

Response to Programme for Government December 2016

Contact:

Kellie Turtle, Women's Sector Lobbyist
Women's Resource & Development Agency
6 Mount Charles
Belfast
BT7 1NZ

kellie.turtle@wrda.net



1 INTRODUCTION

The Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) is a regional organisation operating across Northern Ireland, with a mission to advance women's equality and participation in society by working to transform political, economic, social and cultural conditions. The organisation was established in 1983 and works with women and community organisations located in disadvantaged and rural areas. WRDA is a membership organisation with over 190 members including women's groups, organizations and individual members.

WRDA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Executive Office consultation on the Programme for Government (PfG). As a membership organization, WRDA facilitated a members' meeting at which officials from the PfG team were present and took verbal feedback of key discussion points. This written response reflects the full range of views communicated to us by our members during the period of consultation. The response makes a number of recommendations which are summarized below.

- **Ensure that the whole OBA framework is underpinned by compliance with the Executive's human rights obligations with a visible commitment to uphold the standards in domestic and international human rights law.**
- **WRDA recommends that a long term budgetary plan is put in place to ensure that the potential of a 'whole-of-government' approach is not undermined by difficulties gaining cross-departmental decisions on spending for actions in delivery plans. Any barriers to progress caused by the structure of the budget should be addressed early.**
- **The PfG framework should include a mechanism for mainstreaming gender equality through all outcomes and indicators and making the gender analysis of data a visible priority. This will embed a strategic commitment to eliminating gender inequality as part of the vision for a fair, stable and peaceful society.**
- **Outcome 1 should include indicators for economic growth that acknowledge the reliance on the unpaid and low paid roles mainly undertaken by women. Actions should be identified in the delivery plan to ensure this work is better respected and**

valued in order to build a sustainable economy that does not further entrench inequality and disadvantage for women.

- **Outcome 3 should include a gender equality indicator that captures a composite, cross-cutting measure of progress towards closing the gender gap in Northern Ireland.**
- **Outcome 4 should include an indicator that measures progress on identifying and tackling health issues that relate specifically to women in recognition of their different health needs and the greater impact of deprivation. Any measures connected to health in pregnancy must be linked to improving women's health outcomes.**
- **Outcome 5 should include an indicator to capture the role of community education so that women's experiences can be included in measures of educational attainment. As key delivery partners in this area, resources should be ring-fenced for women's centres to protect women's access to training and education as a way to fulfil their potential.**
- **The PfG team should work with Department of Education officials who are developing the Childcare Strategy to develop a new data source to measure the % of people who are satisfied with the childcare options available to them in terms of cost, quality, availability and accessibility. This should be included as an indicator under Outcome 6.**
- **The definition of 'economic inactivity' should be reassessed in order to adequately reflect the nature of unpaid caring work. People who do this work unpaid are not 'inactive' as economic growth depends on the labour they are providing in the home.**
- **Outcome 6 should include an indicator to monitor the gender pay gap in Northern Ireland that helps shape actions designed to improve women's overall earning potential and their access to better paid, skilled and secure jobs.**
- **Outcome 7 should highlight gender based violence as both a cause and consequence of gender inequality in society which has a huge impact on women's safety. The indicator of prevalence rate is not an adequate measure of success in the reduction of hidden crimes like domestic and sexual violence. A more appropriate indicator should be included for these crimes.**
- **WRDA is concerned that indicators relating to income poverty and housing stress may be too narrow in scope to monitor the**

cumulative impact of austerity and cuts to public services on women and recommends that gender analysis is necessary in the development of indicators for Outcome 8.

