

Building Peace at Belfast's Interfaces

A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE

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A draft version of this report was circulated at the *Gender & Dealing with the Past: UN Resolution 1325* event organised by BCRC on 25th June 2014. Please see www.bcrc.eu for more details.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite continued divisions within its society, Northern Ireland's peacebuilding sector is significant and peace funding from a range of sources have assisted the society in beginning a process of conflict transformation, in particular since the signing of the 1998 peace agreement. A large degree of volunteerism and high levels of community cohesion have however also assisted and sustained the process; it can for instance be argued that peace funded initiatives are in many cases based on, or have come about as a result of, the formalisation of local work and processes.

Among the initiatives that have been established during this period is the Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium (BCRC), an EU Peace II/III funded project aiming to transform conflict and build peace across Belfast's interface areas.¹ While working to make a contribution to peacebuilding processes locally as well as citywide, there is no question that the project has been male-dominated since it was formally set up in April 2007. Although the staff team was made up of 4 women and 4 men in the early stages of the project (currently 3 women and 5 men), its steering group and wider network of Local Area Contacts remain overwhelmingly male. However, following workshops² as well as informal engagements across Belfast this gender imbalance began to be questioned. As a result, BCRC took the decision to begin addressing the issue and, in late 2010, the project commissioned Laurence McKeown (with contributions by Joanna McMinn) to carry out a research project on its behalf with the following aims:

- To “analyse the gendered dimensions of interface conflict resolution work”
- To “assess the strengths and limitations of current conflict resolution from a gender perspective (...)”
- To “examine the opportunities for BCRC to be more effective by taking account of gender in its work”
- To “make recommendations for a gender strategy (...)”³

The research report was entitled *Gender at the Interface* and a final draft was presented to the BCRC staff and Steering Group in May 2011. The report was based on interviews and focus groups with 27 people (26 women and one man) who ranged from interface workers to representatives of the women's sector and addressed a number of key themes, including:

- women and personal/political development;
- women, interface work and community development;
- working with men; ex-prisoners and ex-combatants;
- experience of working with BCRC.⁴

The research presented a broad spectrum of direct quotes from the research participants under each of these themes and also drew conclusions and made a number of recommendations on the basis of these. The research was designed as the beginning of a process of engagement; according to the researcher, “research and research reports” should be viewed as “a process rather than a once-off, static, investigation into a topic”.⁵

This report will aim to discuss and summarise implications of the *Gender at the Interface* research, BCRC’s March 2012 response to the research recommendations (Appendix 1) as well as a subsequent note from a workshop facilitated between BCRC staff/Steering Group members and research participants in November 2012 (Appendix 2). The focus here will primarily be on general rather than BCRC-specific aspects of the research findings with the aim to highlight issues around gender in a ‘post-peace agreement’ environment. In addition to analysing the wealth of information outlined in the *Gender at the Interface* research, this report will further draw on other resources with relevance to the themes of gender, peace and conflict. More specifically, the report will attempt to apply key aspects of UN Resolution 1325 to conflict resolution and interface work in the local context of the north or Ireland, and in particular to the city of Belfast with its many interface areas and persistently divided communities.

GENDER, PEACE & CONFLICT: UN RESOLUTION 1325

Mothers/fathers, sisters/brothers, aunts/uncles, grandmothers/grandfathers, partners, wives/husbands, girlfriends/boyfriends, combatants, peacebuilders, victims and survivors...

There is no question that both women and men play a variety of roles in our society, roles that are often overlapping and/or contradictory. It is however also clear that men's and women's roles have differed both historically as well as in recent times – the 1968-1998 conflict and its aftermath are no exceptions. Acknowledging the significance of the issue of gender for building sustainable peace in Northern Ireland as well as recognising the contributions made by women in interface areas and beyond, led the Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium (BCRC) to commission its research on grassroots peacebuilding through a gendered lens in late 2010.

Northern Ireland is certainly not an anomaly in terms of gender imbalances in relation to peacebuilding following violent conflict. In October 2000, just over two years after the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, the United Nations Security Council issued its resolution *UNSCR 1325* which not only highlighted the disproportionate negative effects of war/violent conflict on women (and children) but also emphasised the significance of women's involvement in preventing and resolving conflict worldwide.⁶ In fact, the resolution was issued because it was acknowledged that attention needs to be paid to the different roles and experiences of women and men during conflicts and their aftermath and that women need to be encouraged and enabled to take on stronger roles in peacebuilding processes. Recent events and processes in Northern Ireland have shown that dealing with the past and the recent conflict is necessary in order to move forward in a constructive and peaceful manner. It is clear that it is essential to acknowledge and address gender issues as part of this process.

While UN Resolution 1325 highlighted a range of issues, the following points in particular are applicable to the Northern Ireland context.

