

Mná Sasa—Women Now!

Presenting the Mná Sasa Manifesto

The word “manifesto” comes from the Latin “manifestum,” meaning “to make public,” and means a public declaration of principles and intentions, often political in nature. Mná Sasa means Women Now in the English and Swahili languages. The Mná Sasa Manifesto (pages 4-6) expresses stories and lived experiences, shared principles and concerns, and the learning and reflections of a group of women community activists in Ireland and Tanzania who have been involved in Banúlacht’s ExChange programmes since 2007. These are women who recognise the urgency of making connections between the local and the global. These women are feminists in community development who are inspired by a passion for gender justice and an ethos of solidarity. They are grassroots women who represent organisations that have spent years working for social change. The Manifesto not only articulates dreams and aspirations, it locates them in very specific obligations and commitments that our governments have undertaken for the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment.



Discussing the Mná Sasa Manifesto at the Kivulini Kitchen, Mwanza during the ExChange Visit 2011. (Photo: Ann Fitzgerald)

The Manifesto draws on discussions at a workshop held in October 2009 when, after two visits to Tanzania by women from Irish community development organisations, a group of Tanzanian women community activists came to Ireland. Banúlacht organised an intensive two-day think-in where women from the two countries explored commonalities and differences in relation to their life experiences, their inspirations and influences, values, motivations for working in women’s organisations and their visions for social change and gender justice. The Manifesto is drawn from these discussions.

The Manifesto, therefore, is a collection of stories, rather than an attempt to tell the “whole” story. We don’t claim that it is an exhaustive treatment of “women’s issues” or represents the final word on gender, development, human rights, or solidarity. We do believe, however, that the Manifesto is more than a record of the particular experiences of the women whose words it uses. It is a call for a global solidarity movement of grassroots feminists. For Banúlacht, the Manifesto represents a high point in our ExChange programmes: it is a powerful articulation by feminists in community development of the values that underpin the global women’s human rights movement.

The style of the Manifesto is unique: it is a collective narrative or story document. And it is written as a “triple-storied” document. The first story acknowledges effects of poverty, maternal mortality and gender-based violence on women’s lives. The second story is of grassroots women’s resistance, opening up personal and social herstories as a basis for claiming our shared futures. The third story is of government promises to honour women’s human rights, and our demands for them to be accountable to grassroots women.

The Manifesto not only articulates dreams and aspirations, it locates them in very specific obligations and commitments that our governments have undertaken for the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment.

In drafting this text, the aim was to reflect the women’s diverse voices and ways of telling stories and to capture the process by which the individuals’ stories became woven into a collective story. Turns of speech and expressions that might be edited out of a different kind of text have deliberately been left in. Rather than identifying the story-tellers, we have allowed different stories to flow into one another. In this way, the Manifesto reflects the spontaneity of the workshop, and the way in which the stories interrupted and overlapped with each other.

The Manifesto was written to be spoken and heard in diverse voices in collective spaces. It was finalised in late 2010 after much discussion and after reading it aloud in groups, several times in both Ireland and Tanzania. It is our hope that it will resonate with the experiences of other grassroots women, inspire their stories and facilitate the articulation of further issues, and, in this way, contribute to harnessing a spirit of collective purpose, global solidarity and feminist movement building.

We hope that women’s organisations and groups will read and discuss the Manifesto collectively. We have developed a workshop format that can be used or adapted to facilitate discussions on Manifesto (see page 12).



Discussing the Mná Sasa Manifesto during the ExChange Visit to Ireland 2009. (Photo: Maeve Taylor)

Mná Sasa Manifesto

We are feminists in community activism in Tanzania and Ireland. This Manifesto is an act of solidarity between us in this urgent time of cutbacks and global economic crisis. We come together from our shared histories of patriarchy and colonialism in a refusal to accept the deepening injustices we witness against women – the daily injustices of poverty and gender-based violence.

Our issues are connected. Our struggles are connected. Our governments must be held to account to women for their promises to honour our human rights.

We challenge the perceptions and stereotypes of women who experience poverty and gender-based violence. Inspired by our exchanges of knowledge and experience, and the historical struggles of the women who came before us, we claim back feminist activism and direction.

The story of We is the story of I and the story of She. Through the power of our individual and collective voices and stories, we lay claim to a future of global and gender equality, where all women are treated with dignity and respect.

Now is the time for action.

Now is the time for women's global grassroots solidarity.

Mná is the Irish word for Women. Sasa is the Swahili word for Now.

We are Mná Sasa!

