



## Recommendations

- An article within the constitution that recognises our aspirations for a gender equal society.
- Develop an aged appropriate gender equality programme that would be embedded in the educational curriculum from the ages of 6-24 and further enhanced by programmes in youth services, sport, and culture organisations.
- Expand the “No Excuses” and “StillHere” to 10-year continuous campaigns running parallel to the educational programme.
- Adopt a Restorative practice approach to violent and sexual offences that can run in tandem with criminal proceedings leading to the improvement in outcomes for all parties.

## **Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality**

### **Gender Based Violence,**

#### **Short Paper Presentation by the Men's Development Network.**

### **Introduction**

The Men's Development Network (MDN) will celebrate its twenty fifth year in 2022. We believe, that gender inequality is one of the most pressing global barriers to social and economic progress and to the fulfilment of human rights. For over 20 years, we have worked to advance gender equality and create a world free from violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women, girls, and individuals of all gender identities. We work on local, regional, national and international campaigns and advocacy initiatives to prevent violence, promote healthy masculinities and advance gender equality. We are the only organisation in the country with dedicated programmes, (Male Advice Line) & (Mend) addressing victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. Our national men's health and developmental programmes engage men to reflect on their health and wellbeing, allowing them to be their most authentic selves and transform traditional norms of masculinity. The White Ribbon Campaign is a further example of our advocacy work promoting men ending violence against women.

### **Initial Reflections.**

When we sit with men in groups and invite them to reflect on their lives and how they can become their most authentic selves, one of the questions we ask of them to reflect on is: what aspects of patriarchy does not work for them? There are times when the reaction is embarrassment, other times silence but mostly it is bemusement and nervous laughter. There are some men who feel no aspects of patriarchy impacts on their lives and have no sense of privilege and others who understand the sense of privilege but see no downside.

Yet, when we provide a space in which men can examine the expectations that patriarchal society places upon them, they begin to see how those structural inequalities undermine their capacity to be their best selves. They see the

beliefs that make them ashamed of their own vulnerabilities, their inability to be emphatic and emotionally intelligent in their own lives and in the lives of their families and communities and the harm it causes. Gender based violence being part of the harm caused.

### **Non-adversarial approaches to Gender based Violence.**

It is from this perspective we wish to talk about the role of men in addressing gender-based violence. As an organisation the Men's Development Network have always adopted a non-adversarial approach to addressing gender inequality. Our experience over 24 years in building alliances, creating partnerships, and working in collaboration has supported and allowed us to develop a depth of understanding that enables us to work effectively with both perpetrators and victims of gender-based violence.

It is this approach that has influenced our core values of Equality, Partnership, Professionalism, Non- Judgemental and Love, and these should underpin any new article, policy, or law addressing gender-based violence or gender equality.

### **“Step up, Step in, Step back” – Transforming Masculinities.**

We believe Men and Boys should have a role in building the alliances that create the solutions to addressing gender-based violence. These solutions should primarily be modelled by example and support the required cultural shift in all our attitudes to violence. At the Men's Development Network, we promote a transforming masculinities approach which invites and encourages men to “step up” and become allies to women's organisations addressing gender equality, “step in” to challenge attitudes and behaviours, and “step back” as women take the lead. This is an approach that can be embedded in the fabric of our society, through our homes, schools, youth clubs, cultural and sports institutions. Examples of this work includes the White Ribbon Campaign, our MenD programme, and campaigns such as ‘Turn off the Red Light’.

A new conversation with a national reach needs to be facilitated in which all ages have the opportunity to discuss, reflect and act upon our attitudes to gender inequality and gender-based violence. Our Patron and Irish President Michael D Higgins once said at a recent event to mark the contributions made by organisation tackling violence against women, that: “individuals are not born violent, it is learnt behaviour, it is now time we facilitate its unlearning”.

This unlearning requires a holistic and comprehensive partnership approach, that includes constitutional acknowledgement of our intention for a full and equal society, political will to enact laws and policies to develop a framework of action and a non-adversarial and collaborative approach within the sector ensuring a cohesive and gender-sensitive approach, that provides the conditions in which attitudinal change can happen.

Gender-based violence has become synonymous with men's violence against women and we fully acknowledge the prevalence of cases that bear out this analysis, yet it is important that we also acknowledge the non-binary forms of gender that now prevails and that a more gender sensitive approach and form of language needs to be adopted.

A gender sensitive approach acknowledges all victims regardless of gender and will ensure a language and discourse is developed which is inclusive.

### **Sexual, Domestic & Intimate Partner Violence**

Finally, we wish to talk about the criminal process when it involves a sexual and domestic violence cases. The outcomes for all involved in these cases are extremely poor. The adversarial process is clearly not the most appropriate vehicle, as we see low levels of reporting, fewer cases in which charges are brought and fewer again that achieve conviction.

Although there are significant reforms recommended within the O'Malley report, the adversarial approach creates significant trauma for both victims their subsequent families and friends and perpetrators. Given that a high percentage of perpetrators are known to their victims, these types of trauma are further exacerbated.

There is significant evidence to suggest a non-adversarial approach can produce much better outcomes for all stakeholders in this area. There is further evidence that non-adversarial approaches are successful in effecting change in an individual, organisational, and systemic way. Processes such as reflective practice have proven their ability in difficult circumstances and could be explored.

A more humane approach is required to allow for all parties to reflect and come to terms with what has happened. The purpose of the process is to reduce the harm caused and could run parallel with the criminal proceedings.

## Recommendations

- An article within the constitution that recognises our aspirations for a gender equal society.
- Develop an aged appropriate gender equality programme that would be embedded in the educational curriculum from the ages of 6-24 and further enhanced by programmes in youth services, sport, and culture organisations.
- Expand the “No Excuses” and “StillHere” to 10-year continuous campaigns running parallel to the educational programme.
- Adopt a Restorative practice approach to violent and sexual offences that can run in tandem with criminal proceedings leading to the improvement in outcomes for all parties.