



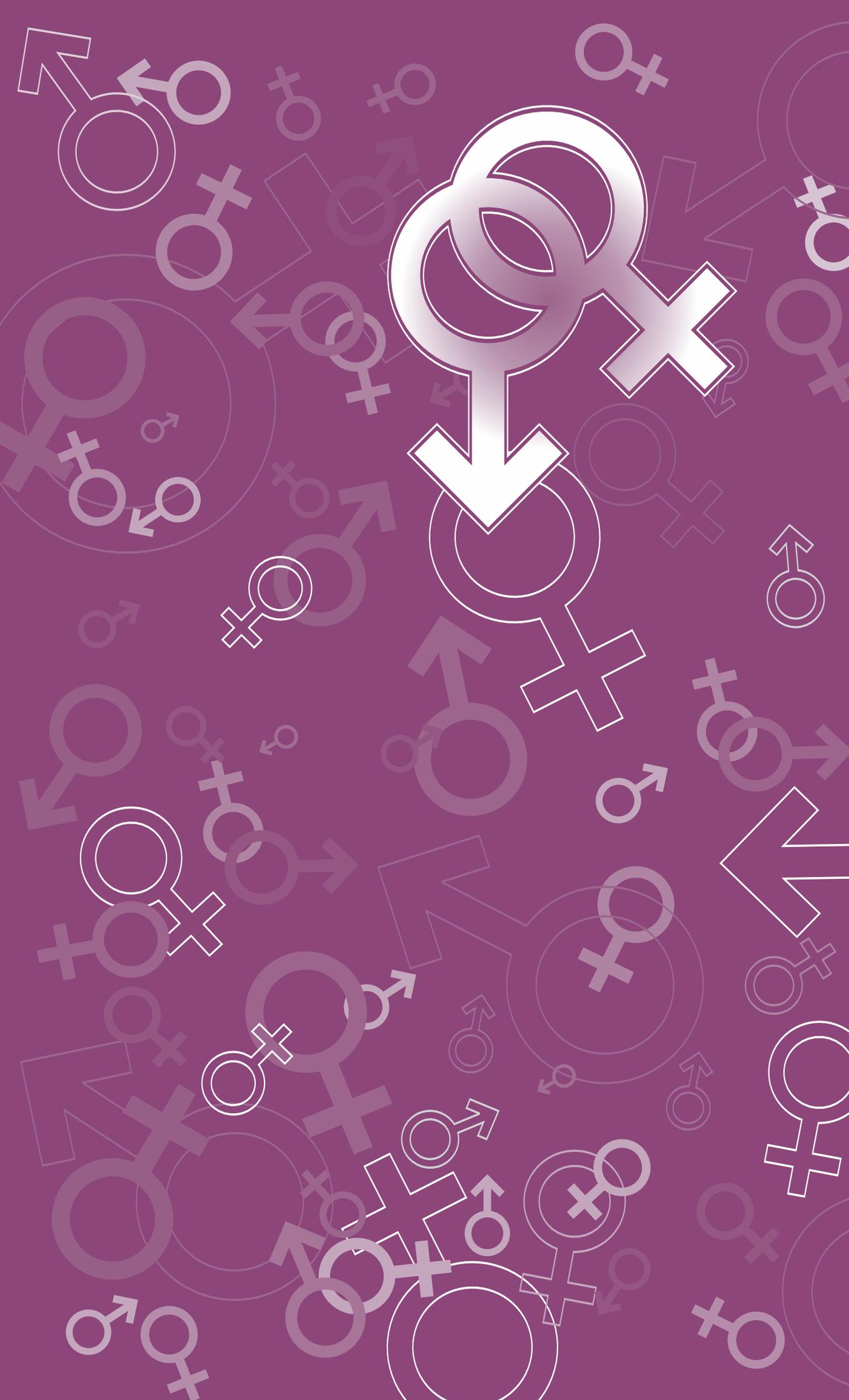
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Is gender part of good relations?

Report of a conference on *A Shared Future* organised by the
Women's Resource and Development Agency



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Forward

The mission of the Women's Resource and Development Agency is 'to advance women's equality and participation in society by working to bring about social, political and economic change.' We recognise that women in Northern Ireland face particular challenges by virtue of living in a society emerging from a conflict situation. The urgency of highlighting those challenges in the context of a new Assembly and local policy making was a key focus of this conference, held to consider whether gender is included within A Shared Future.

Speakers and participants made it clear that equality and good relations must be tackled together. If the barriers preventing women from participation in public and political life are not overcome, then women will never be in a position to play a full part in the creation of a future society based upon the equality of all of its people.

Policy makers need to develop an understanding that women make up half of society, and that policies must reflect that reality. The 'gender neutral' approach that characterises so much of the key policies being developed has an adverse impact on women as they struggle to see where they can be included, only to find no resources available that would enable them to benefit. The Gender Equality Strategy is a welcome development, but not all issues relating to women can be dealt with by it. An integrated approach is needed so that women are named within all strategies, from anti-poverty to anti-sectarianism, and are therefore encouraged and enabled to take their part in changing society.

We hope that this conference report will encourage politicians and policy makers to recognise the importance of including women within all strategies intended to bring about a shared future.

Thanks are due to Bríd Ruddy for her work in compiling this report. We are grateful for the financial support provided by the Community Relations Council and Belfast City Council.

Margaret Ward

'A Shared Future' must include policies relating to women on the ground, as home makers, childminders and all our roles. We need a cultural change in the whole political arena. There are grey suits, men, only a few women, nothing has changed.



Dawn Purvis



Executive Summary

The Women's Resource and Development Agency is part of the Women's Centre's Regional Partnership, providing leadership and advocacy and supporting women's centres across Northern Ireland. On 13 September 2007 it organised a conference in Grosvenor Hall Belfast. This report summarises that conference and proposes a set of recommendations for future action.

The conference was an outcome of the project called 'Bringing Gender Awareness to the A Shared Future agenda', which was funded by Belfast City Council and the Community Relations Council. It was developed because of a recognition by the women's sector that the issue of gender has been largely absent from the Shared Future discourse.

This view was clearly shared by the participants at the conference, where issues relating to political under representation, ethnicity, sexuality, equal pay and women's role in the conflict and in the promotion of good relations were discussed.

The following recommendations are an outcome of that shared and dynamic debate, which is intended to be the start of action to ensure that policy makers understand the barriers and issues concerning women and the necessity of incorporating this recognition into all future policies

To increase the participation of women within the community

- Family-friendly structures
- Work-life balance
- Encouragement of uptake of paternity leave
- Increased childcare provision
- More focus on the specific impact on women of policies such as school closures, water charges, countryside planning
- Make policies accessible to all through a bottom-up approach
- Confidence-building measures

To improve the representation of women in political life and other power structures

- Lobby for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 'Women, Peace and Security'
- Implement the strategic objectives of the Gender Equality Strategy
- Greater resources for the political education of women
- Equality Commission to be more pro-active
- Develop community planning partnerships
- Develop monitoring strategies for gender and rural proofing
- Challenge political parties on their gender equality policies
- Lobby those who oppose equality and do not support us
- Highlight women role models
- Challenge stereotyping

To include women in 'A Shared Future'

- Integrate policies such as the Gender Equality Strategy and Racial Equality Strategy into A Shared Future for a more integrated approach
- Recognise the different impacts of political/sectarian division on women eg. community and school safety; choices for integrated education; integrated housing and public space
- Community Relations Council to gender its work
- Gender champions to be appointed to all government departments

To develop and broaden the women's sector

- Develop links with organisations like the Mother's Union, faith-based groups
- Develop sustainable funding to support the sector
- Government to institute a review into the needs of the women's sector
- Obtain resources for policy engagement
- Greater linkage of the sector with other groups representing women's multi-identities



1 | Background

The Women's Resource and Development Agency is part of the Women's Sector Regional Partnership, providing leadership and advocacy and supporting Women's Centres across Northern Ireland. WRDA strategic aims and objectives for 2005-2010 include:

- Training and capacity building to develop the capacity of women from disadvantaged communities to tackle inequalities affecting them.
- To promote and advocate for women's equality in policy and decision making.

