**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

Assembly and Executive Review Committee

**Stakeholder 'Call for Evidence' Paper on Review
Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly**

Section 1

<u>Stakeholder Details</u>

<u>Contents</u>

Stakeholder Name	Telephone Number
Training for Women Network (TWN)	028 9031 9888

Stakeholder Address	Stakeholder Type (Include one or more X)			
Unit 10B Weavers Court Linfield Road Belfast BT12 5GH	**Registered Political Party**		**Local Government**	
	Academic		**Government**	
	Legislature		**Non-Government**	X
	Other (Please Specify)/ Member of the Public			

Please provide some background information on your role as a stakeholder

Established in 1996, Training for Women Network (TWN) is Northern Ireland's leading network for the promotion of women's training and development, through policy, training, networking and education.

TWN is ideally placed as a first stop shop for women in Northern Ireland seeking information on training, development and entrepreneurship. TWN is one of the largest networks in Northern Ireland with a membership that encompasses a wide variety of groups, individuals and organisations from the public, private and voluntary/community sectors. TWN's activities seek to encourage women to look at opportunities for advancement in a variety of ways.

TWN is a non-profit organisation which aims:

- To advance, promote, develop and co-ordinate provision of accessible, high quality vocational and pre-vocational education and training for women in Northern Ireland leading to sustainable employment.
- To facilitate vertical and horizontal integration of women in the labour market.
- To provide a range of services to members and promote good practice in training for women.
- To encourage and empower women to take up leadership roles and become involved in decision making in public and professional life.

TWN is especially keen to support actions that will:

- Breakdown barriers to training and employment for women.
- Introduce innovative pilot projects which others can emulate.
- Help women gain access to occupations in which they have traditionally been under represented.
- Assist women in vulnerable and declining employment sectors to re-train themselves for potential employment.
- Promote accredited training projects to help women progress in their chosen career.

TWN currently holds Special Consultative Status within the Economic and Social Council

(ECOSOC) of the UN. This status enables TWN to actively engage with ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies, as well as with the United Nations Secretariat, programmes, funds and agencies in a number of ways including:

- Providing expert information to the Council when requested
- Knowledge of the provisional agenda of ECOSOC
- Place items on the provisional agenda
- Attend ECOSOC meetings
- Submit written statements to ECOSOC
- Present oral statements to ECOSOC
- Use of United Nations facilities

Guidelines for Completion of Submissions

The Committee would ask that stakeholders submit <u>electronic</u> responses using this pro forma.

Stakeholders should be aware that their written evidence will be discussed by the Committee in public session and included in the Committee's published Report.

Stakeholders should also be aware that if they decide to publish their submissions, the publication would not be covered by Assembly privilege in relation to the law of defamation.

Section 2

Introduction

Powers

2.1. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee is a Standing Committee established in accordance with Section 29A and 29B of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 ("the 1998 Act") and Standing Order 59 which, amongst other powers, provide for the Committee to:

I.   make a report to the Secretary of State, the Assembly and the Executive Committee, by no later than 1 May 2015, on the operation of Parts III and IV of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; and

II.   consider such other matters relating to the functioning of the Assembly or the Executive as may be referred to it by the Assembly.

Assembly and Executive Review Committee's Terms of Reference for and approach to this Review

2.2. The Committee agreed the **Terms of Reference** of this Review on **24 June 2014** as follows:

i. **Analyse the key challenges / barriers facing women in relation to entry into politics in Northern Ireland and in particular this Assembly**

ii. **Examine potential existing initiatives which would assist women in relation to entry into politics in this Assembly**

iii. **Examine what are the merits of 'positive actions' that have been successful within the United Kingdom and Ireland and within other jurisdictions, and to consider their potential impact in the context of Northern Ireland and in particular this Assembly**

iv. **Provide recommendations / conclusions on i to iii above, including initiatives / mechanisms to enhance the role of women already active in the political arena in Northern Ireland and in particular this Assembly**

Phase 1 – Review Evidence Gathering

The Review will take evidence on **Women in Politics in the Northern Ireland Assembly** in relation to the **(i) to (iv) above. This will include evidence from Assembly Research and Information Services, expert / academic witnesses, a public 'Call for Evidence' and from visits to other legislatures.**

Phase 2 – Consideration and Report

The Committee will consider all evidence received in relation to **Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly** and report and provide recommendations / conclusions to the Assembly on these matters by in **late autumn 2014.**

Matters Outside the Scope of the Review

2.3. The Committee has agreed that the following issue is outside of the scope of the Review**:**
- **Alternative electoral systems / models**

Section 3

BACKGROUND

This section provides some background information on some issues being considered by the Committee as part of this Review.

