

**A Gender Critique of the Draft Consultation Documents,
Programme for Cohesion, Sharing & Integration**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Acknowledgments:

This Executive Summary has been written by Angela Hegarty on behalf of and in collaboration with an ad hoc group, led by Women's Resource and Development Agency, with funding from the Community Relations Council. Brid Ruddy facilitated the consultation events that provided much of the evidence contained in this report. Almost 100 women participated in the consultation:

Thanks go to Newry and Mourne Ltd for organising the event in Altnaveigh House, Newry; Foyle Women's Information Network for Derry/Londonderry; WRDA and TWN for the Belfast event; First Steps Women's Centre and the N.I. Rural Women's Network for the Dungannon consultation.

The Ad Hoc Group members are:

Women's Resource and Development Agency; West Belfast Partnership Board; Women into Politics; Training for Women Network; Shankill Women's Centre; Rural Community Network

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1. It is well established that conflict impacts more adversely and in different ways on women than men. This is as true of Northern Ireland as it is of anywhere else. Thus, measures to bring about "a cohesive society ... in which everyone can live, work and socialise together free from intimidation and prejudice"¹ must acknowledge that differential impact and experience and be programmed accordingly.

2. Throughout the conflict and its aftermath, the issues of gender, women and human rights were frequently seen as "soft issues" that could be addressed after the 'important' or "hard" security issues have been addressed.

3. The long term impact of this is that the post-conflict political structures and processes are founded on pre-existing inequalities. This is despite the fact that the Good Friday Agreement expressly recognised "the right of women to full and equal political participation" and required the government to "pursue broad policies for... the advancement of women in public life."

4. This also means that much of government policy directed at to the post conflict transition ignores or devalues women's needs and contribution. This has also had a significant impact on the funding of women's organisations.

5. The documents issued for consultation on the Draft Programme For Cohesion, Sharing And Integration (CSI) perpetuate these inequalities. There are a number of significant flaws in the draft strategy, which is aimed at bringing about a cohesive, pluralist society – the lack of any concrete goals or timetables, for example.

¹ CSI CONSULTATION DOCUMENT at p5

However, the failure to acknowledge the different experiences and needs of women and men and plan accordingly fundamentally undermines the stated aims of the strategy.

6. The draft strategy ignores the requirements of the government's own Gender Equality Strategy and it fails to properly address the requirements of s75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This is partly a result of a skewed approach - an approach that views sharing, cohesion and integration only through the lens of race and community background. In this approach, conflict and violence are regarded as having had no impact upon women and gender equality is considered irrelevant. This is fundamentally wrong.

7. We regard the absence of any consideration of gender from the consultation documents as a fundamental flaw and, further, a failure to fulfil a range of statutory and policy requirements. It is also a breach of the UK's many international obligations, not least under UNSCR 1325.

8. In failing to consider the concepts of security and shared spaces from the perspective of women, the draft document betrays its origins in the predominantly male-dominated narratives about the conflict. These narratives do not recognise the gendered aspect to the conflict nor its impact. It also means that the draft CSI documents see women's needs and contribution as irrelevant.

9. Significant and important work has been undertaken by women to address the conflict and its impact, as well as promoting cohesion between communities. Yet the authors of the draft CSI documents seem either to be unaware of this work or to regard it as irrelevant to bringing about cohesion, sharing and integration. Nonetheless, the importance of women to the resolution of the conflict and to peace-building in Northern Ireland is significant.

10. In addition to the significant shortcomings of the CSI consultation documents, the timing and manner of the consultation process bear some criticism. The timing and format of the consultations were unsuited to proper participation in the process and the exclusion of women as a sectoral group is a particularly offensive manifestation of the lack of gender awareness on the part of those involved in drafting the documents.

11. The strategy must be urgently redrafted and revised to address these omissions. We suggest that those tasked with preparing the draft CSI documents undergo gender awareness training as a matter of urgency in order that they familiarise themselves with the requirements of the law and of their own government's policy. Those involved must also familiarise themselves much more with the work undertaken by the women's sector.

12. Those responsible for preparing and approving the draft CSI documents should now meet as a matter of urgency with representatives of the women's sector to explain how the documents came to be drafted and circulated for consultation without appearing to consider:

- the government's own gender equality strategy
- the impact of the conflict on women;
- the contribution of women to peace-building, conflict resolution and cohesion, sharing and integration;

13. Furthermore, to circulate such a flawed a draft strategy is a waste of public resources at a time when those resources are very scarce and under pressure. Those responsible for ensuring the efficiency of the use of public funds may wish to look at the process that led to the draft CSI strategy.