- **Outcome 9 should include an indicator that will measure improvements in women's participation and representation in public and political life.**
- **Outcome 13 should include an indicator that will measure improvements in transport accessibility and interconnectivity of transport providers in rural areas.**
- **The investment in and implementation of a comprehensive childcare strategy should be a key priority in the delivery of Outcome 14. Additional indicators should be included that allow monitoring of child outcomes in the 0-3 age group.**

2 GENERAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Outcomes Based Accountability

WRDA welcomes the adoption of an Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) framework and the potential that this approach has to create meaningful measures of success. It has long been a criticism of those working to promote equality that government policy is not effectively delivering real improvement in people's lives. For example, in the 2013 review of the Gender Equality Strategy the following problem was noted;

'Outcomes should seek a positive effect and go further than just delivering an initiative. Many of the action points and the returns provided had outputs (i.e. what will we do) but not outcomes (i.e. what is the impact of doing). In order to evaluate the success of a Strategy, monitoring needs to look beyond rolling out initiatives and must try to seek information on what changes and benefits occur as a consequence of initiatives.'

WRDA is therefore pleased to see an approach to the development of a new PfG that reflects the learning of previous shortcomings in Executive policy and strategies. We are hopeful that this marks the beginning of a process that will be responsive to the objective needs of women in Northern Ireland with effectively targeted measures to meet those needs.

However, we are concerned that the OBA framework being used for the PfG should be rights based. For example, we would like to see a reference to human rights in order to confirm that the PfG is underpinned by the obligations of the NI Executive under international human rights treaties. While there is a commitment to 'fulfil our equality obligations including compliance with international human rights conventions' under Outcome 3, it is important to note that the purpose of the PfG in its entirety should be not just to promote the well-being of people but to respect, protect and fulfill their human rights.

Recommendation: Ensure that the whole OBA framework is underpinned by compliance with the Executive's human rights obligations with a visible commitment to uphold the standards in domestic and international human rights law.

Whole of Government Approach

The structure of this PfG framework provides an opportunity to move away from 'silo' working that has at times made it extremely difficult to progress issues of equality for women. As gender inequality is sustained by a range of factors across multiple areas of women's lives it has always been difficult to tackle equality issues without genuine commitment to cross-departmental cooperation from Executive Ministers and officials. The consultation document states that this PfG presents a 'whole-of-government approach, focused on delivering improvements to multiple aspects of people's lives' which WRDA welcomes. However, there remain concerns about the implementation of this approach if the budget for delivery of actions remains tied to a departmental structure. Whilst we acknowledge that change must be incremental and at a pace that departments can cope with we will be closely monitoring the impact of budgetary decisions and the ability of departments to work well together on the effectiveness of actions in the delivery plans and their subsequent impacts.

Recommendation: WRDA recommends that a long term budgetary plan is put in place to ensure that the potential of a 'whole-of-government' approach is not undermined by difficulties gaining cross-departmental decisions on spending for actions in delivery plans. Any barriers to progress caused by the structure of the budget should be addressed early.

Gender Mainstreaming

In its 2015 paper Delivering Gender Equality, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) notes the duty on the Executive to strengthen mechanisms for achieving equality, including high level government policy with cross-cutting impact:

'The Beijing Platform for Action is clear that national mechanisms for gender equality must be located at the highest possible level of Government, allocated sufficient resources, have the possibility of influencing development of all government policies and have

mechanisms that facilitate planning, implementation and monitoring, as well as involving NGOs and community organisations.¹

As the PfG represents the 'highest possible level' of Executive policy it is therefore important that gender equality is written into the outcomes, indicators and delivery plans if we are going to see real improvement for women. The current Gender Equality Strategy states that 'a gender perspective will be taken into account during the whole process of policy development in all the Government functions.'² WRDA is therefore concerned about the absence of a gender analysis in the PfG and the failure to mainstream or embed any targeted measures to progress gender equality.

WRDA welcomes the following commitment in the consultation document:

'We will ensure that the routine monitoring of programme delivery provides data on all relevant Section 75 categories and routinely analyses the impact to ensure that we provide both an equal society and that we actively promote equality of opportunity at every opportunity.'

