



**nirwn**  
Northern Ireland  
Rural Women's Network



**Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN's) and Rural Community Network (RCN'S)**

**Response To**

**PUBLIC CONSULTATION PAPER FOR  
IRELAND'S THIRD NATIONAL ACTION  
PLAN**

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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## Background to our Organisations

**NIRWN's** (NI Rural Women's Network) vision is a rural community where women are respected and valued and where they have the opportunities, confidence and ability to visibly take up positions of power and influence in all areas of life.

NIRWN key objectives:

- Increasing the voice of rural women through giving them a voice at Policy level
- Playing an advocacy and lobbying role on behalf of rural women
- Encouraging women in decision-making and providing representation for rural women
- Information and networking opportunities for rural women
- Working within the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas Programme, funded by DSD and DARD to give a voice to rural women

### **Mission**

NIRWN's mission, as a rural regional support organisation, is to advance rural women's equality and participation in society. We will ensure rural women are recognised and supported to fully participate as equal citizens in the development of sustainable rural communities and society.

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**Rural Community Network** is a regional voluntary organisation established by community groups from rural areas in 1991 to articulate the voice of rural communities on issues relating to poverty, disadvantage and equality.

It is a membership organisation and is managed by a voluntary Board of Directors, elected every two years. Two community representatives from each of the six counties make up the main component of the Network's Board with statutory, voluntary, farming, environmental, cross border and other sectoral groups making up the rest.

Rural Community Network adopts a community development approach to its work and employs a team of staff with a broad spectrum of skills.

## Context for Rural Women in Northern Ireland

Women in NI today are still economically, culturally and politically unequal. Women continue to struggle with dominant patriarchal values and structures in every sphere of private and public life and are underrepresented in public life and the political arena where change may be influenced and enacted. The process of social change in NI has been impacted by the NI Conflict<sup>1</sup> and Post Good Friday Agreement policy making has not improved matters for women in NI<sup>2</sup>. The lack of gender parity that exists throughout Northern Irish society is, in our view, a key factor hindering the development of a new shared future. Women in NI have not been afforded the opportunity to participate equally in progressing the country from a post conflict society to a peaceful society. This is having a negative impact on their social and economic development, particularly those already experiencing disadvantage; such as rural women. It is imperative that our region has 'visible' women at decision-making level if sustainable peace is to be achieved.

This is amplified for women in rural areas due to Access Poverty<sup>3</sup>. The accessibility of education, training, work and childcare provision and the cost and availability of public transport are factors in determining women's participation; particularly in rural areas<sup>4</sup>. Women in NI remain under represented in public<sup>5</sup> and political life<sup>6</sup> and rural women's participation in public and political life is further hindered by geography and distance from decision making spaces. Even recent welcome initiatives such as; 'Women in Public Life' Programme<sup>7</sup> is based in Belfast and this is echoed in the location of the majority of public appointments; even within the wider women's sector rural women still need a stronger voice<sup>8</sup> and support: *'There are also stark inequities between Government funding for service delivery to women's groups between rural and urban (1.3% v 98.7%)'*<sup>9</sup>. It is imperative that women in rural areas are listened to and supported so that their historic invisibility is not mirrored in a post-conflict society

## Shared Society

Building peace in rural areas and communities is all about supporting the processes that lead to an absence of violence and conflict; an absence of fear of violence, a flourishing of economic, social and political justice, peaceful co-existence and the shared 'democratic' use of power. The principles of community development (equality and anti-discrimination, social justice, collective action, community empowerment and working and learning together) clearly resonate with this. Key elements of peace building in rural areas relate to breaking the silence/s (including 'polite silence', avoidance and a 'tacit culture of silence), learning to share space and the development of community and civic leaders prepared to engage in this type

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<sup>1</sup> **Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation**; Dr Helen Mc Laughlin

<sup>2</sup> **Review of Gender Issues in Northern Ireland**, Michael Potter NIAR 510-13, 2014

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2014/ofmdfm/1514.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> TRPSI Framework <https://www.daerani.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/dard/Final%20Version%20-%20Consultation%20Document%20on%20Proposals%20for%20Successor%20Framework.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Rural Women's Manifesto *Rural Women Speak NIRWN* June 2015

<sup>5</sup> Women and Public Appointments in NI

[http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2014/assembly\\_exec\\_review/11914.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2014/assembly_exec_review/11914.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Women in Politics and the NI Assembly

[http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/reports/assem\\_exec\\_review/women-in-politics.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/reports/assem_exec_review/women-in-politics.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://politicsplus.com/programmes/women/women-in-public-life-programme/>

<sup>8</sup> Evaluation of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (Final Report, June 2015)

<sup>9</sup> Evaluation of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (Final Report, June 2015)

of challenging work. The application of community development principles in practice enables people to follow a very useful and structured process of working together to identify their needs; take action to exert influence on the decisions which affect their lives; and improve their quality of life and ultimately the quality of wider community life. It also provides a mechanism by which community and public agencies can work together to improve the quality of government.

### **The Gender Principles for Dealing With Legacy of the Past**

The absence of a gendered lens and the sustained exclusion of women from dealing with the past - from Eames-Bradley to Haass-O'Sullivan and the Stormont House Agreement (SHA) - has meant that the gendered impact of the conflict and post-conflict legacy needs of women have not been adequately addressed. In response to gaps and shortcomings around gender in the SHA, The Gender Principles for Dealing with the Legacy of the Past<sup>10</sup> were developed independently. These principles avoid distinctions and hierarchies between legislation for the new mechanisms to be established and the lived experience of victims and survivors who will ultimately engage these new mechanisms. We would suggest that the Department review this for recommendations on how better our two governments could address the legacy of the past for women.

### **What do Women in NI need from a National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security?:**

We welcome that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 'National Action Plan will consider the all-island nature of the plan' as women in NI still do not have enjoy the realisation of their internationally protected rights in the same way as their sisters in Great Britain or, Ireland.

Issues that still need addressed for NI in respect of Women Peace and Security include:

- Full implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325<sup>11</sup> in NI
- The 2018 outcome of UN Committee on CEDAW into the UK concluded that the UK violates women's rights in NI in respect of healthcare access<sup>12</sup>.
- BREXIT and it current and future outworking means that women in the North who identify themselves as Irish (through the parameters set out in the Good Friday Agreement) will potentially be reliant on the Irish government to assure their Rights as recognised by the European Union.
- The UK CPS Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy<sup>13</sup> includes Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 which created a new offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship. This protection does not currently extend to women in NI leaving them more vulnerable.

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<sup>10</sup> [Gender Principle Report Sep 2015 University of Ulster](#)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/#resolution>

<sup>12</sup> [CEDAW Inquiry UK Violates Women's Rights in NI](#)

<sup>13</sup> [CPS Controlling or Coercive Behaviour](#)

- Trafficking of women within and between our two islands needs addressed in a new NAP for WPS
- Migrant women and their citizenship and protection on the island of Ireland, particularly post Brexit needs addressed by the new NAP for WPS

### **Closing Comments**

These comments represent an initial response to the development of Ireland's third National Action Plan Women, Peace and Security. NIRWN and Rural Community Network, as grassroots organisations in civil society, would like to continue our engagement with any future consultation opportunities to inform and receive updates on the development of the Third NAP WPS. We welcome the opportunity to give this our consideration and offer our continued support to the Department in its endeavours on Women, Peace and Security, which are of particular interest to our membership and the women of the North.