Learning As We Walk

Lessons from Ireland’s abortion referendum in the current global context

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Comhlámh Member

On May 25th 66.4% of the Irish people voted to repeal a 35 year long constitutional ban on abortion. In doing so, they sent a powerful signal to the world that abortion rights are human rights and that when people hear from and understand one another they choose compassion, respect and support over stigma and shame.

The campaign was long, well over 35 years for many activists, and, at points, it was fraught. However, there were valuable lessons learnt which can now be brought to the global level to continue to progress women’s rights and equality and to tackle societal stigmas wherever they may exist.

A first and most obvious lesson is that change can and does happen on the back of tireless grassroots activism and organisation.

Over the years since the eighth amendment was inserted into the Irish constitution and in the years preceding that, it would often have seemed impossible to have taken the kind of step forward which we did as a society this year.

But it was made possible because of the day-in, day-out activism and the bravery of those willing to speak out in increasing numbers over that time.

A second lesson is that change inspires change. 2018 is also the centenary of suffrage for some women so it may be apt to quote the British suffragist Millicent Fawcett (who, notably, was only this year commemorated for the first time in a statue in Parliament Square following a grassroots campaign calling for more representation of women in statues), who said “courage calls to courage everywhere”.

In the immediate aftermath of the landslide vote to repeal the eighth amendment, an emergency debate was called in Westminster about the ongoing denial of abortion rights in Northern Ireland. Shortly afterwards, Argentina’s lower house of parliament voted to liberalise the country’s strict abortion laws.

In both these cases the Irish referendum was regularly referenced by parliamentarians and activists. It was clear that Ireland would no longer provide a veil of legitimacy to laws in other countries that stigmatised and endanger people in crisis.

Thirdly, we now have an opportunity to offer leadership globally on the issue of reproductive rights. The powerful signal sent out by the referendum result will continue to be highly important in the fraught political landscape of reproductive rights in Europe and globally. Maternal mortality remains a significant threat to the health of people in pregnancy – particularly those who are poor or marginalised in many countries of the Global South.

Addressing it is an integral part of the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda and yet the political will to achieve progress in this area is being eroded in Europe and the U.S. After Trump’s inauguration in January 2017, his administration immediately re-imposed the global gag order which denies USAID funding to any development organisation providing abortion services or even information about abortion services.

This had the immediate effect of reducing essential medical (cont’d pg2)
FOCUS ACTION FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE

Supporting millions of people in pregnancy in the Global South. In Europe, the “pro-life” lobbyists and campaigners are becoming more coordinated and seeking to start a greater political influence. A conservative think-tank called Agenda Europe connects parliamentarians and public figures across Europe dedicated to reducing reproduction and GEDLRT’s rights and opposing sexual liberation.

The impact of this movement can be seen in how some doctors are refusing to give drug abortions to women who have not fully understood the cost to those who have the most to lose in the results of the vote. It can also provide an important public conversation. A growing consensus is emerging about the evidence of the impact of the spotlight to be brought to light on a meaningful personal and political prey that proved highly impactful. This should reassure us of the power of honest, mature and persistent conversation starting important conversations.

There are other essential lessons to take away from the conference. One of the key lessons was how it increased women’s rate of participation in politics and public life cannot be ignored. The conference’s theme was “Women for Peace: the need for women leaders.” The central theme of the conference was the need for women leaders in politics and society.

Finally, the power and importance of young women’s voices and participation in politics and public life cannot be ignored. The conference’s theme was “Women for Peace: the need for women leaders.” The central theme of the conference was the need for women leaders in politics and society.

Addressing the uncomfortable reality of pharmaceutical pricing.

Michele Linnane

Imagine that you have recently been diagnosed with breast cancer. You discover that there is a novel drug that could treat your breast cancer more effectively than any other. Yet imagine that this life-saving drug is so prohibitively expensive that there is virtually no way to afford it for you.

New image of what you’ve been recently diagnosed with breast cancer. You start active treatment. But not all patients respond as expected. Two weeks after diagnosis, you are placed on a medication that has been shown to be effective in treating your cancer. You are registered for a medication aid program. You begin to receive support from a community health worker who visits you regularly. You are committed to ensuring medicines are available when needed. You are no longer dependent on government grants to pay for your medication. You are happy to know that you will be able to continue taking it regularly.

