



ENGENDER 'CONSTITUTION CAFÉS' ACTIVITY REPORT, JUNE – AUGUST 2014

1. INTRODUCTION

In the months ahead of the referendum Engender held three world café style events on gender equality and the independence referendum. The driving premise was to give women and men with an interest in gender issues the opportunity to chat with campaigners from both sides of the debate in an informal context. Rather than a traditional hustings format, with politicians delivering rehearsed lines, we wanted participants to drive the conversation.

Our aims were:

- To allow 'undecided' voters to put questions to activists from Better Together and Women for Independence and to engage in conversation
- For participants to reflect on their vote from gender equality and social justice perspectives, across a broad spectrum of issues
- To be more than another platform for heated debate between those with firm existing views, and to avoid party politics
- To be participant-led, informal and interactive
- To increase the profile of gender, equalities and social justice issues within the broader debate
- To increase the prospect of disengaged women casting their vote.

This broad approach was used in three different contexts, with slightly different framing at each. Café #1 was held in partnership with the Scottish Centre on Constitutional Change. It was pitched primarily as an evening for 'undecided' voters to put questions to campaigners.

Café #2 was held in partnership with the Maryhill Women's Centre, for women who access their services. This followed joint work on welfare reform issues, where it had emerged that many women felt alienated from the referendum debate and sceptical about the impact of the result in their community.

Café #3, 'the referendum and beyond', included an additional forward-looking policy focus and was supported by Close the Gap, Electoral Reform Society Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid.

2. METHODOLOGY

Activists representing Better Together (BT) and Women for Independence (WfI) hosted concurrent conversations at tables, with no set agenda. Participants were encouraged to steer the conversation and to put questions to the campaigners in terms of gender and social policy. At cafés #1 and #3, six activists hosted conversations at tables broadly themed as *Politics and Power (Yes/No)*, *Economy (Yes/No)*, and *Society and Culture (Yes/No)*. Following short interventions from the campaigners, participants were invited to rotate (or not) around these discussions at 10 minute intervals. Note-takers at each table captured the main points raised. Participants were also asked to write down issues, perspectives or ideas that they found to be particularly striking, as the conversations unfolded.

At café #2, participants took part in two longer workshops on the respective implications of a Yes or No vote. On this occasion short interventions from one campaigner apiece were preceded by a group brainstorm on ‘what we need to see for a better Scotland for women’.

Short briefings, based on our policy report *Gender Equality and Scotland’s Futures*, were available to highlight the current context for women in Scotland and to stimulate discussion where appropriate. These were on women and the labour market, women and poverty, women and care, violence against women, women, politics and power, and women and the referendum.

3. BALLOTS

At café #1 at Edinburgh University, participants cast votes in a mock ballot, once at the start and once at the end of the event.

	First ballot	Second ballot
Yes	65%	79%
No	11%	9%
Don’t know	24%	12%

At café #2 at Maryhill Women’s Centre, participants indicated whether they were ‘decided’ (19) or ‘undecided’ (11) at the beginning of the event and cast votes in a mock ballot at the end.

Yes	63%
No	12%
Don’t know / spoiled	19% / 6%

4. ENGAGEMENT

In total, twelve campaigners, ninety four members of the public and fourteen staff/ volunteers from Engender and partners took part in these events. This resulted in diverse debates, the main themes of which are outlined below.

Feedback following each event was extremely positive. Participants appreciated the opportunity to engage in conversation and to collectively drive the discussion, as hoped. Activists and volunteers also provided positive feedback about their own experience of the event and the level of enthusiasm and energy at the tables.

There was positive feedback on Twitter and the results of the straw poll were picked up and relatively widely circulated by Yes advocates.

Café #2 at Maryhill Women's Centre was filmed by Sky News, who ran a segment on the event. Coverage included interviews with participants.

5. DISCUSSION

Topics covered at each café were very wide-ranging. Participants applied gender, equalities and broader social justice perspectives to the breadth of key issues predominating in the independence debate, as well as considering gender equality and women's rights policy issues specifically. This emphatically underscored the fact that gender is not a sidebar or standalone policy concern, particularly as discussion was not facilitated.

Recurrent themes captured by note-takers and points that participants identified as particularly striking are outlined below. This is by no means a complete record of discussions, but does indicate the breadth and depth of discussion at each event.

5.1 Café#1, Edinburgh University

Gender equality issues

- Regardless of the outcome on September 18, it is vital to mobilise effective alliances of women (and others) for gender equality and social justice. Those who are currently aligned with YES or NO share common concerns and aspirations, as evidenced by the six women hosting the conversations at each table. Our challenge will be to sustain constructive and creative energy for change, whatever the constitutional arrangements.

