

FUND Focus



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

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Women in peacebuilding

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CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

There is growing awareness at a global level that women have the potential to play a much more significant role in peace building and that strategies need to be developed to facilitate this process.

Without the dynamic involvement of women at all levels in society, real progress will never be achieved. This edition of Fund Focus, looks at the fundamental role of women in promoting transformation and reconciliation across Northern Ireland and the Southern Border Counties.

We, in the Fund, have long advocated the need for female voices to be heard and valued at all levels in society, but particularly by decision makers and those who hold influences within communities.

Let's not forget that women were often the very people that held communities together throughout the very worst of the Troubles. If we are to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society, we simply cannot afford to lose women's voices on the urgent challenges that still exist.

This edition of Fund Focus reflects on the commitment and vision of female leaders who are driving forward brave and

innovative projects and making a valuable contribution to community transformation.

Our Peace Impact Programme, in particular, has supported a number of initiatives that have facilitated engagement of new women in both communities and in some cases provided a platform for them to undertake valuable work with marginalised young people.

With Fund support, these projects are engaging with women that feel excluded, or have chosen to self-exclude, and women's groups within areas that suffer from multiple-deprivation. Their successes cannot be understated and is only possible because of the support from our overseas donors and the unique ability of the Fund to reach communities where government interventions cannot.

In this edition, Ambassador Nancy Soderberg, Professor Monica McWilliams, and Avila Kilmurray share valuable insights

on women's involvement in international and local peace processes. We are grateful for their compelling and provocative contributions that align with our belief that sustainable peace can only be achieved by men and women having an equal role in peace and reconciliation activities.

In this pivotal phase of the Peace Process, there is an opportunity to make serious progress, but there is also a real risk that momentum could be lost if significant sections of society are not fully represented and engaged.

With the backing of all our donors, the Fund has long been at the forefront of supporting positive change within communities and creating opportunities for everyone to have roles in securing a sustainable peace.

Dr Adrian Johnston,
CHAIRMAN

International Fund for Ireland commits £590,000/€775,000 to 24 community projects

In June, the International Fund for Ireland confirmed financial assistance of £590,000/€775,000 to support 24 projects.

The commitment, approved at the recent Board Meeting in Ballymena, includes £137,000/€191,800 to extend four Peace Walls initiatives – three in Belfast and one in Londonderry/Derry – that have successfully built cross-community confidence and started new dialogue about potential changes to interface barriers.

The remaining funding will support 20 projects delivered through the Peace Impact Programme (PIP), 17 of which are extensions and three are new initiatives. In the past two years, the Fund has invested more than £4million/€5.6million in PIP to enable communities affected by the legacy of conflict to tackle complex social issues and reduce paramilitary influences.

Dr Adrian Johnston, Chairman of the Fund, said: "We are pleased to award financial assistance to the 24 projects and

commend them for their willingness to take calculated risks to support individuals and communities in challenging environments. In difficult times, the Fund has carefully and deliberately sought to engage in areas where there is opposition to the political settlement and where the risk of violence and destabilisation remains high.

"The Peace Impact and Peace Walls programmes have secured remarkable progress and started significant phases of social and physical transformation that have reduced both the risk of sectarian violence and paramilitary influence.

He added: "Our programmes have facilitated important groundwork, but the demand greatly outstrips the resources currently available to us. It is important that other funders seek to capitalise on the gains we have made with ambition and a

readiness to support communities that feel excluded from the Peace Process."

Details of the latest funding are available at the International Fund for Ireland website: www.internationalfundforireland.com



ABOVE: Pictured at the International Fund for Ireland Board Meeting in Ballymena are Board Members: Billy Gamble, Dorothy Clarke, Siobhan Fitzpatrick, Dr Adrian Johnston (Chairman of the Fund), Allen McAdam, Hilary Singleton and Paddy Harte.

Women and Peace in Northern Ireland

Peacebuilding is often seen as a strategy underpinning peace settlements, but Northern Ireland is an example of where peacebuilding has made an important contribution to maintaining a degree of normality in communities experiencing the abnormal circumstances of 'the Troubles'.

The role of women in this process, often unrecorded, was particularly effective during those years when to question 'one's own side', or reaching out to understand 'the other', was unwelcome.