In public discussions, members of the PfG team have expressed that practitioners in the area of gender equality should focus on engagement with the SROs of the relevant delivery plans if we have recommendations on how specific issues impact on women and what actions should be taken to promote gender equality. Whilst WRDA and other women's organisations will continue to do this, it is not without concern regarding the lack of overall strategic focus on gender inequality in the PfG framework. Given the cross-cutting nature of gender inequality and its multiple causes and consequences for women, the current framework disproportionately places the onus on civil society groups to work across multiple delivery plans to ensure that the gendered 'story behind the baseline' is being properly captured and addressed in all of them. Rather than promoting a joined-up approach to gender equality, this could have the effect of making work in this area more piecemeal than before, particularly in the absence of any progress on renewing the Gender Equality Strategy post-2016.

¹ ECNI, 2015. See:

http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/GenderEquality_Policypriorities.pdf ; pg 44

² OFMDFMNI *Gender Equality Strategy: A Strategic framework to promote gender equality for women and men 2006-2016*, Pg 35.

Recommendation: The PfG framework should include a mechanism for mainstreaming gender equality through all outcomes and indicators and making the gender analysis of data a visible priority. This will embed a strategic commitment to eliminating gender inequality as part of the vision for a fair, stable and peaceful society.

3 COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY OUTCOME

Outcome 1

WRDA notes that the PfG will be underpinned by the Economic Strategy, the Investment Strategy and the new Social Strategy. The Executive's commitments in the area of economic growth are also outlined in Outcome 1. The benefits of investing to boost economic growth and prosperity are to be welcomed, particularly if the Executive prioritises socially responsible enterprises that will contribute to a fair and secure labour market and take an ethical approach to taxation. However, the current approach reflects an incomplete understanding of what contributes to a strong and stable economy as it ignores the unpaid work within families and communities that is mainly carried out by women. The UK Women's Budget Group estimates that unpaid work within households is equivalent to about 1/3 to 1/2 of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) although it is not counted in and those carrying out this work are simply recorded as being 'economically inactive'.³ A growing body of work by feminist economists demonstrates that economic models that fail to address the unsustainability of systems of unpaid or low paid work, such as caring work, which women dominate are fundamentally flawed and therefore an unsuitable basis for economic policy.⁴ Many economists are extremely critical of the failure of governments to consider non-market activities when planning economic strategies and question the effectiveness of traditional measures of growth, such as GDP which forms the basis of the Northern Ireland Composite Economic Index.⁵

³ www.lse.ac.uk/genderInstitute/pdf/himmelweit.pdf

⁴ <http://www.swbg.org.uk/news/blog/dignity-and-recognition-for-all-work-will-be-the-basis-of-a-fair-and-sustainable-economy/>

⁵ <http://www.nerinstitute.net/blog/2016/12/01/measuring-what-matters-alternative-measures-of-pro/>

WRDA is concerned that there is a fundamental contradiction in the strategies underpinning the PfG which will make it extremely difficult to achieve gender equality. If the Economic Strategy (and related targets under Outcome 1) ignores the need for a gendered analysis of economic growth and the reliance on unpaid labour in our economic system, it will effectively embed women's poverty at the base of its model. This gendered poverty and disadvantage will then be tackled through the Social Strategy but without recognition that it is the failure of the Economic Strategy to provide for the role of women in the economy that keeps gender inequality so entrenched. It is this fundamental contradiction that makes progress on gender inequality so difficult to achieve.

Recommendation: Outcome 1 should include indicators for economic growth that acknowledge the reliance on the unpaid and low paid roles mainly undertaken by women. Actions should be identified in the delivery plan to ensure this work is better respected and valued in order to build a sustainable economy that does not further entrench inequality and disadvantage for women.

Outcome 3

WRDA has received feedback from women's organisations expressing very clearly that this outcome needs modification to include visible reference to gender inequality. WRDA understands the intention to create a PfG framework based on high level outcomes and indicators for all without breaking these down into specific target groups. It is evident in the EQIA document that accompanies the PfG that the disaggregation of data will be the key mechanism through which impacts on women and men specifically will be measured and gender inequalities identified. The EQIA also states that 'The impact of the PfG in equality terms and more generally is mediated through Delivery Plans' indicating that interventions designed to address gender inequality will be contained within the content of the relevant delivery plans. However, WRDA believes that there is a strong argument for explicitly addressing gender inequality under Outcome 3 by including a gender specific indicator.