- There is a huge task to develop and build support for a politics which will take on commodification, and the deeply entrenched relationship between sexism and capitalism.
- In certain areas, where division of power has been clear-cut, post-devolution Scottish Governments have facilitated progressive policy divergence (e.g. addressing violence against women).
- A written constitution which enshrines gender equality as a right and responsibility. That would ensure that broadcasters *could not* saturate their news and current affairs (and other programming) with men.
- The same would apply to other public bodies. It would also require institutions to consider a whole range of changes to their practices and attitudes.
- It will be vital that women are properly involved in the democratic process of developing a Constitution for Scotland.
- Who pays – it's usually the most vulnerable parts of society. "Campaigning is the key to success in social justice, not constitutional change."
- Proportional representation is of proven importance and progressive potential for gender issues– but resisted from Westminster.
- Tackling structural sexism requires a multi-layered response, using all available levels and levers of political power, including constitution, legislation, strategies for behavioural change.
- There should be compulsory education for all children and young people – not just 'sex education', but on gender, relationships, sexualisation, respect, equality. A cultural shift is needed.
- What would you change for women in Scotland?
 - More confidence
 - The negative and limiting ways that women are characterised and stereotyped
 - Childcare provision
 - Parenting inequalities
 - Introduction of quotas to ensure women are equally represented and engaged in public life
 - Ensure that women and girls are able to live whatever lives they choose, and reach their potential, free from fear, constraint, abuse and violence.

Power

- Key issue is one of *control* and who has right to exercise it. A yes vote is important to ensure that sovereignty, power and control on matters of constitution and governance are retained in Scotland, for Scotland.
- Change brings disruption, which lets us envisage new institutions and processes.
- Devolved power must be limited by a structure that keeps control of tax structures, defence, welfare.
- Reserved issues are the “tricky ones”.
- Westminster is controlled by London-based wealth
 - Yes vote is an opportunity to “take the rest of Britain with us”
- A Scottish Constitution is possible after yes or no

Political engagement

- The referendum debate offers space and possibilities for critical and constructive engagement with gender justice and equality issues. It’s up to us to seize those opportunities.
- A feature of the debate has been the reawakening of discussion about society and the future.
- A grassroots political movement (but not aligned with political parties) has emerged, engaging large numbers of ordinary people in every part of Scotland, sharing sensibilities and values and visions for the future.
- Engagement of people in the debate and the high level of public involvement was seen as extremely positive.
- Regardless of the outcome, a desire to remain involved with the opportunities and discussion that the referendum has stirred up was a common theme.
- In some Councils, all discussion and debate on the referendum has been banned. This is not helpful or democratic.
- There is a sense of excitement and enthusiasm, and increased inspiring conversations. This in itself is a very positive outcome.
- There are promising signs that young people are getting involved in significant numbers – including those who have felt alienated by the stage-managed and confrontational conventions of party politics.
- The referendum has opened up ‘possibility spaces’ where the language, style, discourse and focus of political debate has been freed up in important and democratic ways.

Politics

- What would Scottish people vote for after independence? Scotland has never voted for a government that looks like Common Weal kind of politics.
- Challenge to the idea that Scotland is different. A yes vote “abandons” people outwith Scotland to vile politics (“it’s easy to go home”)
- We have to be aware of who is seeking to influence the vote, and how money is allocated to the different campaigns.
- Why are most MSPs reluctant to ‘show up’ on gender concerns? There needs to be public and electoral pressure on them to take these issues seriously as central to the wellbeing of the nation and its citizens.
- Parties have infected politics
- There’s a lack of a “left Labour voice”
- Hope that Labour get in power in Westminster: political change therefore needed not constitutional change.
- The key issue is local democracy, the Westminster Government isn’t representing the people in Scotland.
- We need a different voting system. FPTP isn’t representative.
- Male-dominated politics
 - What’s the difference in decisions being made by a small number of privately-educated white men in Edinburgh or in London?
 - How can we stop the confrontational mode of politics?
 - Sturgeon/Lamont debate was dreadful
 - Holyrood lobby journalists are all male
 - Male journalists think equality is boring
 - Fear that a new Scotland would be dominated by a small number of men.

Economy

- Young people in the North are already faced with a lack of opportunities. But what would be happening in the case of independence?
- Education policy: The plans of the SNP include cuts in Scotland as well. So, where does the money come from if Scotland becomes independent and Scottish universities lose the tuition fees of students from England?

- Running the country is not only about the constitution. In fact, major changes can be made without writing a new constitution – currently done by the SNP without public debate or involvement.
- We all hate what the Tories are doing to the welfare state, but the answer is not to abandon the people who live in England. We have a lot in common and we can't just leave them to it.
- Financially unstable model now – no taxes, services free.
- Redistribution is not widely discussed.

