

Gender & Development Bulletin

Banúlacht
www.banulacht.ie

Women in Ireland in Global Solidarity

Editorial

Over the past months funding for community development organisations throughout Ireland has been dramatically cut, leading to reduced staffing hours and, in many cases, job losses. Ireland's overseas aid budget has also been affected: the government is to slash the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget by €95 million. While no one denies that the current times call for difficult choices by the government, the cut to the aid budget of more than 10% will seriously hit the poorest of the poor.

"At a time of global crisis, women in Ireland can show solidarity with women in the South..."

Ireland has committed to spending 0.7% of Gross National Income on overseas aid by 2012 and is supposed to reach a 0.6% benchmark in 2010. But, as Dóchas, the umbrella group of Irish overseas aid agencies, points out, the overseas aid programme was hit by €45 million in the public spending cuts of July 2008—a disproportionately large share of the total then—and another €15m was taken from the aid budget in October. Ireland gained international acclaim for its leadership in tackling international poverty and gender issues with an increasing aid budget. But, as Dóchas states, "International standing depends on adherence to principles, commitments and pledges in difficult times as well as in good times. The world's poor are already being hit by the financial crisis, soaring food prices and climate change, and cannot withstand an aid crisis too. If we want economic growth with global stability, we need to work towards a fair and just world. Ireland needs to invest in developing countries, not turn its back on the poor when times get tough."

The majority of the world's poor are women and children. Banúlacht is concerned about the gendered impacts of the current raft of cuts in government spending, both in Ireland and in the countries of the global South (i.e. Africa, Asia and Latin America). How will the cuts in the aid budget be applied? To what extent will they affect civil society, which is heavily reliant on donor funding? What kind of initiatives will be prioritised? Will women's organisations be able to continue their work?

Banúlacht highlights the critical work of women's organisations worldwide in challenging women's oppression and aims to create alliances and deepen connections of solidarity between women's organisations in Ireland and in the South. Through our exchange programmes in Tanzania, women from Ireland have witnessed critical work for women's empowerment at first hand. Liz Price of Limerick Women's Link spoke for all the group when she said: "It was obvious to all of us that our experience as Irish women is very different from the experiences of the women we met. In spite of this, we could not deny the closeness we felt to the women we had met and the realization that we are all working towards the same goal of improving women's lives. Neither could we deny the energy and enjoyment we got from working in solidarity with our sisters in the South."

At a time of global crisis, women in Ireland can show solidarity with women in the South by speaking out on their behalf. On page 11 of this issue we include a letter urging the Minister for Overseas Development to ensure continued support and funding for the work of women's organisations in the South. We urge our members and other readers to add your and your organisation's name to this letter, and to circulate it through your own networks and contacts so that we can demonstrate the solidarity of women in Ireland with women in the South.



About Banúlacht

Banúlacht—Women in Ireland in Global Solidarity is a feminist organisation that is part of a global women's movement and, as such, is committed to political action. Banúlacht believes in justice and equality for all women and men and in relationships of solidarity between women North and South. (We use the terms North and South rather than "First World/Third World" or "Developed World/Developing World," which imply superiority and inferiority.) Through our policy and development education work, we explore such issues as poverty, alienation, disadvantage and injustice through a global lens and from a gender perspective.

Development Education

We carry out workshops and short courses with women's organisations in Ireland on such topics as gender and development, women and the economy, and women's human rights locally and globally.

Joining Banúlacht

Banúlacht's members include community-based women's groups, women's networks, development education organisations and national women's organisations, as well as individual feminists, activists and others interested in development issues from a gender perspective. Members receive regular briefings and updates by e-mail on issues relating to gender and development, women's human rights and economic factors. Members can also avail of special rates for Banúlacht conferences. A membership application form can be downloaded from our website.

Company Details

Banúlacht is a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. It is registered in Dublin, Ireland No. 284753. Directors are the executive members: Nessa Ni Chasaide, Gráinne Begley, Niamh Farren, Sheila Zietsman and Nyamwenda Massamba; Astrid Perez Pinan and Kate Byron are also executive members. Coordinator: Eileen Smith; Policy and Training Project Leader: Maeve Taylor.

Website

Banúlacht's website address is www.banulacht.ie. The website includes all of Banúlacht's policy documents and publications, including its Feminist Principles and Anti-Racist Policy. Copies of all Banúlacht's policy documents, briefings and submissions to government, as well as updates on our work and back issues of the Gender and Development Bulletin, are available on the website. The website has links to the websites of other feminist and development organisations worldwide, and to publications on gender, development and human rights issues by other international organisations.