The conference was an outcome of the project 'Bringing Gender Awareness to the A Shared Future agenda', which was funded by Belfast City Council and the NI Community Relations Council.

The project was developed because WRDA believes that the issue of gender has been largely absent from the Shared Future discourse, partly as a result of women's marginal position in public life in Northern Ireland and partly due to the historical separation between the women's movement and the community relations/good relations field.

A Shared Future policy document states:

That government should deliver policies for good relations which will address the following:

- *Eliminate sectarianism and racism and to enable individuals to live and work without fear or intimidation.*
- *Reduce tension and conflict at interface areas.*
- *Support the development of integrated/shared communities where people wish to learn, live, work and play together.*

The Gender Equality Strategy states:

Women and men often have different needs, aspirations, perceptions and priorities. Gender equality ensures that these are valued equally, however the current gender inequalities in our society, for example, power and decision making, the labour market, living conditions and health, and access to facilities and transport demonstrate they are not.

A Shared Future policy needs to reflect these different needs, and it is clear that if we are to have a fully shared and inclusive society then all policies and initiatives must be gender proofed in order to ensure the equal participation of those who form over 50% of the population - women.

The conference was intended to kick-start a conversation that would explore the gender dimension to political and community divisions in Northern Ireland through the three main areas of women's lives: as income earners, as carers and as volunteers. At the heart of this debate is the issue of power and influence and the extent to which women have been able to take a leadership role in challenging sectarianism, racism and building trust within the family; within the workplace; within their communities.

The aim was to bring gender awareness to the 'shared future' agenda and to offer a critical challenge to the women's sector in examining its own practice and possibilities for future development. As a participatory event it was intended both to affirm good practice and to offer a challenge to both the women's sector and the community relations field to explore the gender dimension to good relations and the 'shared future' agenda.

The project employed Bríd Ruddy, a consultant experienced in community relations issues, to contact speakers and to develop the programme, in cooperation with the WRDA and the advisory group set up for the project. We are grateful to Gemma Attwood from CRC for her support and advice.

This report is the outcome of the conference. It is intended as a contribution towards the development of a robust policy stating clearly the good relations practice and intentions of organisations within the sector.

This objective is given added momentum by the proposed review of 'A Shared Future' policy by the new NI Assembly. Therefore the project and associated report is timely, strategically significant and provides an opportunity to shape policy for the future.

Clearly, all policies need to be gender proofed, particularly in light of the Gender Equality strategy that highlights the differential impacts of social policy on men and women. There particularly needs to be formal recognition of the impact of conflict on women specifically.

Antoinette McKeown

2 | Speakers Inputs

Antoinette McKeown

Head of Policy & Development, Equality Commission Northern Ireland

In terms of Perspectives and Priorities I would like to make my presentation around the following themes:

- Context – legacy of conflict
- Policy Opportunities and Challenges
- Priorities for Action
- Commission role and perspective

Background

We have come out of conflict and now have a new NI but the post conflict era still has some legacies that need to be addressed. These include:

- Demographic changes; increase in diversity (inc. multiple identities)
- Current position of women in NI
- Commission role on gender equality and good relations

In terms of Women and the Labour Market, the NI Monitored Workforce 2005 highlights that:

- Female workers are in a majority (51.8%)
- 1 in 4 work part time
- Women comprise almost 2/3 of public sector workforce (61.9%)
- Gender pay gap narrowing, BUT...
- Ratio median hourly earnings is 95.8%
- P/T working women earn 30% less than F/T working men

In terms of Women and Public Appointments, we know that:

- 32% public appointments held by women
- 18% councillors
- 3 elected MPs
- 1 MEP
- 18 female MLAs
- 15% of judiciary female

In both of these main areas, it is clear that there is still major gender inequality.



Relating these issues specifically to Gender and Good Relations, we would propose the following:

- UN Resolution 1325

This proposes positive policies for women living in post conflict situations. Other world governments have implemented this, but the UK government is loath to develop the resolution in relation to women in NI.

- Gender proofing the ASF

Clearly, all policies need to be gender proofed, particularly in light of the Gender Equality strategy that highlights the differential impacts of social policy on men and women. There particularly needs to be formal recognition of the impact of conflict on women specifically:

- safer homes and communities
- access to safe public services - transport
- a fair share of the power and decision making
- Dignity at work

There is still a major need to address barriers such as:

- Stereotyping, attitudes and structural inequalities
- Barriers to participation in positions of power
- Lack of social infrastructure as a result of conflict
- Geographic barriers – rurality issues
- “Homogenous” or “monolithic” policy thinking on gender

There are many opportunities and challenges, for example:

- New Executive
- St Andrew’s Agreement – e.g. anti-poverty on a statutory footing – dealing with the legacy of the conflict
- Review of ASF by Executive
- Comprehensive Spending Review
- Bill of Rights for NI

The Policy Opportunities and Challenges include:

- Review of Public Administration (RPA)
- Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- Investment programme and ISNI 2
- Redirecting Equality Schemes in light of 5 year reviews and S75 effectiveness review

Immediate Practical Priorities for Action include:

- Review of ASF
- Bill of Rights
- CEDAW
- RPA

The Priorities for Action arising from this conference could include;

- Increasing political consciousness
- Identifying key areas for focus (Singing from the same page)
- Seek aspirations with confidence, giving expression to women’s experience
- Use the existing tools (S75; CEDAW)

The role of the Equality Commission for NI will continue to be:

- Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay
- Other anti-discrimination legislation
- Section 75 (1) and (2)
- Good Relations Forum
- Powers and duties

Our mission is to promote...advise...enforce

Commission’s approach

- Influence and shape public policy
- Addressing persistent inequalities from strong evidence base
- Capitalising on NI public policy initiatives
- Challenging others, challenging ourselves

Maureen Hetherington

Community Relations Council

The Community Relations Council was formed in January 1990 as an independent company and registered charity. Its strategic aim is to promote ‘a peaceful and fair society based on reconciliation and mutual trust through support for groups and by increasing public awareness and encouraging constructive debate on the future of Northern Ireland.’

Some of the issues we deal with are:

- Dealing with the legacy of the conflict
- Reconciling communities
- Challenging and tackling sectarianism

Clearly, although there is now a political settlement, these are all still important issues. Sectarianism is not a thing of the past. The Good Relations Duty 1998 and more recently the development of a government strategy for A Shared Future (ASF), which operates as a complementary partner to the Racial Equality Strategy (RES) are put in place to deal with the legacy of the past and promote more inclusion and integration of men and women from all backgrounds.



As a community relations practitioner, in addition to my role as a member of CRC Executive, I do a lot of work with women and women's organisations and think that the development of capacity is extremely important in gaining the involvement of women in public life and in promoting Good Relations.

There is a lack of capacity and self-esteem in so many women in the community. I am reminded of a meeting where a woman insisted on keeping on her coat and sitting by the door. It was, she said, so that if she was challenged she would be able to walk out the door. This was a single identity group, but she did not even have the confidence to sit in the group.

There are many other public issues such as:

- Exploring our cultural traditions in safe spaces
- Shared spaces v's contested spaces – does everyone have the same access, do they feel safe, do they feel intimidated because of the cultural traditions of the 'other' community. This relates to town centres, residential areas, leisure facilities. This year in Derry there was an initiative to explore how young people in their school uniforms can often feel scared and intimidated in the town centre, it explored these feelings through street theatre and what needs to happen to transform people's attitude and ensure everyone has equal rights to enjoy and use that space regardless of their background.
- How we interact on a daily basis
What choices do we have in terms of where we work, live, socialise, where our children are educated.

We are more divided than before. I come from Derry/Londonderry. We still need agreement on a name for our city.

CRC is supportive of all initiatives that will tackle sectarianism and racism. The shadow of sectarianism hangs over everyone and Council wants to support communities, voluntary and statutory organisations and individuals to engage and explore the legacy of the conflict, discover ways to enter into dialogue, listen to the different perspectives that make up our society and, through continued dialogue, reconcile our differences and recognise that difference must be acknowledged and respected. As Antoinette has outlined, new legislation was introduced in the NI Act 1998 – Section 75 (2) – have due regard for good relations – race, religion and political opinion. The work of the Community Relations Council is complimented by the Good Relations duty,

Government's Role

Council was pleased to see the Direct Rule government develop the A Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland.

