



SUBMISSION TO THE CITIZENS' CONVENTION ON GENDER EQUALITY

MARCH 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality is one of the oldest and most pervasive forms of inequality. It shapes our economies, societies and communities. Although women's movements and activists have developed an increasingly powerful voice over the past number of years, political and economic systems continue to favour men over women.

Policy makers in Ireland have been complicit in the perpetuation of these inequalities both at home and on a global scale. Women are vastly overrepresented in terms of low-paid and precarious work and undertake most of the underpaid and unpaid care work. Social norms that maintain rigid gender roles are also perpetuating violence against women, the gender pay-gap, as well as limiting access to essential services for women such as health care. Women's influence and decision-making is also deeply constrained, with underrepresentation at the highest political and business levels leading to the continuation of gender inequality.

Ensuring that the needs of women and girls are reflected in government budgets as well as domestic and foreign policy tools has the potential to reduce gender inequality. However, gender analysis tools such as gender budgeting and mainstreaming are rarely implemented before policy design, implementation and evaluation despite the recommendations of women's rights organisations and scholars.

At Oxfam Ireland, we put women's rights at the heart of everything we do. We believe that tackling gender inequality is one of the most effective ways of achieving positive economic and social outcomes. It is to be welcomed that Ireland has convened a Citizens' Assembly to explore how these issues can be addressed. It is important to remember that gender inequality does not end at Ireland's borders and that decisions we make in Ireland have an impact on the wider world. Oxfam has campaigned and advocated for gender equality in more than 90 countries around the world. This submission draws on the lessons of this work to detail how Ireland can become an international leader when it comes to achieving gender equality.

2. GENDER RESPONSIVE BUDGETING

A gender responsive budget is one that works for everyone in society, not just for women. It is a tool to help achieve a gender sensitive and gender equitable division of resources; it is essential for both gender justice and for fiscal justice. Gender budgeting involves analysing government budgets from a gender perspective, including how they respond to gender norms and roles. Gender responsive budgeting can play an essential role in achieving gender equality targets while ensuring governments are held accountable to their gender equality commitments. In order to meet fundamental human rights and achieve the targets of the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on gender inequality and poverty, Ireland should adopt gender responsive budgeting as the norm. The IMF has found that governments that have adopted gender budgeting are more likely to achieve the goals they have set on gender equality (Oxfam 2019). Involving civil society, particularly women's led organisations and groups increases governments' accountability and should be done at local, national and global levels.

Fairer fiscal systems should incorporate gender responsive budgeting and invest in care systems by raising revenues to meet everyone's needs without relying on women's unpaid and underpaid work. Women's rights activists across the globe have advocated for governments to restructure tax systems and implement progressive taxation which will divide domestic revenue in an equitable manner and help to reach the targets of SDG 5 (gender equality) as set out in Agenda 2030. Effective gender responsive budgeting can lead to allocation of funding and resources to services such as healthcare, education and childcare. This puts 'virtual money' into the pockets of those that need it most and helps to mitigate the effects of the care crisis and tackle gender inequality.

The Irish government has made positive strides towards 'Equality Budgeting.' As part of the commitments made in The Programme for a Partnership Government in 2016, Ireland first introduced 'Equality Budgeting' on a pilot basis in 2017. The pilot has built upon Ireland's framework for performance budgeting in which departments set performance targets for various programs, in relation to one of nine equality dimensions. The Department for Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) and the Department of Justice and Equality are leading the equality budgeting initiatives. 'Equality Budgeting' involves gathering information on the potential budgetary outcomes across multiple areas including health, education and income and how their impact may differ depending on gender, ethnicity or age. It is a process which recognises gendered differences and employs a gender perspective, therefore encompassing gender budgeting. One of the main themes of the Equality Budgeting Initiative in Ireland is to ensure gender equality.

In 2019, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) conducted a scan on 'Equality Budgeting' in Ireland, which detailed the country's progress so far (OECD, 2019b). While it found that Ireland had made positive progress in equality and gender responsive budgeting, issues still remain that continue to harm the realisation of gender equality in the country. The OECD found that Ireland has a strong and robust institutional framework in situ for delivering equality budgeting, inclusive of gender responsive budgeting. According to the OECD scan report, the pilot system has promoted equality issues on the

agendas of government departments and has helped set specific targets to ensure equal and fair outcomes of budgetary measures.