Women and Poverty

FROM MWANZA TO MAYO, FROM DUBLIN TO DAR ES SALAAM, WOMEN BEAR THE BRUNT OF POVERTY.

As Tanzanian community activists, we know the effects cutbacks will have on women.

Eva was not taken to school because her father had no money. He wanted her to be married at 16 years so he could receive some income through her bride price. She got pregnant. She started labour at home. They had not enough money for transport to reach the hospital. She had a prolonged and obstructed labour. The baby died and she developed the serious medical condition of fistula.

Mama Mushi also had no money to hire a car to go to the hospital, so her baby was delivered at home assisted by her mother. She gave birth to a live male baby, but she haemorrhaged and died. The baby's grandmother had no money to buy milk for feeding him. He became malnourished.

Cutbacks mean more stories like this. The lack of access to appropriate, accessible, affordable health services will increase maternal mortality and the risks to maternal health. Cutbacks will mean that more children, and especially girls, drop out of school. Cutbacks will mean increased malnutrition.

As community activists from Ireland, we also see devastating effects of poverty.

A woman with a number of children trying to survive on the government's One Parent Family Payment has to pay out of this food, bills, rent, heat, clothing for children, and money for her children to take part in activities. She is unable to work because of the lack of affordable childcare.

Poverty means no food in the house.

Poverty means not having money for books, uniforms, lunches.

Poverty means not being able to pay rent when money is needed for something else.

Poverty means not having basic rights such as food, warmth, health, education and housing.

Poverty brings with it feelings of powerlessness, a lack of hope, and not looking forward to the future.

Gender-Based Violence:

Who Will Strengthen the Rule for Stopping This?

FROM MWANZA TO MAYO, FROM DUBLIN TO DAR ES SALAAM, WOMEN SHARE STORIES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE.

The story of my sister beaten heavily by her husband because she was late from the Tanzanian forest where she went to collect firewood while he was waiting for lunch at home.

The story of Mary who left her violent husband by crawling along an Irish ditch for fear a relative would see her when driving by. At her mother's house, she wasn't able to put her babies' washing on the line as her mother was embarrassed that the neighbours would find out that her daughter's marriage had broken down.

▶ The story of Maria who was eight months pregnant when her husband severely beat her, stripped her naked, and dumped her in their Tanzanian home yard. On the day that she died, an in-law had tried to convince her to move, fearing for her life. But Maria persisted in staying in order to have a baby in a matrimonial home. Instead, she ended up dead.

▶ The story of Jane who lived in a beautiful house with a latest model car parked in an Irish driveway. Her expensive clothes hid the cigarette burns her husband made on her arms. With no petrol in the car, no credit in the phone, she wasn't able to get to the services that might help her.

▶ My story from a hospital, in Tanzania where I received a patient bleeding from her hand which was severely cut by her husband, and when I asked myself: **WILL THIS BE STOPPED? WHO WILL STRENGTHEN THE RULE FOR STOPPING THIS?**

We dream of a world...

We dream of a world where poverty and domestic violence in all their forms no longer exist.

Where women's experiences, work, activities and lives are valued as much as men's.

Where women know their own worth and strength.

Where women will turn their wheel through education.

Where women know how women before them fought for their rights.

Where women can fulfill their ambitions; where women are in frontline leadership.

We dream of the world of women's human rights.

The roots of our dreams are deep.

They are in the inspiration of mothers, fathers, aunts, sisters and other women we know: a mother who believes in transforming herself, the world; another who raised fourteen children on very little money; a father who was a self-declared feminist and encouraged independence of thought.

▶ For one of us, it was *"my maternal aunts who made me open-minded and active."* For another, it was *"my Aunt Esther who never stopped telling me of the importance of education for women, and encouraging work for women's rights."*

▶ *"I am inspired by my older sister whose husband left her and their children penniless. She taught me through her strength that a woman had to be strong to survive, and to look out for anyone who might need support."*

▶ *"I am inspired by a woman I know, a survivor of domestic violence, who was able to turn her life and the life of her seven kids around. She was a survivor who refused to be known as a victim."*

The roots of our dreams are in the questions of our girlhood.

For one of us, *"the seed was planted at the age of nine when I wondered where were the women in history."*

For one of us, *"it was, when my father left my mother and took everything they had earned together, I asked myself: what is going on?"*

The roots of our dreams are in women's historical struggles.

The roots of our dreams are in the women's suffrage movement where women stood together against patriarchal society so that women could vote.