This strategy's vision is:

"The establishment over time of a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere, and where all people are treated impartially. A society where there is equity, respect for diversity and a recognition of our interdependence".

Policy Priority Areas

- Tackling the Visible Manifestations of Sectarianism and Racism.
- Reclaiming Shared Space
- Reducing Tensions at Interface Areas
- Shared Education
- Shared Communities
- Supporting Good Relations through Diversity and Cultural Diversity
- Developing Shared Workplaces
- Good Relations, Community Development and Tackling Disadvantage
- Ensuring that Voice is Given to Victims
- Shared Services

Government also recognises the contributions made for example, by employers, churches and other faith-based organisations, minority ethnic groups, trade unions, children's organisations, women's groups, health organisations and youth organisations. These organisations continue to have a role to play in helping build relationships across Northern Ireland. These contributions will be important as Northern Ireland moves forward to a shared society.

The Triennial Action Plan (TAP) when launched fell short of the proposed actions in the Strategy document but was welcomed as a commitment from Government to pursue this agenda. This Action Plan has since been followed by a Baseline Indicators Report which describes in fuller detail the monitoring and evaluation process of the strategy and action plan. At regional level, the Challenge Programme, which was to implement the strategy at Council level has been hindered by the delays in the proposed Local Government reform through RPA.

The strategy is not perfect, but this is why the TAP is critical in that we make suggestions as to how it could be improved, what further actions could take place to strengthen outcomes and ensure real delivery on the ground.

- Work at Community Level
- CRC models of good practice



On the ground there is so much happening. From the women's sector we support a number of initiatives:

Women of the World are a women's group who seek to train up women to deliver cultural diversity training to schools across the County Fermanagh. They also present quarterly cultural events in partnership with other ethnic minority groups in NI to encourage Good Relations and promote an appreciation of community development within Fermanagh. They have been extremely successful to date in enhancing their committee membership, training up local and migrant women in cultural diversity training, delivery of Community Development programmes to a number of primary and secondary schools and in hosting events such as celebrations of Islamic, Chinese and African culture.

Women into Politics aim to deliver a 'Dialogue - Talking and Taking Part' Project. Through Dialogue and Discussion they facilitate political discussion amongst diverse women who share common concerns and experiences, but who have different views and aspirations. These events encourage women in an exchange of views and experiences with women from different backgrounds that may be seen as opposing or at least as different from their own. They also have the opportunity to discuss issues directly with policy makers and with elected representatives, who sit on panels and or/attend events, further empowering participants to make a difference in their communities.

Talking and Taking Part events in the last reporting period have focused on 'transition' and conflict resolution, providing women with opportunities to be informed about societal and political changes which are impacting on their lives and to discuss and strategize around these. TTP aims to facilitate discussion among women who share common concerns and often experiences but who have different and diverse views and aspirations. Through discussion and debate, women are building positive relationships by acknowledging and respecting their similarities and differences. Opportunities are being created through TTP, for women to develop positive relations with other women, within and beyond their own communities and to build positive working relationships with their local politicians and policy makers.

Hopefully from this conference today, WRDA will identify gaps, barriers and opportunities as to how the women's sector currently works to improve good relations and how they can contribute further to A Shared Future. I'm sure many of you are involved in the sensitive work of community relations – often it is done very quietly on the ground, often you will face many barriers – timing of meetings, gatekeepers, funding, understanding of the issues.

Community Relations work and the work of building a truly equal Shared Future is not an easy task – it will not happen overnight. CRC has been in business since the early 90's and as I have already said problems still remain. Although not to the same extent, and of course many parts of our society can and do live in isolation from the difficulties, but they do exist and Council wants to work with all those who have an interest in challenging sectarianism.

Eileen Chan-Hu

Ballymena Inter-cultural Forum

I am Belfast born Protestant Chinese born and bred and there are occasions when I view myself in many different ways - as Chinese, as a young woman and as a NI person. In many different circumstances, each of these comes to the fore. I started off my life working in an ordinary job in the workforce and then became involved in working with the Chinese community. This gave me a new perspective and made me see myself as part of an ethnic minority.

In my current role working with the new immigrant communities, I am perceived not as a woman or as a Chinese person, but as a local person who understands all of the local culture and conditions in NI. I am thus viewed as a Belfast Protestant.

When I take up my new post as Director of the Chinese Welfare Association, I will return to a role of working with the Chinese community, which will again be strange, as they will have certain stereotypes and expectations of me.

It is important to bear this multi dimensional role when exploring gender and diversity.

There are many issues facing women immigrants in particular. There is a stereotype of Asian women as sex workers or as bought brides. Many experience problems with work life balance and sometimes long periods of separation from children. There are language and communication difficulties that prevent some from working in front line roles, thus leading to lack of visibility in more 'important' jobs.

Women work in a labour market characterised by gender inequality in the first place, so they carry a double burden of their gender and their ethnicity. There are problems with pregnancy and maternity services, with lack of translation, which increases women's dependency on their husbands. There is an urgent need for information.



The election of Anna Lo as an Assembly member has given us a positive image of a Chinese woman, but there are very few minority ethnic women in public life.

There are also internal difficulties in migrant communities themselves, relating to previous cultural situations and changes in gender roles when people reach NI. Minority ethnic groups are concerned in case they get caught up in the internal divisions in NI and we must address this in any proposals for a Shared Future. For example, will 'Protestant Slovaks' and 'Catholic Poles' have sectarian fights and live in segregated areas in the future?

Here is a quote from Marizete:

Because I have darker skin, people think I am Portuguese and therefore assume I am a Catholic. For this reason I avoid some parts of Dungannon.

A member of the Bangladeshi community said:

Local people who want to do something for ethnic minorities tend to want to group them all together.....being put together with other ethnic groups can make us feel vulnerable unless we have enough support'

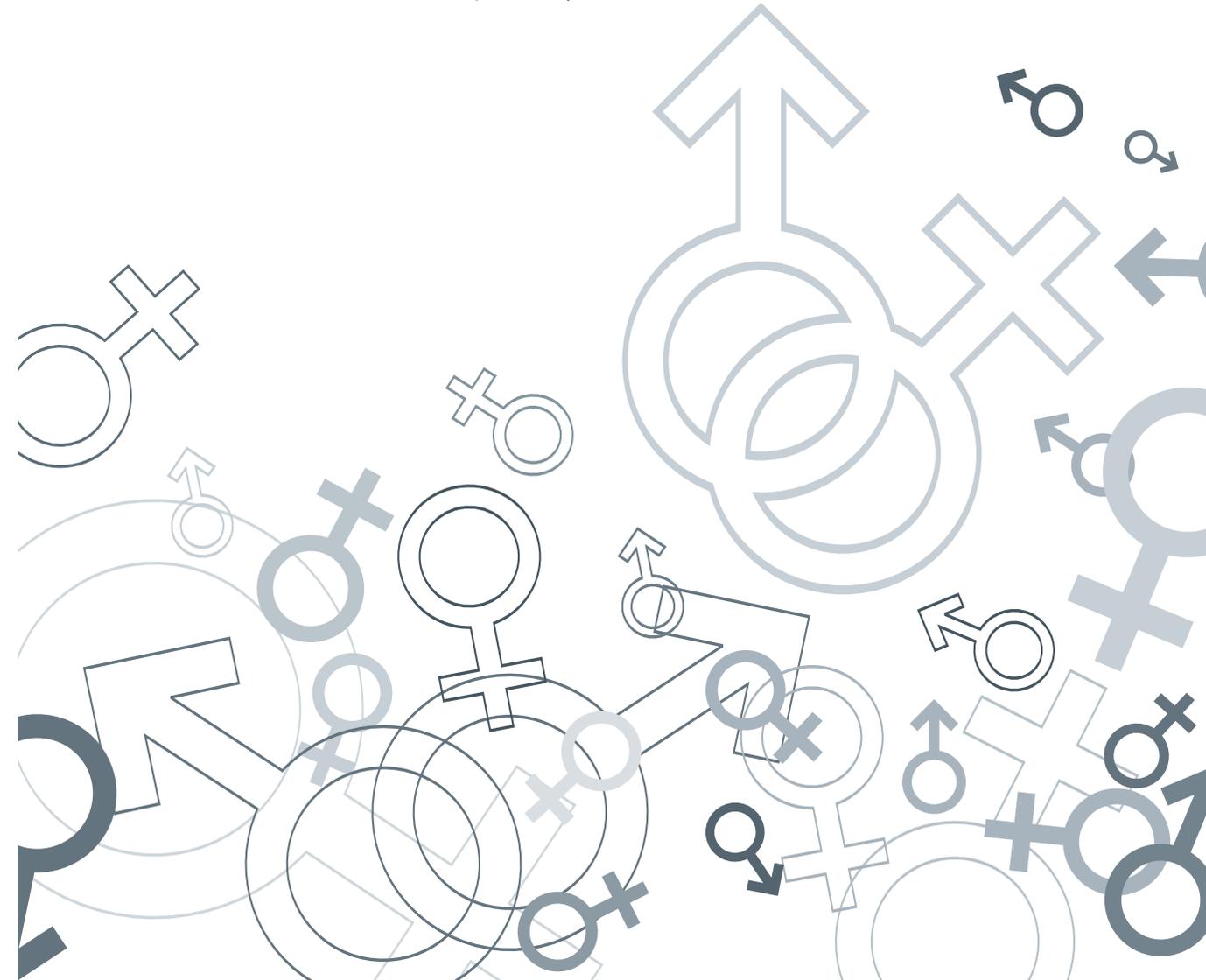
Ballymena has become more segregated since the murder of Michael McIlveen. Where do minority ethnic groups live in this divided town - how can we provide shared space for everyone that reflects all cultural traditions and also ensures physical safety?