However, Ireland has no legal grounding for its Equality Budgeting Initiative. The government does not provide clear instructions and guidelines on how to implement gender responsive budgeting across all departments, unlike most countries practising effective gender budgeting. The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 has been helpful in guiding the budgeting initiative as specific to gender inequality. However, Ireland does not have an overarching equality strategy which can be used as a guide to equality budgeting and this should be addressed. The OECD (2019b) recommends that Ireland should establish a formal interagency working group on gender responsive budgeting and advocates for strong and cohesive coordination across departments and agencies to help ensure consistency within gender budgeting.

Recommendations:

- **Gender responsive budgeting should be employed by all government departments across all policy areas as an essential tool in allocating resources to services, social protection programmes and infrastructure to achieve gender equality**
- **The government should introduce legal frameworks that underpin gender budgeting and increase and improve data collection methods and data analysis to identify gender gaps in fiscal policies. Supporting tools of gender budgeting such as equality budgeting statements and impact assessments should be mandatory across all departments**
- **Increase women's participation in budgetary planning sessions and invest in gender budgeting competency training for all government departments and agencies. Policymakers should work closely with women's organisations and feminist groups to ensure a gender perspective is employed in key decision making. Ensure that all women, including those involved in the care economy, are given a seat at the table. For example, carers in Uganda have previously participated in the Ministry of Health budgetary planning meetings. In Papua, Indonesia 50 percent of those attending village development meetings are women (Oxfam, 2019)**

3. ADDRESSING THE GENDER PAY GAP

Across the globe, the average gender wage gap - which is the difference between women's and men's earnings - is 23 percent. Women consistently earn less than men and are

concentrated in the lowest paid and least secure work (UN, 2015). In countries with deeply entrenched gender inequalities and where women are predominately in informal low paid sectors, the pay gap is even higher. Where various social and economic inequalities intersect with gender, the wage gap becomes higher again. The gender wealth gap encompasses women's earnings along with assets, savings and investments. In 2019, Credit Suisse estimated women's share of global wealth to be 40 percent.

While Ireland has made significant strides towards achieving gender equality in recent years, the gender pay gap remains an issue. The gender pay gap in Ireland stands at 13.9 percent. It is lower than the European average of 16.7 percent, making Ireland the 11th lowest in the European Union (EU) (EU Commission, 2014). However, it remains an issue that prevents the realisation of full gender equality. The roots of the gender pay gap in Ireland run deep, they are complex and nuanced and will require multiple strategies and collaboration across all sectors in order to close the gap. Women's labour force participation has doubled since the 1980s, however access to economic opportunities in Ireland remains divided among gender lines (IBEC, 2018). Causes of the gender pay gap in Ireland include but are not limited to:

1. The Labour Market remains segregated

In Ireland women dominate occupations centered in the education, healthcare and caring sectors. Jobs in these sectors are often undervalued and underpaid. They are also the sectors most dependant on adequate state funding. Gender segregation of the labour market stems from social norms and assigned gender roles. The expectation of certain roles as 'women's work' or 'men's work' extends to education choices and in some cases limits career opportunities that may yield higher incomes for women. This is apparent in Ireland across various sectors. For example, research has shown that just 25 percent of those working in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in Ireland are women (Daly et al, 2018).

2. Perpetuation of Harmful Gender Stereotypes

Harmful gender stereotypes devalue the role of women in society and the economy and dictate which areas are and are not suitable for women to work in. Oxfam believes that harmful norms restrict women's mobility outside of the home and place higher value on roles obtained by men. Roles that are seen as suitable for women are valued less and, in some cases, women occupying these roles are paid less. In 2016, the Irish government committed to holding a referendum on Article 41.2 of the constitution which implies that a woman's place is within the home. To date this referendum has not been held. Articles such as this do little to change attitudes towards gender roles and further entrench gender inequalities within society.

3. Balancing paid work and unpaid care work

Women spend significantly more time on unpaid care work than men. This restricts women's ability to participate in the labour force. Employment rates in Ireland remain equal until a drop off in the rate of female employment in those aged 29-39, the typical childbearing years. In 2019, according to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), participation rates of women in the labour force in Ireland was 56 percent in comparison to 68.4 percent of men. Female participation rates in Ireland remain slightly lower than the EU average of 57.9 percent. When assessing the participation rates of people with children, the gap widens further - men with children had a participation rate of 88.2 percent in the second quarter of 2019, while the participation of women with children was significantly lower at 68.1 percent, invoking the so called 'motherhood penalty' (CSO, 2019).