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Making Connections

Exchange with Tanzanian Women's Organisations 2008

Banúlacht's second exchange visit to Tanzania, held in September 2008, was shaped by the relationships that have developed between Banúlacht, our two Tanzanian partner organisations, the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) and the Kivulini Women's Rights Organisation and the participants on the exchange. Eight women from Irish community development organisations travelled with Eileen Smith and Maeve Taylor of Banúlacht to learn from and share ideas with women in Mwanza, and Dar es Salaam. The women came from a very diverse group of organisations: Eleanor Dalton is the community education programme co-ordinator with the Waterford Women's Centre; Pauline Ennis, is the co-ordinator of Access 2000 in Wexford; Joan McGuire is a development worker with Wolfe Tone CDP, also in Wexford; Mary Naughton, is the administrator of the Aonad Family Resource Centre in Ballygar, Co Galway; Bernie Dunne is a volunteer with the Lourdes Youth and Community Services, in Dublin; Phil Reddy is the development worker of Inchicore Family Resource Centre in Dublin; Liz Price co-ordinates the Limerick Women's Network; and Loretta Needham is the co-ordinator of the Tuam Community Development Resource Centre.

The vision of the programme is to create a set of ongoing processes through which relationships of solidarity are developed between women's organisations in Ireland and Tanzania and our understanding of each other's development contexts is deepened. The idea of 'feminist solidarity' is central to the Exchange process: in raising awareness of the context of within which southern women live, we aim not only to develop understanding of the 'development issues' and problems women face in their daily lives, but to highlight the work of women's organisations in facilitating collective action to confront, challenge and propose solutions.



Liz Price with Mary Kabati of Tahea, Schola from TAMA and Happiness from EDFO, at the Kivulini Kitchen

When Banúlacht organises exchange programmes to the South—as we have in 2002, 2007 and 2008—our aim is to create space for critical thinking about development, gender and human rights and to encourage the development of new forms of solidarity. Our most recent exchange visit in 2008 was a two-week programme organised in partnership with the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), based in Dar es Salaam, and Kivulini Women's Rights Organisation in Mwanza, in northern Tanzania.

Women's centres, women's groups and women's organisations are places where the personal and the political meet and where individual experience can bring collective action. They are incubators and support centres for community education, critical thinking and feminist leadership. They can be catalysts for solidarity and activism, linking the local to the national, regional and international. The Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) and Kivulini Women's Rights Organisation, are just such catalysts. And they are organisations that share Banúlacht's core belief that making connections of global feminist solidarity among women's organisations, North and South, enhances the capacity of women's organisations as change agents globally and locally.

Women's Empowerment: Practical and Strategic Approaches

Introduction



Former house girls supported by Kiwohede

Mary Rusimbi is the former CEO of the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP). She is highly respected within Tanzania and within the African feminist movement, as well as internationally. Mary stepped down as CEO in 2007, but remains active within the organisation as a board member.

As CEO of TGNP, Mary established the institutional relationship between TGNP and Banúlacht, and she has continued to be a supporter and promoter of the exchange. For Banúlacht's visit to Tanzania in 2008, Mary played a role in facilitating and organising the field visit for the group members in Dar es Salaam. She organised meetings with two community-level projects that reflect TGNP's priority work areas and where we could see TGNP's strategic leadership role in action. In addition, she convened a meeting with member organisations of the Feminist Activism Coalition (FEMACT), a coalition of like-minded organisations working on women's human rights, which is housed by TGNP.

Women Living with HIV/AIDS

The first visit organised by Mary was to Temeke in Dar es Salaam, to a group of women who are living with HIV and AIDS. For TGNP, HIV/AIDS is clearly a gender issue—more women are infected, more women are dying and more women are affected by the burden of caring for those who are infected. The Tanzanian government promotes home-based care—i.e., provision of health and social services for people living with HIV/AIDS in the home. According to the Tanzanian government Commission for Aids, home-based care has benefits to the patients, family and the community: "It enables patients to be cared for in a familiar environment, as well as allowing them to participate in and contribute to family life and make them part of their families and community. For the family, it helps to hold the families together with the objective of caring for the patient. It helps the family to accept the patient's condition, thus making it easier for care and support. It reduces costs of care as well as enabling the family to attend to other tasks as they care for the patient. For the community, it raises awareness about HIV/AIDS, reduces stigma and thus prevents the spread of HIV and gets rid of myths and misconceptions about HIV/AIDS and thus helps communities to understand HIV/AIDS. It makes it easier

to provide support, by tapping all possible community resources and helps to bring the community together to combat HIV/AIDS and advocate for more services."

Critical of the government's home-based care strategies, TGNP has produced a booklet entitled "There Are Too Many Empty Promises," which gives a picture of the impact of the home-based care strategy on poor families. It presents findings of research on the cost in time and money for caring for HIV and AIDS sufferers. According to TGNP, the government's policy assumes a continuation of patriarchal social relations to ensure an ongoing supply of unpaid care work in the home. There is also an issue of class. We had already heard many times in Mwanza about the unsustainable burden on low-income families, with very scarce resources, of providing home-based care for relatives living with HIV/AIDS. As Mary Rusimbi explained, "home-based care can be a good strategy in principle if you are middle class and have resources. In practice, the poverty level of women like those in Temeke is so extreme that the impact of home-based care is that they are even more over-worked and over-burdened by the care burden of HIV/AIDS."

