

The Bill of Rights and Women

Thursday 28 June 2007

Women's Resource and Development Agency

Discussion:

The main group of attendees was divided into 3 smaller groups with roughly 8 participants, from varying backgrounds- those involved with The Bill of Rights Forum, the Women's sector and the wider public.

Four questions were posed to the groups with an allocated time of 5-8 mins per question. Within the group, one person was asked to record and the group was instructed to agree on one point per question to feed back in plenary.

WRDA facilitators, Delores Wilson and Ann Marie White were circulating between the groups to ensure continuity and flow in the discussion.

Questions for discussion:

1. List any questions/issues arising from this morning's discussion.
(as there was question time after each speaker only one group fed back)
2. What are the crucial issues for women for inclusion in the Bill of Rights?
Acknowledging previous public consultations
 - a) what are the issues -
 - b) Does this require a separate chapter in the Bill of Rights?
 - c) Is there an alternative to a separate chapter?
3. How can the women's sector become more involved with the current working groups?
 - a) What practical elements need to be place for this?
4. Explore the benefits of wider public involvement with the working groups and possible formats for this?

Group feedback:

Group 1- scribed by Fiona Murphy, CAJ

Group 2- scribed by Helena Macormac, NICEM

Group 3- scribed by Judith Cross, Equality Commission

Question 1

List any questions/issues arising from this morning's discussion?

(Group 1)

- Clarification of the working groups and reports etc...would have been helpful.
- Problem with the viewpoint that the public consultation is over and done with (unhelpful with the process).
- People don't know all the issues or anything at all about BOR (Bill of Rights)
- Outreach is vital.
- CFNI funding is available.
- Resources are available- need to be aware of these.

Question 2

What are the crucial issues for women in the inclusion of the BOR?

(Group 1)

- Not convinced of a separate BOR chapter but convinced of need for strong gender specific provisions.
- Importance of judge's interpretation- mechanisms need to be in place to ensure fair interpretation.
- Violence against women, poverty, and political participation are crucial issues.
- Reproductive and sexual health issues, socio economic rights, social protection, caring, access and judiciary are all important issues that need to be addressed by the working groups.

(Group 2)

- Separate chapter? Issues:
- Enforceability?
- Judiciary-processes.
- Would a good preamble be sufficient?

- Need for a strong equality clause- use international examples, learn from experts.
- There needs to be good representation throughout all the groups.
- Need for expertise- need for sufficient financial resources.
- Public promotion- need to recognize relevance and importance of grass roots involvement.

(Group 3)

- There is a need for mainstreaming and separate chapter- particular areas for women in Northern Ireland need separate chapter.
- Mainstreaming throughout essential.
- Issues:
- Lack of women in public life.
- Career options.
- Violence- need for a strong statement of violence against women.
- Equal pay.
- Mention of women in the preamble and general equality clause.
- Role of judges very important.

Question 3

How can the women's sector become more involved with the current working groups? – What practical elements need to be in place for this?

(Group 1)

- Women's sector very overwhelmed- they need to be given the opportunity however to engage.
- There needs to be clarity of make up of working groups.
- Awareness of other mechanisms of being represented and gaining access egg actively engaging in groups like the Human Rights Consortium are essential.
- Opportunity to lobby and be represented by the voluntary sector group who meets to discuss progress on the Bill of Rights Forum via women's sector representatives on Forum.
- Women's sector can become more involved through lobbying of politicians.
- Email net works could be set up, to encourage communication.
- Central point for all information to be filtered to all groups needs to be established.
- Gender equality panel is needed to ensure involvement.
- Important to lobby civil and political working groups as well as all groups. Important not to ignore civil and political rights and focus on social and economic rights. Some important rights of women will fall under civil and political. But equally need to keep an eye on all of the working groups and find ways of being

represented on them by lobbying groups etc.

- Need to raise awareness of individual women who aren't part of groups etc...
- The use of appropriate advertising campaigns-e.g. Previous campaign, 'how to look good naked', use of media- radio etc... to raise awareness to wider female public.

(Group 2)

- There is a need for women's groups to have contact with the working groups.
- Clear channels of communication are necessary.
- Support and resources essential.
- Feedback to sectors important.
- Media and PR campaign needed to raise general public awareness.
- Such a campaign needs to be relevant.
- Campaign-eg.anti smoking campaign.

(Group 3)

- Ways for women's sector to support those involved:
- Good strategy is needed from the outset.
- Need to raise awareness- educate wider community.
- Local women's groups informed – use of newsletters to communicate and spread awareness/involvement.
- How do we influence the working groups that women are not represented on?
- Importance of Human Rights consortium to lobby across all groups.
- Briefing papers are needed for each of the sub groups.
- Women on the sub groups will need to build alliances with others and also be in a position to lobby for the inclusion of those not represented on the subgroups
- Use existing networks to disseminate information and garner support such as the Gender Advisory panel set up by OFMDFM.
- Evidence- working groups should have the capacity to call for experts to give evidence.
- What support is there for the individual women on the working groups? – is it possible to set up an email/forum to support the women on the working groups?

Question 4

Explore the benefits of wider public involvement with the working groups and possible formats for this?

(Group 1)

- Public engagement gives leverage to lobbying – harder for Government to say no

with groundswell of support which will help get it passed in Westminster.

- Informing people of rights, protection, inform Josephine public.
- Mass media campaign and roundtable forum as formats for engaging wider public.
- Consortium- 3rd July-need to develop communications strategy.

(Group 2)

- High profile public campaign will encourage wider public participation.
- Such a campaign needs to be relevant to be effective.
- In order to raise wider awareness-there needs to be different levels and approaches for different audiences.

(Group 3)

- Wider public engagement is about rights, not benefits.
- Resource arguments are not acceptable.
- Participation is inherent?
- Public engagement could be role of the Forum- decision needs to be made now on who is responsible for wider public participation and resources.
- Public need to be informed of Bill of Rights and processes.
- However women need to ensure that they do not take on board wider public and lose their own focus of gender inequality. Women's sector can't lose its' focus.