The pervasiveness of gender inequality that disadvantages women across all areas of private and public life is internationally recognised and documented

in research.⁶ The lack of progress in significantly changing the landscape of gender equality in Northern Ireland has been criticised by European and United Nations oversight bodies.⁷ Women's organisations therefore find it inadequate to have an outcome that seeks to make society more equal without specifically naming the most pervasive, persistent inequality that affects 51% of the population. For women, a gender neutral approach to inequality seems to undermine the positive intention of this important outcome.

There are also concerns about the scope of the indicators attached to Outcome 3 which only cover the impacts of economic inequality as connected to education and employment. The impact of gender inequality on women reaches across all areas of private and public life, including housing, representation in public life, social protection and equality before the law. The scope of Outcome 3 is therefore too narrow to measure progress towards equality for women across all areas as required under domestic law and international standards.

During the development of the Gender Equality Strategy 2006-2016 a number of indicators were developed 'which provide a description of the relative position of men and women in relation to specific areas of policy, though do not measure performance.'⁸ While these provide a useful starting point, it is important that indicators are built into the PfG that do measure the performance of this high level strategy towards closing the gender gap. For example, a composite measure such as the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index which measures gender parity across educational, employment, health and political empowerment sub-indexes provides an effective model that could be adapted.⁹

Recommendation: Outcome 3 should include a gender equality indicator that captures a composite, cross-cutting measure of progress towards closing the gender gap in Northern Ireland.

⁶ For example, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals which state that 'Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.' See: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

⁷ www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2014/.../1514.pdf

⁸ TEO (2015) See: https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm_dev/gender-equality-strategy-statistics-2015-update.pdf ; pg 6

⁹ World Economic Form See: <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/measuring-the-global-gender-gap/>

Outcome 4

The baseline data regarding health inequalities presented in the PfG document states the following:

'In 2012-14, female Healthy Life Expectancy in the most deprived areas of NI was 14.6 years lower than in the least deprived areas, while the corresponding gap for males was 12.2 years. The equivalent figures for 2011-13 were 14.0 years for females and 11.8 years for males. In 2010-12, this gap was 12.8 years for females and 11.9 years for males.'

While Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) is longer for women than men, both these genders could expect to live in good health for around three-quarters of their lives. However the data demonstrates a consistently wider deprivation gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) for women than for men. This tells us that poverty and disadvantage has a greater impact on women's health outcomes than men's and so interventions that seek to turn the curve in health inequality should prioritise understanding the gendered story behind this baseline and addressing the ways that deprivation affects women's health differently.

Another key piece of baseline data under Outcome 4 relates to health in pregnancy as low birth weight has been suggested as a predictor of poor health outcomes throughout life. However, the connection of this data with health outcomes for women has been completely missed in the PfG framework and the accompanying delivery plan. This is particularly worrying in the face of growing public concern about perinatal mental health,¹⁰ women's reproductive health and rights in pregnancy, and the lack of care options for women facing diagnoses of fatal foetal abnormalities.

The UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) requires that the Executive provide access to healthcare that takes into account women's particular health needs, including their sexual and reproductive health.¹¹ WRDA believes that it is insulting to women to include an indicator on health in pregnancy without making any reference to the health needs of women and represents a missed opportunity to understand and address an area of women's lives that has a huge impact on our health and well-being.

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-35652441>

¹¹ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/HealthRights.aspx>

Recommendation: Outcome 4 should include an indicator that measures progress on identifying and tackling health issues that relate specifically to women in recognition of their different health needs and the greater impact of deprivation. Any measures connected to health in pregnancy must be linked to improving women's health outcomes.