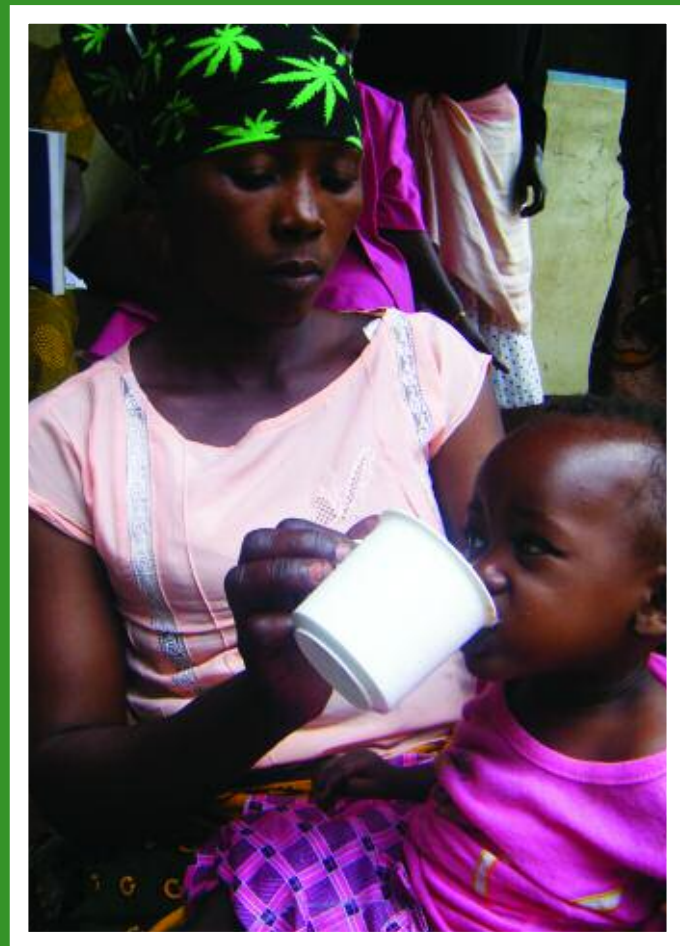


Ashililya Nyanda of the Mwanza Rural Housing Project, with Pauline Ennis, Eleanor Dalton and Mary Naughton at Kivilinin Kitchen

TGNP's link with the group of women living with HIV/AIDS in Temeke began when the group's founder, Leila, began attending a weekly discussion group hosted by TGNP. For TGNP, it is critical that the stories of women in groups such as the one in Temeke—many of which involve domestic violence and rejection by families—are at the centre of their analysis. These stories can be used as case studies in national level policy work to show the impact of HIV/AIDS and how it increases the vulnerability of poor women. TGNP also tries as much as possible to link the women in Temeke to various campaigns, such as the campaign to increase resources to the HIV/AIDS sector. "But they are also at the centre in terms of inspiring us, because here are women who in spite of their situation are trying to do something, and they are also a site of support for us in the sense of movement building," explained Mary. "Our visit to the group in Temeke was emotive and inspiring," recalls Liz Price in her report on the Tanzania Exchange. "Once again, we were amazed at the capacity of these women to provide support for each other. They told us they had several names for the HIV virus, and that laughter and encouragement were an important part of their support group. This resonated with those of us who work with women at community level and made us feel closer to these strong women."

Work with Vulnerable Women and Girls

Our second community-level visit in Dar es Salaam was to KIWOHEDE, an NGO that aims to help former child prostitutes and domestic workers (“house girls”) to become economically self-sufficient. The organisation has 22 centres across the country and has worked with 36,000 vulnerable girls and young women since 1998. Mary took us to meet a group of young house girls who are being supported by KIWOHEDE. KIWOHEDE centres offer health care, counselling and skills training in tailoring, batik making and food processing, among other activities. The organisation also sends some girls back to school. Two of the young girls in the Dar es Salaam group had already told their stories at a recent women’s human rights tribunal organised by FEMACT, and, as Mary translated with tact and respect, they shared their harrowing stories with us. It was heart-wrenching to be with this group of bright, lively, giggly girls and to know of the awful experiences some of them had gone through.



A mother and child at a nutrition clinic supported by the Tanzania Midwives' Association

TGNP and the women’s movement view violence against women as a major issue and priority, and that much has been achieved in this area, but she noted that the focus has been principally on intimate partner violence. In the last few years, women’s organisations have begun to look more at age-related violence—including violence against older women and the situation of house girls. Mary explained that, “we began to look at the issue of house girls in 2007, when FEMACT held a huge tribunal on domestic violence—in which Kivulini participated—

and we realised that we have to do more. This is a major gender issue; it’s a form of violence against women that is perpetrated against young girls, so there’s an age factor there... We are considering a further tribunal specifically on this issue, and we have set up a separate coalition to work on this area, so that we can support organisations like KIWOHEDE and Kivulini that are working directly on this issue.”

In the case of KIWOHEDE, TGNP sees a need to have a clearer analysis of the underlying gender issues. As Mary put it, “it is one thing to work on very practical needs—providing safe spaces and education and training for the girls, but this kind of work does not go to the root causes of the disempowerment, of why, for example, a mother would send out an 11-year-old girl to Dar es Salaam. We believe it is critical that there is both a practical and a strategic approach, and that the organisation links with others so that it can become an issue for the women’s movement.”