▶ **The roots of our dreams are in the undocumented struggles of African feminists who charted their own path independent of Western feminisms.**

▶ **The roots of our dreams are in the anti-colonial struggles for independence.**

The roots of our dreams are in the feminist movement in the 1970s.

The roots of our dreams are in the global women's movement for women's human rights.

▶ Our dreams are inspired by those who support our dreams.

Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland, and the women who voted for her - as a leader and women's human rights activist. Dr. Monica E Magoke-Mhoja, a Tanzanian lawyer and women's rights activist who built women's capacity to work on women's and children's rights issues.

▶ Nelcia Robinson of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action - poet, feminist, and incomparable leader and community educator of women. Helen Kijo Bisimbi, Director of the Legal and Human Rights Centre, who spoke with courage every morning about women's rights.

Our dreams are inspired by the struggles of grassroots women's groups everywhere.

One of us went to her local community centre when her child started school in 1992. *"I started listening to all the local women's stories about health, poverty, violence, and housing conditions in the inner city of Dublin. Myself and other women got together and formed a group to meet the city council and talk about some of the issues."*

▶ One of us planned and conducted a study on rural women's issues in Tanzania in 2002. *"Then I got involved in work on social change, speaking about what rural women were suffering so that the government would take action. I inspired myself"*

▶ Now, our dreams are inspired by each other: *"Listening to Mary Rusimbi talking about how much women had achieved in Tanzania sparked me to get pro-active in encouraging women to be more aware and to realise that change starts with 'me,' not 'them' or 'someone else' but 'ME' and that getting all the 'ME's' working in solidarity is a very powerful thing."*

Manifesto of Mná Sasa!

We Are a Movement: Reclaiming Feminist Activism and Solidarity

We are Mná Sasa! We confidently claim our knowledge as grassroots feminist activists. Our knowledge is from direct experiences, our involvement in community development and women's organisations, our social analysis, and our search for new ways of making sense of power and of women's place in the world.

We refuse to be 'foot-soldiers' plugging the holes of neo-liberal policies.

We refuse to be left doing service delivery instead of holding governments to account. Feminism dares us to expect more.

We refuse to allow feminist agendas to be weakened.

We refuse to allow our movement to become disjointed.

The way cutbacks are being implemented is the opposite of the community development approach. It is top-down, non-consultative and very directive. There is a feeling of being swallowed up by patriarchal organisations. There is a fear of losing all that has been achieved, like a tsunami is coming to wipe it all away.

Crisis can bring people together and change their whole perspective. Our organisations have been making visible impacts on local women's lives. The word has been spreading and gaining energy and momentum. Now that cutbacks are forcing some of us to re-organise, re-evaluate and re-invent, this energy and momentum can be harnessed. There are more voices behind us now.

We are Mná Sasa! In sharing our knowledge, in listening to, learning from, and laughing with each other, we see a bigger picture and a shared vision. From local grassroots to global grassroots, let us not be afraid to go ahead to achieve our goals.

When the Irish government cuts its aid budget, this has impacts on women in Tanzania. When the Irish government cuts funding to community development, this has impacts on women in Ireland. Women in Tanzania cannot march in protest about cuts by the Irish government. The only way is pressure coming from us in Ireland.

But if you push on one side and we push on the other, we can join our efforts to have a stronger voice and move a step ahead.

Together, as women, as grassroots organisations, we have the skills to move forward in solidarity.

Together we have skills of listening, information-sharing, communication, relationship-building and networking.

Together we have skills in social analysis, advocacy, facilitative leadership and being open-minded to new ideas.

Together we have the passion, patience, persistence, courage and resilience to tap the heart and to create movement.

We commit ourselves to the continuation of our solidarity efforts, and collaboration in pushing international agendas.

We are a movement. We are grassroots feminists from Ireland and Tanzania shaping a future together. If we succeed, the women who come after us will find everything so good.

Sasa! Action Now! We are Mná Sasa!

We hold our governments to account for their statement signed in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action that:

'Absolute poverty and the feminization of poverty, unemployment, the increasing fragility of the environment, continued violence against women and the widespread exclusion of half of humanity from institutions of power and governance underscore the need to continue the search...for ways of assuring people-centred sustainable development. The participation and leadership of the half of humanity that is female is essential to the success of that search' (para. 17).

We hold our governments to account for their pledge in the 2000 Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): 'We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty.'

We hold our governments to account for the Millennium Declaration and MDG commitments, 'To promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.'