As a heterogeneous group, the attitude and roles of women are as diverse as the communities that they come from and their day-to-day experiences. There were, however, three main strands of women's activism within the overall peacebuilding context. One strand encompasses those organisations like Women Together (1970), Women for Peace (1972), the Peace Women (later the Peace People – 1976), and others with a primary focus on ending violence in the midst of conflict.

Another strand of activism was largely community-based, perhaps best illustrated by the work of the Women's Information Day Group, established in 1980. WIG reached out to local community Women's Groups throughout the Greater Belfast area, inviting them to meet on a monthly basis to discuss issues of shared interest. The topics focused on health, housing, education, family and financial issues, but the peacebuilding dimension saw monthly meetings rotated between single identity Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist areas.

This allowed participants (who were bused to the selected venues) to see how people lived in the 'other' community and to question pre-existing stereotypes. If the potential benefit of building relationships across 'the peacelines' was explicit, open discussion of divisive political issues was discouraged. A Foyle Women's Information Network in the North-West, and similar networking efforts in Dungannon, and other rural areas, followed.

A related development took place between the various Belfast Women's Centres that were generally located in politically aligned areas. Mutual respect was learned through joint working on shared issues, but space was created to take account of political difference.

This approach also characterized issue-focused organizations, such as the Women's Aid Movement, as well as those infrastructural initiatives, such as the WRDA (Women's Resource & Development Agency that emerged to support the women's sector.

A 2001 study identified some 423 'activist' women's organizations, working largely in the most disadvantaged communities, many of them active since the early 1980's.

The 1994 ceasefires offered space for re-thinking the role of women. Alongside those individual women that had been involved in various political parties (although often relatively invisible), a conference was held on 'Women, Politics and the Way Forward' (1995); a 'Women into Politics' training programme was designed; women in West Belfast debated a Clár na mBan (Programme of Women) agenda; and a broad delegation of women were organized by the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform to attend the UN International Women's Conference in Beijing.

The momentum encouraged the establishment of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) in 1996, to contest an election to the peace talks that was seen as pivotal in re-configuring politics and peacebuilding. Standing on the three principles of Human Rights, Equality and Inclusion, the call was for a deliberate voice for women. Unlike any other parties, the Coalition was consciously structured to reflect the bi-communal nature of both its members and society, with two leaders drawn from each of the main identities. The election of the Coalition carried the explicit message that peacebuilding approaches needed both the involvement of women and a changed attitude towards traditional gender roles.

The advent of devolved government brought a growing understanding that 'the women's dimension' can get short shrift in the hierarchy of political risk management given that it does not threaten the distribution of power

required for the curtailment of violence. Resourcing of community-based women's groups became increasingly meagre, running the risk of exacerbating inter-community competition. There was little, or no, official recognition of the expertise garnered over the years by infrastructural organizations such as the WRDA and Women's Centres.

The signals became even clearer when the naming of 'the inclusion of women' in the initial EU PEACE Programme (1995-1999) was 'mainstreamed' out of the two subsequent programmes. Dominant political discourse (reflected by funding programmes) continued to focus on the issue of contested national identities and narratives; while the British Government rejected the application of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to Northern Ireland, on the basis that the latter suffered an aggravated crime wave rather than a political conflict.

The women are still here. There are a few more colourful jackets in Stormont and in the higher reaches of the civil service, but at community level the pool of potential activism has been undermined by lack of resourcing and recognition. Arguably, peacebuilding, as now experienced in Northern Ireland, is the poorer for its cavalier attitude to women.



Prof Monica McWilliams (left) is a Northern Irish academic and former politician. She is currently Professor of Women's Studies at the Transitional Justice Institute at Ulster University.

Avila Kilmurray (right) has written extensively on Community Action, Women's Issues and Peacebuilding. In previous years, Avila served on the Executive Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and was a founding member of the Foundations for Peace Network.



Essential to Peace

Simply put, most of today's foreign policy challenges cannot be solved without women at the table helping to craft the solution, says Ambassador Nancy Soderberg.

Making women part of the solution enables better and more sustainable resolutions to conflict. It's not that women are better than men or vice versa. They just have different perspectives, especially how to solve problems at the core of much of the world's conflict. That is in part because women bear the brunt of our problems. They are the majority of the poor, uneducated, unhealthy and unfed. Women rarely cause armed conflicts -- but always suffer the consequences.

