ready for this.

Another 10% is needed under Priority 2.

Q8

What are your views on the proposed implementation arrangements for Peace III?

We welcome the commitment that 'particular effort' will be made to ensure 'balanced participation' between women and men on the monitoring committee and again urge that balanced participation of at least 40% will be instituted across all Peace III structures.

We believe that there needs to be some arrangement to provide the space for reflective and strategic thinking around peace-building and reconciliation within the structures of Peace III.

Q9

Do you have any views on the identified Equality Impact of the Programme?

Concerns were expressed regarding the statistical sources used to assess equality impact. These were felt to lead to problematic conclusions across the board. Also, the EQIA which set the Lesbian Gay and Bisexual population at 2%, which is extremely low and not in accordance with well established research figures. There were general concerns expressed regarding the arbitrary approach to the EQIA for Peace III. An Equality Impact Assessment should do more than count numbers of participants. For example, with regards to gender there should be a focus on positive action measures to address known inequalities.

Q10

Do you have any views on the likely environmental and sustainable development impacts of the Programme?

There were concerns that the Shared Spaces aspect of the proposed Programme will create unsustainable ventures within communities who will be left with a huge burden with regards to future financing of such projects.