3.1. The following sections provide information relating to **Women in politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly** drawn from the Northern Ireland Assembly Research & Information Service Research paper NIAR 570-13.[1]

3.2 Statistical Outline

The Northern Ireland Assembly currently has 22 female Members out of a total of 108 (22%), although 20 women were elected in 2011, the net increase being due to two more female than male co-option by a party and independent Member replacing Members since the election. 38 female and 180 male candidates stood in the 2011 Assembly elections (17.4%).

If placed in international perspective alongside national legislatures, the Northern Ireland Assembly would rank 70th in the world. Apart from the Italian regional legislatures, the Northern Ireland Assembly has significantly lower female representation than comparable Western European legislatures.

The following figures place the Assembly in the perspective of female political representation in Northern Ireland and in general.

- 23.5% of Local Councillors in 2011 were women (compared with 31% in England)
- With 5 of 26 Mayors /Chairs of Councils were women
- 4 of 18 MPs are women (compared with 22% in GB)
- 2 of 3 MEPs are women (compared with 30% in GB)
- 4 of 15 Ministers and Junior Ministers are women
- 4 Chairpersons and 2 Deputy Chairperson of Committees are women out of 18 Committees

The representation of women in politics in Northern Ireland has a direct association with candidate selection. An examination of the 2011 Assembly elections indicates that female candidates generally fared better than their male counterparts in terms of votes won, but the lower numbers elected were more reflective of lower numbers of candidates.

3.3 Policy

The Beijing Platform for Action of 1995, which consists of a range of commitments by governments to address structural disadvantages experienced by women internationally, includes specific measures to increase women's participation in power and decision-making.

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[1] http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2014/assembly_exec_review/potter0914.pdf

These include:

Strategic Objective G.1: Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.
Strategic Objective G.2: Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

The Belfast Agreement 1998 includes a commitment to *'the right of women to full and equal political participation'.*

The vision for the Gender Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland states:

Men and women will be able to realise their full potential to contribute equally to the political, economic, social, (including caring roles) and cultural development of Northern Ireland and benefit equally from the results.

One of the Key Action Areas of the Strategy is *'representation in public life/decision-making'*, which is associated with the following strategic objectives:

- To achieve better collection and dissemination of data;
- To achieve gender balance on all government appointed committees, boards and other relevant official bodies;
- To actively promote an inclusive society; and
- To ensure the participation of women and men in all levels of peace building, civil society, economy and government

3.5 Legislative Frameworks

Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly are provided for in the Northern Ireland Act 1998. There are no provisions for gender equality relating to elections in the Act.

The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 amends the Sex Discrimination Northern Ireland) Order 1976 to exempt the selection of election candidates from the provision of the Order. This enables political parties to use positive discrimination for the promotion of women candidates over men. This provision has been extended to 2030.

Further information on barriers to women's participation within legislatures; examples of proposals, mechanisms to overcome barriers; quotas and support mechanisms to increase the political participation are set out in paper NIAR 570-13.

www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2014/assembly_exec_review/potter0914.pdf

(1) Question

What are the key challenges / barriers facing women in relation to entering politics in Northern Ireland, and in particular the Northern Ireland Assembly, and what evidence can you provide on this?