And why waste half of the world's talent? Leaving women out of the formal economy leaves you with a half-powered economy. Leaving women out of education leaves you with an ignorant population. The opposite is also true. Bring women into education, and their children become more prosperous—and so does their country's economy. Bring women into negotiating discussions, and they help end civil wars and build a sustainable peace. I've seen it happen in negotiating peace processes around the world, from Northern Ireland, to the Balkans, to Liberia.

Back in 1994, I found myself as President Bill Clinton's Irish expert at the White House. As I shuttled back and forth to Northern Ireland, London, and Dublin, I quickly found that it was the women who were pushing for peace. They knew the real cost of war. They were the ones trying to make ends meet on a shoestring budget. They saw how whole families suffered when a husband was unemployed. They were the ones who buried those husbands, or brothers, or sons. And so those women organised to help each other – on both sides of the religious and cultural divide – to solve their common

problem. Before the men did, they saw the need for and the possibility of peace. And they insisted on making it real.

In theory, the world has agreed that women should be involved in making peace - but far too often fails to put them at the center of negotiations. Ironically, back in 2000, I was one of only two women Ambassadors sitting in the UN Security Council when it passed Resolution 1325 calling for a stronger role for women in conflict resolution. Today, just a third of the Security Council's representatives are women. Very few women have ever held the top UN peacekeeping posts.

Yet, the UN's experience in peacekeeping has demonstrated that women are key to securing, building, and maintaining peace. When women serve in peacekeeping missions, they often exhibit styles of leadership that are consultative, inclusive, and collaborative. Experience has shown that female military and civilian police personnel are better at building a rapport with the community, are more effective at crowd control, and have performed extremely well in investigating and patrolling.

Post conflict, investing in girls and women is the way to build sustainable economic development. If women are making money, their families have better health, nutrition, and education, making for more prosperous communities and more thriving futures. When women are free to vote and run for public office, governments are more effective and responsive to their people. When women can go to school and get healthcare, their families and communities prosper.

When women have equal rights, nations are more stable, peaceful and secure.

As we look around the chaotic world today – South Sudan, Yemen, Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, ISIS, the flood of refugees – maybe it's time to bring the other half to the peacemaking table and make UN Resolution 1325 a reality. Men and women alike would benefit.



Nancy Soderberg served as Deputy National Security Advisor and an Ambassador to the United Nations under President Bill Clinton. She is now an author, commentator, foreign policy consultant and professor at the University of North Florida.

Queen’s Park Women’s Group in Glengormley was awarded £94,036 through the Peace Impact Programme in June 2013 to deliver a cross-community youth project that enables the women’s group to contribute to the development of good relations and civic engagement within this divided area.

Project Manager Ena McTaggart found herself engaging with local youths from both sides of the community after her grandson had been involved in anti-social behaviour.

Over a period of time, a level of trust was built up and 14 months later the group opened their centre and continues outreach to prevent sectarian violence between rival youths on a daily basis. The group operates on an open door policy, which means that women can receive support and attend activities at any time.

Ena explains; “We provide a really valuable service to women in Glengormley including accredited and non-accredited qualifications and a mix of practical

support like depression awareness, suicide prevention, drugs awareness, parenting skills, stress management and healthy eating.

“Over the last year demand for training programmes has increased significantly and we also use our Facebook page as an effective tool to promote how women can get involved. The activity is certainly helping build relationships between Protestant and Catholic women- something that has never been successfully done here before.”

As a result of Queens Park Women’s Group, females now have more opportunities to contribute in a positive manner within an area that is still deeply affected by sectarian division.



Ena adds; “It is important that women continue to work towards peace here in Northern Ireland as times are changing and progression is key. We can help educate others on the benefits of working together and encourage people to become more understanding and leave the past where it belongs in order to create a positive future.”

ABOVE: Ena McTaggart (far left) with participants in Queen’s Park Women’s Group in Glengormley.

Grace Women’s Development Group was awarded £67,974 in June 2014 through the International Fund for Ireland’s Peace Impact Programme (PIP). It addresses sensitive issues between Catholic and Protestant communities close to one of the most volatile interface areas of North Belfast, Ardoyne.



Project co-ordinator Mary Ellen Campbell believes that launching the project in July, traditionally a time of civil unrest for the area, was the best way to begin dialogue with local women.

