"We need this to do things differently": A framework for a new, inclusive and intersectional organisation to transform attitudes towards women and girls and promote gender equality in Scotland.

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Executive Summary

Women and girls in Scotland continue to face discrimination and violence every day. For Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME), LGBTQ+, disabled, migrant and poor women, the harm they face is deepened further by racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and structural poverty. While this project began before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was completed and written during a time when women were more likely than men to lose their jobs, more likely to take on caring responsibilities, more likely to be in frontline 'essential jobs', more likely to suffer domestic abuse and coercive control, and more likely to experience poverty.

The pandemic has brought many of our social inequalities into sharper focus and reminded us of what we already know: women and girls continue to face social, political, economic and cultural inequalities and experience high levels of violence. At the root of these inequalities and violence are harmful social, cultural and gendered norms that drive negative attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls and lead to gender inequality. Gender inequality damages women's and girls' physical, mental and emotional safety, prevents them from living authentically and free from fear, and impacts workplaces, homes, education, communities, relationships, bodies and identities.

This project arises from a recommendation made by the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (NACWG) that the Scottish Government should develop a new 'What Works?' institute to "develop and test robust, evidence-led, inclusive and representative approaches to changing public attitudes in Scotland to girls' and women's equality and rights, including dismantling stereotypes about what girls and women should study, work at, and be" (NACWG 2019).

The NACWG envisages such an institute as "the place where 'good learning' happens and where specialist gender support can be accessed that will give public bodies; the third sector and business the tools to act to change the culture on women's equality" (NACWG 2019). Zero Tolerance was tasked with exploring this recommendation further, commissioning The Collective in undertaking a light-touch literature review and working with practitioners, policy makers, campaign groups, researchers and academics to respond to the following questions:

- What works in changing attitudes?

- What kind of organisation could help change attitudes to women and girls?

This report is broken down into seven sections: an introduction; our methodology; what we know about attempts to change attitudes to women and girls; what organisational approaches currently exist outside of Scotland; what the landscape looks like in Scotland; the design and direction of a new organisation; and three potential models, as well as a foundational model, for moving forward. At the heart of this work is a participatory, intersectional approach to understanding knowledge. Throughout our literature review, our discussion groups, our interviews and our workshops, we centred our commitment to hearing from groups who have been marginalised, who do not have access to peer-review processes, and for whom large-scale evaluations are beyond their resources and budgets.

This executive summary pulls together our main findings.

What works in changing attitudes?

In our review of what works in changing attitudes, we found that the process of attitude formation – whether pro or anti-equality – was complex and nuanced, and that attitude change work for one area of gender equality (for example, attitudes towards same sex marriage) would not be the same for another area (for example, attitudes towards Muslim women). Also, many evaluations were short term, so researchers were not able to explore the long-term impact of the work that had been completed. However, we were able to identify a few recurring themes around 'what works' and, importantly for those working for change, what does not.

Increased knowledge does not necessarily lead to attitude change, and attitude change does not necessarily turn into behavioural change

While the focus of this project was attitude change, it is not clear if changes in attitudes result in changes in behaviour in relation to the distribution of power, systemic inequality and the experiences of women and girls.

Single, one-off interventions and trainings do not work on their own

One-off workshops, campaigns or interventions tend not to have long-lasting impacts or signify changes in attitudes or behaviours. Instead, longer-term engagement using multiple methods tends to have more significant outcomes.

Relationship building is key

Relationships were found to be one of the key drivers in attitude and behaviour change, with an individual's actions being significantly impacted by the actions of teachers, support workers, family members, friends or other community members around them.

Projects need to be tailored to their contexts and include working with multiple stakeholders

Whether this is on-the-ground community projects or segmented marketing approaches, work that focuses on the needs, views and community of individuals was evaluated well.

'Quick fix' role models may not have the desired impact

While role models are heavily used as an attitude change 'quick fix', evaluations of their impact on changing attitudes and subsequent behaviour are very mixed. In some cases, the impact of role models is counter-intuitive, particularly if they are not relatable to the audience or engaged as a 'one-off'.

