

A Response to SEUPB consultation document -

**'EU Programme for Peace and
Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and
the Border Regions of Ireland'**

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Introduction	Page 3
Current Situation	Page 3
Response to consultation questions	Page 3 - 9
Recommendations	Page 10
Bibliography	Page 11
Appendix 1 WSN member groups	Page 12

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.

Current situation

Prior to responding to this consultation exercise WSN carried out a funding questionnaire amongst our membership, many of the issues arising from that are represented in the specific responses to the consultation questions in this document

Almost all of the member groups of WSN are funded, or part funded through Peace II monies, via a variety of Intermediary Funding Bodies (IFBs). While all of WSN member groups do welcome a possible extension to Peace II funding there is a feeling that some of the current and past difficulties visited

upon groups in dealing with Peace II must at least be articulated prior to the possible extension of this funding stream.

FULL LIST OF CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

What type of activities should the Programme fund?

Q. Which activities contribute most to peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region?

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 contributes 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 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. Also incorporates 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 years 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

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 broad work of capacity building should be fully supported through the possible Peace II extension.

Q. Which activities make the least contribution to delivering Peace and Reconciliation?

Some Peace II monies are spent on the bureaucratic administration of the Programme, this bureaucratic administration seems top heavy to many groups dealing with it on the ground and therefore there is a feeling that this may contribute least in delivering Peace & Reconciliation outcomes.

There is also a concern that Peace monies have been allocated to large-scale structural projects, or to infrastructural projects such as road and rail networks, how this contributes to delivering Peace and Reconciliation is not exactly clear.

Who should benefit from the Programme?

Q. What type of people should benefit in order that peace and reconciliation impacts are maximised?

In its broadest sense all people living in Northern Ireland and the Border regions should benefit from Peace & Reconciliation outcomes. 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. young people, older people, minority ethnic communities, disabled people etc), even where these cross-fertilise each other.

Q. Do the current selection and scoring arrangements result in the appropriate people benefiting from the Programme?

There seems to be an economic emphasis on scoring, with only 6% of scoring on Reconciliation outcomes. Also the allocation of 45% of Peace monies to Government Departments is a concern – does this result in the appropriate people benefiting from the programme?

There appears to be some inconsistency in the way in which groups are targeted. For example, some measures specifically mention women's organisations and groups; some mention the voluntary and/or community sector whilst some mention neither. Women and/or women's groups should specifically be mentioned under targeted groups in all measures.

Q. Are the Horizontal Principles effective in ensuring the appropriate people benefit from the Programme?

The Network is concerned that the principle of gender mainstreaming has not adequately been written into the criteria, targets and indicators for specific measures. In addition, the Statutory Duty to Equality has not been adequately written in. There are also issues where the horizontal principles are written in for example to the rationale, but not to the criteria, targets or indicators.

How should the Programme be implemented?

Q. Do we have the right number and type of delivery structures? Do you have any suggestions as to how we further improve the administration of the Programme? And how can we further improve the monitoring of the Programme and better share the lessons learnt?

There have been problems with the administration of Peace II, apart from those that have been well documented in the wider community and voluntary

sector; WSN also carried out a questionnaire of all its member groups to help ascertain the difficulties individual groups were experiencing. All 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, perhaps 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.
- There does not seem to be enough finance workers in the finance departments of the implementing bodies, and there is a high turnover of staff in the implementing bodies, all of which makes it difficult to develop good working relationships.
- Some caseworkers in implementing bodies have large workloads, which means they have less time to spend with their projects.

WSN would recommend:

- The broad scope of capacity and peace building work within the women's sector should be fully supported through the possible Peace II extension
- A streamlined application and accounting system should be agreed (in consultation with all users) and implemented across the IFBs
- Resourcing and staffing within the finance departments of the IFBs should reflect the generated workloads of groups meeting IFBs financial systems requirements
- Information from SEUPB on administration often comes late. SEUPB need to ensure procedures are clearly understood by the IFBs and information relayed to all parties.

WSN welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation although the time scale of the Consultation is very tight – particularly given the holiday period.

The relationship between our sector and the Peace programmes is multifarious. Many groups struggle and are frustrated by the bureaucracy of the application and financial administration systems of the Peace programme, however, our questionnaire responses highlighted immense support for the programme and a real wish to continue engaging with Europe in this way.

Bibliography

Taillon, Ruth The Social and Economic Impact of Women's Centres in Greater Belfast, Research Report for the Women's Support Network, 2000

Taillon Ruth and May McCann An Assessment of the Impact of Loss of Services provided by WSN and other Women's Organisations in NI, Report for OFMDFM, August 2002

Women's Support Network Pathways for Change Consultation response, March 2004

Appendix 1

WSN Member groups

Al-Nisa Women's Group
Ardoyne Women's Group
Ashton Centre
ATLAS (Lisburn)
Ballybeen Women's Centre
Ballymurphy Women's Centre
Belfast Women's Training Services
Belfast Travellers Education & Development Group
Brook (Belfast)
Citywide Women's Consortium
Derry Women's Centre
East Belfast Community Education Centre & Walkway Women's Group
Falls Women's Centre
Footprints Women's Centre
Greenway Women's Centre
Lenadoon Women's Group
Lesbian Advocacy Service Initiative
Northern Ireland Women's European Platform
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
Parenting Forum NI
Shankill Women's Centre
South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP)
Strabane & Lifford Women's Group
WEA
WEFT
Windsor Women's Centre
Women's Aid
Women's Information Group
Women into Politics
Women's News
Women's Resource Development Agency
Women's Tec