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The elusive 50%

What will it take to get equal representation?

Karen Dargo on why Engender are calling for a debate on measures to ensure equal numbers of men and women are elected

The Scottish Parliamentary elections this year saw a small increase in the number of women MSP's, from 43 to 45 – on the face of it, a good result. But putting it in historical perspective and looking at candidate selection reveals a more worrying trend for those of us who want to see equal numbers of men and women representing us. In 2003, 51 of our 129 MSPs were women and the number fell to 43 in 2007. So the increase this year, although welcome, is tempered by the knowledge that we have to keep the pressure up just to get back to where we were.

With the number of female candidates falling, from 36% in 2007 to 29.5% this year, we need to look at the party selection process and ask where are the women? There is evidence that parties will select a 'safe' candidate (male, white and middle aged) for their winnable constituency seats and that women are placed lower down the regional list unless equality measures, such as zipping are used.

In the run up to devolution the principle of equal representation was endorsed by the Scottish constitutional Convention but it was up to each party to decide how or

if they would honour this ideal. And this is how it's been left. When equality measures in the selection process are used – such as the Labour Party twinning candidates in the constituency votes and zipping them in the regional list – equal representation is the result.

We believe each party needs to renew their commitment to equality and adopt measures which will ensure that they present a gender balanced slate of candidates. The measures exist – but using them is voluntary not mandatory and we'd like to see a real debate around whether the time has come to make their use compulsory. We need to address the lack of diversity of our parliament and ask what we can do to improve it. That's why we are supporting a debate at this year's Festival of Politics on quotas. Women make up over 50% of the Scottish population, our perspective and input into the policy debate is vital if Scotland is to become a modern, truly representative democracy.

Has the time come for quotas?

25th August, 11am-12pm at the Festival of Politics in the Scottish Parliament.

See the Festival of Politics 2011 programme for booking details (free)

Projects...

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Students from Broughton High School who took part in the Eye of the Beholder workshops last year are currently working with Strange Theatre to produce a drama around the issue of the objectification and sexualisation of young women and girls. The students will perform the piece to MSPs in the Scottish Parliament in September and it will be filmed so that it can be viewed on our website. There will also be a photo exhibition of the drama workshops. Eye of the Beholder is funded by the Esmee Fairbairn foundation.

Students work on their theatre piece



WHO COUNTS?

The Who Counts project aims to highlight women's poverty and throughout the project Engender have worked with women's groups from around Scotland who have shared their experiences with us. March 1st was What Counts? Day and we held events in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Inverness and Perth to bring women together to raise awareness of the gendered nature of poverty. We followed the day with an evening event in the Scottish Parliament on March 16th which highlighted the issues raised by the groups involved with the project and gathered support for work to develop gendered poverty indicators. The night featured artwork from the Kiran Women's Support Group and Women Loud and Proud on the effects of poverty, presentations from Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre and Umoja Inc and theatre pieces from Shakti and Beechwood Women's Arts Group. We also





What Counts? Day in Dundee

showed our DVD which featured the women from Umoja speaking about their experiences as asylum seeking and refugee lone mothers in Scotland. Thanks to all the other groups who contributed information and campaigning material – it all helped to make the night an uplifting experience where we all felt connected and united in our work on women’s poverty.

Our focus is now on developing gendered poverty indicators based on the issues raised during the project which will be presented to the government and COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) later this year. Who Counts is funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.

EQUALITY COUNTING

Funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Equality Counting sees women coming together in ‘communities of interest’ to evidence and demonstrate the impact of public bodies’ gender neutral and gender blind policy and practice on their lives. They will also look for opportunities to use equalities legislation, such as Equality Impact Assessments, to press for change. We are working with five communities of interest, 3 which have been working on the project from last year – Women Thinking Trans Issues, Women Thinking Disability and Women Thinking Diverse Communication Needs – and two new groups, Umoja Inc, who will explore issues faced by women seeking asylum and refugee status and Together (Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights), who will work on the relationship between women’s inequality and child poverty. Engender will continue to work with previous communities of interest while we start work with the new groups over the summer. We’ll be holding workshops on equalities legislation with our new groups and they will also learn how to carry out participatory action research before deciding on the issue(s) they want to investigate. The groups will then develop and articulate a gendered analysis of their issue.

As part of the Equality Counting project we’ll be holding a series of roundtable events around Scotland in October and November on Transgender issues, Rural Women’s Participation, Disability and Care, Asylum and Refugee issues and Child Poverty. These events will enable the women who have worked on the project to meet with academics and activists to learn from each other’s understanding. We will also host a conference on International Women’s Day 2012 where all the communities of interest will come together with academics, voluntary sector and those at the policy – making level to engage with each other and share the groups’ research.

Who Counts event in Parliament



Women Thinking Trans Issues

The group carried out research into access to gender reassignment services in Scotland. They produced a report which revealed that the provision of gender reassignment services and waiting times for treatment was inconsistent across health boards and made several recommendations to improve the system.

The report was launched at the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh in June. You can download it from our website or contact us for a copy.