Outcome 5

WRDA is concerned that the role of women's centres and community based education in supporting women to fulfil their potential has not been identified in the PfG. Training and education is an important part of what women's organisations offer along with good quality affordable childcare, which is the single largest barrier to women's participation in education, training and work as well as public and political life.¹² The training and education offered has been described as flexible and offered at times to suit the needs of women, providing opportunities in areas of social disadvantage to women who also may not have the confidence to participate in 'mainstream' education.

WRDA believes that an indicator measuring the Level 2 qualifications of school leavers alone will not adequately capture the story of how many women seek out community-based education opportunities as adults. This means the vital work women's organisations do to support these women will be invisible in measures of educational attainment and they will not be recognised as delivery partners.

Recommendation: Outcome 5 should include an indicator to capture the role of community education so that women's experiences can be included in measures of educational attainment. As key delivery partners in this area, resources should be ring-fenced for women's centres to protect women's access to training and education as a way to fulfil their potential.

¹² http://wrda.net/Documents/WRDA_WomenOnlyServices_web.pdf

Outcome 6

WRDA welcomes the commitment to developing employment opportunities for all and the recognition of certain barriers to employment that particularly affect women. The consultation document highlights 'structural barriers that can make it difficult to work full-time' including access to childcare and notes that 'underemployment is most likely to impact women and young workers.' The delivery plan addressing economic inactivity and underemployment indicators also notes the importance of childcare, particularly to lone parents of whom 98% are women. WRDA would like to highlight that it is not just in the case of lone parents that childcare becomes an issue of gender equality as evidence shows that women are more likely than men to undertake unpaid caring work regardless of the family structure.¹³

While the delivery plan highlights the need to 'work closely with colleagues in the Department of Education on the Childcare Strategy' WRDA believes that this issue is of such importance to women's access to quality, well-paid employment that there should be an indicator in the PfG to measure progress on the availability of childcare that is accessible and affordable. While indicator 33 (% of people working part time who would like to work more hours) will capture some information relevant to this issue it is not direct enough to properly assess if childcare provision is getting any better.

Recommendation: The PfG team should work with Department of Education officials who are developing the Childcare Strategy to develop a new data source to measure the % of people who are satisfied with the childcare options available to them in terms of cost, quality, availability and accessibility. This should be included as an indicator under Outcome 6.

In addition to addressing the barriers women face to fully participating in paid employment, WRDA is also increasingly unhappy with how the Executive describes the unpaid work that many women are engaged in. The definition of 'economic inactivity' as measured by indicator 17 includes all those who are not in paid employment but are doing caring work in the home. The consultation document highlights that:

'The groups most impacted by economic inactivity (the long term sick and disabled, and those with caring responsibilities) are also impacted

¹³ https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid_care_work.pdf

by a range of negative social consequences, with inactivity contributing to poor health and wellbeing outcomes, a lack of financial independence, lower levels of social inclusion and higher rates of deprivation.'

WRDA believes that if our social and economic policy valued caring work more highly and reflected the importance of it through investing in support for those who carry out this work then the 'negative social consequences' would be reduced. Access to paid employment is one route to improving outcomes for those with caring responsibilities but it is not realistic to view all unpaid caring work as a problem to be eliminated. As has already been addressed under Outcome 1, until there is recognition that economic growth and stability is reliant on the complex network of care that is mainly provided by women then the economic inactivity indicator will be a problematic measure that is unlikely to see any significant progress.

Recommendation: The definition of 'economic inactivity' should be reassessed in order to adequately reflect the nature of unpaid caring work. People who do this work unpaid are not 'inactive' as economic growth depends on the labour they are providing in the home.

Finally, WRDA is disappointed that there is no indicator under Outcome 6 to assess progress on the gender pay gap in the Northern Ireland workforce. Data on the gender pay gap is readily available and demonstrates that there is a persistent problem which shows extremely slow progress. The OBA framework used by the Scottish Executive includes a pay gap indicator that measures the gender pay gap for full time workers.¹⁴ This would be a useful indicator to include in Northern Ireland. A more developed indicator that also examines part time workers could provide further information on the distribution of women across the workforce such as the concentration of women in low paid, low skilled and precarious employment.