Firstly, *UNSCR 1325* stresses

... the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and (...) the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.⁷

The resolution also emphasises that

... an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.⁸

As *UNSCR 1325* predicts, the Northern Ireland conflict's impact on women and men was in many cases very different. While conflict actions were dominated by men, women nevertheless experienced its consequences, as for instance highlighted in the recent documentary *We Were There*. The film emphasises women's experiences in relation to the Maze Long Kesh prison during the recent conflict – as mothers, daughters, prison officers' wives and tutors.⁹ It provides a glimpse of how prisoners' as well as prison staff's experiences of the prison and imprisonment reached far beyond their own to encompass their families and loved ones. As several film participants allude to, the strain on dependants of those imprisoned or working in the prison were significant. In other words, while this was a prison for men, it had an impact far beyond its walls.

In addition, there is also no doubt that the families of those who actively took part in the Northern Ireland conflict were impacted on in a variety of ways. Only a small number of women would have taken on active roles as combatants but many were indirectly involved through support for the cause and by trying to maintain family life.

Another aspect to consider is the role of women in DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration¹⁰) processes, i.e. acknowledging women's participation in conflict, the effect of conflict on women and also emphasising their roles coming out of conflict and in processes of peacebuilding. UN Resolution 1325 indeed

[e]ncourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants.¹¹

Bill Rolston furthermore argues that “DDR, like the war which precedes it, is inevitably gendered”.¹² Rolston highlights the indirect effect violent conflict and its aftermath can have on women but also the direct role played by women as combatants, claiming that

if the issue of DDR in general has been under-considered, then that of gender and DDR is even more so. Eighteen years after the republican and loyalist ceasefires, this is in many ways a debate still waiting to happen.¹³

Although there has been no official DDR process following the conflict in Northern Ireland, it is clear that ex-combatants and ex-prisoners make up a significant part of society and the

post-1998 period has also seen a number of initiatives come about that could in effect be seen to form part of an informal DDR process. As Rolston concludes

... a number of developments emerged in Northern Ireland in relation to demobilization and reintegration which can match the best practice in DDR globally – such as the commitment to self-help, mutual aid and community development.¹⁴

And, as noted, although most of those who played an active role in the conflict were men, women also took part either directly as combatants in some cases or through more indirect roles. Following an informal discussion regarding gender and the conflict in Northern Ireland, a point was made to me recently that there have been a lot of militant women but that a lot more men have been involved in 'militarism'. As one of the participants in the *Gender at the Interface* research also noted, "[s]ometimes it has been the women calling the men (paramilitaries) to action (over something in the community) and the men respond."¹⁵ A potential distinction can hence be made between attitudes/beliefs/convictions on one hand and actions on the other, i.e. whereas women can have militant attitudes men more often tend to be the ones responsible for practical applications of militarism.

Applying UNSCR 1325 to the Northern Ireland Context?

It is clear that the gender dimension of the conflict as well as the post-agreement phase in the north of Ireland has not received sufficient attention to date. According to Hanna's House, it is therefore recommended that *UNSCR 1325* "becomes part of the fabric of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and its institutions" through both British and Irish national action plans that "reflect the needs of women in each of these jurisdictions".¹⁶

A Stormont Committee, the 'All Party Group on UNSCR 1325: Women, Peace and Security', was set up with an aim "[t]o raise awareness of the lack of participation of women in political and public life in areas outlined in UNSCR 1325" and is serviced by the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform.¹⁷ However, the resolution itself has not yet been officially implemented in Northern Ireland. It can be noted that this is not for lack of trying by a number groups and initiatives, such as Hanna's House, who have lobbied politicians in the UK, Ireland and Northern Ireland on the issue. While formal processes have not taken place, the UN Resolution 1325's potential is however recognised by many, in particular within the broader women's sector. *UNSCR 1325* has for instance been utilised as a tool to assist in encouraging women's greater participation in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. One key initiative to note is the Women and Peace Building Project, a cross-border, EU-funded initiative run jointly by the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA), the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) and the National Women's

Council of Ireland (NWCi). The project has engaged some 1,000 women over two years and has for instance resulted in roundtable discussions and workshops as well as conferences, all culminating in a final event and launch of a toolkit “aimed at ensuring women’s voices are heard in policy development”.¹⁸

A quick look at what is happening locally and across the world regarding the themes addressed in this report also reveals a plethora of activities aimed at addressing the gender, peace and conflict nexus. Internationally, a wide range of recent activities can be noted, including:

- Conciliation Resources’ 12th June 2014 events (London), ‘Women in Peace Negotiations: Reflections from the Philippines and Colombia’ and ‘Women’s Innovations in Peacebuilding’¹⁹
- PRIO event 7th-8th November 2014 (India), ‘International Conference on Gender, Empowerment and Conflict in South Asia’²⁰
- UN lecture series 21st May 2014 (New York), ‘Invest in Women for Peace: Conflict Prevention & Women’s Participation in Ukraine’²¹
- Australia, the UK and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom event 12th March 2014 (UN HQ, New York), ‘Women’s Participation in Peace Processes: How Can the International Community Support Women’s Leadership in Conflict Resolution?’²²
- PeaceWomen Project’s event 9th July 2013, ‘Men, Peace and Security: Engaging Men and Boys to Promote Gender Equality and Eliminate Gender-Based Violence’²³

