

Women's Policy Group NI

Key Briefing for Ministers: Minister for Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs

6th February 2024

Introduction

The Women's Policy Group (WPG) is a group of policy experts and practitioners who advocate collectively for women and girls by promoting gender equality through an intersectional feminist lens. We challenge systemic injustice and discrimination affecting women and girls by informing society and influencing policy and law. Our work is informed by women and girls' lived experiences and rooted in international human rights law.

There are a number of issues that we have spent several years lobbying for and working towards, that could not be progressed because of the absence of government. Now that the Assembly has returned, we would like to outline our key priorities to every Minister, explain why these issues are important, and highlight what can be achieved if we begin early and focus on the long-term benefits of these actions.

Policy Issues: Just transition, UN Sustainable Development Goals, support for rural women

- **A Just Transition that centres the promotion of equality and rights must be embedded into all Departmental decisions.**
- **We need a clear pathway to the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.**
- **An Independent Environmental Protection Agency**
- **Support for Rural Women including ensuring the Over 60s SmartPass is retained**

Why are these measures important?

A Just Transition is crucial in ensuring that those who contribute to the economy in any way - both in paid and unpaid work - are not negatively impacted as we collectively move to a lower carbon economy. The inclusion of a just transition can mitigate the human and economic costs of such a drastic change, generate employment in existing low-carbon sectors and create jobs for new and emerging low-carbon sectors.

Northern Ireland must play its part in the fulfilment of the UK's commitment to the 17 SDGs and to meet the goals, investment in both social and physical infrastructure is required. As noted in the SDGs, "...ending poverty and deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth - all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests." There must be collective and cross-departmental working, not only to adapt physical infrastructure, but to change areas of social infrastructure and systemic inequality. This will help to tackle barriers to multiple SDGs as well as assist in the transition to a low-carbon, sustainable economy.

An independent Environmental Protection Agency is vital; it can ensure that we do not see disasters of the type we are seeing at Lough Neagh repeat in other lakes and waterways, the quality of which are already poor.

Women in rural Northern Ireland receive only a small fraction of available funding, and with this fraction they do wonderful things to amplify the voices of rural women, to build community and to provide services. With a little more, they could reach many more rural women - a greater share of the pot should be ring-fenced for women's community work. In addition, rural women are disproportionately reliant on the over 60s SmartPass and we know that the loss of this will have a profound impact. This is of course under the remit of the Department for Infrastructure, but we urge the DAERA Minister to make representations for rural women in any final decisions, if possible.

What are we asking for?

- Establish an independent Just Transition Commission and independent Climate Commissioner.
- Develop a cross-departmental Strategy to guide the fulfilment of the SDGs.
- Ensure rural women receive a greater share of available funding, and support their access to the over 60s SmartPass.

Further information

If you have any questions or queries regarding this briefing, please contact:

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