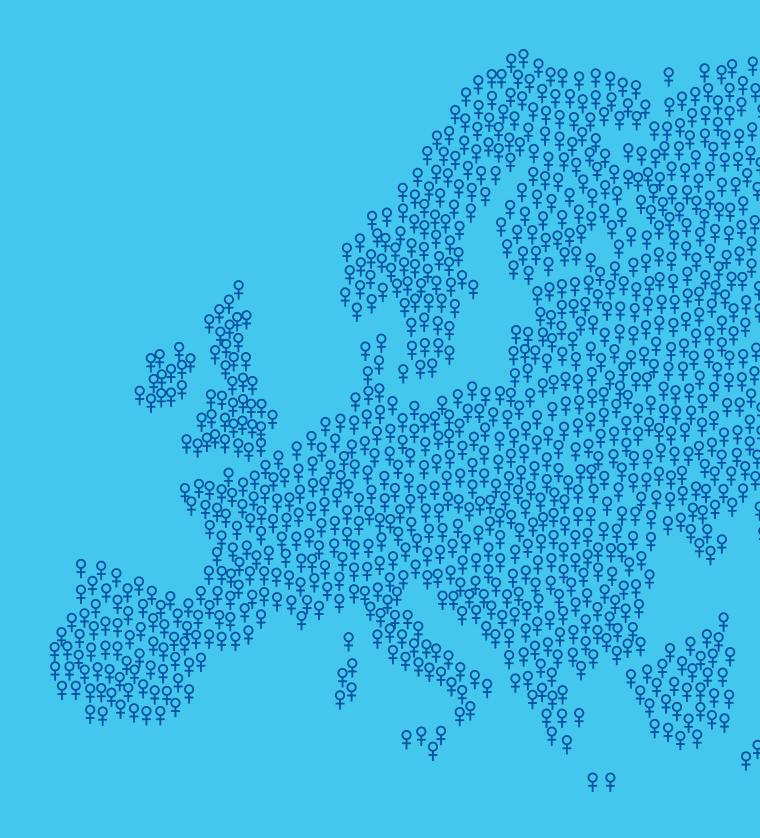# GenderWorks

Oxfam submission to NAP 2008 –
Women and Social Exclusion

April 2008

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1. Introduction

1.1 Oxfam works to overcome poverty and inequality all over the world, including in the UK. We raise public awareness of poverty to create pressure for change. And we work with policymakers to tackle the causes of poverty. Since 2002, Oxfam has worked with grassroots activists, community groups, regeneration and service delivery practitioners, and policymakers in England, Scotland and Wales to improve the lives of women and men by focusing on gender issues in regeneration programmes. Now Oxfam has partnered with two European organisations, WAVE in Austria and Lamoro in Italy, on Gender Works, a two-year project to investigate women's experiences of social exclusion in Europe and the policy processes and methodological tools that can be used to address women's social exclusion. The project will report in autumn 2009, and findings will be presented in a submission to the UK National Action Plan (NAP) 2010.

1.2 Tackling women's social exclusion is key to tackling women's poverty. People's experiences of poverty differ according to their gender, as well as their race, age and where they live. And people's needs, assets and the barriers they face in overcoming poverty are also gendered. In this submission to the UK National Action Plan 2008 we focus on women's experiences of social exclusion, and provide recommendations for social inclusion policy to meet the needs of low income women. We also comment on the methodologies used by the UK government to measure social exclusion and how they could be improved to give a better picture of why and how women experience social exclusion. Designing and implementing policy from an understanding of the how and why women experience poverty will ensure that interventions not only meet women's particular needs, but go further and address the deep structural and systemic barriers that cause and deepen women's social exclusion.

2. Gender and the NAP Process

Data collection and disaggregation, and indicator setting

2.1 The European Commission has critiqued the UK NAP reporting process for its failure to systematically mainstream gender, and the government has responded in a number of different ways over time. In this section we look at what Oxfam views as essential in terms of data collection and disaggregation, and indicator setting and analysis in order to tackle women's social exclusion

more effectively; and what has been done in the last two rounds of NAPs. Our analysis is followed by recommendations for future action.

2.2 Oxfam has learned that several factors need to be in place for successful identification of the issues that put women at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion. The first is data gathering to create a baseline about the situation of men and women in areas of social exclusion such as employment, access to benefits, health and education. This needs to be achieved at the level of the household, as well as in the public sphere. The second is collation of the disaggregated data to create a picture of what is happening to men and women differently across areas of social exclusion. The third is analysis of that data, which means going beyond collation and comment, to analyse where women and men are doing better or worse than each other, and to seek reasons based on contextual analysis of why this is the case. The final factor is the making of proposals on what policy would be necessary to tackle women and men's different reality of social exclusion.