At a local level, there have also been a range of recent activities dealing with relevant themes:

- Women and Peacebuilding Project’s 27th June 2014 event (Belfast), ‘No Peace Without Women’²⁴
- BCRC’s 25th June 2014 event (Belfast), ‘Gender and Dealing with the Past: UN Resolution 1325’²⁵
- Women and Peacebuilding Project’s 20th March 2014 conference (Belfast), ‘Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning’²⁶
- Hanna’s House’s 5th November 2012 conference (Dublin), ‘Women Delivering Peace & Security’²⁷

From the above, it is clear that the issue of gender is an important one locally as well as internationally. BCRC’s research and engagements on the issue are therefore timely, in particular in an environment when ‘dealing with the past’ is high on the agenda in Northern Ireland, recognising that both male and female perspectives need to be considered when addressing such issues.

Gender at the Interface: RESEARCH & ONGOING PROCESS

The Research & Its Findings

Laurence McKeown was appointed to carry out the *Gender at the Interface* research on BCRC's behalf in 2010 and it was completed in early 2011. The research covered a range of themes, including:

- 'Gender and gender relations'
- 'Structural Inequalities' and links to 'Peace Process, Policy-Making, and Funding'
- 'The Women's Sector'
- 'Women and Personal and Political Development'
- 'Women, Interface Work, and Community Development'
- 'Working with Men'
- 'Ex-Prisoners and Ex-Combatants'
- 'Experience of Working with BCRC'

The report defines 'gender' as "the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women".²⁸ In other words, although the research focuses primarily on women's views and experiences it is clear that this concept applies equally to men and women, though there are no doubt prevalent gender inequalities that remain to be addressed. The report introduces the concept of "structural inequalities", such as "relative poverty; gender-based and socially prescribed obligations (...) and the distinct socio-economic, political and social inequalities between men and women in post-conflict societies", arguing that these factors face women on a number of levels in society and also have an impact on "the extent to which women can engage in social/communal/political processes". It also emphasises these as "daily-life realities and obstacles" experienced by those interviewed for the study.²⁹

Studying the interview responses featured in the *Gender at the Interface* report makes it clear that McKeown's conclusion that a broader contextual understanding of the connections between "de-militarisation, peacebuilding, and community development"³⁰ is key when looking at issues of gender in relation to interface/peacebuilding work. In particular, it is important to understand the role played by men in interface areas during the conflict and the roles that the same individuals have the potential to play in the post-peace

agreement context. Although there were female combatants during the conflict, the vast majority were male and an indirect division of labour seems to have resulted from this, with women often playing important non-combatant roles. Following the 'end' of the conflict it is clear that the roles have been changing, largely voluntarily among former combatants and perhaps to a larger extent involuntarily among those women (and men) who would have played key community development roles in local communities during the conflict and in earlier stages of the peace process. One of the findings of the research is the change in gender balance and roles within the community sector itself over time. As one research respondent argues, “[p]aid work in community development posts, which during the conflict would have been held largely by women, are now more likely to be held by men”.³¹ In addition, another respondent finds that “mainstream funding for promoting women’s equality has diminished significantly since the Good Friday Agreement”.³²

As the research shows, women have played a variety of roles in local communities. Men’s roles have also varied, not least with some moving from combatant roles during the conflict to being peacebuilders more recently. It can be argued that this has in fact formed part of an informal DDR process that has taken place in Northern Ireland since 1998. In other words, while other contexts have frequently had problematic DDR processes, Northern Ireland’s has been quite successful – even though DDR as a concept has never been officially applied in this context. The research however shows that while many former combatants have successfully moved away from conflict towards peace work, this has also in some cases caused friction in the field of peacebuilding and community development with men being accused of taking over. It is however emphasised that part of the explanation for a lack of women’s formal involvement is likely to be a lack of confidence. As one respondent notes, “they’ve [women] have agreed to do wee things locally but not to come to the committee meetings or that” and “[w]e find it very difficult to get women involved”.³³

Research participants in some cases also argued that women and men can bring different qualities to different situations and that women may be more effective in certain situations than men. Men are for instance accused of being less “empathetic”³⁴ or less “approachable” than women³⁵.