Many explanations have been put forward to explain the lack of women in political life and especially in leadership positions. First of all, deep-rooted stereotypes about women lead to gender discrimination in political life. Indeed, social expectations see women as responsible for the household/family sphere whereas responsibilities in the political sphere fall to men[2]. Women are primarily defined by these expectations, that is to say family responsibilities, caring roles and housekeeping. Therefore, a real gendered division of labour appears in the household and constitutes a strong barrier for women who are eager to take up a leadership role in the political sphere. This division was often denounced as inconsistent since each sphere permeates the other[3]: on the one hand laws directly affect households and private relationships, such as marriage law; on the other hand, current power structures directly rely on the work women perform in households. Even when women get involved in political life, their role is most of the time linked to this assumption of the 'private woman' and <u>her</u> caring role.[4] This is particularly obvious at national politics where 'soft' portfolios, such as education, health or family issues, are mostly given to women. One cannot deny recent progress in female representation in public life, but too often women have to adapt to a system designed for men and unfriendly to family commitments, with long working hours and no facilities to help parents[5].

It can also be argued that women limit themselves in public life and lack self-confidence to go beyond their traditional role. Furthermore, women have less access to networks of influence and to finance; they are also less encouraged by their peers to take up responsibilities in public life[6]. Within the political sphere, political parties are often reluctant to put forward a high number of women candidates in elections because they assume voters are not ready to elect a woman (the 'imputed prejudice') or they invoke the 'incumbency factor' according to which it secures more voters if the same candidate runs for election again[7], all of which open very few opportunities for women. As far as the media are concerned, women can be put off by the

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[2] Pateman, C (1989), *The Disorder of Women : Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, Stanford University Press

[3] Nussbaum, M et al. (2003), *Essays on Gender and Governance*, Development Resource Center, UNDP

[4] Cowell-Meyers, K (2003), *Women in Northern Ireland Politics : gender and the politics of peace-building in the new legislative assembly*, Irish Political Studies

[5] Stakeholder Engagement Event held at the Ulster Business School on March 25th 2013, *Gender Equality at Executive Level in the Northern Ireland Public Sector*, University of Ulster

[6] Ballington, J et al. (2012), Empowering women for stronger political parties : a guidebook to promote women's political participation[caps?], United Nations Development Programme and National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

[7] Bird, K (2004), *The political representation of Women and Ethnic Minorities in established democracies : a framework for comparative research[caps?]*, AMID Working Paper Series, McMaster University, Canada

exposure it entails. Females in the public eye are more easily attacked around their expected respectability, and their image is more sexualised than that of their male counterparts[8]. On top of this, the specific Northern Irish situation adds some barriers. Politics is indeed organised along community lines and diversity issues are mostly understood in terms of relations between communities, not in terms of gender diversity[9].

The need for better inclusion and representation of women in public life is now widely recognised, but the justification is not always straightforward and can vary depending on the political structures and opportunities. On the one hand, the rights-based discourse simply states that gender equality is a matter of global justice: women represent half of humankind and as such they have a right to play an equal part in public life. This is seen as a prerequisite for democracy, where the government is inclusive and accountable to its citizens and takes into account the perspectives and experiences of all its population[10]. On the other hand, another argument emphasizes the efficiency of gender equality. Women, as a different group with different needs, perspectives and experiences, will promote issues and laws which will benefit women and indeed families. Specialists often state that a minimum of 30% female representation in parliaments is needed to improve the situation of women effectively because they are more willing to promote women's interests and more aware of the needs of women through their personal experience[11]. It is also believed they will promote family-friendly legislation[12], will increase financial performance and transparency and will contribute to the advancement of other social issues such as children's rights[13]. From this, some draw the conclusion that there would be a 'feminine' way of doing politics and there would be a 'women's interest'. But authors such as Anne Phillips[14] challenge these ideas and emphasise the complexity of the notion of representation in politics. Indeed, it has been recognised that women do not constitute a homogeneous group and that gender identity intersects with other features such as race, ethnicity and religion[15]. Whether one woman represents 'all women' or not is not obvious since they do not all have the same experience or interests to defend. Furthermore, if women are said to have a different perception of their role in public life, it is not even clear if they translate their beliefs and attitudes into concrete actions for women[16]. Finally, saying women bring new values to politics is an argument which needs to be used with caution as there is a risk of homogenising the feminine identity. For instance, feminist associations in France widely used this argument when advocating political parity in the nineties, but somehow it reinforced stereotypes of women being more peaceful, more concerned with social matters and 'softer'. Emphasising a supposedly feminine nature, they overlooked the social structures