2.3 Oxfam's analysis of the last two Opportunity for All reports (Seventh Report, 2005, and Eighth Report, 2006, strategy and indicators documents) is that they go some way towards achieving some of the factors above, but not far enough. The Seventh Report introduced a specific chapter in which the poverty and social exclusion of women was the focus, and relevant policies that the government believed assisted women out of social exclusion. The Eighth Report took a different approach, reporting on how the situation of target groups (e.g. children, people of working age) were doing well or badly in relation to previously set baselines. In this indicators document there are regular but not systematic comments on gender and ethnicity in relation to the indicators.

2.4 While there are gaps in the availability of gendered data on social inclusion, especially at household level, which has a particular impact on the picture of who gets what benefits, and intra-household income, overall the UK has continued to improve in its data collection techniques and analysis at both local and national level. However, the availability of data by gender continues to be patchy, and insufficiently collated and analysed. There have been significant numbers of research reports [1][2][3] published in the last few years which

demonstrate that women continue to be the majority in socially and economically disadvantaged groups, yet this research does not feed through into analysis and active policy making in ways that significantly impact upon their structural disadvantage. While the decisions not to analyse and act on women's social inclusion are primarily political, the need and urgency could be better demonstrated by cross-department action that is encouraged and supported by the DWP as the key body charged with anti-poverty and social inclusion policy.

Recommendations:

- **Reinstate in the NAP 2010 a specific chapter or study of the situation of women using the latest government and external research.**

- **Improve DWP and other departments' research and information gathering capacity.**

- **Develop the DWP work on indicators to routinely analyse and comment on the picture of how women and ethnic minorities are faring, publishing the findings in the NAP 2010.**

- **Commission an independent analysis of how the UK Government is matching up to best practice in targeting social exclusion across the EU and follow up on its recommendations.**

- **The DWP and the Cabinet Office, as the government centres for excellence on the study of social exclusion and poverty, should hold discussions with relevant government departments at key moments in the planning and decision making cycle which would enable women's social exclusion to be more effectively targeted and dealt with in policy-making.**

Women's input into the NAP process

2.5 The government has worked hard, with much success, to open up opportunities for people on low incomes to input into the NAP process in the UK. Support from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for both the Get Heard[4] and Bridging the Policy Gap[5] projects was followed up in July 2007 with the first UK conference for people experiencing poverty. Held at the University of Warwick over two days, the conference brought together 52 people to talk to government officials about a wide range of government policies addressing social exclusion. Forty-one of the delegates were women, from a range of grassroots community-based organisations from around the UK.

2.6 Bridging the Policy Gap was a 12-month project funded to increase awareness of European action in the field of social inclusion and social protection. The project brought together officials from central, devolved and local government, academics,

and people with experience of poverty and their voluntary organisations, to identify and assess how national policies tackling social exclusion were being implemented at local level. The project adapted the European 'peer review' model, and assessed projects in four locations. Two of these addressed issues experienced predominantly by women: The City and County of Swansea's Play Strategy and Glasgow City Council's implementation of the Working for Families Fund.

2.7 Oxfam has welcomed the opportunity to participate in a NAP stakeholder group, established by the DWP to enable voluntary sector organisations, including those that work closely with and involve people with experience of poverty, and government departments to exchange information and raise issues regarding social exclusion to support the DWP through the process of compiling the National Action Plans. The DWP has organised events to bring a variety of stakeholders together, which have been well attended. A number of participants in these events have been women, many of the issues raised have been specific to women's experience, and many of the projects and government interventions showcased in these meetings have focused on women's needs.

2.8 While all these initiatives have seen a high participation of women, this has remained ad hoc and informal. Oxfam's experience of supporting women's participation in influencing policy, in the Women's Economic Empowerment project in Scotland and through the Voices of Experience project[6], shows that poor women need extra support to build their knowledge and confidence to take part in policy processes. While they are often well-represented in community groups, women are in the minority when it comes to making the decisions; women's organisations represent around seven per cent of the total voluntary and community sector, but on LSPs, they represent less than two per cent of voluntary sector representatives[7]. Yet we know from our extensive work on regeneration in England that gender equality in service planning and delivery results in better outcomes for all in the community – more effective and fairer targeting of resources results in service provision that is more accessible and appropriate, based on a more accurate understanding of needs.

2.9 Oxfam's experience shows that women's participation at the grassroots level ensures that women's issues are raised and made visible. The Get Heard project, while not aimed solely at women, clearly showed that where women are involved in deliberation about government policy, the impact of

policy and economic and social policy on women's complex lives is drawn out. The Get Heard report highlighted women's concerns in a variety of policy areas – from Tax Credits to support for children and young people, from benefits to work and training opportunities – providing material for an analysis of government interventions through a gendered lens.

