

## **Submissions on Irelands Third National Action Plan**

### *Understanding the context*

Even though SCR 1325 was adopted nearly two decades ago, there has been scant reflection of its intent in most peace agreements. Strong gender provisions are still the exception rather than the rule. Nearly half of all peace agreements either make no reference to gender or women or they have references that are weak.

Comprehensive peace agreements and constitutions are the most likely to have concrete gender provisions. Non-binding agreements, such as those that emerge from HD's dialogue and mediation processes, attempt to make gender provisions. Case studies also show that processes that are supported and facilitated by an outside agent, such as HD, have a far greater chance of achieving the goal of meaningful gender-sensitive agreements. These findings underscore the importance of HD's inclusion work and the initiative in bringing women to the table in a parallel forum to (male-dominated) mediation processes.

The benefits of mainstreaming women in peace processes is twofold. There are quantifiable gains not only for women but for society in general. HD seeks dialogue and reconciliation that includes women because their presence boosts the chances of achieving transformative agreements that shape outcomes for gender equity and equality. HD seeks gender-sensitive peace agreements, monitoring and implementation mechanisms in the knowledge that if this is achieved, peace is far more likely to be enduring. Women and women's groups have consistently and clearly voiced equitable solutions to grievances. They are more open to discussing conflict issues in an impartial way too.

National Action Plans (NAP) are aimed at providing states with the opportunity to localize implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 to the homegrown context. However, despite progress achieved so far, a lot still needs to be done in order to translate the normative structures to a language that benefits the women at the grassroots level. The context most often dictates that the language used in advancing women's inclusion and participation in decision making, has to be relatable to the stakeholders being engaged.

Over the years in HD, one of the starkest lessons for us as mediators has always been the importance of context. While international norms are critically important, understanding how these can translate in a given context is often a huge challenge. Transplanting ideas without respect to the local political cultural context does not build sustained support or understanding for new approaches. Working closely with communities, with leaders (both women and men) to work through how and at what pace things can be done differently is a critical element in our approach.

HD's inclusion programme has prioritized the need for providing women with space where they can build their skill set in negotiation and mediation but most importantly expose them to practical negotiation and mediation opportunity within their regions. How has HD achieved this?

1. Creating informal networks of women at the grassroots level whose responsibility is to engage on on-going dialogue processes, propose recommendations on how to address endemic problems and most importantly, help manage emerging tensions. The ultimately goal is to help secure the relative peace reached between the

communities in the inter-communal dialogue processes. Creating linkages between International and local networks is an area that the Irish Government can support in, in realizing empowerment of women in decision making.

2. Helping change the narrative on the role, or lack thereof, of women in decision making amongst the traditional structures as well as within public office provides an opportunity for HD to achieve inclusion.

The success of HD's endeavors in Nigeria have depended on the creativity of the team and their ability to create a discussion on inclusion, and systems and actions to accompany that, which were particularly Nigerian and to build genuine acceptance for this approach.

## **Opportunity**

There are opportunities for the Government of Ireland in pursuing its four pillars of the National Action Plan including;

1. Providing increased support to local level initiatives in advancing gender inclusion in decision making as well as in peace processes.
2. Maintaining partnerships between the international level and local level platforms in contextualizing normative approaches to gender inclusion which would help broaden the scope of actors focusing on gender inclusion.
3. Continually creating linkages between the international and local level networks in building the capacities of women at the local level.
4. Helping translate global protocol and conventions for responding to and preventing gender violence is also an area that the Irish Government can help support.

HD has, and will continue to focus on two of the four pillars of the Irish NAP including; i) Empowerment, Participation and Representation of Women in Decision Making and; ii) Promotion of the Women Peace and Security agenda in International, Regional and National Arenas. By doing this, the opportunities within the international structures would go a long way in effectively advancing gender inclusive processes at the local level.

Mediation is an organic process, one that evolves and shifts as the dialogue progresses. A mediator who cannot course correct during a dialogue is unlikely to find their way through the many obstacles that a peace process faces, and it is the role of the mediator to help to find this winding path, and convince the parties to walk it with them. In the case of inclusion, the mediator needs to further convince the parties of who should be walking this path and why. This is never easy. Too many times we see token representation of women, chosen by men, in the room but not really "in the room" in terms of their power to be heard. The essence of inclusion is not presence but ability to participate fully and influence a process.