[8] Nussbaum, M et al. (2003), ibid
[9] Side, K (2007), *Women's Civil and Political Citizenship in the Post- Good Friday Agreement Period in Northern Ireland*, CAWP, Belfast
[10] UN Women website : http://www.unwomen.org/ Last access 13/5/2013
[11] Dahlerup, D (1988), *From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics*, Scandinavian Politics Studies, Volume 11, Issue 4. The objective of 30% of women in parliaments to effectively foster change was internationally recognised during the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995.
[12] Powley, E (2007), *Rwanda : The Impact of Women Legislators on Policy Outcomes Affecting Children and Families*, in State of the World's Children
[13] UNICEF (2007), *'Reaping the Double Dividend of Gender Equality', in The State of the World's* [cf.above] *Children 2007*, UNICEF, New York
[14] Phillips, A (1995), *The politics of Presence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford
[15] The concept of intersectionality between different disadvantaged and/or minority groups was first theorised by Kimberly Crenshaw in 1989 in *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex : A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, University of Chicago Legal Forum
[16] Cowell-Meyers, K (2003), *Women Legislators in Northern Ireland : Gender and Politics in the New Legislative Assembly*, CAWP, School of politics, Queen's University Belfast

that indeed give women a different point of view and experience but not necessarily a different nature[17]. Diversity is desirable in itself because it brings positive changes, healthier environments and more productivity.

The post-conflict situation in Northern Ireland creates challenges as well as opportunities for women's participation in public life. One of the legacies of the conflict is a strong divide in politics along community lines, which left little space for women to push their interests forward. Even feminism is often seen through a community lens, and as such it is considered as emanating historically from the two sides of the constitutional question. During the conflict women on the Republican side were more accepted as actors in the conflict because Nationalists framed their equality claim in very broad terms, allowing for gender equality to be taken as part of the struggle[18]. On the other hand, Unionists used a more gendered discourse during the conflict[19], emphasising male authority and militarism, backed up by housewives at home, and thus making their contribution to the conflict invisible. Beyond this difference, parties from both sides of the political spectrum have a strong internal discipline[20]. Therefore, party members cannot easily differ from the party whips so women are primary defined by their political orientation rather than their experience as female citizens.

(2) Question

Can you provide evidence on initiatives which demonstrates positive outcomes to encourage more women to pursue a career in politics which could be applied to the Northern Ireland Assembly?

Examples of good practice in terms of gender equality in public life can be found throughout the world. Using quotas in politics to increase representation of women in governments has been one of the most widespread tactics (95 countries worldwide use it in various forms)[21] and has proved quite successful. The case of Rwanda is spectacular and is often cited as a good example. Indeed, the country jumped from the 24th ranking in 1995 to 1st position in 2003 in terms of female political representation after the introduction of quotas[22]. Increasing the number of women representatives is key to advancing gender equality and makes women more visible. Seeing more women take up leadership roles can change voters' perceptions

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[17] Lepinard, E (2007), *L''égalité introuvable : la parité, les feministes et la république*, Presses de la FNSP, Paris
[18] Sales, R (1997), 'Gender and Protestantism in Northern Ireland', in Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern, eds, *Who Are 'The People'? Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland*, Pluto Press, London
[19] Racioppi, L and O'Sullivan See, K (2001), '"This we will maintain" : Gender, ethno-nationalism and the politics of Unionism in Northern Ireland' in *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol 7 No 1 January 2001
[20] Ward, R (2004), *Gender issues and the representation of women in Northern Ireland*, Irish Political Studies, 19:2
[21] UN Women website : http://www.unwomen.org/ Last access 13/5/2013
[22] UN Children's Fund (2004), *The State of the World's Children 2004*, UN

about what is a 'good candidate' because they realise that women can be as effective as men in politics[23]. However TWN acknowledges that the issue of gender quotas is beyond the scope of this review.