Minority ethnic groups were very involved in the original consultation to develop the policy A Shared Future, as the late Fee Ching Leong ensured that she got sufficient resources from OFM/DFM to host extensive consultations. We felt that was a model of good consultation, we got our view across and had interpreters provided to facilitate the process.

Any review of a Shared Future should develop the same model for all sectors that require it. This would ensure that consultation is inclusive and that diversity is truly promoted.

Because I have darker skin, people think I am Portuguese and therefore assume I am a Catholic. For this reason I avoid some parts of Dungannon.

Marizete
quoted by Eileen Chan-Hu





Dawn Purvis

PUP MLA

I have limited knowledge of 'A Shared Future' policy and am pleased that this is the beginning of a conversation about the policy, as most people at this conference are probably uninformed about it also. The objective of eliminating sexism and violence against women are not in ASF, but women in my community are afraid – in their home, walking in the street, etc. In considering my input, I looked at my various roles and related them to ASF as follows:

I experience the lack of Good Relations in my various roles in the following ways:

As a woman:

- I need to live in a society that has a commitment to eliminating sexism, violence against women, and makes the streets safe for us. I want to be able to walk in public spaces without fear
- I need to be valued and respected in all aspects of my life, home, work, social and cultural
- I need to be able to watch an Orange march without being called 'bigot' and to participate in a ceili/traditional session without being called a 'traitor'
- Women are not promoted into leadership within the protestant community and there are many women who have been vocal in their criticism of me for stepping outside accepted roles

As a mother:

- I sought an integrated primary school for my two sons, but they were over subscribed. When I sought to have them enrolled in secondary school, I was told that they could not go as they had not attended integrated primary schools
- I would like my children to live in an integrated community, not in culturally neutral housing, but in a space where everyone's symbols were respected
- I would like safer neighbourhoods where my children can walk in all areas without being attacked because of their school uniform

As a politician

- I would like policies that promote a shared future in:
 - Shared schools
 - Shared housing
 - Shared services

More importantly there needs to be a cultural change in the whole political area, in place of the lip service that is currently paid to ASF and equality. ASF must include policies relating to women on the ground, as home makers, childminders and all our roles. We need a cultural change in the whole political arena. There are grey suits, men, only a few women, nothing has changed. Parties talk about human rights and ASF but pay lip service. They protect each other, answer questions the way they are supposed to. But which parties are promoting policies for shared services?

The level of Assembly debate at present is characterised by sexist terminology and attitudes, sectarian attitudes and stereotyping. It is very depressing and shows the level of mistrust that exists.

There are several very important issues coming up that women will need to lobby on - the closure of local schools and the implementation of water rates. We need to think of politics at the local level.

You are the expert if you have experienced it!!

There is a double burden for women politicians, most of us have to come home and do the next shift at home in terms of housework, cooking, childcare. This does put women off.

The two Unionist parties in the assembly reflect the lack of importance given to women in the unionist/loyalist community because they pay lip service to equality but hold to the merit principle only. For this reason, a motion to set up an all-party committee on women's involvement in the Assembly fell at the first hurdle.

In spite of this, however, it is important that women take pro-active action. Politics is not someone else's responsibility. If you want things changed you have to participate, or else nothing is going to change. Stand for office yourself, don't leave it to other people.



Jennifer McCann

SF MLA

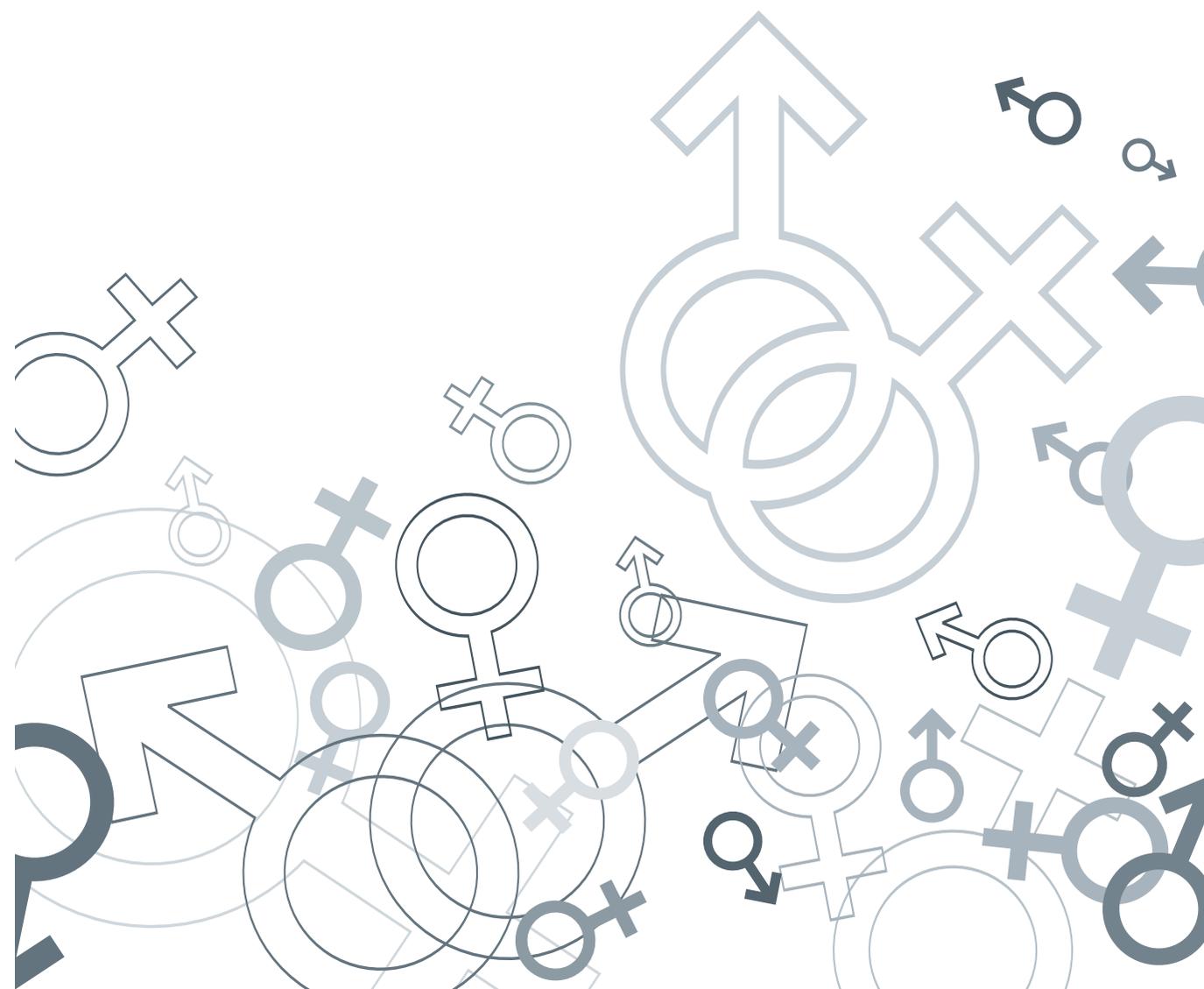
The community in West Belfast suffered structural inequality for years before the conflict and that has to be acknowledged. There is a need to address the legacy of the conflict through truth recovery and clarity on the definition of victim. Some appear to be less of a victim if killed by plastic bullets or loyalists. This needs to be part of ASF. Within this examination, the role of women needs to be examined and their contribution remembered. Women were in the forefront of their communities. They had to undertake that role because the men were in jail. There were very strong women who took ownership of campaigns and who were positive role models. We need to remember their contribution. However, it is very difficult for women to be involved in politics.