Report Conclusions & Recommendations

*Any gender strategy for BCRC will only be effective if located within a broader understanding of the role of the organisation within the context of demilitarisation, peacebuilding, and community development.*³⁶

BCRC as a project is discussed in some detail in the report’s concluding chapters, in particular its structure and “uneven developments”³⁷ internal to the project regarding

“experience, political support, and community involvement”³⁸ while also highlighting the links to “the politics, history, and culture of the constituent groupings that it attempts to engage in a common endeavour”.³⁹ The research also confirms the perception that the role of BCRC is sometimes unclear and that the project is being viewed by some as the “flavour of the month’ in terms of funders”.⁴⁰ The report further highlights optimal conditions and factors needed for the delivery of effective interface work, not least placing the work within a process of addressing broader socioeconomic issues such as education, poverty and community safety. The report therefore concludes that interface work has to be connected to wider community development processes and “should not be reduced to firefighting”.⁴¹ BCRC’s overall work has indeed been “underpinned by a community development ethos” from the outset, applying a two-pronged approach of short term conflict management combined with longer term community development work to transform conflict and build peace.⁴² There was however a clear wish from the research participants to see the project broadened out to be inclusive beyond the key constituencies involved and in particular for women to take on a more prominent role along with stronger engagement with young people. In addition, the report encouraged greater awareness of gender issues along with the application of *UNSCR 1325* to the work that BCRC does at a local level across the city of Belfast.⁴³

In terms of conclusions regarding women’s involvement in interface/peacebuilding work, the report finds that there is frequently a lack of respect for women in these roles and that their work is also insufficiently valued. According to the report, this is for instance evident in the proportion of unpaid interface work carried out by women and the disproportionate number of men who are paid interface workers. It is also argued that the low proportion of funding for “women’s groups/projects” is an indicator of this.⁴⁴ Other issues raised include women’s family responsibilities and, by extension, for instance the necessity of childcare. In addition, the findings give an indication of women’s difficulty to work with some men under some circumstances, while showing that the opposite is also true in other contexts.

In relation to the informal process of DDR mentioned above, research participants expressed opinions that range from a view that

Interface workers ‘with paramilitary backgrounds’ are being funded without qualifications, not receiving proper training ..., not engaging in any meaningful manner with long-established community organizations, not challenging real issues in the community, and that they are not positive role models ... as some appear to regard their role (as interface workers) as a continuation of their ‘paramilitary involvement and position’ rather than in a community development context.”⁴⁵

In contrast, the report also concludes that

others felt that there are former prisoners and combatants who have played a very positive role in moving things forward within their communities⁴⁶

These diverse opinions could arguably reflect a 'culture' clash between a 'militaristic' approach to getting things done and a more inclusive community development approach. In an optimal environment the reintegration of ex-combatants would include a seamless move from the former to the latter but it is more likely to involve a complex transitional process, as indicated by these statements.

Some differences were also highlighted by research participants regarding the extent of gender imbalances within the republican and the loyalist communities, with more women reported to take on prominent roles in the former:

On the republican side the women were to the fore whereas on the loyalist side they were kept more to the back, keep the home fires burning. Republican women got their hands dirty and they were prominent in it. And they were listened to as well, if they were in command. Loyalist women were held back.⁴⁷

Another response referred to the context of North Belfast and estimated that the proportion of male and female interface workers had been "about 50/50" at one time and that "[t]he catholic side would have had more women than men but today that seems to be more men."⁴⁸

In terms of its 13 recommendations⁴⁹, the research proposes that BCRC as a whole considers the report and issues an agreed response, to be circulated to the research participants in order to begin a broader process of engagement. A follow-up discussion was then suggested between the research participants to consider the final research report and BCRC's response to it as well as to "offer practical suggestions for taking it forward".⁵⁰ Other recommendations included the publication of the report, awareness raising regarding gender issues within BCRC, to address the gender imbalance within the project as well as to include those with community development experience on its Steering Group who are "not necessarily reflective of the three constituencies" along with those who have youth work experience to ensure that a "community development strategy" is used and engagement with youth is improved. Finally it is also recommended that "BCRC examine those interface community projects that reflect models of good practice, engagement, and communication".⁵¹

BCRC's Response to the Research

Following presentations by the researcher as well as internal discussions among BCRC staff and steering group, a response to the research was drafted by the project in March 2012. In

the introduction to its response, BCRC clearly confirmed its “intention and commitment to working on the issues identified within the report” and welcomed the research findings, stressing the “significance of gender in conflict resolution work”.⁵²

While the project agreed with the overall findings of the research, it also recorded a number of points for consideration by research participants and others. It was for example acknowledged that the different experiences of BCRC among those interviewed (ranging from negative to positive) could partly be explained by “inconsistencies” and “uneven development” within BCRC regarding “experience, political support and community involvement”.⁵³ The response also recognised that engagement with local communities could be done better at times and that the “militaristic culture that is part of BCRC’s background” could perhaps provide some explanation. BCRC therefore agrees with the research findings that “any gender strategy ... will only be effective if located within a broader understanding of the role of the organisation within the context of demilitarisation, peacebuilding, and community development”.⁵⁴ The project’s response also clearly recognises the significant work done by women at the interfaces but also agrees with the research that much of this work is done in the background while men’s work is “much more in the foreground”.⁵⁵