However with this in mind it is also important to state that affirmative action such as quotas have to go along with other initiatives from all stakeholders in order to transform descriptive representation (just numbers) into substantive representation. First and foremost, it concerns the state itself: governments have to be gender-sensitive in budgeting and drafting laws and policies, and they should ensure that all of these are effectively implemented[24]. In that process, parliamentarians have a key role to play to draw on grassroots experience and then apply it in policy and legislative processes[25].

In the wake of the economic crisis, a growing number of people started to challenge the existing modes of power and governance to promote new notions such as participatory democracy (as seen in Switzerland). At the core of this concept is the idea that every citizen has a say on government decisions and should participate in the process of decision-making when it concerns them[26]. Beyond the strong media coverage of the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement, a whole range of groups and individuals advocated for a new economic, social and political mode of governance which would be focused on local issues, allow for every citizen's active participation and build strong partnerships between state institutions and civil society. Civil society here is understood as all the non-state matters and everything in public life concerning relationships between citizens[27]. It is believed that this other form of democracy, called participatory, brings about accountability of governments, fairer and more equal decisions, less divisive partisanship and more informed thus more effective state interventions, especially at local level.

This change in the way power is thought of is seen as a great opportunity for women to take up leadership roles and be more included in decision-making processes. Indeed, civil society has been described as a 'middle ground' between the male political sphere and the female private sphere where women can engage as active citizens without experiencing the high barriers[28] discussed above. The figures on the composition of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland show the prevalence of women: they represent 72% of the workforce in this sector[29]. If more links are developed between the sector and the state, it could enhance the influence of women in decision-making and their representation in government. From that idea, the concept of state feminism has been developed: it envisages a situation where state and

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[23] Deaman, L et al. (2008), *Powerful Women : does exposure reduce bias ?*, Harvard University

[24] UN Women website : http://www.unwomen.org/ Last access 13/5/2013

[25] Inter-Parliamentary Union (2007), '*The role of parliamentary committees in mainstreaming gender and promoting the status of women', Seminar for members of parliamentary bodies dealing with gender equality*, reports and documents number 52, Geneva

[26] Ross, C (2012), *The Leaderless Revolution : how ordinary people will take power and change politics in the 21st century*, Blue Rider Press, Penguin

[27] For a good overview of academic controversy over the definition of civil society, see Potter, M (2005), *Women, Civil Society and Peacebuilding : Paths to Peace through Empowerment of Women*, Training for Women Network

[28] Ainhorn, B and Sever, C (2003), 'Gender and civil society in Central and Eastern Europe' in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol 5

[29] Northern Ireland Community and Voluntary Agency (April 2012), *State of the Sector VI*, NICVA. This figure contrasts with those for the private sector where women represent 46% of the employees and for the public sector (52%).

women's political agencies interact with the result that the state pays attention to women's movement representatives and demands[30].

Anne Phillips however, among others, has warned against the notion of civil society as the solution for gender equality in public life. Indeed, she points out that existing power structures are often replicated within civil society's organisations and so do not always serve feminist interests and demands.[31] Indeed, even though the figures have widely improved over the past few years, women represent 48% of the chief executives in the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland[32], a figure out of proportion to the mainly female composition of its workforce.

Furthermore, as participatory democracy focuses more on the local level, it is seen as a great opportunity for women to be meaningfully involved in public life[33]. With the current setting and functioning of political institutions, women seem to have less difficulty being involved at local level than national. Indeed, through their experience in society, women seem to grasp issues related to the community they live in more accurately. Therefore they prove to be very good community mobilisers and are more accepted as leaders by the population. On the more practical side, there is less competition in local politics and local engagement fits more easily with family responsibilities[34]. But involvement of women should not stop at local politics because it 'suits them better', it should be seen as a launching pad to further challenge gender stereotypes and advance gender equality at all levels of decision-making.

