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The objectives of the citizens' assembly on gender equality are admirable and optimistic. However, it must be recognised that equality implies special measures targeted at particular issues as well as ensuring equal and balanced treatment, conditions and outcomes.

Special measures need to be developed in order to address the status of girls and women in Irish society currently and in the past. The rates of violence against women is well documented by domestic violence agencies, which estimate one in five women experience domestic violence and coercion in their private lives (Women's Aid, accessed 28/2/20). The rates of rape and sexual assault against women and girls is also well documented by the agencies rape crisis agencies, which is very concerned about the increasing sexual violence against girls and women, not only from strangers, but also within intimate relations (Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, assessed 28/2/20).

However, in the quest to ensure a particular version of equality, men's experience of domestic violence is increasingly included in the discourse addressing DV, as if there was an equivalence between men's and women's experiences, when there is not, as Kimmel found in his extensive review of literature (Kimmel, assessed 28/2/20)

It is clear that in the treatment of women and girls in legal practice leaves them (us) very vulnerable to victim blaming, in contrast to all other crimes, where the blame, responsibility and/or intention resides with the defendant rather than the victim. The law and the practice of law has to be fundamentally transformed in order to address this overt and covert misogyny.

Another special measure that ought to be examined is that of the status of the LGBTQI+ community. The tone of the Citizens' Assembly implies a normative heterosexual, patriarchal, binary construction of gender. It is vital to understand that our notions of gender are based on tradition maintained and cultivated by social institutions including the family, religion, education, and the economy. Thus, special measures for non-binary equality must be addressed in the Citizens' Assembly, in order to ensure that this community is protected.

However, an unhelpful discourse that hampers progress is the unquestioning assumptions about masculinities and patriarchy. That is, humanity is still considered to be normative masculine, and the LGBTQI+ community is characterised by deviations from heterosexuality, irrespective of the development of feminist theories since the beginning of women's and gender studies. The Citizens' Assembly must grapple with these assumptions in order to genuinely address gender equality.

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Theme 1: Gender norms and stereotypes

Gender norms and stereotypes as barriers to gender equality

Fixed ideas about what women and men should do in the home or at work are learned by girls and boys in early childhood and throughout their lives. These ideas or gender stereotypes affect their choices in school and as they enter careers and contribute to a lack of progress toward equality between women and men. This limits not only the jobs that women and men consider or are available to them, but also can exclude women and men from social roles and tasks.

➢ Please outline what you see as the key barriers/ obstacles and challenges to gender equality under this theme in law, policy and practice.

This answer is focused primarily in the social and cultural domain, but reference is made to law and policy. The key barriers include the persistence of internalised and externally imposed gender stereotyping which starts at a very early age. External stereotyping starts probably at the moment of birth or before, while internalised notions kick in around the age of three or four. This is monitored and maintained by the peer group, where girls monitor what girls do and boys monitor what boys do. This persists to adulthood. The other major key barrier is the overt and covert dividends that emanate from stereotyping, including the unpaid work of carers, generally women, and the higher rates of pay for higher status work, particularly in hierarchical employment, such as directors, CEOs, management, and so on, as opposed to those on the front line of work. Further, gender stereotypes play a crucial role in social and cultural lives, with some level of internalised passivism preventing women from stepping forward, and an internalised activism urging men step forward, even if it is not the right thing for either of them. However, it is more acceptable for women to transgress the stereotype, as a result of the legal changes that have taken place since the 1970s, while men are still struggling again the stereotype of what a 'real man' is. A key response to this must be in education, particularly in early childhood and primary, where stereotyping is maintained by the gender stereotyping in the teaching, administrative and higher executive staff. This could be underpinned by law, in order to change attitudes and values, by regulating the gender balance in employment, curriculum and pedagogy.

➢ Please identify the steps to be taken to address the issues raised and who should address them (e.g. the state, private sector, education system etc.)

As an educator, I perceive that the key steps to address these issues begin in education, particularly with the Department of Education and Skills, but also the trade unions and the Teaching Council. A thorough re-education/ professional development needs to be designed and implemented, underpinned by the learning from feminist and LGBTQI+ communities, which ultimately challenge gender stereotyping. Secondly, vested interests in gender stereotyping must be questioned, particularly with regards

to the gendered divisions of labour: women for caring, men for strength or reasoning. This implies action through legislation, but also the practice in employment. For example, there seems to be an unconscious bias against families with small children, and an assumption that, as the family is primary carer of children, that it is not the responsibility of employers, the state or other social institutions to support parents. This may need to be addressed in a wide variety of outlets, including media; employment, health and welfare law; and the entire education system.

Theme 2:   Work: Occupational segregation by gender, gender discrimination and the gender pay gap

Women and men are often concentrated into different kinds of jobs and within the same occupations, women are often in work that is less well paid and has less opportunities for career advancement. Women often work in areas where they can work part-time so as to fit in with their caring responsibilities. While many men work in low paid jobs, many professions dominated by women are also low paid, and professions that have become female-dominated have become lower paid. This worsens the gender pay gap (the average difference between the wages of women and men who are working).

➢   Please outline what you see as the key barriers/ obstacles and challenges to gender equality under this theme in law, policy and practice.