Ireland continues to provide a relatively low level of state funding to childcare services and lacks investment in infrastructure for good quality, affordable childcare. Childcare costs in Ireland are among the highest in the EU. In 2019, the average full-time fee for childcare was €184 a week (EU Commission, 2019). Many parents struggle to finance childcare needs and this leads to women leaving paid employment to take up caring roles.

4. Women are overrepresented in part-time roles

Research has shown that women are overrepresented in part-time roles, which are generally low paying (ESRI, 2019a). Women who are working less hours due to care responsibilities often have reduced benefits such as bonuses or pensions. Women who have to take time out of paid work for care responsibilities find it more difficult to progress to senior or managerial positions, thus widening the gender pay gap even further. Men are over-represented in managerial positions while women in developed countries are concentrated in the service industry, where the pay is less than the national average (UN, 2016).

Following on from a longitudinal study of ageing in Ireland, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI, 2019b) published a report that revealed that there is a gender pension gap of 35 percent in Ireland. Like the gender pay gap, the causes of the gender pension gap are complex and multifactorial. As women in Ireland are over-represented in the low paid sector, they may not have access to private pension schemes. Women are also more likely to have to leave paid employment to take up unpaid care work of children or the elderly and thus many do not have enough contributions for a full state pension at retirement age. Closing the gender pay gap, increasing gender equality in the care economy, promoting women's economic empowerment and investing in strengthening pension provision will help to reduce the gender pension gap.

The Gender Pay Gap Information Bill (2019) aimed to amend the Employment Equality Act (1998). If enacted into law, it would require certain companies to comply with mandatory reporting on gender pay gaps and to account for the nature and scale of any differences in pay between men and women. (The Gender Pay Gap Information Bill, 2019)

Recommendations:

- **The government should ensure decent incomes, secure employment contracts and safe working environments for women. Labour and wage standards should be assessed to ensure that domestic workers, migrant workers and those employed in the informal sector are protected by legislation**
- **The government should work in collaboration with trade unions and workers with the aim to increase minimum wages to the living wage**
- **Ireland should review the pension system so women do not lose pension incomes as a result of leaving the workforce for care responsibilities**
- **The government should increase efforts to support women to achieve decent wages. This can be best done by legislating for all workers to have the right to collectively bargain in relation to pay and conditions with their employer. Governments should ensure laws are in place that protect the rights of women workers to unionize and strike and rescind laws in opposition to those rights**
- **Tackle social norms regarding roles of women and promote positive attitudes to women in the workplace through public campaigns and education initiatives**
- **Invest in easily accessible pathways for all women to education, training and upskilling. Encourage upskilling and training of low paid workers**
- **The government should utilise the 4 R's framework in relation to Care Work- Recognise, Reduce, Redistribute and Represent care work. Investments should be made in public services which will reduce and redistribute care work such as free universal health care, social protection programs and childcare. The government should adopt gender sensitive tax policies which maximise fiscal space for women's empowerment**
- **Ireland should increase investment in early years education to bring expenditure in line with UNICEF recommendation of 1 percent of GDP**
- **Government and businesses should recognise and redistribute women's unpaid care work through provision of paid parental leave, flexible working hours and through campaigns which encourage men to do their share of care work. Women who are involved with care work should be consulted in terms of policy and decision making to ensure their needs are truly reflected**

- **The government should prioritise the enactment of The Gender Pay Gap Information Bill 2019 and disaggregated data collection methods should be improved to obtain a clearer picture of issues relating to the gender pay gap**
- **Ireland should hold a referendum on Art.41.2 of the constitution as soon as possible to amend the language so it is gender neutral and includes a statement on the value of care to Irish society**
- **All actors should support women's collective enterprises and cooperatives by providing training and integrating them fairly into supply chains**

4. ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

Centuries of women being viewed as inferior and unsuitable for the public and economic sphere has become so ingrained in our social institutions that progress is proving to be slow in this area. In this context, temporary, affirmative action measures such as the utilisation of gender quotas in positions of decision-making have proven successful and helped bring about institutional change by creating a mass of women at the top. The United Nations has called for the creation of positive working environments in which women can take up leadership roles (UN, 2015).

