

**Issues of Recovery  
Relief and Rehabilitation**



The Women and Peacebuilding – Sharing the Learning project is funded under the EU PEACE III programme for Northern Ireland and the six southern Border Counties. It recognises the fact that the European Union has defined equality between women and men as a fundamental right and builds on this to examine equality in the context of the centrality of conflict transformation in Northern Ireland/Ireland. As such the project draws on the global commitment to women's rights in contested societies as epitomised in the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820, on Women, Peace and Security.



### WOMEN AND PEACEBUILDING: SHARING THE LEARNING

Drawing on the main provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 the Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning project focuses on –

**PREVENTION:** Strengthen the efforts to prevent violence against women, including various forms of gender based violence.

**PARTICIPATION and REPRESENTATION:** Promote and support women's active and meaningful participation in all peace processes as well as their representation in formal and informal decision-making at all levels.

**PROTECTION and SECURITY:** Strengthen efforts to secure the safety, physical and mental health, well-being, economic security and/or dignity of women and girls; promote and safeguard the human rights of women and mainstream a gender perspective into legal and institutional reforms.

**RECOVERY, RELIEF and REHABILITATION:** Promote women's equal access to aid distribution measures, including those dealing with the specific needs of women and girls in all relief and reconstruction programmes.

The material and recommendations contained in this Women and Peacebuilding Briefing Note are based on the views expressed by 700 plus women, from across Northern Ireland and the six northern Border Counties of Ireland, at a series of seminars over the period 2012/2014.

The partnership that designed the Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning initiative includes:

#### **Community Foundation for Northern Ireland**

An independent grant-making Community Foundation that has been active in Northern Ireland since 1979 and has a long commitment to supporting a more just, equal and peaceful society.



**Foundations for Peace Network**

A peer Network of in-country based independent Funds and Foundations working in contested societies – Bangladesh; Colombia; Georgia; India; Indonesia; Israel; Mexico; Northern Ireland; Palestine; Serbia; Sri Lanka – that are united by a commitment to social justice and conflict transformation.

**National Women’s Council of Ireland**

The national women’s membership organisation of Ireland committed to equality and the recognition of the positive contribution of women to society.

**Women’s Resource & Development Agency**

The support organisation for Women’s Groups and Networks across Northern Ireland which works to advance equality and participation of women in society.



## ISSUES OF RECOVERY, RELIEF AND REHABILITATION

Intrinsic to this aspect of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is the application of a gender perspective to reconstruction and peacebuilding programmes and the response of local, national and international systems to women's priorities in post-conflict situations as they impact on stability and development. It is recognised that women take on additional responsibilities both in the home and in their local community when family members are arrested, killed, injured or missing during conflict. These include financial, emotional and relational responsibilities which are assumed without additional statutory support or resources. This was particularly true in Northern Ireland where owing to the official state narrative that normalised the conflict it followed that there were few special policies in place (apart from the legal and security spheres) to deal with the consequences of armed conflict.

With much talk of a 'peace dividend' over the post conflict period, women in many disadvantaged areas, which bore the brunt of the impact of the violence, have been disappointed at the lack of social and economic change. Although peace has brought major improvements in terms of people no longer fearing – to the same extent – for their lives, there has been little change in the areas that are highest on the index of deprivation and a concern that the emphasis on economic investment has failed to offer the promised 'trickle down' effect. As such there is a need for more proactive measures to address this broader legacy of the conflict.



### WHAT WOMEN SAID ABOUT ISSUES OF RECOVERY, RELIEF AND REHABILITATION

The Workshop sessions addressed these broad issues through a number of questions –

- i) **What stops you from doing what you want to do in your life?**
- ii) **Do you feel women's lives are better or worse now than 15 years ago?  
In what way?**
- iii) **What would you change?**

The answers that emerged from the Workshop participants included the following –

- i) **What stops you from doing what you want to do in your life?**
  - Lack of money and the fear that the situation is getting worse with welfare cuts and austerity policies in both Northern Ireland and in Ireland. There was frequent mention of the related issues of debt and depression. Equally the role of many women



as primary care-givers brought concerns over expensive child-care facilities and uncertain community service support.

- Lack of employment opportunities and the need for appropriate training courses not just for the young unemployed, but over the full life course. Jobs that are available are often being cut back from full time to part time and there is limited access to life-long learning facilities with problems of accessibility in remoter rural areas.
- Concerns about children particularly in terms of high rates of suicide, criminality, drugs and the danger of being recruited by paramilitary/gangs.
- The impact of living in interface areas with all the associated tensions, stress and potential for violence. Allied to this is the fear about what might happen if the Peace Walls are taken down. Will people feel threatened even further? Fear is a normal part of life. There are also the 'hidden' interfaces in rural areas.
- The need for facilities for young people within communities in order to divert them from getting caught up in activities that can lead them into danger. Youth services should also take account of the importance of outreach work with young girls.

### ii) **Do you feel women's lives are better or worse now than 15 years ago? In what way?**

- Politicians are still disagreeing with each other over issues related to the legacy of the past. There does not seem to be much movement forward when there are constant political crises and lack of decision-making.
- Segregation in terms of housing, education and attitudes is still a big issue which does not seem to be getting the political attention that is required to move forward.
- There are now some very good examples of cross-community programmes but many of these receive short-term support and consequently cannot be brought to scale. These programmes are important for facilitating listening to one another and building relationships and empathy.
- Support has been available from the various European Union funding programmes, and there will be a PEACE IV, however there are the problems of red tape and complicated funding arrangements.
- There is the new issue of trans-generational trauma whereby the events experienced by an older generation is transmitted to, and affects, subsequent generations even though the latter have no direct experience of the events that are relayed. There is the related danger that the past can be embroidered and made more of over time.