Loretta Needham with Mwaniko Village Rural Women

TGNP’s mapping project has shown that organisations like KIWOHEDE, which are working very much from a practical approach, are interested in engaging with a more strategic approach—e.g., keeping informed of developments at policy level, of new initiatives, new legislation. In Mary’s view, KIWOHEDE does not currently have the capacity to work on public policy, or the access to policy makers. But through linking with other organisations in the women’s movement, they could develop that capacity. “Just as important”, she emphasises, “it should not be the responsibility of KIWOHEDE alone to speak on the issue, all of us in the movement must take on the issue of house girls.”

Both the Temeke group and KIWOHEDE are part of a major research project that TGNP is finalising—and of which Mary is one of the two team leaders—called “Strengthening the Women’s Movement.” TGNP has sent out teams in different parts of the country to map out the work and identify the priorities and capacities of community-based organisations. Through this study, TGNP has identified that they have to learn more about age-related gender-based violence, not only in relation to house girls, but also older women. The study has also reinforced TGNP’s belief in the importance of community-based organisations getting involved at the policy level. “For us it is clear that if we only concentrate on community-level issues, we lose out at the strategic level, policy level and the resource allocation level. If we focused only on the national level policy dialogue, we would miss out on linking with the experience at community level. So a two-pronged approach that involves movement building, as well as attending what is happening at the policy level is a necessity.”

Kivulini

Nurturing Grassroots Women's Leadership

In Swahili, the word *kivulini* means in the shade or shelter; it implies a safe place where people feel supported. Kivulini Women's Rights Organisation is a safe space in Mwanza for women and men who recognise gender-based violence as a violation of women's human rights and as a priority issue for the community as a whole. The organisation was established by six women who felt compelled to respond to the needs of women experiencing domestic violence, including intimate partner violence, rape, sexual abuse, elder abuse, and violence against girl children. Older widows in rural areas and young domestic servants are particularly vulnerable groups. Kivulini believes that creating violence-free communities involves the empowerment of entire communities to promote women's rights.



Mary Kabati of TAHEA and Pauline Ennis

Kivulini's strength lies in the extensive roots it has created within the community in Mwanza. This is something we witnessed many times during our trip, as everyone we met when changing money, asking directions, or shopping at market stalls seemed to know the organisation. Kivulini has a network of over 20 community-based groups and about 200 community volunteers—individual members at grassroots level who volunteer their time and energy to conduct community awareness and education sessions on domestic violence. Community volunteers engage their respective constituents to challenge traditional norms and customs that encourage gender-based violence. Local government, street leaders, ward executive officers and tribunal members (i.e., the local level dispute resolution tribunals), religious leaders and *Sungu Sungu* (informal community policing) are often the first level of response to women experiencing violence. As such, they deeply influence the environment and culture within communities, and are a focus of Kivulini's advocacy and capacity-building programmes.

The week we spent in Mwanza with Kivulini had a huge impact on all those involved, and this was due in no small part to the community development process employed by Maimuna Kanyamala in facilitating the visit. The programme began with a day-long workshop with a range of community based

organisations, where we all shared facilitation roles and had the opportunity to learn about and make connections with each other's work. As well as Kivulini, the other organisations involved in our workshops and meetings were: Tanzania Home Economics Association (TAHEA); the Tanzania Midwives Association (TAMA); Education Foundation (EDFO); and the Mwanza Rural Housing Project (MHRP). We also spent two days in pairs visiting organisations in both the city and in rural Mwanza, which was an opportunity to meet people involved in the projects, and to get a feel for how people live and what the issues they face are.

We were privileged to meet some of the people working in communities and neighbourhoods in Mwanza who have been supported by Kivulini. At Kivulini Kitchen, the organisation's training centre, for example, we spoke with a group of street elders—older women who sometimes risk their own safety to help women leave violent relationships. These women were engaging in training as paralegals, learning about the Marriage Act and other laws that prohibit violence against women. With Maimuna Kanyamala, the Director of Kivulini Women's Rights Organisation, we met members of a ward tribunal, who spoke about the impact of Kivulini's training. Elected by committees of street elders, the ward tribunal members receive no formal legal training, but are expected to use their wisdom to resolve disputes. Many of the cases brought before them involve domestic violence. In the past, the approach was to persuade women to return to situations where they were in danger. With training, however, the ward tribunal members attain knowledge and the confidence to invoke national legislation that criminalises violence against women and to refer women to the police or medical services as appropriate.



Street elders taking part in training as paralegals at Kivulini Kitchen

We also met Joyce, an inspiring woman who has survived a violent marriage to a man who infected her with HIV to become a respected community leader and facilitator. Meeting women like Joyce, and hearing her story of survival and empowerment, reinforces the need for organisations like Kivulini. Within this safe space, she found support when her life was at its lowest; because of its vision, she has emerged into a new life as a community leader and promoter of women's human rights.

Our process of working with Kivulini was rooted in the ethos of community education: it was a journey of mutual learning and discovery. And in the best traditions of community development, we ended our stay with a day-long evaluation workshop and a party. We were privileged to have spent this time with these inspiring people in the shade of Kivulini.