Where the project disagrees with some respondents of the research is in particular regarding the point made that some “interface workers with paramilitary backgrounds are being funded to do community work without having proper qualifications”. In response to this, BCRC stressed that community work is not necessarily best delivered by those who have qualifications but can also be carried out successfully with commitment, skills and a close connection to local communities:

There are many routes to being a community worker. Therefore while we accept that BCRC needs to deliver genuine, committed and skilled work in communities we do not believe this can only be done by people with qualifications. We would also point out that the vast majority of BCRC personnel live in the neighbourhood where they work – BCRC personnel are also part of the community not something apart from the community as is implied in some of the criticism.⁵⁶

Another point was raised with regards to the allocation of funding. Some research respondents had argued that the women’s sector had been in receipt of a larger proportion of funding during the conflict but that there had been an increased favouring of ex-prisoner groups (i.e. mostly male) in the post-agreement period. BCRC does not dispute this but does argue that “there have been times in the past when people from BCRC networks have been excluded from positions and activities through political vetting and other formal and informal policies during the conflict”. In addition, the project stresses that “the community

sector as a whole is under resourced” and that it would therefore “like to work towards a broad alliance of all groups involved in working for social justice”.⁵⁷

BCRC ended its response with a request for research participants to meet with the project to discuss the research as well as BCRC’s response to it. Laurence McKeown agreed to make contact with the participants, to forward the BCRC response to them as well as coordinate a workshop discussion if there was an appetite for further discussion between the project and those who had contributed to the research.

Outcome of Workshop Discussion

A workshop was subsequently arranged in November 2012 which included BCRC staff/steering group representatives and some research participants and was facilitated jointly by Laurence McKeown and Karen McMinn. In advance of the meeting, it had been agreed that it would take the form of a workshop “to discuss the findings and recommendations of the research report and to explore ways to progress the development of a greater gender dimension to conflict resolution work and community development in interface areas of Belfast”.⁵⁸

Small group discussions led to a number of conclusions, for instance that the research presents a “strategic opportunity” for “addressing gender imbalances”, that women’s roles and contributions needed to be more valued within local communities, women “face real barriers to participating” in interface work, women often lack confidence to engage and women also tend to take “steps back in interface areas”.

While it was highlighted that women’s potential “roles and skills” can be effective in “calming tensions within interface areas” it was also noted that this can pose “a challenge to those who hold traditional authority” in some areas. Instances of “competition and friction” were also noted between “ex-prisoner/ex-combatants” on one hand and local women on the other and it was concluded that this was most likely a result of “the tension between the roles of men and women since prisoners and combatants have been released”. The workshop discussions further highlighted that a low proportion of women and young people engaged/represented would lead to “limited effectiveness and development within communities”.⁵⁹

In terms of internal reflections, BCRC representatives acknowledged the need for improved communication to highlight that the project’s role goes beyond firefighting to include work “to strengthen and develop local communities”. There was also agreement “that there is a need to address the military-style structures that exist”.⁶⁰In addition, the need for two-way

communication and engagement between women's organisations and ex-prisoners/ex-combatants was also stressed by the workshop participants.

A number of next steps were agreed at the workshop, including to ensure that the research findings were launched and disseminated as a means to broaden debates on gender issues, that engagement with participants who had a negative view of BCRC should take place, that follow-up events with participants of the research and others should be considered and that relevant events should be organised regarding dealing with the past and, in particular, awareness-raising of *UNSCR 1325*. As a direct outcome of these discussions, an event was organised by BCRC in June 2014 on the theme of *Gender & Dealing with the Past: UN Resolution 1325*.⁶¹

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

UN Resolution 1325 provides a very useful framework for discussing the wider process and implications of the *Gender at the Interface* research. In addition, as the research and its process of engagement have shown, issues of gender in relation to local peacebuilding work in Belfast and beyond need to be placed within wider discussions of *DDR*. While neither the concept of *DDR* nor *UNSCR 1325* have been officially/formally applied to the conflict in the north of Ireland, it remains clear that both are relevant.

The *Gender at the Interface* research not only confirms the significance of gender and the important roles both men and women need to take on in the process of building peace but also the complexities that follow conflict, for instance with ex-combatants and former political prisoners beginning processes of reintegration and taking on alternative roles within society and local communities. The research clearly shows that this process is far from straightforward and a balance needs to be struck between those who have engaged in peacebuilding and community development during the course of the conflict and afterwards and those who transition from 'militaristic' to community development-focused roles.

As the research indicates, there are no doubt vast numbers of extremely strong, capable and knowledgeable women in Belfast and Northern Ireland as a whole. However, the issue of confidence is frequently highlighted by the research participants. One respondent for example concluded that "[w]omen put themselves down and that's a difficulty"⁶². Another participant noted that

[t]here's a woman I know who would be brilliant to have in the cumman but I know she's not getting that wee push from her husband.⁶³

In conclusion, it remains evident that as women are likely to have experienced the conflict and its aftermath differently than men, and also make up some 50% of the population, it is essential that these experiences are also captured, considered and respected in processes of dealing with the past and building a sustainable peace, alongside the experiences of men.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1:

Response from BRCR to the research report *Gender on the Interface*⁶⁴ March 2012

Overall comment

The Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium welcomes the research report *Gender on the Interface* and its conclusions and recommendations. We believe this is a very significant piece of research that sheds light on the significance of gender in conflict resolution work within and between interface communities in Belfast. We would like to thank all those who participated in the research for the time they gave to the research and the insights that they provided. We would like to place on record our intention and commitment to working on the issues identified within the report.