Oxfam Ireland acknowledges that change like this takes time. It involves challenging social norms and attitudes towards women in the workplace as well as changing the structure and operation of economic, political and social institutions. A growing number of countries have introduced gender quotas to enhance women's representation. More than 100 countries currently have gender quota systems, the majority of which have been introduced in the last 20 years (Oxfam, 2016). It is important to acknowledge that higher proportions of women in positions of decision-making does not necessarily guarantee gender equality; it cannot simply be a case of 'add women and stir,' as highlighted by feminist activist Charlotte Bunch. Certainly, quotas are useful in that they strengthen the collective voice of women who come together to raise the profile of gender concerns within society or within a company or institution. However, the structural inequalities that prevent or restrict women from taking up leadership positions across all spheres including economic, social and political need to be addressed. Therefore, the establishment of gender quotas should be tailored to each country context and supported by other measures to promote gender equality.

In Ireland, women occupy less influential decision-making positions than their male counterparts. Only 13.2 percent of board members of public listed companies in Ireland are

women (European Commission, 2019). In 2016, the World Economic Forum calculated that it will take 170 years for women and men to be employed in the same numbers, be paid the same and hold the same levels of seniority, if progress continues at the current rate.

Oxfam Ireland believes that gender quotas can be used as an effective tool in the fight against gender inequality. In certain contexts, such as business or politics where progression of gender equality is slow, gender quotas can be used to 'fast track' change. While it is positive that many organisations are now introducing voluntary gender targets in relation to their boards, these are still aspirational goals. Legislative quotas, on the other hand, are binding and mandatory with non-compliance attracting sanctions. The international evidence is clear that a reliance on targets will not deliver significant progress on gender imbalance on corporate boards, this will require a quota.

Gender quotas are not a complete solution; however, they offer a solid start in achieving gender equality in political spheres. Gender quotas are becoming a regular part of political life and are a talking point in electoral campaigns. A study published in the *American Economic Review* journal assessed the impact and value of implementation of gender quotas for candidate selection in Sweden's Social Democratic Party from 1993-2014. Overall the study found that gender quotas increased female leadership in the party but also increased the competence of those elected. The study found that the quotas did not affect principles of meritocracy (Besley et al, 2017). In Ireland, the Electoral Amendment Political Funding Bill introduced an electoral gender quota for the first time. The Act stated that political parties that did not have at least 30 percent of each gender would have their funding cut by up to 50 percent, this quota is due to rise to 40 percent by 2024 (Electoral Amendment Act, 2012). Historically, politics and government in Ireland have been highly male-dominated. Research has revealed the link between low levels of women in decision-making positions and poorer outcomes for women and issues of gender equality (Fawcett, 2017). Women continue to be underrepresented in government and policy-making positions in Ireland. The most recent general election in February 2020 saw the number of female TDs elected to the Dáil rise by one to create a total of 36. Currently only 22.5 percent of all TDs elected are women. The number of constituencies with no female TD has fallen from 21 in 2016 to 12 in 2020 (Oireachtas, 2020).

While some progress has been made in Ireland, there is a long way to go to have equal and fair representation of women in government. Oxfam Ireland believes that gender quotas are an important step to female representation, however wider gender inequalities continue to create barriers to women's political participation. Research by the National Women's Council of Ireland in 2019 found that women are significantly underrepresented in local governments.

In the 2019 local elections, only 226 female candidates or 24 percent of women were elected to local government. The report found that gender imbalances in local government have a significant effect on women's representation in the higher institutions such as the Dáil.

The political system and infrastructure are highly gendered and can be an unsupportive environment for women. The disproportionate care role of women has been identified as a significant barrier for women entering politics. Campaigning and canvassing for elections is time intensive and this makes it more difficult for women candidates who often have to combine paid work, unpaid care work and political duties. In a predominantly male environment, systemic and structural barriers continue to suppress women's political participation. Gendered social norms, disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work, sexist party politics and women's concentration in low paid work hinder opportunities for political participation and fulfilment of leadership roles within government. Lack of flexible parental leave, lack of entitlement to maternity leave, long working hours and the high cost of childcare in Ireland also restricts women's participation in political life (NCWI, 2019). Addressing gender inequalities in the care economy, challenging societal gender norms, closing the pay gap, promoting a feminist economy and implementing effective gender budgeting across all departments will help to remove barriers to women's political participation.