“Our project offers women the chance to be heard and be part of peace building in North Belfast. To date we have worked with over 100 women through a range of courses on culture, identity, tradition sectarianism and discrimination. Women not only have the chance to investigate

issues important to them and find solutions but they can also take part in a range of accredited and non-accredited skills to enhance their employability.”

Participants from both sides of the community are working through important subjects and also learning to respect and communicate more effectively with one another.

Although the project focuses solely on women, activities are open to a range of age groups across both sides of the community. According to Mary Ellen, the engagement and role that women play is an important part of the project that must continue.

“This project demonstrates that all engagement is positive and participants are on a journey of learning and

respecting each other. Peacebuilding cannot happen without women and projects like this give women from diverse communities the chance to engage in a neutral environment and begin difficult dialogue.

“There are always challenges around peacebuilding, but our role is to bring people to a level where they feel comfortable communicating with others. This is where women can make their biggest contribution – by making it real, making it relevant and making sure the good work that’s happening in the heart of these communities continues to inspire others and help the Peace Process.”

LEFT: Fund Board Member Billy Gamble; Mary Ellen Campbell, Maureen Doherty, project participant; Rev Dr Lesley Carroll and Fr Gary Donegan at the official launch of the Project.

Cox’s Demesne Youth and Community Project is based within a Dundalk housing estate that experiences high levels of social deprivation, anti-social behaviour, crime, dissident activity and drug use. The Fund awarded €50,601 in June 2013 and €32,623 in November 2013 for two projects that create new opportunities for vulnerable young people. A further €33,094 was awarded in February 2015 to extend the youth diversionary programme for at risk youth.

Clodagh Mahoney (right) has been Project Manager at Cox’s Demesne for over 20 years and provides support for young people ranging from four to 30 years. As the programme is based in a highly disadvantaged community, outreach that provides opportunity remains a key priority.

She says; “The IFI has funded three projects that have made a massive difference for young boys and girls here. These include an early intervention drama programme, accredited football coaching and an innovative training system for marginalised young men.

“Our soccer projects raised the profile of the area, increased capacity within the community, built up young leaders and

up-skilled around 47 people. The other training project successfully engaged with at risk youths diverting them away from crime and anti-social behaviour and some are now pursuing outdoor pursuit employment opportunities.”

“Through our youth work we are also able to reach out to young women and young mothers. They often receive support and advice from the Child & Family Agency funded Teen Parent Support project.”

The biggest challenges facing Clodagh’s role are cuts to the community voluntary sector, funding and providing quality youth work. Although there are a higher percentage of females in this sector in Ireland, there is still an opportunity for improvement.



“The role of women is essential in peacebuilding as we are able to offer alternative perspectives alongside a different skillset. Although on the ground I feel there are more women than men in these community roles, we do need to encourage females to get involved in community projects and take on leadership roles so that they can make a real difference.”

The Fund awarded €130,799 to the Unheard Voices Project in June 2013 through the Peace Impact Programme (PIP). It is a community wide women’s project designed to engage women who remain marginalised in community development and peace- building.

Carol Cunningham (pictured right) is the coordinator of Unheard Voices and says previous community work in Derry/Londonderry spurred her on to her current role with this project.

“Creggan historically is a socially deprived area. I have worked with various programmes here including a women’s training project aimed at engaging and empowering women to contribute to post-conflict transition, reconciliation and reconstruction

through a programme of training and cross community interaction. My current post as coordinator at Unheard Voices has been one of the most fulfilling projects I have ever been involved with.”

“On a daily basis women here are being given a voice. The project allows women to examine different views of history, culture, identity and conflict. It also seeks to encourage women who feel vulnerable within local areas to communicate openly.”

The project tackles big issues such as sectarianism and marginalisation through peace building workshops. As a result of the project and after many years of silence, women are creating, learning and developing skills for a better future as well as promoting a sense of greater community spirit and inclusion.

Unheard Voices has demonstrated that

women have an important role to play if a lasting peace is to be achieved here.

Carol adds; “For many years women have been traditionally excluded from the Peace Process despite more often than not being the glue that holds families and society together. At the moment we are also working with participants on an oral history programme that encourages them to share their experience of the troubles and the impact it has had on them and their wider family circle.

“Women’s voices need to be heard as they have important experiences to share. A greater sense of involvement and decision making within the community is an important starting point. From my experience, there remain challenges for women today and they do need to feel valued. Feeling appreciated instils the confidence that will ultimately bring positive change to local communities.”