We hold the Irish Government to account for its commitments in the Millennium Declaration and MDGs 'To grant more generous development assistance', and in the Beijing Platform for Action to 'adequate financial resources' for 'the implementation of the Platform for Action in the developing countries, particularly in Africa and the least developed countries.' (para. 353).

We hold our governments to account for their commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action to encourage 'women's organisations and feminist groups...to advocate for and support the implementation of the Platform for Action' (para. 298).

We demand people-centred sustainable economic and development policies based on values of gender equality, human rights, global solidarity, and accountability.

We demand structured processes for the voices of grassroots women to shape these policies.

As a core element of this and as a matter of immediate priority, we urgently demand that Irish Aid prioritise resources for grassroots women's activism in Tanzania and Irish Aid's other priority countries.

We call on grass-roots feminists and women's organisations in Ireland and Tanzania to support our Manifesto.

MNÁ SASA!

Mná Sasa Manifesto—Workshop Ideas

Facilitators or group leaders can use the discussion questions and other ideas below in planning workshops with women's organisations where participants discuss the Mná Sasa Manifesto and their own ideas and questions about feminism, solidarity and women's human rights in Ireland and globally.

Discussion questions

1. Your own story: why and how you got involved in a women's group or organisation

- ♦ Why did you first decide to participate or get involved in a women's group or organisation or in working for social change for women?
- ♦ Think of one particular person (a friend, relative, public figure, writer, artist, historical figure, international leader) who has inspired your ideas about women's rights. What was or is inspirational about her/him?

2. Dreams and aspirations for women's lives in Ireland and globally

- ♦ What are the particular women's issues that you are passionate about? What are your dreams for a better world for women in Ireland and globally?
- ♦ In what ways do you personally contribute to bringing about social change for women?
- ♦ What are women's organisations doing to bring about change and promote gender equality in Ireland and countries of the South (e.g. countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America)?

3. What should governments be doing to bring about those changes?

- ♦ What should the Irish government do to support gender equality in Ireland and in countries of the South (e.g. Africa, Asia, Latin America)?

Reading the Mná Sasa Manifesto in groups

Introduce the Manifesto (see page 4). Explain any unusual or difficult words.

Divide into three groups. Each group reads one page of the Manifesto. Each person is given a copy of the page and reads silently first. Then the group discusses:

- ♦ What is your response to the text? Are there echoes with the earlier discussions? What similarities and differences strike you most?

This process can be repeated with each of the pages. One person in each group takes notes (preferably on a flip-chart page).

Each group then reports back their discussions to the full group.

Reading the Manifesto aloud

In a circle, the group reads the Manifesto aloud, each person reading a sentence or short paragraph (use the arrows in the margins on pages 4-6 as guides). Some sections can be read by the whole group together.

Discussion: How did it feel to read the Manifesto aloud? What are your impressions of the Manifesto? Do you agree with the demands? How can you use these words and ideas in your own work?

Responding to the text

In small groups, participants could:

- ♦ Brainstorm ideas for their own local manifesto.
- ♦ Create a poster reflecting their ideas about solidarity, women's human rights.
- ♦ Draft a message of solidarity (e.g., a message to the Tanzanian women who were involved in drafting the Manifesto).

Share your reactions to the Manifesto

Email the group's ideas and thoughts to Banúlacht: e.g. notes from the group's discussions on the questions above; notes of the responses to and ideas and thoughts about the Manifesto; notes or photographs of posters, messages and other creative responses to the Manifesto. We will feature appropriate material, texts, photos and comments from workshops on a new section on the website.

Notes for facilitators

1. Read the Manifesto carefully before planning a workshop. Then contact Banúlacht if there is anything you are not sure about. You will find more information on Banúlacht's ExChange programme on Banúlacht's website, www.banulacht.ie. The website also includes information on the Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action.
2. Reading the workshop aloud has proved to be very powerful with groups. It takes at least 20 minutes to read the full text

aloud. A shorter version of the Manifesto is available from Banúlacht on request. A version in plain text is also available.

3. A more detailed workshop format is available: Contact Banúlacht at (01) 872 3039.
4. The Manifesto is most suited to groups that have worked together previously. It includes stories about domestic violence, and this aspect needs to be dealt with sensitively. Have information leaflets in the room, with contact details of Women's Aid and any organisations that work on the issue locally.

5. Agree with participants before sending any material (photos, stories etc.) to Banúlacht for publication on the blog (tip: do not use individuals' real names).
6. Take digital photos of the group with any posters or messages on flip-charts that are produced during the workshop.
7. We welcome feedback from facilitators and tutors in relation to workshop ideas and methodologies that have been particularly effective.