After the 1981 Hunger Strikes, when women played a major political role in supporting the protests, the Sinn Féin Women's Department was set up and this was the first step to the fuller inclusion of women. Sinn Féin is still to the fore in promoting women and has the highest number of female MLAs but there is still a long way to go. For example, it provides a crèche for its women's conference, but not a crèche for most of its other major conferences. Political parties need to encourage and develop women through policies that foster participation, crèches at all conferences, and it is important to have a committee to investigate women's participation set up at the Assembly. We need to keep that issue on the political agenda.

There needs to be more than just lip service to including women and the structures of the Assembly need to be made women friendly. In terms of work/life balance, it is still the case that women MLAs will have the double burden of housework and childcare when they return home after a long day at the Assembly, and this is a disincentive to the participation of more women in politics. The role of women in the Nationalist/Republican community is high, and women are in leadership roles, but again, there is still some way to go, and an ongoing need to support and promote women to get involved. For women on the ground, the issues that are important to them include anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse and the high rate of suicide. We need to make that real for people and see how we can make a difference. It is important for people to lobby. The concept of two communities needs to be changed, as society is more diverse now than ever, but also the role of the state as a factor needs to be acknowledged. Structural inequalities are stark, and one example remains that of Hydebank prison, where women are serving jail terms for relatively minor offences, such as non-payment of fines, and where they experience much worse conditions than the male prisoners. The inbuilt structural inequalities due to the role of the state in the conflict and the reflection of this in its prison institutions amongst others, is something that needs to be considered in any future policies.

Gender has to mean real things to real people on the ground. As the Sinn Féin spokesperson on women I have had meetings with women from all over the north and I share their sense of inequality and frustration. Hopefully we will get to a shared space. Not just two communities but society in all its diversity.

Jennifer McCann



**Eleanor Jordan**

Co-ordinator, Windsor Women's Centre

Windsor Women's Centre was established in 1990 and has always been committed to providing for the vital services of the diverse needs of local women. Situated in the 'Village' area of South Belfast, the centre has 29 staff working with a mostly local management committee of 18 volunteers. Working hours are flexible and most of the staff work part time/job share, thus providing much sought after local working opportunities in an area of high social need. We currently have 59 women from 19 different countries enrolled in our classes. Three women from minority ethnic backgrounds are now employed and all class users are offered diversity training.

We have worked over the years, as have all the local Women's Centres, to promote diversity and a shared future through intercommunity and cross border work. Our partner group is Footprints Women's Centre, based in Poleglass and we have recently started work with Derry Women's Centre through The Women's Centres Regional Partnership. We are also involved in an intensive three year cross border programme.

All Women's Centres have promoted gender equality and good relations and have pushed boundaries in our work at local level and in areas of high disadvantage. This has not been reflected at policy level and the Shared Future policy is not gender proofed to reflect the particular needs of women. We are very willing to assist in the gender proofing of such policies and believe our extensive experience will be invaluable in the review of the Shared Future strategy.

One of the gender issues of particular importance for consideration within ASF is the fact that, since the end of 'the troubles', domestic violence levels have risen. This needs to be publicly acknowledged and tackled if there is to be a shared future that includes women as equals and recognizes their different and specific needs.

In order to maintain good relations within our local community, we also take a lead in local issues of interest to both genders. We started the debate about housing regeneration locally at our International Women's Day celebration and this was followed up later by two local housing protests that were supported by the general community and focused attention on serious housing regeneration needs. We are involved in local regeneration through representation on a number of local agencies, including Partnership Boards and the Greater Village Regeneration Trust.

We have been impressed by some local development strategies which recognise specific gender needs. For example, within our local neighbourhood regeneration strategy, the Department of Social Development has stated that action plans are deliberately targeted to benefit women more than men. They state the reason as:

Single parenting and women's programmes are a significant feature of regeneration activities. Historically it has been difficult to encourage those in most acute need to take up related programmes and in implementing the strategy we are seeking to address this.

We believe this is an example of gender proofing that could be adopted by other government agencies to better promote gender equality through recognition of differential needs and impacts. We have faced challenges and pushed boundaries, but in doing so we believe we truly have worked within a feminist ethos and promoted a shared future. It would be a good start for future policies to include the following:

We commit the Shared Future policy to eliminating gender inequality and violence against women.

Anne McVicker

Chief Executive, WomensTEC

Established in 1993, WomensTEC provides facilities to enable women's participation in non-traditional training and employment, especially in the construction, ICT and Environmental industries, where there is historical under-representation.

The agency is based at a North Belfast interface which was once considered dangerous and inaccessible to particular sections of the population. WTEC now welcomes and provides safe training opportunities for women from the Catholic and Protestant communities and increasingly women from minority ethnic groups and of varied sexuality. We have thus contributed in a major way to developing shared space in an area that was once closed to many sections of the population.

We are still however, battling major complacency around the exclusion of women from all areas of training and the job market where there are still high levels of work segregation leading to disparities in earned income between men and women.



Government appears unwilling to take positive action to redress this, and to understand and support the role of agencies such as our own. This was exacerbated by the government review of the women's sector, which selected out 14 groups for funding and created an exclusion factor for the remaining majority of groups.

There are still many barriers to women and young girls who seek to undertake 'non traditional' training in mainstream agencies and these are some examples: BIFHE:

- Lack of affordable childcare offered to students
- Barriers of age and gender
- Employers lack of commitment to giving placements to women

There is limited attempt by employers, colleges, training agencies to address historical inequalities because generally most places on training courses are filled and they do not need to target women. There is no mention of the under-representation of women in the Skills Strategy from the Department of Education and Learning.

There is no 'Shared Future' in trades, training, and employment in non traditional sectors. If inequalities are to be redressed, then this must be seriously addressed and positively changed. A 'Shared Future' must address the gender imbalance in the workforce and ensure that policies and funding support is put in place to support those who are working to provide access for women.

Tony MacAuley *MacAuley Associates, Co-author of Baseline Study of Rural Women's Infrastructure in Northern Ireland*

We carried out a baseline study of Rural Women's Infrastructure in Northern Ireland. This was commissioned by the Rural Community Network and Rural Women's Sectoral Programme Consortium and was carried out between February and June 2007. It will be published later this month. It involved an extensive baseline of all organisations or groups, in rural areas run by women, who organise activities for women, aged 16 years or over and provides a comprehensive survey of rural women's groups and organisations. Our methods involved: Interviews and Focus Groups with 1,238 rural women's groups and organisations in Northern Ireland. Our findings are as follows:

- Largest number of groups are faith based women's groups. 37.8% of all groups are local church groups. The vast majority of these groups are Protestant church groups, and most are Presbyterian Women's Associations and Mothers Unions (Church of Ireland).