When discussing pricing strategies, we cannot ignore the fact that there are different ways to achieve the same goal. For example, a pharmaceutical company may choose to price its product at a lower level in one country and at a higher level in another country. This is because the company may have different costs associated with producing the same product in different countries.

We want to live in a society where people are treated with respect and dignity, and where profits are valued more than the health of its people.

Gender & Culture

How we use language can often hide as much as it illuminates, suggests ISW member Carol Ballantine.

At a recent conference on Gender Justice in UCD, a fellow researcher Yasmin Kutub explored how culture influences the ways we respond to violence against women.

The term concorna as much, for undeniably some of those couples were not consensual, and many of those marriages were not even legal. As we wake up to the necessity of the 16th amendment, we can reflect on the meaning of forcing women to remain pregnant against their wills, in a society where single parents are seen as unattractive. How many women today were faced with the choice of either to go against a court order, or to remain pregnant against their will?

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The consensual forced expulsions of 750,000 Palestinians created the Nakhba (Catastrophe), as Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and 2018 was always going to be a seminal year for the Occupied Palestinian Territories and, given that the 70th anniversary of the foundation of Israel has just been marked, the Nakba (Catastrophe), as Palestinians call it.

In this way there is significant potential for online platforms to connect people who are geographically apart, from thousands of kilometers apart. With programmes like ‘Glocal Classroom Dialogues’ there is potential for a win-win for all. The dialogues provide students an opportunity to increase their social awareness and enhance their social emotional competences as part of fun, relaxed and free integration, collaboration, and exchange within and between classes. Since the 19th century when schools prepared students to work in industries and professions, the world has changed dramatically from a world where we were taught to accept the concept of learning, education and how we understand and produce outcomes we acquire knowledge in a specific way and build experience in decision-making wise ones.

Through the dialogues, students stand to increase their understanding of global and local interconnections and interdependence, respect and appreciate the differences in short term, tackle the human tendency of imposing viewpoints and identities in medium term, and distinguish cases of bullying, racism, xenophobia, and other discriminations in the long term.

In sum, programmes like ‘Glocal Classroom Dialogues’ help work towards global citizenship by way of online platforms. They are much needed in our times - to increase the scale and quality of cross-cultural relationships and to empower young people and their educators to navigate the somehow unpredictable and new world that we see emerging.
The second president on the line is the case relation to why not in the world? was actually? is it subject to indigenous rights. These rights relating to cultural identity, territorial autonomy and the right to be informed and consulted about development projects (particularly ILO Convention 169) are recognized both in the Peruvian legal system and Constitution as well as in international treaties to which Peru is a signatory. In the regional courts in this, the judges ruled that Walter Aduviri was not subject to these rights, because it was treated as a university education. According to Rodrigo Lancay, lawyer at local human rights defence organisation BIDA in Peru, “this represents a violation of international standards to terms of indigenous people’s rights... it affects not only Walter Aduviri but all indigenous peoples because it derogates from international jurisprudence.”

Like many other criminalisation cases in Peru and across the region, this one must be understood in the broader context of the multiple forms of discrimination and persecution faced by indigenous communities.

To give just one example, the Peruvian public prosecutor in another legal action related to the Aymarazo protests spoke of those involved in the social mobilisation in the following way: “...who in their role as institutional leaders and commanders with control over these situations, institutional, impeding, interfering actions, pushed the population to...”

Whether it’s the neglect of indigenous rights or the occupation of land by illegal miners, with criminal justice, the objective is clear: to suppress social protest on the part of already marginalised communities in order to facilitate the extraction of natural resources - mostly by multinational corporations.

Local human rights groups in southern Peru and international organisations have launched a campaign not just to highlight this case and the two legal proceedings on the line, but also to pressure the courts in Lima and the Peruvian government to take action on the case of Walter Aduviri, as well as all the other cases of criminalisation of indigenous rights defenders. That’s the problem, if you understand. The Criminalisation of Walter Aduviri, you are one that argument in this case that was already acquired to form a conviction.

State Repression

When former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori was convicted of various criminal offenses against humanity in 2009, he was convicted under legal theory known as indirect perpetration (collusion mediation).

When Shimon Graminski, thinking Path (Sondo Luminoso) leader was sentenced in 2009 to 13 years in prison for terrorism against the State in Peru was convicted using the same theory.