To me, the key barrier to addressing this is social practice, rather than the law. The main obstacle is the complete absence of solidarity among workers. For example, until fairly recently, the main 6 o'clock news on RTE featured two experienced journalists, one of whom received practically a full salary more than the other. This was redressed with two female journalists took over, in solidarity with one another. Similar examples have been exposed on the BBC and other media. However, these examples only apply to equal work, and the structural gendering of work persists in spite of existing equality legislation. This is because work and social life is organised along the lines of unpaid or low paid care the private domain: the home, in care homes, in childcare and so on, while the world of work is based on the almost complete availability of the worker. Further, gender stereotyping persists in career guidance, with for example, teaching an ideal profession for women, because of the contact hours, leading to the feminization of the profession, without feminist principles of gender equality underpinning it. By the way, I disagree with the term: 'female-dominated', as these professions are not dominant and high ranking, and are quite often subordinated, such as nursing subordinate to other medical professions. I prefer the term feminization, with the implication that it is mainly done by women, it is lower paid and with fewer opportunities for promotion.

➢   Please identify the steps to be taken to address the issues raised and who should address them (e.g. the state, private sector, education system etc.)

Firstly, this is an issue for civil society, particularly the trade unions, communities and partnerships, to develop that sense of solidarity with one another, rather than competition for scarce resources. Secondly, the education system needs to embrace

gender equality, in terms of the profession and the education of teachers and guidance counsellors, the curriculum, the culture within educational institutions and a measure similar to Athena Swan to monitor gender equality. Thirdly, the law needs to take into account that we live in a society. The economy is subordinate to the society. Society is made up of families, communities, urban and rural, class, ethnicity, politics, health, welfare and so on, and all these people and sectors are entitled to protection under the law, rather than simply regulating the economy.

Theme 3.   Care, paid and unpaid, as a social and family responsibility

Care -- the social responsibility of care and women and men's co responsibility for care, especially within the family

Women remain disproportionately responsible for unpaid care and often work in poorly paid care work. For working parents or lone parents, balancing paid work with parenting and or caring for older and dependent adults presents significant challenges. Women are most disadvantaged by these challenges, yet men also suffer from lack of opportunities to share parenting and caring roles. Despite recent legislation and policy initiatives to support early years parental care, inequalities in the distribution of unpaid care continue between women and men. The cost of childcare has been identified as a particular barrier to work for women alongside responsibilities of caring for older relatives and dependent adults.

➢   Please outline what you see as the key barriers/ obstacles and challenges to gender equality under this them in law, policy and practice.

The key barrier is the cost of care when it is not carried out by unpaid labour - mainly women.

➢   Please identify the steps to be taken to address the issues raised and who should address theme (e.g. the state, private sector, education system etc.)

This is definitely an issue for the state. Care should be included in public services like education, social welfare, housing, (somewhat) and health. It is not a profit making business like making jam or coffee. And men and women could be supported in undertaking the paid employment in the statutory services.

Theme 4:   Women's access to, and representation in, public life and decision making

Ensure women's participation and representation in decision-making and leadership in the workplace, political and public life

Women are systematically underrepresented in leadership in economic and political decision-making. Despite the introduction of a candidate gender quota (through the system of party funding) for national political office, and initiatives to support women's access to corporate decision-making roles, men continue to dominate leadership positions. There are also issues to be considered around how media represents women and men.

➢ Please outline what you see as the key barriers/ obstacles and challenges to gender equality under this theme in law, policy and practice.

There are a number of barriers, including the organisation of public life, particularly the clientelism of political practice; the internalised oppression of women and the generalised misogyny in the ways in which men and women are socialised,; and the specific misogyny in social media, which has created a wide dynamic of information that can be devastating. Further, models of leadership needs to be challenged, based as it is on a dynamic person at the head of the organisation or system and quite passive and unquestioning followers or workers. Finally, there are fewer role models and many of those are perceived as quite traditional, like Angela Merkel, one of the most powerful figures in modern life, is seen as a mother, Mutti. while Theresa May was seen as 'a bloody difficult woman'.

➢ Please identify the steps to be taken to address the issues raised and who should address them (e.g. the state, private sector, education system etc.)

The business and academic worlds ought to be able to come up with alternative models of leadership, with shared leadership at the very least offered with seriousness and for men and women. Institutional politics needs to change too, for example, the Dáil could have on-site childcare and there ought to be extra allowances for people with children or elder care to cover the extra expenses incurred through their duties and obligations. Also, it is vital that the practice of politics is organised on more human friendly lines, for example, during school time. Finally, it would be worth thinking about the organisation of school, to provide longer hours to complete 'homework' at school with guidance, and more physical exercise for children, for well being and health.

5. Where does gender inequality impact most?

To conclude we would be interested in your response to the following question: In which area do you think gender inequality matters most?
Please rank the following in order of importance, 1 being the most important:

- Paid work   4

- Home & family life   1

- Education   2

- Politics and public life   5

- Media   66

- Caring for others   3

- Other – please elaborate   7

> Gender equality also refers to LGBTQI+ which is very important in each of these spheres.

➤ Please outline the reasons for your answer below:

> The personal is political: As a feminist, I consider that the private domain of family and community is the primary educator of society and when that is deeply gendered, there is a knock-on impact on all the the spheres

➤ Please include any further comments or observations you may have here.

> I have been an adult educator for over 35 years and the issues that learners are grappling with today have hardly changed in all those years, particularly with regards to violence against women, rape and slut-shaming, distain and disrespect. In some ways, the public domain has improved, but only along 'business as usual' lines, rather than a transfromation of society to embrace and value each and every one of us.