Approaches at community level to encourage modelling of desired behaviours are considered effective

Numerous studies and feedback from practitioners highlight the importance of role modelling within communities; friends, family, neighbours etc. tend to have a high impact on behaviour and attitude change.

Material and social benefits are more likely to support attitude change than changes in laws

While legislative change can impact attitudes, more evidence was found to support the view that material and social rewards support attitude and behaviour change. This was found to be particularly true for attitudes towards men's role in equitable parenting, as well as boys' engagement in anti-sexist programmes and behaviours.

Communication campaigns need to be accessible, relatable and positive

Communication campaigns have the biggest impact on attitudes when they are understandable, sustainable, empowering and positive.

Both myth busting and 'sympathy-inducing' campaigns often backfire

While myth busting continues to be a common message translation method, there is now compelling evidence that it does not work and can create negative effects, particularly when based on negative stereotyping.

Personal storytelling and messaging that focuses on values can be particularly effective

Individuals sharing their personal experiences and stories – whether through media and social media, or through face-to-face interactions – can be a crucial part of changing public perceptions about particular groups and challenging prejudice and stigma. Similarly, activating people's compassionate and 'public-spirited' values can increase support for campaigns in the long-term.

Policy change can help change minds

Research is mixed on whether messaging that focuses on policy change as being 'good for women' or about 'women's issues' helps or hinders attitude change. In some cases, messaging on 'policy for women' can educate the public that gender inequality exists and inform them that action needs to be taken to tackle it. In others, it can further embed ideas of gender roles or differences.

What are some of the challenges?

In reviewing different types of intervention aiming to change attitudes, we found a number of common challenges and gaps.

Intersectional approaches are missing

Across the different areas of intervention, we found very few examples of work which considered overlapping inequalities in relation to social norms and attitude change.

Difficulties working long-term and at scale

Many practitioners reaffirmed what the literature tells us about the difficulties of working within short-term, competitive funding environment. One told us, "You do what is funded, but what is funded is not evidence-based". Another said, "Short-term funding seems like a waste of money, what is it really going to change? Yeah, they'll know the legal definition of consent, but how long is that going to last?"

Lack of space and capacity to collaborate across silos or contexts

Small organisations often struggle to find the time and staffing to share lessons and collaborate across sectors, and different issue areas, such as violence against women, can become siloed. Further, levels of distrust exist between sectors working on these issues, whether it's government departments working against each other, or small organisations competing for similar funding.

Negative consequences for women who share their stories and for staff who handle backlash

While the value of sharing stories was recognised in the literature and by participants, it was also apparent from our discussions that sharing stories can negatively impact people's health and wellbeing, often within the context of toxic social media environments.

Difficulties working against the status quo, both with and against people in power

Across our review, interviews, discussion groups and workshops, a theme that emerged very strongly was power. Questions arose over who has power, where they have power, and how power is distributed; whether in relation to power in the classroom, in relationships with police and government, or in navigating competitive funding environments. A clear barrier for many working on the ground was the lack of critical reflection on how power is circulated within mainstream feminist spaces working alongside state institutions.

Complex relationship between attitude change, behaviour change and power

While attitude change was the focus of this piece of work, the relationship between attitude change and behaviour change is not straightforward; nor is the relationship between attitude change and the redistribution of power. We believe any new organisation would need to consistently engage with the question of if, when and how power is being redistributed as a result of attitude change work. We recommend that attitude change is seen as a means to achieve both specific and 'higher purpose' goals, rather than an end in itself, and is understood to be intimately linked to other strategies for transformative change.

What kind of organisation could help change attitudes to women and girls in Scotland?

From developing an understanding of what works and what some of the challenges are, we were then able to explore what kinds of institutes or organisations might be needed to promote attitude change towards gender equality. Drawing on our learning, we recommend 10 guiding principles in developing an organisation to support gender equality in Scotland.