The case of the Aduviri will be settled by the Supreme Court in Lima in the coming weeks. It has been going on for more than 7 years but now in the final stretch it’s being closely watched by human rights lawyers and political analysts across the country - because of two important legal precedents, as well as implications for many other struggles for indigenous and peasant rights.

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Two of the most significant legal cases in Aymarazo were “terrorist” charges brought against two Peruvian tribespeople, the leaders of the Aymarazo- against a proposed silver mine in Aduviri but all indigenous peoples, because it affects not only Walter Aduviri but all indigenous peoples because it derogates from international jurisprudence.

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Soya not the solution

Meat consumption is driving deforestation and social injustice in South America

James O'Donovan
Comhlámh Member

In 2016 global production of soybeans was 324 million tonnes on a staggering 12 million Km2 - more than three times the size of Germany. In 2014 82% of soy was planted as Genetically Modified monocultures that use high quantities of energy, water, herbicides and pesticides. The United States, Brazil and Argentina account for more than 80% of production.

Soybean meal is used primarily as feedstock for poultry and pork but also for beef, dairy and factory-farmed fish. It is usually combined with maize, barley or other grains. According to the International Feed Industry Federation globally approx. 1.3 billion tons of feed-grain, 242 million tons of soybean meal and a further 160 million tons of other oil seed meal was used for animal feeds in 2016 producing just 310 million tons of meat (2016). Animal agriculture converts food with the potential to feed 8 billion people into enough food for only 1.5 billion people by first feeding it to animals.

Biodiversity and Habitat Loss from Soybean Production.

In South America from 2001-2010, an average of approximately four million hectares of forests were destroyed each year (400,000 km2), mostly for beef and soy production. This has impacted a range of precious ecosystems and their biodiversity. Species populations in tropical regions have fallen by an average of 60 per cent since 1970.

Large scale soy production also has an impact on human populations. The Brazilian Amazon and the Cerrado and Chaco ecosystems are home to an estimated 60 million indigenous people across Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Argentina. The expansion of soybean cultivation has taken place at the expense of indigenous people and the ecosystems they depend upon. Growing soybeans often means evicting indigenous people and destroying large areas of natural habitat.

Opening up new agricultural land to grow soybeans has often led to violent, sometimes fatal, conflicts with local communities and indigenous people. A study in Argentina's Chaco region documented 224 land conflicts, including a number related to soy, affecting 127,886 people on more than 2.7 million ha: one quarter of the families were evicted.

In Brazil, soybean cultivation displaces 11 agricultural workers for each one who finds employment in the sector. In the 1970s, soybean production displaced 2.5 million people in Paraná state and 0.3 million in Rio Grande do Sul. Many of these people moved to the Amazon where they cleared pristine forests (Pearsnside, 2000).

When plantations encroach on nature reserves, or reserves for indigenous people, locals often find it hard to stand up for their rights – regardless of whether they have formal land ownership papers. According to one report, “Falsification of property contracts, sometimes with the complicity of local authorities, is common practice to 'steal' land for agricultural purposes.” Expansion of agricultural and grazing land threatens 650,000 Brazilian Indians in over 200 tribes, according to Survival International.

NGOs have documented cases of land eviction, misuse of pesticides and, in Paraguay, violent suppression of land protests related to soy. Greenpeace has documented use of slaves in soy farms in the Amazon region, with workers being duped into coming to ranches where their papers are taken away and they are forced to work. The Brazilian government keeps a 'dirty list' of farms successfully prosecuted: in 2004, for example, it intervened in 236 cases of slavery in soy farms involving over 6,000 labourers including 127 children.

How to stop and reverse the damage of Soybean production?

The WWF estimate soybean production will increase to 514 million tonnes by 2050, which would require a massive two million km2 of land. Around 75 per cent of soy worldwide, and 93 per cent of soy imported to Europe, is used for animal feed (mostly pork and chicken). Between 1961 and 2013 pork and poultry production jumped from 40 to 225 million tonnes of meat per year.

The ecological destruction and massive social disruption caused by soy production is being driven by the violence of our current food system, which is based on the animal agriculture and aquaculture industries.

An easy way to restore these precious ecosystems, which stabilise the climate system and sustain the hydrological and other vital cycles of life is to transition to a non-violent plant based food system.