Culture, nationality and identity

- Experience of the current debate, especially at grassroots level, is that it does not focus on divisive identities, but on a more equal and democratic future for everyone in Scotland, regardless of background.
- Different and distinctive policies are required to take account of, and to serve the Scottish context, e.g. on immigration.
- There was some discussion about media misrepresentations of the tone and tenor of the debate – casting it in crude terms based on stereotypical constructions of Scottish identity, history and grievances against England.
- There was agreement that the fundamental question is not about nationality but the kind of nation we want to be
- There's too much complacency about Scottish anti-racism.
- Scotland's culture is different. Our arts are different.
 - What will happen to the arts? It's non-statutory so what hope is there for it when 60% of cuts are still to come?

5.2 Café #2, Maryhill Women's Centre, Glasgow

Introduction: why are we here? (Lynne Robertson)

- Local women's voices are missing
- We need to get out the vote; women fought hard for the vote
- Welfare reform and other policies/issues impacting in communities. This is not 'fate', but engineered by politicians
- Messages usually come from men (in grey suits) but women are backbone of communities and families
- We are not being spoken to in 'our language'

What would make Scotland better for women? (Plenary session)

1. Childcare

- Increased nursery hours
- Free childcare
- Workplace creches

2. Labour market

- Fairer pay (x2)
- More jobs and more job opportunities for women
- No sexism in the workplace
- More trades for women
- Reasonable working hours
- No zero hour contracts

3. Less violence against women

4. Social policy / poverty

- No pension cuts
- Safeguard the NHS
- No food banks
- No Scottish child to live in poverty
- Address unfair digital access issues
- Address fuel poverty / utility bills

5. Social security

- No sanctions
- Eliminate Bedroom Tax
- Better housing conditions

6. Values/ culture

- Less violence against women
- Treated equally and be valued and respected
- Society with more opportunities, respect and values for older people

7. Community engagement

8. Politics

- More representation for women in Scottish Parliament
- Women to have a voice (x2)
- Government that recognises that women are voters and need to be taken seriously

9. Rights

- Access to legal advice
- Progress not regression – currently moving backwards on rights/ issues we have been fighting for years

Sessions with activists

1. Women for Independence

Intro

- Agree with BT women on most policy goals, just a question of what constitutional arrangement will best achieve women's demands.
- Indy not a magic wand, but it offers us a chance for change. Westminster offers no chance for change.
- There is uncertainty on both sides. People worry about the economy, but we already experience boom and bust cycles – the crash in 2008 has had devastating impacts in communities.

Discussion (key points)

- What are you doing for women?
 - Monitoring panels, calling out the media in Yes/No campaign. There is misogyny in all political campaigns.
 - Empowering women locally – local groups and local engagement.
 - Helping women to find their voice.
- How is yes vote going to influence 250,000 children living in poverty?
 - Benefits angle initially. Westminster going to roll out Universal Credit, the single payment and the bedroom tax
 - Would be disaster for child poverty
 - Wfl will include women and children's poverty as a key campaign focus ahead of the parliamentary 2016 elections
- If debt gets transferred over, what is the plan to clear it? And currency union = weakest part of the Yes campaign. Will tax increase?
 - Point is that we decide what we want to spend our tax dollars on in Scotland. Can prioritise childcare and pensions
- How would independence address higher energy bills than anywhere else in Europe?
 - With control over energy policy and our renewable energy strategy
- Would indy stop fracking?
 - Depends on who we vote for

2. Better Together

Intro

- Women are grossly under-represented in Scottish politics, 3 Scottish women MPs. It was better in earlier sessions of the Scottish Parliament, thanks to the STUC campaign.
- Still don't know what is happening to the pound. 'Appalling state of affairs', lacking of political willingness to get things done.
- Independence Taking risks for decent care, help for elderly, childcare. There is never enough money for everything, have to make priorities.

Discussion (key points)

- Labour have let us down, how is a 'no' vote going to change that. Beginning to think it's time for a change.
- Consecutive governments, Labour/ Lib Dems/ Tories all the same. Time to give Scottish Government t a chance.
- Labour had a chance to change all that (ref introductory remarks), but nothing has changed. Pander to South East, can't tell difference between Scottish Labour and Tories any more.
 - It's not about Salmond, but he will be negotiating with EU/UK/ Nato.
 - SNP record on women not good – Labour brought in National Wage, stayed up all night, but Nationalists went to bed
 - STUC thought up idea of equal rep campaign for women in Scottish Parliament
 - SNP only 26% female representation rate
- It's not about the SNP. Tell us why we should stay? What are you going to do?
 - Protect cuts to women's aid groups.
 - Women need a comprehensive package of care.
 - VAW is on increase, people think it's going down, but very much on increase
- What will happen under a Cons/UKIP coalition?
 - That's a vote for a change of government not a change of country.