Recommendations

- **Legislate a 40% quota for gender balance on all non-state Irish company boards**
- **Legislate for a quota system to be extended to local elections with an initial quota of 30% women's representation in the Local Elections 2024**
- **Introduce an entitlement to maternity/adoptive leave for women councillors and women TDs**
- **Political parties and government departments should promote women's political participation and inclusion and invest in measures which will support this. Resources should be allocated so that women from all backgrounds in Ireland are not excluded from the possibility of participation in leadership positions**
- **The government should promote and increase awareness of gender quotas as a management tool for progressing gender equality in Ireland through public information campaigns. There should be a particular focus on increasing female political representation at local and national levels and recognition of the value of gender quotas. Gender norms and stereotypes regarding division of labour and sexist attitudes towards women in leadership positions and decision-making positions should be challenged at all levels**

- **The government should utilise the 4R's framework to tackle women's disproportionate time spent on care work and increase women's opportunities to participate in political, economic and social spheres and promote gender equality**
- **Investment should be made in women's education and training to increase opportunities to progress to senior levels and leadership positions. Organisations such as Women for Election who train women interested in running for political office should be promoted and supported. Adequate funding should be provided for organisations such as National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN) and Women's Political Caucuses that promote women in politics and support women who wish to participate at local and national levels**

5. ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE CARE ECONOMY

According to the International Labour Office (ILO), women and girls put in 12.5 billion hours of care work a day (ILO, 2018). The monetary value of unpaid care work globally for women aged 15 and over is at least \$10.8 trillion annually which amounts to three times the size of the global tech industry. Without intervention the burden of care that is placed on women stands to dramatically increase.

Ireland is no exception to this trend when it comes to care work where women undertake twice as much as men. Oxfam Ireland estimates that in Ireland, women's unpaid care work contributes at least €24 billion to the economy every year - the equivalent of 12.3 percent of the entire annual Irish economy. The responsibility for caring in Ireland is deeply gendered and severely unbalanced. The average time spent on care across the whole population is 16 hours per week with men spending 10.6 hours and women spending 21.3 hours a week on care. Among those who provide regular childcare, i.e. at least once a week, the mean weekly time is 35.2 hours averaging at 42.6 hours for women and 25.2 hours for men (ESRI, 2019a). Gender stereotypes that see men as the 'breadwinners' and women in the domestic sphere as caregivers has resulted in the majority of unpaid work such as cooking, cleaning and caring for children falling to women, regardless of whether they are also in paid employment. Due to this extra unpaid work, it is estimated that a woman on average works the equivalent of an extra four years over her lifetime than a man (ActionAid, 2016).

Women's responsibility for unpaid care work restricts the amount of time they have to pursue education and training and to engage with work opportunities. Professional care work is generally poorly paid and less secure than other sectors. Unpaid care work is the 'hidden

engine' that keeps the wheels of our economies, businesses and societies moving. Yet care is often treated as non-work, with spending on care viewed as a cost rather than an investment. As with all policies working to achieve systematic gender equality, carers, both paid and unpaid, must be part of the decision-making processes at all stages of policy-making in order to ensure that it is participatory and truly reflective of the needs of those in the care economy. Oxfam Ireland believes in the transformative ability of the '4R's' framework that takes into account the principles of:

- **Recognition** of unpaid and poorly paid care work as a type of work or production that has real value
- **Reduction** of the total number of hours spent on unpaid caring through access to affordable and quality time-saving devices and care-supporting infrastructure
- **Redistribution** of unpaid care work more fairly within the household but also in shifting the responsibility of unpaid care work to the state and the private sector
- **Representing** the most marginalised caregivers to ensure that they have a voice in the design and delivery of policies, systems and services that affect their lives.