Implementing Economic and Social Rights

*A Community Development Perspective
By Sarah Oates, Tuam Community
Development Resource Centre*

The International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is part of the International Bill of Human Rights and is monitored by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The other treaties that form part of the International Bill of Human Rights are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).



Rural meeting organised by human rights organisation, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA).

Economic and Social Rights - the Reality

Article 8 of the ICESCR deals with the right to work, to safe working conditions and to join unions. The 'Clean Clothes Campaign' and many other similar initiatives have enlightened us to the reality on the ground. These campaigns ask us 'Do we know where our shoes and clothes come from?' They highlight the lack of human rights for those working to produce our clothes in 'sweat shops'. But they also make us aware that we can make a difference and we can use our voice to help others attain the rights they are entitled to, no matter where they live.

Are things any different in Ireland? The Celtic Tiger may have brought Ireland to the fore and given us a pride in our little nation, but where do we stand when it comes to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights? The Irish Human Rights Commission protects and promotes human rights in Ireland. Their mandate states that 'The Human Rights Commission Act, 2000, confers a wide ranging competence on the Commission to promote and protect human rights as defined both in the Constitution and in international agreements to which Ireland is a party.'

Local authorities and state agencies should also be held accountable for their obligations. We have a right to health, which includes access to drinkable water and a safe environment free from pollution. The discovery of lead in the drinking water in Galway last year opened many eyes, but how many realised that their Economic, Social and Cultural Rights were being infringed upon?

Article 9 of the ICESCR highlights the right to social security, yet the Irish social welfare system dates back to 1910 and is based on the man being the breadwinner and the woman being the 'qualified adult'. Women all over Ireland from Tuam to Wexford are currently involved in the National Women's Council of Ireland 'social welfare reform campaign' which makes women aware of the inequalities in the system and how they are affecting women's lives.

Acting in Solidarity

There are several non governmental organisations actively promoting awareness of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Banúlacht's Economic Literacy Training and Tanzanian Exchanges have opened the eyes of many grassroots women. Connecting women in Ireland with women in the Global South is educating women in two very different parts of the world and making them aware of how they can make a difference by their actions not only in their own country but globally.



Tuam Community Development Resource Centre action for the 16 Days Against Violence Against Women 2008. Photo: Ray Ryan.

The ICESCR includes the rights to education, adequate standard of living, work, social security, health, water, food, work, family life and housing. All people are entitled to these rights without being discriminated against because of gender, language, religion, sexual orientation, political or cultural beliefs, ethnic origin or colour.

The International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 16th December 1966, and came into force on 3rd January, 1976. However, it was not ratified by the Irish Government until 1989 and has never been ratified by the United States of America.

The ICESCR imposes a duty on each member state to "take steps... to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the present Covenant by all appropriate means, including particularly the adoption of legislative measures."

Economic, social and cultural rights are as important to women as civil and political rights. Women in many countries have been denied access to human rights, and many women are unaware of their rights or how to go about securing them. Many factors account for this: women are usually in the majority when it comes to poverty and lack of education, and in the minority when it comes to decision making.

Feminist Movement Building:

The Feminist Open Forum

by Ailbhe Smyth

The topic for the first meeting of the Feminist Open Forum (FOF) was “Is Feminism Necessary?” Organised by Therese Caherty and myself, this meeting was held in Wynn’s hotel on 30 October 2008.

We set up fifty chairs in a tidy circle, and were delighted and amazed when about 150 women (and a few men) turned up and sat or stood wherever they could—on the floor, on tables, on the windowsills, full of excitement and anticipation. There was a terrific atmosphere, with women of all ages and backgrounds, some of them like ourselves involved in the women’s movement for decades, many of them new to feminism and eager to get going, and lots of young women from groups like RAG (Radical Anarcha-feminist Group), Choice Ireland and Lashback. Women came mainly from Dublin, although some had traveled from Belfast, Waterford and other places around the country. We had phone calls asking us if there would be local branches set up, and, in fact, women in Cork and Galway are working on doing just that.

because women “had equality” (what a joke!), or because “feminism never did anything for us.”

To be sure, women have taken giant steps since the early days of the Women’s Liberation Movement (who stole the word “liberation” by the way, and where have they put it?) at the beginning of the 1970s. There are laws in place to ensure or protect our rights in many areas. For example, we’re not officially discriminated against in the workplace; we can and do have careers; we can and do stand for election; we have access to contraception (but no abortion in Ireland, still); there are rape crisis centres and women’s refuges in many parts of the country; and we’re entitled to social welfare in our own right.

And yet, equality is still a long way off for the vast majority of women in the world today. Women throughout the world have less power, fewer assets, and are poorer than men. Everywhere, women and children are still subjected to horrendous violence at the hands of men. Introducing the first FOF meeting, Therese said that in this male-dominated world, structural differences ensured that the gender divide remained in place, with women continuing to carry out the majority of unpaid work, such as childcare and homemaking.