- People are no longer afraid to visit Belfast and other cities and towns that were previously the object of bombings; however there are still fears that the conflict may re-ignite given the power of symbols and emblems to be divisive and spark off street protests.
- Concerns that existed two decades ago, such as paramilitary influence, can still exist but it is now more difficult to upfront them given the new emphasis on normality and economic growth. Fears were also expressed that if women speak out at community level they may be putting their children at risk.
- The perception in many Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities is that the situation is worse with regard to recognition of their identity and position in society. The example was cited of the positive influence of band membership rather than involvement with paramilitaries. There was a sense that the two main communities – Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican do not understand each other's circumstances.
- Concerns were expressed about social media. While this can be positive and broaden horizons there is also evidence that it is being used to fuel sectarian views, organise street riots and for cyberbullying.
- Programmes that can provide resources for re-imaging communities have been positive by removing the more aggressive paramilitary murals and presenting a more welcoming face to people from outside that community.
- Attitudes are changing. The first woman taxi driver in Belfast was petrol bombed in 1993; there are now more female bus drivers, taxi drivers, women returners to colleges and women getting qualifications than in previous years.

### iii) What would you change?

- There is a need for somewhere that people can go to talk about memories – there are some awful memories about the past that will lead to trauma unless there is a chance to talk and be listened to. There have been some excellent projects, but many of them tend to be short term and ad hoc.
- A more positive future needs more open and honest discussion. There is a tendency to blame everything on paramilitaries or the British Army, but in fact it was politicians that created the conditions for the conflict to occur. This needs to be recognised in any truth recovery process.
- Contested space is still an issue that needs to be addressed. There is a need for inclusive processes to identify what can be done about this issue in a manner that local people feel comfortable with.
- The tendency south of the Border to turn its collective back on Northern Ireland needs to be addressed by the Irish Government as the issues relating to both the past, and future development, cannot be considered in isolation.
- The lack of information about the various provisions that have been agreed by the British and Irish Governments as well as by politicians in Northern Ireland through the various agreements needs to be remedied. People should understand what has been



agreed rather than unpicking all the issues again. One such provision referred to is the Civic Forum which has disappeared.

- Churches, schools, politicians, community groups/leaders, security forces, perpetrators of conflict and victims/survivors all need to be involved in making change happen. Relevant civic education in schools can make a particular contribution.
- Successful programmes should be mainstreamed by government rather than being left to rely on spasmodic EU funding. However, the work of community based women's groups and Centres should continue to be a priority in any EU PEACE IV programme.
- Current austerity and welfare policies need to be audited to ascertain their detrimental impact on women. This can be particularly acute in the case of young single parents and older women.
- Political leadership should not play to the extremes and the lowest common denominator, instead they should have the courage to lead on issues such as the need to design feasible measures for a shared future. There is currently a danger of benign apartheid based on single identity political clientalism.
- The concept of 'parity of esteem' needs to be deconstructed so that communities do not feel that their traditions and identities are threatened.
- Media coverage can both exacerbate political tensions and project a poor image of the position of women in society.
- It must be clear that support is available for community-based work which is positive in nature rather than politicians seen as reacting to conflict and crisis.
- New community planning powers and the greater role of the reformulated District Councils in Northern Ireland need to take account of women's views, and provide resources for women's organisations and cross community initiatives. However, concerns were expressed at the lack of women on the Public Administration Transition Committees.
- It is important that women from local communities should reach out and build relationships with women from other nationalities, ethnicities and identities.



### WHAT OTHERS SAY

“No lasting peace can be achieved after conflict unless the needs of women are met – not only justice for the victims of crimes of war, but their active involvement in creating a society in which their rights are respected and their voices are heard.”

**UK Foreign Secretary William Hague (October 2010).**

UNSCR 1325 is of particular relevance to Northern Ireland and the Irish Border counties as regions both in transition from conflict and that have borne the brunt of political violence over a protracted period.



Policy and implementation are expected to include attention to the specific needs of women and girls in rehabilitation and post-conflict reconstruction, including new governance, economic and social structures and in political and public life generally. However the experience of Northern Ireland has been that predominant attention has been focused on the two main community identities to the virtual exclusion of the gender dimension. The approach to conflict management and resolution and rebuilding Northern Ireland strongly suggests a hierarchy, where political/religious identity is primary and gender comes a poor second – if it features at all. This is despite the obligations driven by the UN and the EU to ensure the equal integration of women into all aspects of building the peace and post conflict developments.



### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Work undertaken in Northern Ireland by the 'Empty Purse Campaign', and in Ireland by the National Women's Council of Ireland on the differential impact of austerity measures should be continued accompanied by on-going lobbying and advocacy, with the outcome of increased economic independence and participation of women in the economy through greater economic security, a reduction in the pay gap and greater access to affordable and accessible childcare.
2. Increased participation of women in local government arrangements and representation, including in community planning structures and processes.
3. Gender analysis and gender responsive budgets applied to respective Programmes for Government, North and South, with specific government initiatives and programmes for reconstruction and development of those communities that suffered the brunt of the impact of the conflict.
4. There should be explicit referencing and a visible integration of women into key peacebuilding related strategies in Northern Ireland such as Delivering Social Change and Together: Building a United Community as well as other key strategies related to post-conflict reconstruction, such as economic strategies.
5. Women to be included as beneficiaries in any proposed EU PEACE IV funding programme.
6. The Governments of Northern Ireland and Ireland should meet the UN target of minimum 15% of post-conflict spending on women's recovery needs and empowerment, including direct financing to women's civil society organisations.
7. There should be a gender perspective developed to reconstruction work in interface areas within a broader context of de-militarisation, peacebuilding and community development.
8. All key peacebuilding and reconstruction strategies – including shared learning with other societies in conflict – should be informed by women's perspectives.