Nowadays, peacebuilding processes are taking place throughout Northern Ireland with the purpose of achieving an inclusive and fair society where individuals have positive relationships[35]. These initiatives, which acknowledge some failures of previous initiatives and constitute a driving change for society, can open new opportunities for women to take part in public life, all the more as the inclusion of women as active players in the peacebuilding processes is an international requirement, as stated by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325)[36]. This legal framework has the advantage of going beyond the widespread belief that women are naturally predisposed to peace. Rather it states that women experience the conflict differently and therefore have different needs and views which should be included in the decision-making process, but this does not mean they are passive victims of the conflict[37]. Further to this, the EU has committed itself to the resolution in all its

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[30] Mazur, A and McBride, D (2008), 'State Feminism', in Goertz, G and Mazur, A (eds), *Politics, gender and concepts : Theory and Methodology*, Cambridge University Press

[31] Phillips, A (2002), 'Does Feminism Need a Concept of Civil Society?' in Chambers, S and Kymlicka, W (eds), *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, Princeton : University Press

[32] Northern Ireland Community and Voluntary Agency (2010), *The 2010 Salary Survey*

[33] United Nations Development Programme (2011), *Fast Facts – Responsive Institutions : local governance*, UNDP

[34] International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics, *Consolidated Response : Women's participation in local governments*
(http://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/cr20women27s20participation20in20local20governments20en.pdf)

[35] The Special European Union Programmes Body has set guidelines for organisations seeking Peace funding for projects, inspired by Hamber, B and Kelly, G (2004), 'A working definition of reconciliation', in *Democratic Dialogue*

[36] United Nations Resolution 1325 (2000) adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting on October 31st, 2000 S/RES/1325

[37] For a good overview of debates surrounding the relationship between women and peace see Potter, M (2005), 'Chapter 1: Women and Peace', in *Women, Civil Society and Peacebuilding: Paths to Peace through the Empowerment of Women*, Training for Women Network

peacebuilding programmes[38]. This is a powerful tool for the women's sector in Northern Ireland to advance women's representation and participation. It can be used to say that so-far, the peace initiatives did not fully integrate women and it is one of the reasons why Northern Irish society is still facing forms of conflict.

(3a) Question

What policies should political parties have in place to increase the number of women candidates in Northern Ireland elections?

A key political actor is the political parties themselves which are the essential launching pad for women to access elected office. The reality is that women may be active as members in Northern Ireland political parties but most of them barely make reference to women's issues in their manifestos. Yet it is recognized that women's issues are a strong vehicle for better representation of women in political positions and for focusing more attention on gender issues, as was the case when the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) existed.[39]

Many other steps can be taken targeting the empowerment of women. In a supportive and positive learning environment women who take part in leadership programmes gain in self-confidence and in knowledge about their rights, which are necessary for them to decide to get involved in public life. Key to this process is also the use of inspiring role models women can draw experience and confidence from[40].

In the recent publication, 'Sex & Power 2014: Who Runs Britain?'[41], it suggests the following recommendations that TWN would advocate Northern Ireland Political parties take on board:

- **Recommendation 1** – "All political parties should take immediate action to increase the number of women candidates at all levels of election, and to draw those candidates from as wide a variety of backgrounds and communities as possible. This should include positive action measures in selection processes wherever necessary, action plans for implementation…and steps to promote and increase support for a diverse range of women candidates at all levels of elected office"[42].
- **Recommendation 3** – "All political parties should establish, publish and implement internal complaints procedures for dealing with sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying. These should reflect the fact that political parties are both employers and spaces where unpaid members, activists, staff and public representatives interact with both one another and the general public"[43].
- **Recommendation 4** – Political parties should make diversity awareness training,

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[38] European Parliament resolution on participation of women in peaceful conflict resolution 2000/2025 (INI)
[39] Ward, R (1997), *'The Northern Ireland Peace Process: A Gender Issue?'* in Gilligan, C and Tonge, J, eds, *Peace or War? Understanding the Peace Process in Northern Ireland*, Aldershot, Ashgate
[40] Fearon, K (1996), *Power, Politics, Positionings – Women in Northern Ireland*, Democratic Dialogue, Belfast (http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/dd/report4/report4g.htm)
[41] Centre for Women and Democracy, 'Sex and Power 2014: Who Runs Britain?'
<*http://www.countingwomenin.org*> Accessed August 2014.
[42] Ibid, p. 7.
[43] Ibid, p. 8.

advice and support available to party members involved in candidate selections, all parties should work towards the implementation of statutory maternity and parental leave for representatives[44].