Specific Issues & Recommendations:

1. Women and The Conflict

A crucial absence from the document is a consideration of the conflict, which the draft strategy ignores. As one participant in our consultation exercise put it: “We feel the document comes from a false position because it doesn’t mention the conflict”. We are not in a post-conflict situation, as recent attacks and bombs have demonstrated.

1.2. Thus a redrafted strategy must acknowledge:

- that a long and violent conflict took place and is still in some aspects ongoing;
- the differential impact of the conflict on women and address the needs of women which result;
- that this impact continues – for example in respect of dependency upon alcohol, prescription drugs, mental health problems etc;
- that dependency upon drugs and alcohol also feed into hate-based crimes and a health strategy needs to address that;
- that inequality was a factor in the conflict and that the conflict impacted upon inequalities in education, housing and employment;

1.3. A redrafted strategy must also tackle those issues with concrete proposals, with set targets, measurable indicators and timetabled. periodic, independent reviews.

1.4. Those involved in making and drafting policy should undergo gender awareness training. This must include MLAs and civil servants at all levels.

2. Addressing Women’s Exclusion

2.1. Women are significantly absent from many of the key decision making processes in Northern Ireland and are elsewhere considerably under-represented. Progress on women's rights is very slow but integration of women is crucial to developing community cohesion.

2.2. Thus, a new CSI strategy needs to acknowledge the role of women in conflict resolution and peace-building. It must look specifically at examples of good practice in the women's sector and especially that outside Belfast.

2.3. An audit of this work, past and present should be undertaken and the lessons of the experience enumerated and drawn.

2.4. The definition of cohesion must be all encompassing and specifically name women and women's groups as having contributed to the development of peace, having a place in building the peace and the need for women's sector to be positively encouraged into public life in a post conflict situation.

2.5. The strategy should regard identity as multi-layered and address the fact that women's cultural identities are varied and different to those of men

2.6. Women should be included as a 'vulnerable group'.

2.7. A new CSI strategy must set measurable targets and timetables for the improvement of women's participation and representation in all of the decision making structures (e.g. government, local councils, community bodies, police and judiciary). Positive action, such as confidence building and family friendly measures are needed to ensure such participation.

3. Engaging Women From the Grassroots Up.

3.1. Women at the grassroots are often so excluded from policy discussions that they are not aware of policy developments. There is a really pressing need to involve grassroots workers, volunteers and activists in drafting and reviewing policy.

3.2. At the same time, there is a need to involve people in new and different ways – many people, for example, simply won't engage when a jargon-laden document is circulated. Women's organisations have become adept at facilitating participation through creative and artistic pursuits and this experience should be drawn upon.

4. "Shared Spaces"

4.1. The strategy should be redrafted to consider how all of the spaces it envisages may be made safe, shared and welcoming for women specifically. It needs to notice and address the fact that there is a dearth of safe open space where women feel comfortable.

4.2. The strategy needs to address the specific concerns and needs of women and shared space, for example:

- When requiring all public authorities to "discharge functions and deliver services equally and inclusively recognising the diverse nature of the community they serve", the strategy should ensure that this is being done specifically in relation to women. It needs to pay particular attention to women from a minority ethnic background, who face significant and quite distinct barriers.
- When considering any unnecessary duplication of services, the impact of this upon the needs and requirements of women specifically should be considered.

- The process of “Developing a culture of fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect” should be implemented to ensure that the rights of women are respected and promoted. A good place to start would be with a gender awareness programme for those involved in drafting this strategy.
- Any strategy around ‘crisis intervention’ must ensure that it will assist women who are the subject of hate crimes and other forms of violence, such as sexual assault and domestic violence;
- Women who experience sectarianism, racial violence and hate crimes have specific needs and especially so women from a minority ethnic background who often find it difficult to access services;
- Any proposed process of community renewal must specifically seek to involve and empower women, given the historical under-representation of women in political structures and public bodies.

4.3. At the same time, there is sometimes a need for safe, reserved spaces – e.g. for women who want to start education in a woman friendly environment. There is no “one size fits all” approach- different people need different spaces as we live in a diverse society we need space to understand each others issues.