Each of the 13 speakers answered the question “Is feminism necessary?” There was no set agenda or “party line.” Alwiye Xuseyn, from AkiDwA (the network of African women in Ireland), talked about living as a Muslim woman in the contemporary world, about women’s health issues, and about the appalling practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). Grainne Healy, chair of the European Observatory on Violence Against Women, stressed how important feminism is in the battle against prostitution and the trafficking of women and girls for commercial sexual exploitation. Ivana Bacik emphasised the difficulties faced by women with young



Marie Quierly speaking at the inaugural Feminist Open Forum. Photo Paula Geraghty

Therese and I set up FOF because we felt the time was right for strengthening feminist politics and for raising feminist voices in public. Our poster invites people to come along to “a new space for feminists to get together to share views and experiences, to discuss current political issues, and to strategise and plan actions for change.” We had both had enough of the so-called “post-feminist era,” of hearing that we didn’t need feminism any more

children in continuing their working lives, the lack of childcare provision, and the need for full paternity rights. Elisa O’Donovan from University College Dublin, talked about the misogyny of popular culture, and said that Irish women still had massive self-esteem and body image issues, and one of the highest rates of self-harm in Europe. Níav Keating of Choice Ireland stated that “the draconian laws in Ireland on abortion rights” are the main

Local and Global

reason why she is a feminist, while Marie Quiery from Belfast urged us to think about how we organise, and how we relate to feminism and politics in the north. Sinead Kennedy focused on the importance of allying feminism with socialist politics; Anne Speed talked about women in the trade union movement, Noreen Byrne about the lessons to be learned from many years of activism, and Mary McDermott from the National Women's Council gave a thoughtful analysis of the principles of feminism and feminist strategy, and urged us to think, and to love. Emily and Clare from RAG talked about their politics as young anarchist feminists, and showed us their new 'Zine, to be published later in November.



Inaugural Feminist Open Forum. Photo Paula Geraghty

There was much lively discussion, as well as plans for more meetings, probably every month; a web site; a plaque commemorating the Irish Women Workers' Union in Fleet St; and a focus on poverty and the impact of the budget and recession on women. There were jokes and some good laughs (no songs, but that was only because there wasn't time or space for Cathleen O'Neill and the piece she'd prepared – next time, for sure!). Paula Geraghty filmed it all for the FOF archive, and we're definitely going to focus on organising activities for International Women's Day 2009.

Chairing the meeting, I reminded everyone at the end that although we had indeed made gains, these could be taken away from us at the drop of a hat, and often were. This is no time for us to turn our backs; NOW is the time to renew, regenerate, reactivate and get out there on the streets with our strong feminist voices, for the good of women in Ireland and for women throughout the world. There is much work to be done.

The Feminist Open Forum, set up by Therese Caherty and Ailbhe Smyth, can be contacted at feministopenforum@gmail.com, or on 087 2055433.

The Feminist Open Forum will convene a workshop at the Banúlacht/National Women's Council of Ireland International Women's Day Conference on March 5.

The Power of Movements

Personal Reflections on the 2008 AWID International Forum on Women's Rights and Development.

by Bénédicte Allaert

The Association for Women's Rights in Development is an international membership organisation that works to strengthen the voice, impact and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women. Every three years, AWID organises an International Forum on Women's Rights and Development, which brings together women's rights leaders and activists from around the world. The 11th AWID Forum was held in Cape Town, South Africa, in November last year, attracting more than 2,000 participants from 144 countries.

"The Power of Movements" was the cross-cutting theme in the hundreds of parallel sessions over four intensive days. Starting from the assumption that there will be no advancement of women's rights without women organising and joining forces, we addressed questions such as these: How do we organise and empower ourselves? How do we counter systems of oppression and exploitation that mutually support each other across the globe? How do we ensure that feminism includes marginalised women? Why do we want power?

Central to the discussion were the challenges of intergenerational dialogue and of integrating diversity in the movement (for example, including women with disabilities, members of the LGBT movement, and women prostitutes). Other topics addressed included (religious) fundamentalisms, health issues, reproductive and sexual rights, HIV/AIDS and, finally, the use of the Internet as a powerful tool for awareness raising and collective action.

WIDE, a European feminist network of women's organisations, development NGOs, gender specialists and women's rights activists, organised two workshops on macro-economic issues: one on "Movement Building Against Free Trade Agreements" (co-organised with the International Gender and Trade Network) and another on "Trade, Aid and Conditionalities" (which we organised with AWID). These workshops raised issues of the direct impacts of current macro-economic policies on poverty, hunger, health and climate change. The workshops, which attracted large numbers of participants, provided much-needed opportunities for critical feminist engagement with the triple crisis we are currently facing (finance, environment and resources). A common concern was the need for more economic literacy in order for more women's groups and associations to enhance their political analysis of the forces of oppression unleashed by the macro-economic policies of international financial institutions on the global South.

Bénédicte Allaert is the Coordinator of WIDE (www.wide-network.org), a European feminist network of women's organisations, development NGOs, gender specialists and women's rights activists. Banúlacht is the Irish Platform of WIDE.

Women's Organisations

Focus on Feminist NGOs

In this issue we have focused on women's organisations in Tanzania that exemplify the critical role of civil society in development and women's empowerment. To accompany the petition on the next page, here we feature five other inspiring organisations whose work highlights their role as agents of change and promoters of human rights, and the enormous contribution of women's organisations in the South to development.

