A Response to the SEUPB discussion document on the –

Preparation of Operational Programmes for
The EU Programme for Cross Border Territorial Cooperation
and
The EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation
2007-2013

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Introduction

Women's Support Network

The Women's Support Network (WSN), established in 1989, is an infrastructural umbrella organisation, which provides support services to, and represents over 30 groups (see Appendix 1 for full member listing) including; community-based women's centres, women's projects and women's infrastructure groups.

WSN aims to achieve social, political and economic justice through the promotion of the autonomous organisation of women. The Network aims to strengthen the collective voice of women's groups and to promote and develop networking opportunities, to enable collective action and to impact upon policy and decision making processes. The WSN provides an accessible, feminist, relevant and high quality support service and resource for its member groups. The Network is also an important information resource on issues relevant to community-based women's organisations and for other infrastructure groups, nationally and internationally.

WSN welcome the opportunity to feed into to this pre-consultation discussion on the preparation of the EU Operational Programmes. Almost all of the member groups of WSN are currently funded, or part funded through Peace II monies, via a variety of Intermediary Funding Bodies (IFBs). WSN have also attended a SEUPB seminar and roundtable on this topic on 20th June 2006. At this seminar three questions were posed for consideration –

⇒ **Can you identify projects/areas of intervention for the future programmes?**

⇒ **Who should deliver the programme locally?**

⇒ **What can be done to enhance cross-border cooperation within the new programme?**

This response will examine these three key areas

⇒ **Can you identify projects/areas of intervention for the future programmes?**

The heart of the peace building process in Northern Ireland begins with developing the capacity of individuals and groups, this leads to the development of communities and this leads to a vibrant, diverse and participative civic society. Therefore the role of Peace-building should be centred on capacity building. A research report commissioned by Women's Support Network clearly demonstrates that 'the activities of the women's sector contribute to Peace and Reconciliation' (Taillon 2000). These activities include:

Education and training

15, 000 women have enrolled in education & training classes over the Peace I & II programmes. This training is -

–women-friendly and delivered in supported learning environments

–of a high standards, leading to achievement and education awards

–capacity-building in traditional and non-traditional training.

Community & Economic Development

Through developing infrastructure for the community-based women's sector community networks & partnerships have been/are developed and enhanced, at a local and regional level, representing the interests of women and giving women a voice in communities.

Health & Well-being

Women's centres and organisations have been working on priority issues such as; mental health, families & children, smoking cessation, nutrition, alcohol & drug awareness, physical activity, sexual health, domestic and sexualised violence. They also incorporate a community development approach to healthcare with a holistic approach to health & well-being. This has been

recognised by health professionals as providing an essential and valuable service.

Information, Advice & Support

Informal advice & support services are accessible to local women in local areas; these services are women-specific and women-friendly. Women's advice services also deal with referrals from HSS professionals & agencies.

Early Years Provision

There are various forms of early year's provisions ranging from Pre-school, after-school, homework clubs and holiday programmes. This provision brings social & economic benefits to children, women, their families and communities –Childcare, which enables women to take education & training classes in their women's centre

–Childcare for women using their Centre

–Childcare for staff & volunteers

-Childcare for women who work outside the home.

Work with Young People

There is a lack of appropriate recreational and social support services for young women, and young women continue to be marginalized, however Women's Centres are helping to meet these needs through initiative such as:

- Young Mothers' projects
- Peer Education projects
- Personal development & social clubs for girls & young women

Celebrating Diversity

The Women's sector embraces a holistic approach to equality & peace-building agendas, incorporating a gender perspective to anti-sectarian, anti-racist and human rights practice and working in areas most affected by conflict. Groundbreaking work has enabled positive expressions of different communities' culture, helping in engendering respect for cultural differences.

Diversity work in the Women's sector includes cross-border, cross – cultural and cross-sectoral work across communities (geographical and interest based communities). The impact of this is should not be undervalued.

Overall then the work of the Women's sector:

Contributes to Government Priorities in
 - Education
 - Health
 - Employment
 - Social Inclusion
 - The Peace Process
 - Economic Regeneration
 - The Equality Agenda

Contributes to the Economy via:
 - Job Creation
  - Enhancing Employability
 - Community Development and Regeneration

Contributes to Society through:
Community Services and Infrastructure
 Social Cohesion and
 Peace Building

It is WSN's contention that this capacity building activity should be supported through Peace III monies.

$\Rightarrow$ **Who should deliver the programme locally?**

There have been difficulties in the administration of Peace II, primarily Peace II funded groups reported delays in vouching as a cause of financial hardship within their organisations. Other issues and suggestions include

- There needs to be a more streamlined application process with fewer intermediary bodies – all sharing information with a streamlined application process incorporating ease of accessibility and shorter, more concise applications procedures.

- Financial monitoring and evaluation should be proportionate to the amount of funding received.

- There are many good examples of 'best practice' within the women's sector, for example: many women's groups and organisations have worked hard to develop standardised and robust financial accounting systems only to find that the divergent requirements of various IFBs place great strain on finance workers within these organisations. This strain is exacerbated where projects have to work with two, three and four Peace II IFBs all with different administration systems. The development (in consultation) of a single streamlined system would be beneficial and advantageous for the groups and the IFBs. SEUPB could also do more showcasing of examples of good/best practice.

- Some caseworkers in implementing bodies have large workloads, which means they have less time to spend with their projects.

$\Rightarrow$ **What can be done to enhance cross-border cooperation within the new programme?**

The emphasis on cross-border co-operation for Peace III may play down the need for continuing work on local reconciliation. In many cases, single identity groups are willing to work with those of the 'other' identity across the border, but this may not be a priority where reconciliation is more necessary at a local level. Particular emphasis is required in TSN and Interface areas and across and within communities including single identity work. Communities should be considered as geographical entities and as communities of interest (i.e. women, young people, older people, minority ethnic communities, disabled people etc), even where these cross-fertilise each other.

$\Rightarrow$ **Further Considerations**

At the SEUPB seminar the Director of the EU Programmes explained that the context of the development of the new programmes does acknowledge the fact that Northern Ireland is a divided society and that sectarianism still exists. Given this understanding, women's role in peace-building must be acknowledged and supported to continue and develop. WSN fully endorse TWN's recommendations on this issue; 'Women's organisations have been leading efforts to reconcile communities throughout the conflict and have developed models and mechanisms that have made significant impacts on reconciliation in Northern Ireland. This work should not only be supported to continue, but developed to provide a positive outcome for Northern Ireland to contribute to post-conflict reconstruction in other contexts, particularly in terms of women's participation'.

'Specific initiatives for women in post-conflict situations are obligatory under UK commitments to UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which is promoted vigorously in other post-conflict contexts, but under-used in Northern Ireland. If future Programmes are not to be based on specific Measures, there should be sufficiently resourced provision made for women's projects and initiatives in Northern Ireland, certainly under Peace III, but also to be considered under all Programmes involving the development of the region'.

WSN recommend:

⇒ Peace III should support activities and projects which seek to reduce inequalities experienced by women within a democratic and human rights framework.

⇒ Capacity building, in its broadest sense, should be supported in local communities to enable engagement with civil society. Local communities should be enabled to develop and set their own agendas and articulate their needs and experiences

⇒ There should be a smaller number of IFBs or one funding body for Peace III that should operate on a cross-border basis. This will streamline the application and implementation process as well as reduce the amount of resources spent on administration and bureaucracy and should ensure that the available resources are targeted at those groups and communities most marginalised