Recommendation: Outcome 6 should include an indicator to monitor the gender pay gap in Northern Ireland that helps shape actions designed to improve women's overall earning potential and their access to better paid, skilled and secure jobs.

¹⁴ <http://www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/paygap>

Outcome 7

WRDA is alarmed to see that there is still no mention of gender based violence under Outcome 7 in the consultation document. The accompanying delivery plan for indicator 1 (prevalence rate) does recognise the importance of tackling domestic and sexual violence and abuse and lists specific actions designed to turn the curve on these types of crimes. However, there is no gendered analysis of these issues and their disproportionate impact on women, and therefore no opportunity to tell the story of women's safety that lies behind the baseline data for this outcome.

It is also evident that the following advice from one of our member organisations, Women's Aid submitted to the consultation on the Draft PfG Framework, has not been taken into account:

'The indicator of reducing crime does not reflect an understanding of reportage of domestic and sexual violence crime. As domestic and sexual violence crime is chronically under-reported, it is established practice that law enforcement agencies should seek to achieve a rise in reportage. This reflects the understanding that it often takes 35 incidents of abuse before a victim will come forward, and that a rise in reportage represents an increase in confidence in police and support services as opposed to a rise in incidences of domestic and sexual violence. This has been reflected in PSNI statistics over the last decade – while general levels of crime have dropped, reportage of domestic and sexual violence crime has risen.

Our concern regarding the use of a general indicator and measure of reducing crime is that the more successful our response to domestic and sexual violence, the more likely victims are to report to police or feel comfortable to disclose in a crime survey. Conversely, this data could then be misinterpreted as an indicator of failure under the current draft of the PfG framework. It may be useful therefore to include separate outcomes and indicators around domestic and sexual violence within the framework to more accurately reflect the government's aims and targets in this regard.

WRDA echoes this advice from Women's Aid and in light of the following evidence, we suggest that the visibility of domestic violence under Outcome 7 should be urgently addressed:

`In 2014-15, the PSNI responded to a domestic violence incident every 19 minutes of every single day. 13,426 domestic abuse crimes were reported, which amounted to approximately 13% of the overall crime in Northern Ireland (105,072). 6 out of 16 murders, 37.5% of all murders in Northern Ireland, had a domestic abuse motivation. There were over two and a half times as many domestic abuse crimes (13,426) as drug offences (5,048), and more domestic abuse crimes (13,426) than burglary offences (8,937). There were 2,734 sexual offences recorded including 737 offences of rape. Domestic and sexual violence remain one of the biggest threats to the safety and wellbeing of our citizens.¹⁵

Recommendation: Outcome 7 should highlight gender based violence as both a cause and consequence of gender inequality in society which has a huge impact on women’s safety. The indicator of prevalence rate is not an adequate measure of success in the reduction of hidden crimes like domestic and sexual violence. A more appropriate indicator should be included for these crimes.

Outcome 8

As Outcome 8 addresses issues of poverty and social exclusion WRDA would like to highlight the evidence regarding women’s experiences of austerity and the recession in recent years. The disproportionate impact of austerity on women has been extensively documented.¹⁶ The Fawcett Society has called the cumulative impact of social security reform and cuts to service provision ‘a tipping point for women’s equality’ that is ‘turning back the clock on women’s rights’.¹⁷ Research by WRDA in 2011 outlined the experiences of women locally as a result of the recession. It demonstrated that the Government’s response to the financial crisis, including cuts to tax credits, the restructuring of benefits under a programme of welfare reform, and job losses and pay freezes in the public sector, would have a disproportionate

¹⁵ <https://www.womensaidni.org/.../WAFNI-response-to-Draft-PfG-Framework-FINAL-...>

¹⁶ Rafferty A., 2014. Gender Equality and the Impact of Recession and Austerity in the UK, Revue de l’OFCE Debates and policies 133.