- Other main groups are:
 - Women's Institutes
 - Community Based Women's Groups (mainly in the West)
 - Young Women's Groups (mainly Protestant church based Girls Brigades)
 - Sports groups -mainly women's Gaelic sports groups (Camogie Clubs and Ladies Gaelic Football Associations)
 - Very few business, ethnic minority, training and farming women's groups and organisations

The two main regional rural women's organisations are:

The Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)

The Federation of Women's Institutes of Northern Ireland

The main sub regional rural women's organisations are:

Rural Women's Networks

Sub regional structures within church, sport and business groups.

- Mainly church based women's groups and less community based women's groups in predominantly Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist areas and mainly community based women's groups in predominantly Catholic/Nationalist/Republican areas.
- Shared purpose of social, educational and community development.
- The community based women's groups tended to work with other community based women's groups, their sub regional Rural Women's Network and their Rural Support Network.
- Church based groups tend to work with other church based groups and the sub regional and regional structures of their group.
- Limited awareness, networking and collaboration across the separate infrastructures.
- Diversity (Survey)
 - 60% do not monitor the level of diversity within their group
 - the majority indicated that their members/participants were predominantly (70% or more) from one community background
 - the majority said that they were engaged in cross community work
 - 69% said they have links with groups from a different community background
 - low levels of participation in groups by women who are under 25, who are divorced or separated, who are neither Protestant nor Catholic, who are from an ethnic minority group, who are lesbian or who have a disability
- A significant number of groups were involved in cross community contact, peace and reconciliation work and cross border work
- Very few groups were involved in addressing domestic violence/refuge provision, sexual orientation or politics



Representation

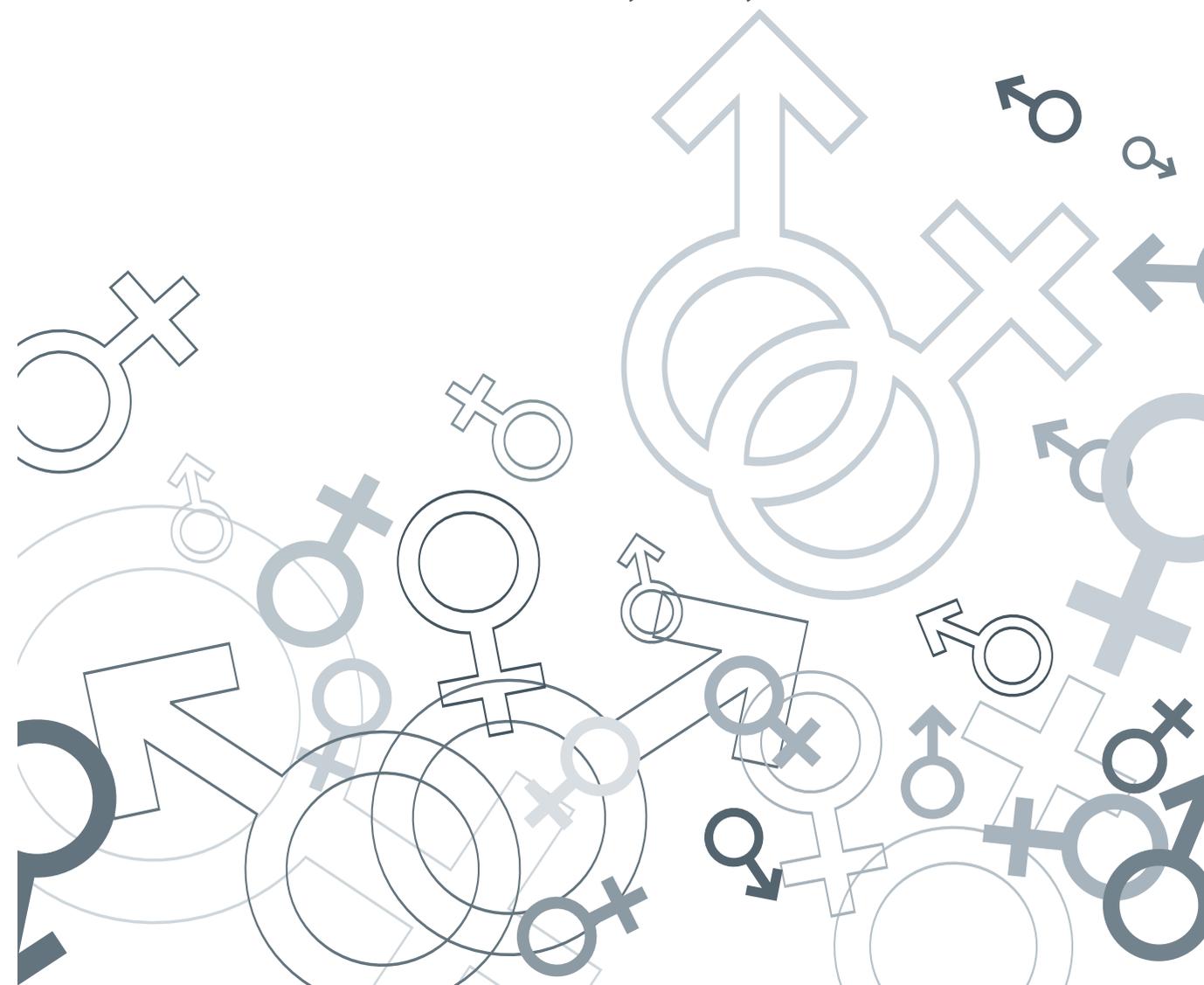
- Women play a central role as active volunteers within local rural community development groups and voluntary organisations.
- Rural women are significantly under represented as elected representatives in the NI Assembly, among rural MLAs, on rural local authorities, on key education bodies and on the Boards of Local Strategy Partnerships.
- Rural women are significantly under represented on a range of key strategic rural development organisations.
- Structural and organisational culture barriers are more significant factors than skills gaps in the lower representation of women in political and public bodies
- Men are under represented on the staff of key rural community development organisations.
- Social Capital
 - rural women's groups and organisations are contributing to most dimensions of social capital within local communities
 - the aspect of social capital in which many groups are less active is political empowerment
 - the mainly 'single identity' nature of parallel infrastructures does not contribute to wider social cohesion or 'bridging' social capital.
- With a level of experience of cross community interaction among many rural women's groups and organisations, there is the potential for the rural women's groups and organisations to play an important role in 'bridging social capital' between the two larger communities in rural Northern Ireland.

Recommendations

- DARD : develop a long term strategy for women in rural development as part of its Gender Equality Strategy
 - Action plan for redressing gender imbalance
 - Strategy for removing cultural and structural barriers
 - Long term strategy for sustaining regional and sub regional support to local women's groups
 - Mentoring Support Initiative
 - Targeted support re farming, business and social economy
- Rural Women's Stakeholders should develop a shared strategy:
 - Increase connections between infrastructures in Catholic and Protestant communities
 - Develop 'bridging social capital' role to contribute to a more shared future in rural communities
 - Increase participation of under represented groups
 - Increase number of groups addressing ethnic minority issues, domestic violence, sexual orientation and politics.
 - Increase rural women's representation as elected representatives.
 - Engage rural women and men together in gender awareness/equality training

With a level of experience of cross community interaction among many rural women's groups and organizations, there is the potential for the rural women's groups and organisations to play an important role in 'bridging social capital' between the two larger communities in rural Northern Ireland.

Tony MacAuley



I do a lot of work with women and women's organisations and think that the development of capacity is extremely important in gaining the involvement of women in public life and in promoting Good Relations.