Specific comments

We believe that the research has been carried out in a way that encourages engagement with it and facilitates an ongoing dialogue. We hope that the research participants will be willing to contribute further to the process. There are two aspects of the research that are helpful in this respect.

The first point is that the responses from the interviews are very comprehensively collected in the Findings section of the report and comprise the bulk of the report. It is usual in research for participants responses' to be précised and quotes selected to illustrate general points. Instead the report presents the full spectrum of the interview responses arranged under different themes. This enabled us to hear the voice of participants very directly. It also gave us a sense of the range of opinions and allowed space for different views including contradictory attitudes about BCRC. It was very helpful for us to realise that although there is much agreement about some of the core issues there are also disagreements and a range of experiences. We believe that this is also true of BCRC itself and of the sector we work in and it is within this spectrum that there can be space for dialogue and action.

The other aspect is that the research is not a finished product and that the main recommendation is for a process to happen with the research as a catalyst. The research recommends that BCRC gives a response which is then considered by the participants and responded to and the participants then give permission for their names to be included in the report. This response is part of that process.

BCRC is broadly in agreement with most of the research findings. We agree that there is uneven development within BCRC in terms of experience, political support and community involvement.

These inconsistencies within BCRC may explain why some of the research respondents had different experiences ranging from positive to very negative.

BCRC also acknowledge that at times we do not do engagement with the community as well as we should and that at times we can come across as protecting the interests of our constituencies rather than creating collaborative working relationships with others working in the community. We recognise that some of this may come from a militaristic culture that is part of BCRC's background and we agree with the research conclusion that any gender strategy for BCRC will only be effective if located within a broader understanding of the role of the project within the context of de-militarisation, peacebuilding, and community development.

We accept that there is a disparity between men and women in terms of representing work on interfaces, that men are much more in the foreground with women in the background. This does not do justice to the work that women do in interface communities and we completely accept that this needs to change.

There are some parts of the research that we do not agree with and would like to discuss further with the participants. The point was made that some interface workers with paramilitary backgrounds are being funded to do community work without having proper qualifications. While we fully support the recognition of professional standards in community work and have supported people to gain qualifications we do not believe that all good community work is delivered in this way. There are many routes to being a community worker. Therefore while we accept that BCRC needs to deliver genuine, committed and skilled work in communities we do not believe this can only be done by people with formal qualifications. We would also point out that the vast majority of BCRC personnel live in the neighbourhoods where they work – BCRC personnel are also part of the community not something apart from the community as is implied in some of the criticisms.

We would also wish to point out that there have been times in the past when people from BCRC networks have been excluded from positions and activities through political vetting and other formal and informal policies during the conflict. As some of the interviews in the report suggest, there have been times during the conflict when some parts of the women's sector benefited from policies aimed at managing and containing the conflict. Other parts of the research interviews reflect a belief that current funding policies of conflict resolution favour ex prisoner groups that are mostly male. BCRC believes that the community sector as a whole is under resourced and would like to work towards a broad alliance of all groups involved in working for social justice.

BCRC accepts the recommendations outlined in the report. We would like if possible to meet directly with the research participants' focus group to discuss the research and our response outlined here. We note that this is not specified in the recommendations (which suggest that the research participants meet separately to consider this response and outline a way forward) and will defer to the advice of the research participants on this point.

APPENDIX 2:

***Gender at the Interface* Research Report Note of a Meeting between BCRC and Research Participants⁶⁵ November 2012**

(Meeting Facilitated by Laurence McKeown & Joanna McMinn)

1.1 Purpose and Outcomes of the Meeting

This paper provides a note of the meeting between Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium (BCRC) and research participants to consider the findings of the *Gender at the Interface* (2011) research report.

The purpose of the half-day meeting was to provide an opportunity for BCRC staff, BCRC management committee members, and research participants to discuss the findings and recommendations of the research report and to explore ways to progress the development of a greater gender dimension to conflict resolution work and community development in interface areas of Belfast.

The desired outcomes were to facilitate:

- 1) A shared understanding of the key findings and recommendations of the *Gender at the Interface* research report.
- 2) A shared understanding of the key points in BCRC's response to the research report.
- 3) A shared understanding of the current challenges and opportunities posed the by an approach which places gender work in interface areas within a broader context demilitarisation, peacebuilding, and community development.
- 4) Agreement on any actions /next steps that could be taken to progress recommendations and assigned next steps for the process.