The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP) works primarily to create awareness about harmful traditional practices and women's empowerment, focusing on sexuality and gender based violence, promotion and protection of women and girl children's political, social, sexual, reproductive health and educational rights. GAMCOTRAP works to change attitudes by focusing on community and religious leaders, policy makers, journalists, medical doctors, civil rights organizations, gender activists and political activists. One of the organisation's innovative approaches was the formation of a group of 'Sheroines', women who once carried out the practice of FGM and are now community advocates for its eradication. In addition, GAMCOTRAP co-ordinates a programme to increase women's political participation and representation in elective decision making positions. Dr Isatou Touray, the director of GAMCOTRAP, is one of the key-note speakers at Banúlacht's conference on 5th March.

Tanzania Midwives' Association (TAMA)

TAMA works to educate village leaders, patients, and community members about a range of reproductive and maternal and child health issues, including fistula and HIV/AIDS. Working in hospitals, dispensaries, health centres and schools, members of TAMA show videos, produce radio announcements, and post information sheets. To help ensure that midwives' skills are up-to-date, the association holds workshops on antenatal and obstetric care (including screening for patients at high risk of pregnancy complications and care of those experiencing prolonged labour). TAMA has also successfully reached out to religious leaders with messages opposing early marriage. In Mwanza, Tanzania, TAMA organises nutrition centres. Women who attend the clinics receive food supplements for their babies, but can also avail of HIV testing, contraceptive advice and support in relation to domestic violence.

CAFRA

The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) is a regional network of feminists, individual researchers, activists and women's organisations that define feminist politics as a matter of both consciousness and action. We are committed to understanding the relationship between the oppression of women and other forms of oppression in the society, and we are working actively for change. CAFRA's work includes research/action projects on issues of relevance to the regional women's movement, such as women in Caribbean

agriculture; women's history and creative expression; women and the law; violence against women; tourism and the sex trade. The organisation also organises education and training programmes based on needs identified by the membership, including popular theatre methodologies; participatory methodologies for legal education; use of national and international human rights instruments; advocacy and lobbying skills training; domestic violence training programme for police officers and social workers.



Postcard campaign by Women WONT Wait, international coalition of organisations and networks from the global South and North. Photo: www.womenwontwait.org

WILDAF

Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) is a pan-African network of organisations and individuals who work in the area of law and development to promote and strengthen strategies which link law and development to increase women's capacity to claim and enjoy all their human rights. The network now comprises over 350 organisations and 1000 individuals in 31 African countries. WILDAF works to raise awareness of and protect the rights of women. WILDAF aims to strengthen the capacity of local groups and individuals to design and carry out effective strategies that enhance the status of women from a legal, cultural, economic, political and social perspective. WILDAF's training targets community literacy volunteers and community based legal educators, as well as women in rural communities. Training is also provided for parliamentarians, traditional and religious authorities; and health personnel, among others.

The Xochilt-Acalt Women's Centre

This centre in Malpaisillo, Nicaragua carries out training programmes for health promoters, midwives and traditional birth attendants. The centre also works on violence against women. It has a young women's leadership programme, as well as a women-only credit program to promote women's economic empowerment and status within the family. In addition the centre runs adult education and literacy classes, a construction project, a gardening project, a small business program which generates income for the center, an agricultural program and a sewing program. Finally, there is a citizen participation project that aims to democratize the electoral process at the community level so that it is more focused on citizen needs.

Need Resources

Banúlacht Campaign

Banúlacht is calling on our members, colleagues and readers to add their signatures to the letter below, urging the Irish government in its overseas aid budget to increase funding for organisations that promote women's participation in decision making.

Background

Irish Aid's commitment to gender equality and the importance the Irish government attaches to gender and development are clearly outlined in the 2006 White Paper on Irish Aid (the Irish government's policy document on overseas development assistance). Irish Aid has undoubtedly made great advances in recent years in its gender work in priority aid countries.

The White Paper states that "the impact of our actions will be greater if issues of gender equality are taken into account at the outset and if the realization of the human rights of women informs everything we do." Both the White Paper and Irish Aid's 2004 Gender Equality Policy clearly state the government's commitment to supporting work aimed at the fulfilment of women's human rights and, specifically, the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Article 7 of CEDAW says that all States who ratify the Convention "shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country."

The work of women's organisations in Ireland and globally to enhance women's participation in decision making aims to create a critical mass of women who will work to transform the political structures, their agenda, priorities and ways of working at community, local and national levels—that is, a critical mass of women who are committed to a pro-women, pro-citizen and feminist agenda. At a time of global financial crisis, this work is more important than ever, and it is critical that organisations in the South that work for gender equality and women's human rights are funded by donors. To mark both International Women's Day 2009 and the 30th Anniversary of CEDAW, Banúlacht is calling for a commitment from Irish Aid to increase funding to women's organisations in the South.

This letter is based on the One World Action Campaign "More Women More Power" (www.oneworldaction.org). See also the European Women's Lobby 50-50 Campaign (www.womenlobby.org).