5.3 Café #3, Scottish Youth Theatre, Glasgow

This event, 'the referendum and beyond', included a policy focus and looked ahead to the immediate aftermath of the vote. Six colleagues from Close the Gap, Electoral Reform Society Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid hosted respective discussions on the economy, politics and power, and society and culture, along with six campaigners.

Following the participant-led conversations common to all three events, there was a strategy session focussed on the policy landscape in the immediate aftermath of the vote. Participants and activists were asked to consider what the women's movement should call for in the specific policy context under either scenario, to identify opportunities, how best capitalise on them and what to prioritise. Notes were provided by our partners in the event.

Politics and power, ERS Scotland

A number of exciting post referendum campaign ideas were floated at Engender's Constitutional Café.

They are designed to promote gender equality in Scotland whatever the result of the referendum, and it is hoped we can capitalise on the networks and enthusiasm that has sprung up during the referendum debate and present a united front fighting for women's rights.

1. **A manifesto for women.** As women we prepare 5 – 10 commitments that we ask all election candidates to sign up to. If they agree, we endorse them and publicly acknowledge their action. If elected, we then hold them to account based on that endorsement, regularly assessing their actions and seeing if they measure up to the commitment. This would be a cross-party promotion, open to all candidates to sign up to. Our seal of approval would indicate we thought their election would be beneficial for gender equality and could advance the rights of women.
2. **Gender Watch.** This would be a broad based crowd sourced campaign. We would produce an assessment index akin to the Humankind Index to enable citizens to "gender assess" policy decisions, corporate behaviour, public services, media, public events etc. Failures to meet the gender index would be reported via an online forum at Gender Watch. This could include, gender imbalance in the media; policies at central or local level that fail to take account of the implications for women; misogynistic behaviour by individual community or business leaders. Equally, it could highlight positive actions and success stories.

3. Women in the Q and A were concerned about: gender imbalance in power structures, in business and in public institutions, wondered how independence might offer an opportunity to address that; strong interest in how to reach out to communities who do not feel they have a voice and are not engaged with political process or other kinds of activism.
4. Policy discussion: linked to the proposals for a women's manifesto and a Genderwatch campaign the need to create new media spaces to advance an agenda for women and to provide an alternative gender sensitive analysis of big issues. This could be pursued through high speed almost "guerilla" tactics on social media but also more substantially in other on- line spaces. There was support for involving men in the work and for the need to "federate" with other organisations.
5. Looking at how impact can be improved we discussed strengthening and refocusing the SHRC.

Society and Culture, Scottish Women's Aid

1. We need to change Scottish culture from misogynistic, male-dominated and violent to feminine.
2. We need to begin by getting broad-based acceptance and agreement of the key issues before we outline the solutions or changes we need to make. These issues include
 - a. Deep seeded gender stereotyping – addressed in education through teacher training and curriculum development
 - b. Casual misogyny
 - c. Overrepresentation of men in public life and in positions of power – addressed through a cultural shift to give women more power; Minister for Women, Feminist Political Party
 - d. Lack of equal pay – addressed by setting up an Equal Opportunity Committee Enquiry on Gender and offering tax incentives to (private) employers who demonstrate pay equity
 - e. Childcare continually represented as a woman's issue – reframe it as an economic issue
3. Women's engagement at local level needs to be fostered, not just as party political, but from all communities and to influence policy areas at local and national level.

Economy, Close the Gap

- Gender stereotyping
- Mainstreaming
- Childcare as infrastructure
- Independent Scotland
 - written constitution
 - new institutions/legislation
- There needs to be culture of change
- Gender pay gap – “choices” – conversation framed around blaming women
- There should be a back up to the tribunal system that is instant, and not based on opinion.
- We need to work towards getting employment law delivered in the event of either outcome. Devolution of employment law in the event of No?
- Equality clauses should be incorporated into procurement, and companies in Scotland procuring public services should be obliged to publish their gender pay gaps. “What gets measured gets valued”
- If we raise the national minimum wage and living wage, it may disbenefit women – e.g. Indian call centre flight
- Change happens because of robust reporting on mechanisms.
- Scrap Work Programme – redesign whole new system.
- Maximum wage not minimum wage
- Need to ensure women’s equality remains at top of agenda in either case – where economic pressures being women’s issues slip down
- How do we meaningfully communicate, campaign and convey messages.
 - take lessons from YES campaign grassroots movement
 - Women for Indy comprises 50 local groups driven by people in their communities
 - Women only spaces
 - “how do we bring this engagement into the everyday for ordinary people – social media?”
- Protracted discussion about taxation:
 - Gendered implications of tax systems

- Scottish Women's Budget Group against council tax freeze, and out of date banding system.
- COSLA thinks that further tax raising powers should be introduced for local authorities
- Some favoured a land value tax instead of council tax
- Land reform needed
- Progressive redistribution of tax
- Traditional accounting measures do not measure quality of life but should do. Humankind Index or something similar to be added on to GDP.