Recommendations

- **Invest in a cross-governmental national care system to address the disproportionate responsibility for care work done by women. This must include investments to deliver universal childcare, eldercare and care for people with disabilities**
- **Legislate to protect the rights of all carers and secure living wages for paid care workers. As part of the national care system, governments must ensure that legal, economic and labour market policies are in place to protect all carers in both informal and formal employment and monitor their implementation to ensure that they are paid a living wage**
- **Ireland should increase investment in early years education to bring expenditure in line with UNICEF recommendation of 1 percent of GDP**
- **Government and businesses should recognise and redistribute women's unpaid care work through provision of paid parental leave, flexible working hours and through campaigns which encourage men to do their share of care work. Women who are involved with care work should be consulted in terms of policy and decision making to ensure their needs are truly reflected**
- **Ireland should hold a referendum on Art.41.2 of the constitution as soon as possible to amend the language so it is gender neutral and includes a statement on the value of care to Irish society**

- **Ensure that carers have influence on decision-making processes. Unpaid carers and care workers should participate at all levels in policy-making fora. Resources should also be invested into collecting comprehensive data that can better inform policy making and evaluate the impact of policies on carers. Women's rights actors, feminist economists and civil society experts on care issues should also be part of the decision-making processes**
- **Challenge harmful norms and sexist beliefs: as part of a national care system, governments need to invest in resources that challenge harmful norms and sexist beliefs that place the responsibility of care on women. These norms should be challenged through advertising, public communication and legislation. Men also need to step up to fill their responsibilities when it comes to care work**
- **Value care in business policies and practice: businesses should support the redistribution of care work through the provision of benefits and services such as creches, childcare vouchers and ensuring a living wage for care providers. Businesses should assume their responsibilities in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals by paying their fair share of taxes and implementing family-friendly employment practices such as flexible working hours and paid leave.**

6. ENSURING IRELAND PLAYS A POSITIVE ROLE TO ENHANCE GENDER EQUALITY GLOBALLY

Development between different groups continues to be extremely uneven. Unequal gendered power relations need to be tackled from the perspective of development and aid in order to bring about transformative change. The changing global context means that Ireland's international development cooperation and humanitarian action needs to adapt accordingly. Successful aid ensures that gender justice is at its heart. A feminist approach to foreign policy and official development assistance (ODA) tackles the root causes of gender inequality, discrimination against women, girls and other minorities and challenges existing power structures that have benefited men whilst discriminating against women and girls globally. Aid is truly transformational when it addresses the root causes of structural and systematic inequalities and transforms systems of power. This helps countries to mobilise and sustain financing for their own development priorities; it assists citizens to realize their rights and demand the services and investments they need. It also supports communities to escape poverty sustainably as well as providing humanitarian assistance in times of crises. The feminist approach to foreign policy has been popularised by Swedish and Canadian

Governments with the aim of tackling unequal power relations with bringing about transformational change. It aims to challenge mainstream global discourse around development and gender equality, not just to support women and girls but to include men and boys in the conversation in order to successfully challenge existing social norms such as toxic masculinity.

By increasing our expertise and partnering more strategically with NGOs and INGOs with experience, scale and reach Ireland can become a leader in innovative programming and aid. Oxfam Ireland encourages ownership as the core principle of development cooperation in order to deliver transformational change, we also urge the government to continue to champion human rights through multilateral diplomacy. It is imperative that Ireland continues working in partnerships that are collaborative and constructive in order to scale-up Ireland's global footprint and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the aid that we contribute.

The feminist approach to foreign policy is underpinned by a number of key feminist principles:

1. **Transformative Change:** addressing the root causes of discrimination and oppression at all levels in society rather than focusing on improving the capabilities of women and girls to deal with these injustices.
2. **Recognising power and privilege:** lack of power and privilege must be recognised as key determinants of poverty and the subordination of women. The patriarchal structures that maintain unequal divisions of power, influence and resources must also be recognised. Gender equality analysis is a key tool that can be used to identify power imbalances.
3. **Localisation and Women's Rights Actors:** involving local actors in all stages of the development process is key. In feminist foreign policy, women are seen as key agents of change in peace operations and peace building rather than victims. Local and national Women's Rights Organisations should be supported and included in every step of the process.
4. **Honouring context and complexity:** it is important to recognise the need for nuanced and context-specific approaches rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model. This requires acknowledging and accepting that partners in the country have a better understanding than donors and NGOs and they should take the lead.
5. **Intersectionality:** coined in the 1990s, the intersectional approach involves acknowledging the added layers of discrimination as a result of gender, race, class, age, sexuality etc. A program can be better framed, the analysis more thorough and outcomes more likely to be sustainable if an intersectional approach is taken.
6. **Agency and Empowerment:** this involves moving away from the idea of women as poor and powerless and needing assistance from the global north to empower them. A

feminist approach to foreign policy is about supporting women's agency and decision-making whilst tackling the multiple forms of discrimination experienced by different women and other minorities. Women should be included at every step of the design, programme implementation and evaluation processes.