(3b) Question
Political Parties are asked to specify what policies and initiatives they have in place to increase women in political life?
N/A

(4) Question
What 'positive actions' would you recommend to increase women's representation in the Northern Ireland Assembly?

TWN believes that **political skills training** such as undertaken by women on projects such as the Positive/Extending Positive Relations Projects and the Women, Good Relations and Interfaces Project (funded under OFMDFM's Central Good Relations Fund) would greatly increase women's representation in the Northern Ireland Assembly through the following vehicles:

Skills Training

TWN research[45] through interviews and questionnaires show how political skills training helped them to not only participate but participate in a more meaningful way. When asked to rank how useful 7 different sets of skills are for them in public life, '*public communication skills*' were ranked the second most useful, a fact that was reflected in interviews. Indeed, interviewees often used the term 'people skills' describing "*how to listen to someone, how you convey your ideas and relate to the person you are discussing with*" when discussions turned to this particular skillset. Participants felt they were more comfortable communicating, mediating and negotiating after the training; all of these are prominent tools needed when engaging in politics. In fact a lot of participants directly acknowledged the role of public events organised through the above mentioned projects, as they gave the women a platform to express themselves and apply these skills in a positive environment. On top of this, speakers invited often served as role models for them.

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Mooney, J and Billiet, A, (2013) *Women in Public Life*, Training for Women Network: Belfast.

More practically, participants said their involvement in political skills training made them more aware of the opportunities available in regards to participation in public life. Attending training conducted by TWN gave the women more information on the sector and opportunities for involvement. In this process the importance of networking is critical to women, in fact it was ranked as the third most useful skill when collated in the research. Meeting with other women opened new opportunities as they exchanged contacts, experiences, advice and information. It was reported that many of the participants who had finished the training were still keeping in touch with other participants through social events. Interviewees (77.8%) also acknowledged that they had received encouragement from other women in the training in their desire to participate more fully in politics. The above highlights the importance of the link established between participants in training and how networking imparts on their decisions to participate in politics.

Confidence building and Personal Development

The TWN research mentioned above also show how self-confidence was at the heart of participants' decisions to participate in politics. Indeed, 'confidence building and personal development' was ranked as the most useful skill provided through political skills training.

Skills, knowledge and tools provided by the projects such as communication and networking would not have had as big an impact on women if they had not found themselves in a safe and positive environment where they could build their confidence. This process involved self-discovery, auto-reflection and positive confrontation; it was an intimate evolution which affected all aspects of women's lives.

Active Citizenship

The research above also highlighted how 65% of women interviewed stated that their perceptions of political life changed positively after their involved in the training mentioned above. Coupled with this, not only did participants have a better image of political life, they were also more interested in it. Indeed 25.7% of participants said their interest in political life, before becoming involved in the training was 'very strong' of 'strong' whereas after the training, this had grown to 44.2% with an impressive increase from 6.8% to 21.6% of respondents saying their interest in political life was 'very strong' after their involvement in the training: The more self-confident women feel, the higher their interest in political life is.

When answering the questions concerning the flag protests many participants were more confident to talk about their thoughts and opinions. Many of them acknowledged that before the training they would have "*shied away*" and avoided the subject whereas now they felt more willing to discuss it and face the debate. This did not mean that participants imposed their views on others but rather it helped emphasise the need to be open-minded and tolerant of others' opinions while still ready to defend their own viewpoints when required. These qualities are very important in advocating a cause/issue in a productive way while reducing the likelihood of negative conflict/confrontation.

Questionnaires and interviews also revealed that participants were more confident about their self-belief and the power they yield as citizens: This is exactly what is meant by the notion of 'empowerment': "*shifting power, influence and responsibility away from existing centres of*

power and into the hands of communities and individual citizens".[46] In this regard participants in the training became convinced that participation in political life was not only possible but needed.

As females, many participants felt that they could bring something extra to political life, indeed many participants identified advantages in being a women and how this was something desirable in political life. For instance, some participants mentioned a "*women's network*", a female solidarity they benefitted from. Furthermore, participants also mentioned their experience as mothers and carers which enabled them to understand and empathise making them more effective.