5. Urban and Rural Women

The document acknowledges sectarianism and racism are experienced differently in rural and urban areas, but seems unaware that women and men experience them differently too and that for women, these often manifest with sexism to compound the trauma of the experience. Yet the strategy does not acknowledge that reality and that needs to be changed. A redrafted strategy also needs to look at infrastructure and transport, which also have a

significant impact on cohesion, sharing and integration, especially for women from the inner cities and rural areas.

6. Empowering Every Generation

6.1. There is a great deal of emphasis in the document on youth, but no awareness of the value of older people nor the benefit of intergenerational working, where the experience of wise women is invaluable. This needs to be factored in to a revised strategy, where there is a need to look specifically at the needs of young women and girls.

6.2. Whilst it is laudable to wish to “support... young people to increase their civic responsibility including facilitating and empowering youth groups to work together on civic responsibility projects,” any such proposal must specifically target, involve and empower young women.

6.3. Similarly, any focus in education on promoting greater understanding of shared values must specifically address the issue of respect for women, especially considering the increase in violence against women and sexual assaults.

6.4. Any consideration of harassment and name-calling and its impact on a shared society must address the experiences of women, young and old, who have experienced name-calling and harassment because of their gender.

6.5. When the draft CSI document talks about young people, it makes no reference to young people with disabilities and their carers – how will this strategy impact upon them?

6.6. The document's focus on young people seems to ignore the fact that youth services have been continually and systematically cut back in funding and resource terms.

7. Women and Culture - Respecting All Our Citizens Equally.

7.1. Any strategy aimed at "building a peaceful climate of fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect" must do so in a way that promotes the rights of women as equal citizens and acknowledge the historic and continuing significant inequalities faced by women.

7.2. Any programme aimed at "working with and supporting the local community to resolve contentious cultural issues" must ensure that that women are fully involved and empowered. Such programmes also need to ensure that the experience and wisdom of women and women's organisations in this respect are valued, accessed and supported.

7.3. Where the strategy proposes encouraging "greater engagement with, and understanding of, cultural diversity and intercultural relations," it must do so in a way that encourages a greater understanding of the contribution and importance of women in cultural diversity and intercultural relations.

7.4. In any promotion of cultural exchanges, joint events and tourism initiatives, women's cultural activities (such as arts and crafts, for example) must be included and facilitated.

7.5. Tourism initiatives and other such activities must address and celebrate the role and contribution of women in history, art and culture.

7.6. Any strategy aimed at "encouraging community events which reflect cultural diversity and are open, welcoming and inclusive to all" must ensure that it reflects the diversity of women's lives and

experiences. Such a strategy must also be open, welcoming and inclusive to women, something the current strategy is not.

7.7. The focus in the draft CSI documents on sport, as both a locus for sectarian and racial abuse and as a means of addressing prejudice needs redressing. Sport has long enjoyed significant public funding and is very male-dominated. But there are many other leisure activities which are undertaken primarily by women and which are as important to cohesion, sharing and integration. So the strategy needs redrafted to fully consider the contribution and importance of, for example, arts and crafts activities.

7.8. Any strategy which is intended to “build community support networks across community, cultural and minority ethnic groups” must ensure that women are able to fully participate in these community networks. Women’s organisations should be fully entitled to be involved in these networks and be consulted and funded to fully participate.

7.9. In “building capacity of the local and minority ethnic communities to support people who have experienced hate crime, ” the strategy needs be redrafted do that it specifically supports women who have experienced hate and other similar crimes.

7.10. Women must be involved and empowered in any multi-agency partnerships between indigenous and minority ethnic and migrant worker communities.

7.11. The strategy should be redrafted to ensure that organisations and programmes that specifically support and empower women are properly resourced and funded, especially considering the chronic under-funding of women’s organisations identified by the UN

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

7.12. The consultation documents refer to migrants in several places, but show no awareness that the difficulties and barriers faced by women migrants are significantly greater and different to those faced by men. A revised strategy should address this problem.

7.13. Similarly the document refers to the needs of travellers and their significant marginalisation. But it does not acknowledge that the needs and experiences of Traveller women are different and need to be addressed in a very different way.

8. Secure Communities Must be Safe for Women

8.1. The document refers frequently to the need for people to feel safe, but it does not mention the issue of women's safety and our right to be free from violence. When discussing the issue of 'secure communities' the issue of women's safety in public spaces and at home needs to be addressed.

8.2. Women have particular safety issues that need tackling specifically. For example young women out socialising are afraid to travel in the evenings, older women are afraid in their own homes, women in families are often threatened by domestic violence. Any increase in street crime is particularly threatening to women, so any strategy aimed at creating a secure community must take into account how variations in crime affect women.