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/nov/04/women-equality-clock-back-fawcett>

effect on women.¹⁸ The Trade Union NIPSA estimated that 72.5% of the cuts would be shouldered by women and 27.5% of the cuts would be faced by men.¹⁹ This analysis was based on the gender composition of the public sector workforce and women's increased reliance on public services, benefits and welfare, and community sector support services.

Recommendation: WRDA is concerned that indicators relating to income poverty and housing stress may be too narrow in scope to monitor the cumulative impact of austerity and cuts to public services on women and recommends that gender analysis is necessary in the development of indicators for Outcome 8.

Outcome 9

WRDA is disappointed that the role of women in community relations and peace building has not been adequately recognised in the consultation document and the PfG has failed to take into account international standards regarding the role of women in post-conflict peace building and conflict transformation²⁰. The ongoing absence of women in decision-making bodies compounds the lack of a gender perspective on these issues, despite the commitment in the Fresh Start Agreement to 'the development of a programme to increase participation and influence of women in community development.' The Together: Building a United Community Strategy (May 2013) states that '[t]he Government remains committed to ensuring the right of women to full and equal political participation and will continue to work towards increasing women's representation in public and political life.'²¹ However there are no indicators in the PfG framework to monitor this or actions identified to demonstrate how this will be achieved.

Recommendation: Outcome 9 should include an indicator that will measure improvements in women's participation and representation in public and political life.

¹⁸ Women's Resource & Development Agency (2011), The Northern Ireland Economy: Women on the Edge <http://www.wrda.net/Documents/Women%20and%20the%20Economy%20Section%201%20-%20Setting%20the%20Scene.pdf>

¹⁹ www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA-in-Action/Equal.../Archive/.../Impact-of-Cuts-on-Women

²⁰ <http://www.community-relations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Women-and-Peacebuilding.pdf>

²¹ http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/community/sharedfuture/2013-05-23_ofmdfm.pdf

Outcome 13

WRDA is concerned about the impact of connectivity on women living in rural areas. Gender inequality is compounded by the effects of rural isolation and women's access to services. Recent research conducted by the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) identified lack of access to transport as a major issue for rural women accessing education, training work and childcare.²²

There are no indicators that would adequately measure improvements in transport connectivity and infrastructure for women living in rural areas. Measuring average journey time on key economic corridors suggests a focus on roads infrastructure as a driver for growing the private sector. It does not give priority to the need to improve access to services for rural women. The percentage of all journeys made by public transport may go some way to measuring improvements in access but it would be more meaningful to provide an indicator that looks specifically at the connectivity of rural public transport networks.

Recommendation: Outcome 13 should include an indicator that will measure improvements in transport accessibility and interconnectivity of transport providers in rural areas.

Outcome 14

WRDA welcomes the commitment to:

'Adopt and embed a coordinated and collaborative approach to the investment in and implementation of early childhood development policies and programmes to improve the social and emotional development of children aged 0-4.'

It is our expectation that the Childcare Strategy, due to be published by the Department of Education in the coming months, would be central to this process. WRDA is also pleased to see that this Outcome includes the intention to increase the capacity of the childcare workforce as this workforce is predominantly women. Despite the rising cost of childcare for

²² Rural Women's Manifesto [http://www.nirwn.org/nirwn%20rural%20women_s%20manifesto%20final%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.nirwn.org/nirwn%20rural%20women_s%20manifesto%20final%20(1).pdf)

families, workers in this sector face low pay and a lack of opportunities to increase their skills and qualifications.

Women's centres have developed considerable expertise in the delivery of childcare and child development services. It has been noted by some of our member organisations that they have been involved in gathering data which would allow for indicators of child outcomes in the 0-3 age group through their work with Sure Start or other voluntary sector early years programmes. It should not be necessary to leave such a large gap in indicators from birthweight to developmental stage in the immediate pre-school year.

Recommendation: The investment in and implementation of a comprehensive childcare strategy should be a key priority in the delivery of Outcome 14. Additional indicators should be included that allow monitoring of child outcomes in the 0-3 age group.