16 participants attended the session: including 5 BCRC staff members; 1 BCRC steering group representative; and 10 participants who had contributed to the research representing community based women's groups, women's sector organisations, feminist activists and academics.

1.2 Participants' Hopes and Expectations

Participants identified a wide range of themes as part of the hopes and expectations for the session. These were:

- A good exchange of info, and to leave the room having taken the process further

- To learn more about the research and how to hook into it
- How come working class / interface areas continue to suffer so much in terms of gendered economic issues?
- To dig deeper into the research comments
- To look at gender in working class areas generally
- To use today as the start of a process for potential development and use the new understanding from the research
- To develop better working relationships between BCRC and women's sector organisations' and to clarify misunderstandings
- A genuine discussion about how those of us working at interface areas can engage better in terms of gender issues and within communities generally
- How to move good practice forward in interface communities and look at sustainability and leadership issues
- To know that I am not on my own regarding issues in working class areas and to strengthen the voices of women
- Greater recognition for the work in interface areas
- Address gender imbalances
- Explore what support BCRC can bring to groups on the ground
- That the debate on gender within local communities can go further
- That evidence from today can inform the wider debates nationally and internationally
- To see the process going forward
- To have the difficult conversations regarding the challenging issues raised in the report so that it can lead to better co-operation

1.3 Presentation of Research Findings and Responses

Following inputs from Laurence McKeown, author of the report on the key findings, and Joe Marley from BCRC on their response to the findings and recommendations, participants discussed their response to the report findings in small groups and fed back the following points:

- This research offers BCRC a strategic opportunity in terms of addressing gender imbalances in local communities
- Women need to be more valued in their roles and contributions within communities
- Women in interface areas face real barriers to participating
- Women are actively taking a step back in interface areas
- Women lack confidence in putting themselves forward
- Women's roles and skills can be more effective in calming tensions within interface areas. However, this can be seen as a challenge to those who hold traditional authority in interface areas

- The gaps in representation and engagement of women and young people in interface areas results in limited effectiveness and development within communities
- The competition and friction that is evident between some ex-prisoners / ex-combatants and women in local communities is the legacy of the tension between the roles of men and women since prisoners and combatants have been released
- There is a need for BCRC to communicate more effectively what we do – that we are going beyond firefighting and working to strengthen and develop local communities
- BCRC acknowledges that there is a need to address the military-style structures that exist
- It is a two way street – there is a need for women’s organisations to engage with ex-prisoners / ex-combatants groups in local communities
- The reality is that there is a high level of competition for resources within and across the sectors – initiating proposals means that you are putting your group in competition with other organisations.

1.4 Opportunities and Challenges

Participants were asked to identify the opportunities and challenges to developing gender work in interface areas within a broader context of de-militarisation, peacebuilding, and community development in small groups. The following feedback points were noted:

Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ To action the research recommendations as a tool / catalyst for broader engagement ~ Focus on regeneration and visioning processes - this will help dispel some of the myths / stereotypes that groups may have about BCRC, ensuring everyone knows we are about much more than firefighting ~ Use existing research participants as a sounding board ‘think tank’ on how we increase collaboration between the various sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ The perception of BCRC as an organisation and the remit / focus of our work ~ Finite resources – the competitive nature of funding streams – ‘dog eat dog’ ~ Lack of confidence (of women). ~ Providing the opportunities for women to fully participate. The need to make a conscious decision to be proactive in getting more women involved and valuing their contributions.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Organise an event / activity as part of International Women's Day ~ BCRC needs to move towards a development programme ~ Long term community funding (needed) (Peace 4 + Other) ~ Outreach to communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ The legacy of the conflict ~ Fear and control a major concern in some areas
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1.5 Next Steps

The following next steps were agreed by participants.

1. Agree a process and timescale for the publication of the research report, (including a note of this meeting), report launch and dissemination of the report findings.
2. Deidre and Joe to report back the key points generated from this meeting to the BCRC Steering Group.
3. Ownership of the Research findings could be broadened to include the Research Participants Group.
4. That the Research Participants Group could be used as a resource / reference group to inform future pieces of work.
5. There needs to be a process for the engagement of participants who have expressed a negative perception of BCRC.
6. To consider ways to use the research report findings to broaden the debates in other organisations across Belfast regarding gender issues (within interface communities).
7. Consider a series of follow up events on gender with Research Participants Group and other key players.
8. Explore opportunities regarding awareness raising of the broader issues re United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security / International women's Day/ Talks on Dealing with the Past and Historical talks.

1.6 Evaluation of the Session

Participants were asked to evaluate the session.

The positives identified were:

- ~ A valuable opportunity to engage and speak with research participants
- ~ There was a high level of participation in the discussions
- ~ There was a good level of honesty expressed within the conversations
- ~ The structure of the agenda was helpful
- ~ Clear action points were generated from the meeting
- ~ Venue was good - a good bright space to work in

In terms of changes for the meeting, participants would have liked:

- ~ A higher level of attendance
- ~ Better acoustics in the room.