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(5) Question

What recommendations would you put forward to enhance the role of women already active in the political arena in Northern Ireland (providing evidence for recommendations as applicable)?

In the recent publication, 'Sex & Power 2014: Who Runs Britain?'[47], it suggests the following recommendations that TWN would advocate Northern Ireland Political parties take on board:

- **Recommendation 2** – "In order to enable everyone concerned to develop a much better understanding of who is standing for elected office at all levels, an equalities monitoring form similar to that used in recruitment for public appointments and applications for funding should be introduced by the relevant election authority. It would be completed and submitted to returning officers by all candidates together with nomination forms at all levels of election, and the results collated and published annually"[48].

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[46] Communities and Local Government (2008), *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power* – White Paper.
[47] Centre for Women and Democracy, 'Sex and Power 2014: Who Runs Britain?'
<*http://www.countingwomenin.org*> Accessed August 2014.
[48] Ibid, p.7.

(6) Question

Do you consider there are specific initiatives / actions that the Northern Ireland Assembly as an institution should take to enhance the role of women in politics, including a gender sensitive environment – and if so please include your recommendations.

TWN believe that the Northern Ireland Assembly as an institution should take the following actions to enhance the role of women in politics:

- **Women bear the main responsibility for childcare**: The Northern Ireland Assembly should include childcare provision to members to remove this disadvantage to women in terms of participation.

- **Women bear the main responsibility for other caring roles, such as elder care and care of disabled family members**: The Northern Ireland Assembly should include provisions for respite care arrangements for members so that female members are not disadvantaged in terms of participation.

- **Women bear the main responsibility for the care and administration of domestic life**: The Northern Ireland Assembly should incorporate some form of flexible working for members enabling participation that is responsive to personal circumstances which does not disadvantage women.

Section 5

Additional Information

Please provide any additional information which you believe will be of assistance to the Committee during the course of the Review.

N/A

Section 6

Contact Details

All responses should be sent by email please to:

The Committee Clerk   **Tel:** 028 90521787 or
Assembly and Executive Review Committee   028 90521928
Room 241
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Belfast
BT4 3XX

To arrive no later than Wednesday 3 September 2014 please

Email: committee.assembly&executivereview@niassembly.gov.uk

Thank you for your submission

TWN GENDER-PROOFING CHECKLIST

TWN is a consultee under the provisions of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which is to assess the impact of policy on specific groups regarding equality. TWN comments on policy development in the area of equality between men and women, while contributing to consultations in other areas. With regard to gender issues, the following are key points of policy the absence of which indicates a disadvantage to women.

- Women bear the main responsibility for childcare: Any policy that does not include the provision of childcare disadvantages women in terms of participation
- Women bear the main responsibility for other caring roles, such as elder care and care of disabled family members: Any policy that does not include provisions for respite care arrangements or arrangements for temporary care of family members disadvantages women in terms of participation
- Women bear the main responsibility for the care and administration of domestic life: Any policy that does not incorporate some form of flexible working enabling participation that is responsive to personal circumstances disadvantages women
- Men tend to be given priority in the allocation of household resources, including means of transport: Any policy that does not ensure sufficient transport arrangements, particularly in rural areas, excludes women
- Statistics indicate that women constitute the larger proportion of older people in society, the ratio increasing the greater the age: Any policy that disadvantages older people not only constitutes age discrimination, but also gender discrimination
- Many areas of policy development include some form of consultation or advisory body or forum: Any body that does not have a significant proportion of women, with sufficient financial support, does not represent the interests of women
- Consultation processes are often restricted to a policy document available for comment: Any consultation process that does not take steps to sufficiently access the opinions of women does not represent women's views
- Women constitute more than half of the population, which includes constituting more than half of other disadvantaged groups, indicating multiple disadvantage for women in those groups: Any policy or legislation that subsumes the category of 'women' into other categories or generalisations or does not gender-proof each individual group ignores the multiple disadvantages women experience and therefore discriminates against women

For further information, contact:

The Policy and Research Officer
Training for Women Network
10b Weavers Court
Linfield Road
Belfast BT12 5GL

028 9031 9888
028 9031 1166 (fax)

www.twnonline.com
info@twnonline.com