Recommendation:

Develop a clear strategy to ensure the participation of grassroots women and women's community-based organisations in the NAP process and report on it in the 2010 NAPs.

3. Women and Social Exclusion

3.1 In the UK, more women than men live in poverty, and women are more likely to experience persistent poverty. Much of this is due to the pattern of women's lives. At work, women still earn less than men; women are more likely to be out of work than men, are more likely to be in part-time work, and are concentrated in lower-paid work. Women's working patterns are often shaped by their social roles: women are more likely to take on unpaid caring responsibilities, and many head their own households, without financial support, especially as lone parents and single pensioners. The full impact of these disruptions to mainstream economic and social participation is seen in women's poor pension entitlements and social isolation in old age – problems that are compounded by women's greater longevity and increased risk of living alone.

3.2 This pattern of disadvantage experienced by women means that they are more likely to face social exclusion, especially at key 'drop off' points in their lives (e.g. childbirth, separation, retirement) and once excluded are less likely to benefit from government interventions. Policies to tackle women's poverty and social exclusion must therefore be based in an understanding of the complex picture of women's lives.

Promoting active inclusion

3.3 There is a wealth of evidence to show that women in general have lower incomes than men. Twenty-five per cent of women live in poverty[8]. Around 30 per cent of women have total, net and disposable incomes of less than £100 per week, more than twice the total proportion of men[9]. On average women earn 45 per cent less than men per week[10]. Women working full-time are paid on average 17 per cent less than men; for women working part-time the gap is 40 per cent[11]. The concentration of women in particular sectors also contributes to women's lower earnings. For example,

whilst 79 per cent of (predominantly low-paid) administrative and secretarial workers are women, as are 83 per cent of personal service workers, only nine per cent of skilled trades employees and 31 per cent of managers and senior officials are women[12].

3.4 The reasons for disadvantaged women's continued exclusion from the labour market are complex, reflecting an interplay of factors resulting in long-term exclusion, and a vicious cycle deepening their exclusion. A variety of solutions are required, linking proactive labour market policies with regeneration investment, sustained support for women's complex needs, welfare and labour market reform, and strengthened labour market demand for high quality jobs[13].

3.5 Women's poverty is closely linked to their family status and caring roles, which can present barriers to active involvement in the labour market. Women are more likely to be carers and they make up 90 per cent of lone parents; they are seven times more likely than men to be out of work as a result of family responsibilities[14]. Even within couples, women are more often the main carers for children[15]. The continuing lack of sufficient affordable, accessible, high quality childcare acts as a further barrier to women participating in the labour market; there is only one registered childcare place for every three children under eight[16], and 18 per cent of lone parents report that they are not working because they cannot afford childcare[17].

Recommendation:

Take immediate action to enforce equal pay legislation; increase the availability of affordable childcare places; redesign the benefits system so that it is compatible with a flexible labour market.

3.6 Women's exclusion from local labour markets is deepened through gender stereotyping in career support. Through the Routes to Work South project in South Lanarkshire, Oxfam worked with local advice and support services to help advisers identify where gender stereotyping was channelling women into low paid jobs and training schemes that were unlikely to improve their job prospects. While advisers did not overtly push men and women into stereotypical training and jobs, they did not actively challenge clients' perceptions of their skills and abilities, or their beliefs and attitudes about work; when asked about why there were no girls on their course, young men on a manufacturing course said it was 'because lassies like weans, and care is easier'. The project ran a pilot work experience placement in joinery for five girls, who said they had

gained confidence through the work experience and would recommend it to others. The dual approach of working with clients and provider meant that the project was able to tackle two sides of the employment problems in the area.

Recommendation:

Design local employment initiatives to provide skills development opportunities for women and men, and targeted outreach to all members of the community.

3.7 While the government has recognised the need for targeted support for particular groups, many of whom are women (such as the New Deal for Lone Parents), these initiatives do not address the need for all employment support services and employment policies to recognise the realities of disadvantaged women's lives. An evaluation by Oxfam and the South Bank Women's Centre of the Redcar and Cleveland Job Connect Service examined how far a gender neutral service met the different needs of men and women. The study found that once they had accessed the service, men and women had similar success rates for gaining employment. But initial access to Job Connect services by women was much lower, women were less successful at gaining training places through Job Connect, and were less able to get financial support through the service. The study also found that women were more likely to use channels other than job centres to find employment, and were likely to experience stereotyping in the types of jobs offered through Job Connect.

Recommendation:

Monitor employment services provided by all agencies, public or private, to ensure that they reach and meet the needs of women and men.