Maureen Hetherington

3 | Recommendations from Workshops/Round Tables

Each of the Round Tables made a series of recommendations that are summarised in this section. A wider view of the input may be gained from the following statements:

- *What struck me in the honesty and inspirational quality of Dawn Purvis's input was the following: "You are the expert if you have experienced it"*
- *Despite being 52% of the population women are still discriminated against and barriers to their full and equal representation have not been addressed*
- *I was delighted that the women's drama piece highlighted the role of women as more than just Peacemakers in our society*
- *What stood out was the call to get involved, get active and to challenge not only others but ourselves*
- *The end of Antoinette's presentation particularly struck me - it was the need to exert the challenge function - not only about others but in relation to ourselves*
- *Get active, don't just criticise, recognise that we have the ability to influence and lobby and affect policy change at all levels,*
- *The presentations highlighted that government has just paid lip services to the Shared Future policy - for example, look at the examples of domestic violence and the fact that a Junior Minister in the Assembly can make negative statements about gay people*
- *Gender has not been strongly highlighted in ASF and there is complete under representation of women in the wider political process*
- *The ECNI presentation highlighted a widening pay gap between men and women*
- *Women are being pushed out of roles they held during the conflict and the whole process of peace making has now been taken over by males*



- Develop community planning partnerships
- Develop monitoring strategies for gender and rural proofing
- Challenge political parties on their gender equality policies
- Lobby those who oppose equality and do not support us
- Highlight women role models
- Challenge stereotyping

To include women in 'A Shared Future'

- Integrate policies such as the Gender Equality Strategy and Racial Equality Strategy into A Shared Future for a more integrated approach
- Recognise the different impacts of political/sectarian division on women eg. community and school safety; choices for integrated education; integrated housing and public space
- Community Relations Council to gender its work
- Gender champions to be appointed to all government departments

To develop and broaden the women's sector

- Develop links with organisations like the Mother's Union, faith-based groups
- Develop sustainable funding to support the sector
- Government to institute a review into the needs of the women's sector
- Obtain resources for policy engagement
- Greater linkage of the sector with other groups representing women's multi-identities

General recommendations:

To increase the participation of women within the community

- Family-friendly structures
- Work-life balance
- Encouragement of uptake of paternity leave
- Increased childcare provision
- More focus on the specific impact on women of policies such as school closures, water charges, countryside planning
- Make policies accessible to all through a bottom-up approach
- Confidence-building measures

To improve the representation of women in political life and other power structures

- Lobby for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 'Women, Peace and Security'
- Implement the strategic objectives of the Gender Equality Strategy
- Greater resources for the political education of women
- Equality Commission to be more pro-active



4 | Conclusions

It is clear from conference contributors and from participants alike that there is strong support for applying a gender lens to the review of A Shared Future Strategy in Northern Ireland. The Gender Equality Strategy highlights the impact of past conflict and current segregation at all levels on men and women. Although all experience the negative impacts of sectarianism, women have a dual discrimination to deal with because of our gender. This reinforces the negative impacts of sectarianism, racism and homophobia. However, whilst there is mention of the work of women's organisations in ASF, there is no commitment to tackling sexism and violence against women alongside the commitment to challenging sectarianism and racism.

This conference report highlights that women strongly advocate seizing the new policy opportunities presented by the review of ASF through adopting and resourcing actions around UN Resolution 1325 'Women, Peace and Security', in order to promote a shared future for women as well as men in the future.

This will involve gender proofing all policies, in recognition of the fact that women's issues are multi dimensional. An example is the closure of rural schools and legislation banning house building in the countryside. This impacts more severely on women who need to travel longer distances to drop off children to school, who cannot live in new houses near parental support for childcare, who experience closure of after schools and crèche provision as a direct result of school closures and banning of new house building.

The conference drama highlighted how women's roles in the past conflict have been stereotyped and reduced to that of passive peacemakers, whilst in reality, women have been active in military organisations and have been imprisoned for their beliefs. There is very little focus on these needs due to gender blindness in policy making.

Those who spoke at the conference strongly recommended a pro-active role in challenging rather than complaining, with Dawn Purvis stating: *If you experience the issue, you are the expert*, and Antoinette Mc Keown, ECNI, ending with the quote: *We should constantly challenge our own role as well as that of others*. Eileen Chan Hu also challenged us with her presentation of her role as Belfast born Protestant Chinese and as a young woman within the Chinese community.



All contributions highlighted the need to recognise the multi dimensional aspects of being female and the need for policy makers of applying a sensitive policy lens to every issue. The varied contributions and wide range of recommendations from the conference form what conference chair Margaret Ward, WRDA, calls: *The start of the conversation on how to gender A Shared Future and ensure that future policies are not 'gender neutral'*.

One of the gender issues of particular importance for consideration within ASF is the fact that, since the end of 'the troubles', domestic violence levels have risen. This needs to be publicly acknowledged and tackled if there is to be a shared future that includes women as equals and recognizes their different and specific needs.

Eleanor Jordan

5 | Appendix

- Agenda
- Briefing Paper on A Shared Future
- List of Attendees

Agenda

9.30 - 10.00	Registration and Tea / Coffee
10.00 - 10.30	Welcome: Margaret Ward, WRDA Keynote addresses: Antoinette McKeown – Equality Commission NI Maureen Hetherington – Community Relations Council
10.30 - 10.40	Women's Drama 'A Woman's Part', Community Arts Forum
10.40 - 10.45	Question and Answer Session
10.45 - 11.15	Dawn Purvis MLA - Political opinion and A Shared Future Jennifer McCann MLA - Political opinion and A Shared Future Eileen Chan-Hu – Minority ethnic groups and A Shared Future
11.15 - 11.45	The community-based women's sector: Eleanor Jordan - Windsor Women's Centre Anne McVicar - Women'sTec Rural women: Tony Macauley - Rural women and issues for A Shared Future
11.45 - 12.45	Round Table Discussion on all presentations
12.45 - 1.30	Lunch
1.30 - 2.00	Feedback of recommendations from Round Table
2.00 - 2.30	Question and Answer Session
2.30 - 2.45	Evaluation Next steps
2.45 - 3.00	Depart



Briefing Paper

A Shared Future on Improving Community Relations in Northern Ireland

Background to the strategy

- The consultation document A Shared Future on Improving Community Relations in Northern Ireland was launched in January 2003.

Government was urged by contributors to deliver policies for good relations which would address the following (in rank order):

- Eliminate sectarianism and racism and to enable individuals to live and work without fear or intimidation.
- Reduce tension and conflict at interface areas.
- Support the development of integrated/shared communities where people wish to learn, live, work and play together.

There were recurring criticisms of A Shared Future along the following lines:

- There cannot be good relations until there is equality of opportunity and outcome and the full protection for human rights for all in society. The document therefore considers good relations in a policy vacuum.
- The actual and potential role of the voluntary and community, business and trade union sectors in addressing good relations is currently undervalued and under-utilised.

A Shared Future Strategy

The policy – A SHARED FUTURE - Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland was published on Monday 21 March 2005.

Vision

“The establishment over time of a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere, and where all people are treated impartially. A society where there is equity, respect for diversity and a recognition of our interdependence”.

Policy Objectives

- eliminate sectarianism, racism and all forms of prejudice to enable people to live and work without fear or intimidation;
- reduce tension and conflict at interface areas;
- facilitate the development of a shared community where people wish to learn, live, work and play together;

- promote civic-mindedness via citizenship education through school and lifelong learning;
- protect members of minorities (whether for example by religion, race, or any other grounds) and mixed marriages from intimidation and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice;
- ensure that all public services are delivered impartially and guided by economy, efficiency and effectiveness;
- shape policies, practices and institutions to enable trust and good relations to grow;
- encourage understanding of the complexity of our history, through museums and a common school curriculum;
- support cultural projects which highlight the complexity and overlapping nature of identities and their wider global connections;
- support and learn from organisations working across ethnic divides for reconciliation, including those operating on a north-south basis;
- ensure voice is given to the diverse victims of violence in Northern Ireland, including via archives and victim-centred reconciliation events;
- encourage communication, tolerance and trust across Northern Ireland, but particularly in areas where communities are living apart;
- promote dialogue between and mutual understanding of, different faiths and cultural backgrounds, both long standing within Northern Ireland and recent arrivals

Making it happen at Central, Regional and Local Government, Community and Individual level

Summary

- cross-departmental Good Relations Panel to drive forward strategic framework and policy
- triennial action plans, including report on the ‘health’ of community/good relations, with annual progress reports to the Assembly
- OFMDFM to have enhanced policy and challenge role
- leadership required at all levels: political, civic and community
- government policies will positively promote good relations
- enhanced and broadly based Community Relations Council
- enhanced district council Good Relations Challenge Programme
- review of community relations legislation



3.1 Action at Central Government Level

- Government will make a long-term commitment to improving relations in Northern Ireland.
- Establish a cross departmental Good Relations Panel, chaired by the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, to prepare a co-ordinated triennial plan, underpinned by S75.
- These plans will be reviewed annually and rolled forward.
- Policies, practices and institutions will be shaped to enable trust and good relations to grow.
- Review the current community relations legislation.
- OFMDFM to develop an enhanced policy and challenge role backed up by research capacity, monitoring and evaluation.