For more information on Irish Aid's work on gender equality, see www.irishaid.gov.ie and the web site of the Gender Based Violence Consortium (www.gbvi.ie).

Letter to Peter Power T.D., Minister of State for Overseas Development

Women make up more than half the world's people but only a fifth of the world's decision makers. I believe that it is a matter of justice and democracy that women should be fairly represented in formal political decision making at local, national, regional and international levels.

Having more women in decision-making roles ensures different perspectives, solutions and approaches. It means that issues of gender equality and equity are highlighted and addressed within international and national policy debates on, for example, the economy, trade, climate change, foreign policy and defence.

It also means that many issues that involve women will be more fully addressed, including those related to marriage and divorce, equality under the law, violence against women, reproductive rights and health, rape, public services, land rights, caring, equal pay, parental leave, pensions and others critical to the welfare of women, men and children.

Women who want to run for public office or participate in other forms of politics face enormous obstacles, including discrimination, violence and lack of resources.

I welcome Irish Aid's work in supporting initiatives aimed at gender equality, maternal mortality, gender-based violence, health and education. I now urge you to take further action to support gender equality by allocating more funds to programmes promoting and supporting women's political participation.

Signed: _____

Name and Organisation in block capitals:

You can send this page back to Banúlacht by post, or you can email your support for this letter to info@banulacht.ie. Signatures will also be gathered at our Conference on March 5 (see overleaf). A letter with all signatures received before April 30th will be presented to the minister as a message from women in Ireland in support of women's organisations in the South.

Inspiring Women: Challenging Voices, Changing Times

Banúlacht and the NWCI have come together to organise a major conference for International Women's Day. The conference will be held at the Croke Park Conference Centre in Dublin on Thursday 5th March, and will focus on women's activism and feminist leadership locally and globally.

Voices of Challenge

The challenging voices to be heard at the event are all feminist activists with experience of working at community level as well as local, national or international levels. The event will begin with a panel of three speakers. Kathleen Lynch, from the Equality Studies Centre at UCD, an outspoken champion of equality and women's human rights, will chair the session. She will be joined on the panel by two other women who are role models and feminist leaders. Isatou Touray is a long-time feminist activist from the Gambia, where she runs the Gambian Committee on Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP). Dr. Touray also coordinates the Women and Law Project of the Network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws in the Gambia. In 2005, she was the sole

moments of the last 30 years in Ireland. Anne Speed of SIPTU will talk about the women's liberation movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Cathleen O'Neill of Kilbarrack CDP will reflect on the emergence of feminist community development and community education in the 1990s. Benedictah Attoh will address feminist leadership emerging from the new communities. Elisa O'Donovan of UCD Students against Sexism will talk about young feminists and new feminist tactics.

Special events

During the conference there will be a performance of "Acting in Solidarity", a drama developed for the event by the Waterford Women's Centre with Jenny MacDonald of Blue Drum CDP. This drama is inspired by Banúlacht's Exchange Programme with women's organisations in Tanzania. Following the conference, Front Line, the International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, will launch "Insiste - Persiste Resiste Existe", a manual of protection strategies to address the specific security needs of women human rights defenders.

Something for everyone

This conference is for all women interested in women's issues, equality, feminism, feminist activism and development from a local and a global perspective. We've planned the event so that, whether this is your first conference, or you are a conference veteran, you will have a space to explore and articulate issues. Workshop facilitators include: Ailbhe Smyth of the Feminist Open Forum; Ann Irwin of the Community Workers Co-op; Nessa Ni Chasaide of the Debt and Development Coalition; Orla O'Connor of the NWCI; and Siobhán O'Donoghue of the Migrant Rights Centre. Themes for discussion are: 'Does Feminism Matter?'; 'Economic Downturn: Women Bearing the Brunt?'; 'Taking Action in Solidarity with Women in the South'; 'Feminist Leadership and Diversity'; 'CEDAW: From Community Activism to UN Action'.

There will also be three workshops for those who want to try something different: the facilitators are community artist, Martina Hynan, poet Siobhán Daffy and Siobhán Larkin of Blue Drum community arts CDP.

A range of organisations will have stands at the conference. Birth Choice Clare, a community women's group which is lobbying for the provision of maternity services in Co. Clare, will be exhibiting "Keeping Mum", a community arts project which has been developed with artist Martina Hynan. Women's Aid will be promoting the Avon Foundation's international 'Speak Out against Domestic Violence' campaign, and selling a special women's empowerment necklace.

For more information or to make a booking, contact Valerie Connolly or see Banúlacht's and the NWCI'S websites, www.banulacht.ie and www.nwci.ie.



Women at the Tanzania Gender Festival 2007. Photo TGNP

representative of Gambian nongovernmental organisations before the UN Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Bella Matambanadzo is a Zimbabwean feminist working with the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa. As a journalist, she has written widely on women's rights, and has been involved with the African Feminist Forum. She has also written witty and perceptive poetry to respond to violations of women's rights (see our website for some examples).

Reflections on Changing Times

In the afternoon, Margaret Ward of the Women's Research and Development Association in Belfast, will chair a panel entitled 'Reflections on Changing Times'. This will feature brief inputs from four women reflecting on feminist leadership at critical