NOTES

- ¹ See www.bcrc.eu for more information on the project and its activities.
- ² Jessica Blomkvist & Claire Hackett, *Issues and Strategies for Conflict Transformation at Belfast's Interfaces: Results from Belfast-Area Workshops 5th-28th February 2008* (Belfast: Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium, 2008).
- ³ Laurence McKeown, *Gender at the Interface, A Report Compiled for Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium* (Belfast: Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium, 2011/ redesigned and printed June 2014), 6.
- ⁴ McKeown, *Gender at the Interface*.
- ⁵ *Ibid*, 8.
- ⁶ United Nations Security Council (2000), *S/RES/1325 (Resolution 1325) (2000), Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting on 31 October 2000*.
- ⁷ <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement> [accessed 18 June 2014]
- ⁸ *Ibid*.
- ⁹ Laura Aguiar & Cahal McLaughlin, *We Were There* (Belfast: Prisons Memory Archive). For details on the film, please see <http://prisonsmemoryarchive.com/we-were-there/> [accessed 21.06.2014]
- ¹⁰ See for instance www.beyondintractability.org/essay/demobilization [accessed 24.06.2014]
- ¹¹ <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement> [accessed 18 June 2014]
- ¹² Hanna's House (2012), *Feminist Visions of Peace, Justice and Transformation*, Invitation issued regarding conference on "Women Delivering Peace & Security" organised by Hannah's House, 5th November 2012 at Croke Park, Dublin, 4.
- ¹³ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁴ Bill Rolston, 'Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: the Irish Case in International Perspective', *Social & Legal Studies* 16: 275 (2007).
- ¹⁵ McKeown, *Gender at the Interface*, 39.
- ¹⁶ Hanna's House, *Feminist Visions of Peace, Justice and Transformation* 4.
- ¹⁷ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Your-MLAs/All-Party-Groups/All-Party-Group-on-UNSCR-1325-Women-Peace--Security/> [accessed 16 June 2014]
- ¹⁸ Women's Resource & Development Agency, 'Events', <http://www.wrda.net/Events.aspx> [accessed 3 June 2014]
- ¹⁹ <http://www.c-r.org/news/ESVI-women-peacebuilding> [accessed 24 June 2014]
- ²⁰ <http://www.prio.org/News/Item/?x=1824> [accessed 16 June 2016]
- ²¹ http://www.peacewomen.org/news_article.php?id=454&type=event [accessed 16 June 2014]
- ²² http://www.peacewomen.org/news_article.php?id=440&type=event [accessed 16 June 2014]
- ²³ http://www.peacewomen.org/news_article.php?id=388&type=event [accessed 16 June 2014]
- ²⁴ <http://www.wrda.net/events.aspx> [accessed 24 June 2014]
- ²⁵ <http://www.bcrc.eu/gender-dealing-with-the-past-un-resolution-1325> [accessed 24 June 2014]
- ²⁶ <http://www.communityfoundationni.org/Programmes/Women-and-Peacwome-Building/Women-Delivering-Peace-and-Security> [accessed 24 June 2014]
- ²⁷ <http://www.communityfoundationni.org/Programmes/Women-and-Peace-Building/Women-Delivering-Peace-and-Security> [accessed 24 June 2014]
- ²⁸ McKeown, *Gender at the Interface*, 17.
- ²⁹ *Ibid*, 9.
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, 77.
- ³¹ *Ibid*, 19.
- ³² *Ibid*, 21.

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- ³³ Ibid, 39.
- ³⁴ Ibid, 38.
- ³⁵ Ibid, 39.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 77.
- ³⁷ Ibid, 71.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, 73.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² See www.bcrc.eu for further information on the project.
- ⁴³ McKeown, *Gender at the Interface*, 75-76.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 86.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, 75.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid, 31.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, 40.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid, 78-79.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid, 78.
- ⁵¹ Ibid, 79.
- ⁵² Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium, *Response from BCRC to Gender Research* (Belfast: BCRC, 2012)
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Laurence McKeown & Karen McMinn, *Gender at the Interface Research Report: Note of a Meeting between BCRC and Research Participants* (Belfast: BCRC, November 2012)
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² McKeown, *Gender at the Interface*, 34.
- ⁶³ Ibid, 40.
- ⁶⁴ Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium, *Response*.
- ⁶⁵ McKeown & McMinn, *Gender at the Interface Research Report*.

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Parallel to administrating the BCRC project from its inception in April 2007, Jessica has also completed a PhD at Queen's University Belfast on the theme *Transforming Conflict in Divided Societies: The Role of Faith-Based Actors in Northern Ireland*. Prior to taking up her post with BCRC she worked as Administrative Assistant with BCRC partner organisation Intercomm as well as completed a 5-month internship at INCORE, University of Ulster. Jessica has also completed Bachelor/Master degrees with a focus on Peace & Conflict Studies at Uppsala University, Sweden.