3.2 Action at Regional Level

- Support for a regional body, independent of Government to promote good relations.
- Transform the existing Community Relations Council into an enhanced organisation more broadly representative of civic society with elected representatives.
- Functions to include:
 - challenging progress towards a shared future;
 - connecting actions at regional, sub-regional and local level;
 - providing support, training and guidance to organisations;
 - commissioning of research;
 - promoting good practice (with Equality Commission) within their respective responsibilities;
 - providing funds to support good relations;
 - reporting progress to Ministers and the Assembly.

3.3 Action at Local Government Level

- Current District Council Community Relations programme to be phased out by March 2007 or in line with changes resulting from the Review of Public Administration.
- Creation of a Good Relations Challenge Programme – an enhanced, permanent programme for the promotion of good relations through the new District Council arrangements.
- Development by each Council of a 3 year local good relations plan against which funds can be drawn. The plan will be linked to the Government's triennial action plan and reporting arrangements to the Assembly or Westminster.
- Plans to be approved by OFMDFM and reviewed annually to ensure satisfactory progress against agreed targets.
- The revamped Community Relations Council to provide training and development, support, advice and guidance.

3.4 Action at Community Level

3.4.1 There is a clear recognition that the voluntary and community sector has made a powerful contribution to the achievement of better relations between communities. It is important that that role is underscored, especially in the most disadvantaged and interface areas. It is recognised also that there is a relationship between community development and community relations. The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the Investing Together report on resourcing the sector are very important developments. The development of and investment in, social capital – particularly bridging capital – through community development can help promote relationship building within and between communities. This is particularly so in the work being taken forward across government to tackle the problems facing working class areas - particularly, though not confined to, loyalist areas.

3.4.2 Government also recognises the contributions made for example by employers, churches and other faith-based organisations, minority ethnic groups, trades' unions, children's organisations, women's groups, health organisations and youth organisations. These organisations continue to have a role to play in helping build relationships across Northern Ireland. These contributions will be important as Northern Ireland moves forward to a shared society.

3.4.3 It is important for all strands of civic society to play a role at the local level in the preparation of action plans to promote relationship building.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Summary

- Need for short, medium and long term indicators
- Monitoring by a regional body with annual report to Assembly
- Use of attitudinal, administrative and new sources of data
- Measurement at project, programme and government levels

The First Triennial Action Plan (TAP) 2006 - 2009 was launched by the Rt Hon Lord Rooker MP on Thursday 27 April 2006.

The TAP when launched fell short of the proposed actions in the Strategy document but was welcomed as a commitment from Government to pursue this agenda. This Action plan has since been followed by a Baseline Indicators Report which describes in fuller detail the monitoring and evaluation process of the strategy and action plan.

At regional level, the Challenge Programme, which was to implement the strategy at Council level has been hindered by the delays in the proposed Local Government reform through RPA.



Conference Attendees

NAME	ORGANISATION	NAME	ORGANISATION
Ann Marie White	WRDA Community Facilitator	Judith Cross	Equality Commission NI
Anne McVicar	Women's TEC	Kellie O'Dowd	Trademark
Antoinette McKeown	Equality Commission NI	Liz Curran	WRDA
Brid Ruddy	Brid Ruddy Associates	Louise McNeill	Belfast City Council
Caroline McCreight	WRDA Community Facilitator	Lynn Carvill	Women's Support Network
Catherine McErlean	WRDA Community Facilitator	Maggie Stewart	WRDA Community Facilitator
Charo Lanao-Madden	Rural Community Network	Maire Geraghty	WRDA Community Facilitator
Claire Conroy	Belfast City Council	Margaret Doole	Ballymoney Borough Local Strategy Partnership
Colin Ellis	Carrickfergus Borough Council	Margaret Ward	WRDA
Dawn Purvis MLA	PUP	Marie O'Prey	WRDA Community Facilitator
Deborah Webster	Presbyterian Church of Ireland	Maureen Hetherington	Community Relations Council
Dolores Wilson	WRDA	Michael Potter	Training for Women Network
Eileen Chan Hu	Ballymena Community Forum	Miriam Titterton	Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
Eimear Farrell	Irish Department of Foreign Affairs	Patricia Byrne	Sole Purpose Productions
Eleanor Jordan	Windsor Women's Centre	Pauline Perry	Border Action
Gemma Attwood	Community Relations Council	Rebecca Tracey	Sandy Row Community Forum
Geraldine McAuley	Women's Information Group	Robert Lee	Groundwork NI
Geraldine Stanley	Ballynafeigh Community Development Association	Sandy Webb	Ballynafeigh Community Development Association
Gillian Fay	North Down Borough Council	Sarah Coulter	The NEXUS Institute
Grainne Close	Tada Rural Support Network	Sarah Morris	Women's Information Group
Helena Macormac	NICEM	Shauna Crawley	WRDA
Isabel Loughran	Women Into Politics	Sunita Chada	WRDA Community Facilitator
Janet Flynn	Concorde Community Centre	Terry Deehan	NICEM
Jennifer McCann MLA	Sinn Fein	Tim Cunningham	The Committee on the Administration of Justice
Jim Gibney	Sinn Fein	Tony MacAuley	MacAuley Associates
Jim Murdock	Ards Borough Council	Una Mulgrew	The NEXUS Institute
John Gracey	Newry and Mourne District Council		



'A Shared Future' must address the gender imbalance in the workforce and ensure that policies and funding support is put in place to support those who are working to provide access for women.

Anne McVicar

Conference Apologies

NAME	ORGANISATION
Ali Copur	NITECA
Amy Frost	NI Prison Service
Anita Mukherjee	Women of the World
Ann Ward	Rural Community Network
Anne Molloy	Border Action
Bernie Laverty	Macauley Associates
Brent van der Linde	Mediation Northern Ireland
Catherine Cooke	Foyle Womens Information Network
Clr Naomi Long MLA	Alliance Party
Denise Hughes	Mediation Northern Ireland
Edna Walmsley	NIRWN
Gillian Arthur	Ards Borough Council
Godfrey McCartney	Armagh City and District Council
Hilary Harbison	Equality Unit OFMDFM
Helen Harris	Women's Information Group
Helen Lewis	Incore
Ian Wallace	Antrim Borough Council
Joan McCool	First Steps Women's Group
Lily Clarke	Women's Information Group
Lily McGeough	Women's Information Group
Lisa Adair	Carrickfergus Borough Council
Liza Kelly	TIDES Training
Lori Ann McVay	Queens University
Louise Coyle	NIRWN
Maire Ni Threasaigh	British Council - N Compass Project
Majella Murphy	NIRWN
Maria Ellis	Women of the World



Conference Apologies continued

NAME	ORGANISATION
Marie Louise McAllister	An Munia Tober
Monica McWilliams	NIHRC
Mr Lindsay Conway OBE	Presbyterian Church of Ireland
Naomi Long	NI Assembly
Pamela Matthews	Banbridge District Council
Paul Casey	Beyond Conflict
Professor Pauline Murphy	Irish Association
Sabine McAllister	Saver/Naver
Sean Henry	Magherafelt District Council
Siobhan Doherty	NIRWN
Siobhann McKeating	Women's Support Network
Stella Gilmart	Belfast City Council
Susan McCory	Falls Women's Centre
Tommy McLaughlin	Fermanagh District Council
Tracey Read	First Steps Women's Group
Valerie Moore	Women's Information Group