8.3. One of the most important issues consistently raised by women throughout our consultation process was the issue of domestic violence. We are baffled as to why domestic violence is not considered a hate crime and why it is that the authors of the draft

CSI documents do not seem to regard building respect for women as a major contribution to societal cohesion. When developing “Zero tolerance” for crimes motivated by prejudice, offences against women, such as sexual assault and domestic violence must be included.

8.4. The CSI strategy should seek to tackle prejudice against women and place domestic violence in that context. The redrafted strategy should link to relevant policies and programmes on domestic and sexual violence and it should pay particular regard to the needs of women from migrant and/or minority ethnic backgrounds.

8.5. The CSI strategy should draw upon the experience, wisdom and best practice of women’s organisations in this respect. The contribution of women and women’s organisations to the promotion of rights and respect as a basis for combating hate crimes must be recognised and supported.

8.6. The themes laid out in the draft documents are vague and are not spelled out sufficiently. What, for example, is meant by crisis intervention? When conflict arises (through dissident bombs, interface violence or racism etc.) what is needed is a multi-agency approach, which involves and empowers local people and communities.

9. Community Cohesion

9.1. The work that grass-roots women’s groups do is ignored in the draft CSI documents, as is the central role that women play in the leadership and improvement of local communities, particularly along

interface areas. This is a result both of historic and inequality and of the focus on ex-combatants since the ceasefires. These factors have had a significant funding impact for women's organisations. Thus, where the draft CSI documents seek to "support the local community to resolve local issues through local solutions" there must be specific proposals to support and empower women to play a full role at community level.

9.2. Similarly, when "ensuring the sharing of best practice projects aimed at improving cohesion, sharing and integration" the strategy must be redrafted to ensure that it draws upon the experience of women's organisations. It too must propose concrete measures for encouraging the involvement and participation of women.

9.3. Where intercultural work through the Minority Ethnic Development Fund is promoted, these funds must be distributed to ensure that women and women's organisations are properly and equally resourced.

9.4. The concept and funding of 'good relations' work needs to be strategically linked to community development. There is a strong correlation between social disadvantage and some of the issues the CSI strategy is intended to tackle. A more coherent and strategic community development strategy would help to address this. However, any good relations or community development strategy that does not acknowledge and address the issue of gender equality and the ongoing disempowerment of women will be a failure. The contribution of women and women's organisations should be recognised and women must be supported and empowered as leaders.

10. "A Shared Society."

10.1. A new redrafted strategy must make the issue of equality central. A strategy that simply ignores the existence of widespread and historic inequality is doomed to fail from the start. Nor can a strategy simply dismiss the inequality of more than half the population as irrelevant: a ‘shared society’ cannot be built upon such false foundations.

10.2. The draft CSI strategy is intended to provide the framework for “the delivery of aspects of the Racial Equality Strategy relating to good race relations in a co-ordinated, joined up process”. Yet the draft strategy signally fails to relate to gender equality in a joined up way. A redrafted document must not focus only upon the delivery of the Racial Equality Strategy or a newly minted sexual orientation strategy, but also and equally upon the delivery of Gender Equality Strategy.

10.3. The absence of women from decision-making processes, despite their contribution to peace building and conflict resolution, is stark. It is therefore imperative that any new community structures proposed address this absence and ensure that the central role that women play in the support and regeneration of those communities is acknowledged. In particular:

- if the state was willing to countenance a 50/50 quota for recruitment to the PSNI for Catholics and protestants, there is absolutely no reason why there should not be a 50/50 quota for women and men in recruiting to all public bodies.
- A Minister for Women is required in the local assembly and targets must be set to ensure that political and public bodies reflect the population.

11. The Role of Business

11.1. When addressing the issues of civic responsibility there is a need to have the business community involved. We also believe that investment initiatives should specifically support and promote the efforts of women entrepreneurs.

11.2. We support the idea of developing and supporting workplace initiatives to promote respect and understanding of cultural diversity. But those initiatives must address the need to promote respect for equality between men and women and in doing so should tackle outmoded and erroneous ideas about the roles of women and men.

12. Health & Education

12.1. One of the strong messages to emerge from our own consultation process was the need to make health and education cross-cutting themes. These are two areas where the conflict has impacted greatly and where improvements could significantly contribute to community cohesion and integration.