1. **Ensuring collaborative and collective approaches to building the organisation and ongoing decision-making and governance**.

   A number of comments were made about the need to avoid replicating hierarchical structures found in national policy making or other government-led initiatives.

2. **Centring experiences of women and examining ideas around 'expertise'**

   The organisation should challenge received notions of where evidence and knowledge come from and centre the experiences of women.

3. **Recognising that attitude change requires long-term engagement and sustained multiple, multi-track interventions**

   The organisation should target individual and group attitudes as well as behaviours, communities, systems and structures. This is resource intensive work, with relationship building also central to sustainability.

4. **Recognising the importance of highly tailored and small-scale community interventions to an overall picture of change**

   Across research it is clear that although some overarching frameworks, messaging methods and attitude change methods can be applied relatively widely.

5. **Making sure to build upon existing work in Scotland and helping build bridges across sectors and communities**

   Silos, distrust, power and duplication were themes that occurred frequently in our discussions with practitioners, alongside the desire to work more collaboratively and more openly.

6. **Understanding and challenging power dynamics**

   Any future model must seek to dismantle – and avoid reproducting – inequitable power dynamics, including through inclusive movement building, intergenerational learning and amplification of the work and voices of groups that hold least power.

7. **Prioritising intersectional approaches and analysis across all streams of work**

   The organisation should be committed to delivering intersectional analysis by ensuring that intersectional understanding and gender competence are priority skills among staff and cultivated in the organisational culture.

8. **Ensuring safe, inclusive spaces online and offline that promote community wellbeing**

   To be truly inclusive, spaces that enable conversation and dialogue must also create safe boundaries.

9. **Working towards systemic, transformative change**

   Working to change attitudes cannot exist in isolation from an understanding of systemic inequality.

10. **Embracing complexity, risk and failure**

    Systemic change will need to be supported by a bold vision to try, to learn, to fail and to try again. Not all activities will work, and not all projects will be a success, but enabling teams, individuals and communities to share their failures and their lessons honestly and openly will allow the organisation to understand better what works and what doesn't.

Recommendations and conclusions

At the request of the Scottish Government, three models have been developed for further examination and exploration. All models include a foundation focus on research and good practice dissemination, as well as capacity building on effective attitude change methods. These models are (in brief):

1.   A collaboration and movement building space

Model 1 focuses on developing a Scotland-wide movement and peer-learning on attitude change work to challenge and change damaging attitudes towards and about women and girls. This model would work across communities in Scotland (practitioners, small charities, artists and community groups) and take a grassroots approach to change. This model would be member-led with co-production at its heart.

2.   Project development and learning hub

Model 2 focuses on supporting the learning and development of projects (both existing and new) which are working on attitude change directly. This model would provide intensive support for these projects over an 18-month period to deliver highly competent, evaluated and evidence-based interventions. The model would operate under a relatively flat and non-hierarchical staffing structure and be informed directly by the projects it works with.

3.   Research and practice centre

Model 3 would work most closely to a 'traditional' third sector model. It would focus on conducting and collating research on effective attitude change methods and establishing how these methods could be practically applied across Scotland. To enable participatory work in this model, community research methods would be included to provide research input from on the ground examples of attitude change interventions for the creation of toolkits and practical guides.

The research team has also created a framework for a foundation model, which we recommend is implemented for at least one year to create a base from which further examination of the three models can be pursued. This foundation model would include three members of staff who would be tasked with strategy development, research analysis, outreach and strategic communications testing. The foundation model would also provide space for the learning obtained through this report to be put into practice and for there to be a period of buy-in across sectors for this work.

From our light-touch literature review and participatory research we recommend that the 10 principles detailed above are at the heart of any organisation created. In order to create high quality and effective attitude change interventions, this work must be participatory (beyond the third sector 'usual suspects'), evidence-based, intersectional in its analysis, diverse in who it engages, and a space for practical guidance and accessible knowledge.