The launch of the trans women's report

Women Thinking Disability

The parent council at Oaklands Special School are meeting the manager of therapy provision in special schools (NHS Lothian) in September to discuss concerns regarding levels of therapy provision. There has been no official reduction but effectively children are receiving less direct provision as vacant / reduced posts are not filled. Oaklands Parent Council is now an official group and has secured funding from Edinburgh Council to support its activities.

We also continue to be involved with Upper Springlands care home in Perth, where the aim is to ensure that disabled women are able to fully participate in society.

Women Thinking Diverse Communication

The Inverness Carers community of interest are developing materials for their 'Prepare to Care' campaign which will raise awareness of the gendered nature of care and ways that women of all ages need to be aware of their rights.

Rosaria Votta, Project Worker

WOMEN INTO PUBLIC LIFE

Food features in Women into Public Life Argyll, supported by the EU's INTERREG IVA programme. We networked at another Scottish Parliament Women's Dinner and our Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland partners came over for it, an Engender Inspiring Women debate, and a visit to West Lothian Council.

International Women's Day in March saw a joint event with the EU Office in Edinburgh and Catherine Stihler MEP. Dunoon's European Union funded WiPL event featured 100 years birthday cake! We launched two projects; 'Women on the Shelf' to invite nominations of books for our Argyll and Bute Rural Women shelf in Glasgow Women's Library, and 'Celebrating Women' to make visible wonderful work across Argyll.

Two more training days were held in May. June saw Catherine Stihler and me at a 'blethering breakfast' on Iona to talk with amazing women. At Craignure, Mull we ate lunch and talked with more women in Mull and Iona Community Trust's new Community Enterprise Centre, the vision of a Mull woman.

Lorna Ahlquist, Project Co-ordinator



I-r, Catherine Stihler MEP, Tina Scopa and Lorna Ahlquist in Iona



For more information about any of our projects please see www.engender.org.uk

Consultations...

Policy worker, **Nicole Hewlett** gives an overview of some of the consultations Engender have responded to this year. Our responses have been driven by the learning coming from the communities of interest taking part in the 'Equality Counting' project and from our 'Who Counts?' project exploring women's poverty in Scotland.

The Criminalisation of the Purchase and Sale of Sex (Scotland) Bill

Trish Godman MSP, proposed a bill to criminalise the purchase of sex in Scotland and invited individuals and organisations to share their views on her proposal. Engender identifies prostitution as a form of violence against women and believe that it is never appropriate to accept that women should be "made available" for sex. We supported MSP Godman's recommendation to criminalise the purchasing of sex and recognise that it is the buyers of sex who are exercising free choice and therefore should be sanctioned. We found the legislation to be a powerful statement, challenging our culture's attitudes that normalises the commodification of women and look forward to seeing its progress through the parliament in the next session.

Child Poverty Strategy

Engender responded to the consultation regarding the development of the Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland. The strategy was gender neutral at best and gender blind at worst, failing to take adequate consideration of the gendered nature of poverty and the intrinsic link between women's and child poverty. We recommended that if there is going to be real change to the level of poverty in Scotland, the government strategy should take into consideration the cycle of gender biases and how this effects cycles of poverty, deprivation, unemployment, health etc. A child poverty strategy that recognizes the well being of the mother and understands that women's earnings are fundamental to keeping families, and in turn children, out of poverty, is crucial.



Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Act 2010, a consolidation of past equalities legislation passed by Westminster in October, was followed by a consultation from the Scottish Government regarding the public sector specific duties. We were supportive of the specific duties and see them as essential, necessary change in order to mainstream equality for all the protected characteristics. Our main concern were the reporting procedures outlined. We stressed the need for equality outcomes and equality impact assessments to be published in the public domain so that people can hold their public authorities to account. After the Scottish consultation process was complete, the UK government tendered their own consultation questioning the need for the specific duties. This has prevented the implementation of the public sector duties in Scotland and kept useful equality measures from taking full effect. We will keep an eye on what comes out of the UK consultation and continue discussions with the Scottish Government on implementation the of the public sector duty in the future.

To read more of our Consultation Responses see 'our work' at www.engender.org.uk

Strategy...

Grounded advocacy

The flow diagram opposite illustrates Engender's current programming strategy. The strategy aims to ground our policy work at national, UK, European and UN levels in women's lived experience whilst supporting women to articulate the impact of gender neutral or blind policy and engage in action to lever change. With the support of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Scottish Government we are working with women in communities of interest to use participatory research to evidence and articulate the impact such policy on their lives and engage with those that have the power to change things. So far these include women caring for severely disabled children, women partners of men with communication difficulties due to strokes, single mother asylum seekers and refugees and transgender women. And, we are in the early stages of engaging with 2 new communities of interest – people interested in the gendered nature of child poverty and students with caring responsibilities. The learning we get from working with women in this way is invaluable as it enables evidence based policy advocacy both by Engender working on the big picture and by the women themselves who have succeeded in levering positive change that directly impacts on their lives. (see the Equality Counting case studies on our web site).

Niki Kandirikiria, Executive Director



Engender works to make Scotland a fairer, safer place where women can flourish and contribute to both the social and market economies with dignity, freedom and justice.

Become an Engender member!

See www.engender.org.uk

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