12.2. However, we are concerned that the draft document says it is aimed at “eventually eliminating segregated services.” In doing so, it betrays no awareness of the need to consider the specific requirements of women that might arise when eliminating segregated services (e.g. in health, family planning, adult education). This should not be an excuse to cut back much needed health and education provision in areas of significant social disadvantage.

12.3. The draft CSI documents have little to say about tackling the ongoing problem of anti-social behaviour. Nor do they take into account the importance of family and parenting support in doing so. A redrafted strategy must address this gap.

12.4. Education is a key concern for women, not least because it offers the opportunity of future economic independence. However, without access to affordable childcare, neither education nor work is as open to women as they are to men, because of continuing inequalities in childcare responsibilities.

12.5. More specifically, the following need to be tackled:

- The need for the curriculum in schools to look at the impact of conflict on women and girls
- The need for more nursery places, especially in areas where the conflict has impacted most;
- The need for funded places for childcare if women are to be able to take part in all aspects of education.

13. Looking Outward

13.1. The Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration proposes that an effective outward looking dimension is part of the programme. In identifying key exemplar projects that have proven track records of success in promoting good relations, it needs to look specifically at the experience of women's organisations – something the draft documents signally fail to do.

13.2. In sharing of relevant research and experiences on a North/South, East/West, European and international basis, it needs to ensure that women's experiences and expertise are included and supported.

13.3. In promoting cultural diversity and encouraging better social networks on North/South, East/West, European and international level, it needs to take specific steps to ensure that women and their expertise and contribution are empowered and recognised.

14. Proposed Structures.

14.1. The absence of indicators and/or targets is a significant flaw. Throughout our consultation exercise, women asked “how would this strategy help address the divisions in our communities?” and came swiftly to the conclusion that it would not. Partly this is because vague concepts are deployed but not defined - for example, what does the strategy mean by “shared space”? How would it measure progress towards an improvement in shared space? Neither of these questions is capable of being addressed by the document in its current state.

14.2. Yet it seems as if the structure, makeup and other aspects of the Ministerial Panel will be crucial to developing these targets, goals and indicators. Our comments about the structures proposed by the draft CSI documents must therefore be read in that context.

14.3. Any proposed structure which emerges from the CSI consultation needs to bring on board much more practical experience of conflict resolution and peace building. Very many women’s organisations feel that the proposal is too much focussed on ‘experts’ with little practical experience.

14.4. There must be a specific role for the women’s sector on any such advisory body. This should not be a token place at a table, but an effective Women’s Advocate to articulate the perspective of the sector and able to critique and effect change in policy, practice and funding.

15. OFMDFM Funding for Good Relations Work

15.1. The consultation documents lay out options for structures and mechanisms for the delivery of advice to Government and funding

delivery services. We have reservations about good relations funding becoming the responsibility of OFMDFM. We believe this function should remain separate from political institutions and direct political influence.

15.2. Women's organisations are both chronically under-funded and face great difficulties in having their work recognised as 'good relations' work. The strategy must be revised to acknowledge and address this issue, as well as ensure that funding follows that work. Any structure for funding work around cohesion, sharing and integration must enable, empower and support women's organisations in undertaking that work.

16. Equality Issues

16.1. There is no action plan for implementing any equality aspect of the draft CSI strategy and no targets, timetables and indicators for measuring progress. This needs to be addressed.

16.2. It is uncertain that an EQIA has been carried out on the draft strategy. The wording in the draft CSI documents is very unclear and when one MLA enquired about the findings of the EQIA on the Draft CSI Strategy, the written response from government was very unclear. It implied that no EQIA has in fact yet been carried out. If this is the case, it is remarkable. However, we will reserve comment until we learn whether in fact an EQIA was carried out before the draft strategy was issued.

17. Conclusion: We wish to leave the final word to one of the participants in our own consultation process, who very effectively summed up the mood and the response of the women's sector to the draft CSI strategy. She said:

“They're talking about promoting fairness, equality, rights responsibilities and respect - how can this be done when women, half of the population, are missing from the policy? There can be no cohesion in society when 50% of the population are not named in a CSI strategy. And this is in the year 2010!

Women built the peace by our work in networks, in making relationships, in being aware of multiple identities and multiple roles. Male politicians built the conflict resolution of the Agreement on the back of this work. The Agreement might have been the end of conflict but it was just the beginning of building the peace. Women's groups must be involved in this as of right, because without us there would be no security and no peace.”