7. **Do No Harm:** governments and NGOs must continuously adhere to ethical practices and standards. It is vital that safeguarding and protection policies are in place and are updated regularly.
8. **Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL):** donors must take a step back and allow women's rights organisations (WROs) to define the effectiveness of a program. This involves working with WROs to develop indicators. Learnings should also be shared mutually between donors, NGOs and local WROs.
9. **Walk the Talk:** governments and NGOs adopting a feminist approach to foreign policy must work to become feminist organisations from the inside. This includes ensuring all voices are valued and heard, challenging power structures within organisations and educating and training about gender-related attitudes and norms.

The OECD (2019a) reports that 62 percent of the funding for ODA programming for 2016 - 2017 was gender blind. Ireland has played a central role in the development of the SDGs and has pushed for the development of the underlying principle 'leave no one behind.' Considerable steps forward are also seen in the new Irish Aid Policy 'A Better World' where feminist language surrounding intersectionality, agency and empowerment is used. However, according to Irish Aid, gender equality is placed in the same sector as human rights which received over eight percent of the official development assistance (ODA) budget in 2017. Just 15 percent of the budget was allocated to support civil society and it is unclear how much of that was received by WROs. However, if Ireland is to adopt a feminist approach to foreign policy the current system that facilitates tax avoidance by multinational companies, undermining developing countries needs to be addressed.

Recommendations

- **Ireland must deliver on its commitment to spend 0.7 percent of the gross national product on Official Development Assistance (ODA)**
- **Ireland must adopt a transformative approach when it comes to foreign policy that tackles the root causes of gender inequality and existing patriarchal power structures**
- **A twin-track approach should be taken, meaning that standalone pillar to achieve gender equality and access to women's rights should be accompanied by effective gender mainstreaming in every sector**

- **The support for women's rights organisations should be a central part of the mandate to achieve gender equality**
- **An intersectional approach should be implemented to account for the multiple discriminations a woman may face due to race, gender, sexuality, age, ability etc.**
- **All programming should be participatory deriving from the feminist principles of empowerment, autonomy and agency**
- **Internal structure within NGOs and government should work to develop a feminist approach to their internal systems and mandates**
- **Ireland's aid commitments should avoid focusing on large scale projects that support the industrialization of agriculture and instead prioritise investment that will boost incomes and security for the poorest people, especially women**
- **The Irish government should actively support the full participation of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and recovery and support initiatives to address conflict-related sexual violence**

7. CONCLUSION

There is much to be done in Ireland to improve the level of gender equality within the Irish political, economic and social landscape, not least with regards to closing the gender pay-gap, implementing gender quotas and gender-budgeting and recognising and reducing unpaid care work. However, it is vital that gender equality and feminist ideologies are considered with regards to Ireland's global footprint. The employment of an ethical feminist framework is the most effective way to bring about wide-spread social justice in order to tackle growing inequality. A mainstream approach to international development and foreign policy poses huge risks to women in the global south as initiatives that do not include the use of gender analysis tools stand to exacerbate harmful phenomena such as violence against women, rigid gender stereotypes and norms and massive economic inequality.

Gender equality is not just the concern of women, it is the concern of everyone. Inequalities continue to be perpetuated by harmful social norms and discrimination. It is not just women and girls that suffer because of gender inequalities. Antiquated norms pervade societies and toxic masculinity prevails across the globe, causing harm to all in society including men and boys. Change is possible. However, it will take bold policy changes and effective government and civil society collaboration if gender equality is to be achieved. Ireland must concentrate its efforts to achieve gender equality as part of its global impact. Increased investment in key services such as childcare, healthcare and education can reduce the burden of unpaid work

on women and create pathways to increased economic participation, thereby helping to close the pay gap and increase gender equality in Ireland and around the globe.

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