Ending child poverty

3.8 Currently in the UK, having a child in itself puts women at greater risk of moving into poverty. The UK government is committed to ending child poverty by 2020. This target will be missed unless the government tackles the structural drivers of child poverty, foremost amongst which is mothers' poverty. Oxfam notes that two key measures announced in the 2008 Budget to end child poverty (Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit increases) will go to the primary carer - and will therefore in most cases go directly into women's purses instead of men's wallets. But this will not be sufficient to meet the target of halving child poverty by 2010.

3.9 The majority of children in poverty are either in single-mother households or households in which the mother has no income – families in which the father is working but the mother is not constitute 34 per cent of in-work families in poverty[18]. Even in two-parent households, research shows that women in full-time employment spend nearly 30 per cent more time on childcare every day than men in full-time employment[19].

Recommendation:

Incorporate a strategy to address women's poverty in the government strategy to end child poverty. This includes addressing women's need for secure yet flexible work.

3.10 The event of childbirth itself can cause both immediate financial penalties and ongoing downward mobility in their career. Despite anti-discrimination legislation being in place for decades, negative attitudes and discrimination by employers persist; 30,000 women each year lose their jobs as a result of becoming pregnant[20]. Over 60 per cent of female workers are in part-time work throughout the ten years following the birth of their first child; yet less than 10 per cent of female workers are in part-time employment in the years prior to childbirth[21]. There is also a general movement towards non-permanent and non-supervisory roles for women following childbirth[22].

Recommendation:

Monitor and enforce the implementation of employment legislation to improve the fulfilment of maternity rights and end discrimination against pregnant women and women with childcare responsibilities; report on progress in the UK NAP 2010.

Improving access to services

3.11 For men and women in disadvantaged communities, the need for effective service provision extends beyond employment support. The government's regeneration programme has targeted large investment into deprived communities with a focus on improving service delivery and involving communities in planning for improvements. Oxfam's work on gender and regeneration (the ReGender project) has worked with both local communities and regeneration practitioners, to explore and demonstrate the need for regeneration planning to take account of the different ways that women and men experience poverty.

3.12 Transport is a key service, often used very differently by women and men, yet these different needs are often overlooked by planners. Oxfam

worked with the Beacon Women's Network in the East Manchester New Deal for Communities area to investigate women's problems with local transport services. The project found bus routes which did not connect residential areas and local facilities, expensive fares, inadequate provision for those carrying shopping, and limited access to new developments and facilities such as sports centres and shops. One women said she and other women 'feel like prisoners on our own estate'. The group successfully raised these issues with the NDC, and the local Health and Well Being Network now address transport provision as a matter of course.

Recommendation:

Carry out gender impact analysis in the early stages of service design, to ensure that service provision meets the different needs of all members of the community.

Promoting equality and ending discrimination

3.13 The Gender Equality Duty (GED) is the most significant opportunity for public sector accountability on gender and poverty for a generation, as it places responsibility on public authorities to promote gender equality and remove gender discrimination for all women. The introduction of the GED builds on much progress by many local authorities, but in addition requires public bodies to screen public services to ensure that services are provided on an equal basis. An Equal Opportunities Commission study[23] into how public authorities went about implementing the GED found that many of the resources needed to carry out Gender Impact Assessments and implement the GED were already available, and that local authorities simply needed to identify these resources in order to design and monitor Gender Equality Schemes (GES). Yet a study of Local Strategic Partnerships across England in 2007[24] found that although 70 per cent were aware of the GED, none was developing a GES (some were considering it, although not as an immediate priority).

Recommendation:

• **The DWP should work with local authority service providers, particularly in the areas of employment service delivery and social inclusion, to actively seek information on how women are suffering disadvantage and discrimination.**

• **To gather information on progress in implementation of Gender Equality Schemes, and report on this in the NAP 2010.**

3.14 The GED includes an obligation on public

bodies to consult with employees, service users and others, but does not include guidance on how to ensure involvement is meaningful. Oxfam's long experience in developing and supporting participative approaches to decisionmaking has shown that consultation is no replacement for meaningful involvement, which requires information, feedback and opportunities for communities to set the agenda in partnership with decisionmakers. The business case for this is obvious: investment in meaningful involvement of communities at the start of the planning process results in the provision of more appropriate, effective services with better take-up by service users. Oxfam's work with women's community groups[25] has shown that when women are involved in setting the agenda, women's issues are more effectively addressed by decision makers.

Recommendations:

• **Public bodies responsible for the production of Gender Equality Schemes provide evidence about how they actively support the involvement of women with experience of social exclusion and women's community-based organisations.**

• **Mainstream the gender-proofing of policy and services through incorporation into the Local Authority Performance Indicators Set, and audit this as part of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.**

• **The Equalities and Human Rights Commission should undertake an audit of Local Authorities' Gender Equality Schemes for reporting to the NAP 2010.**

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