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The IFI and EU Peace II Fund: Respondents' Perceptions of Funded Project Success in Promoting Peacebuilding and Community Development in Northern Ireland

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Abstract

This article examines the views of ninety-eight study participants on community development and peacebuilding supported by the European Union (EU) Peace II Fund and the International Fund for Ireland (IFI). We elaborate the perceptions of community group leaders, funding agency civil servants and development officers regarding the role of both funds in Northern Ireland. Their experiences of the EU Peace II Fund and the IFI are discussed in the wider context of peacebuilding and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. Furthermore, this article explores the importance of community development and cross-community contact through joint economic and social development projects.

Keywords: *civic organizations, economic aid, European Union (EU) Peace II Fund, International Fund for Ireland (IFI), Northern Ireland, peacebuilding, reconciliation*

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THE IFI AND EU PEACE II FUND: RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FUNDED PROJECT SUCCESS IN PROMOTING PEACEBUILDING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Sean Byrne, Chuck Thiessen, Eyob Fissuh, and Cynthia Irvin

Abstract

This article examines the views of ninety-eight study participants on community development and peacebuilding supported by the European Union (EU) Peace II Fund and the International Fund for Ireland (IFI). We elaborate the perceptions of community group leaders, funding agency civil servants and development officers regarding the role of both funds in Northern Ireland. Their experiences of the EU Peace II Fund and the IFI are discussed in the wider context of peacebuilding and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. Furthermore, this article explores the importance of community development and cross-community contact through joint economic and social development projects.

Introduction

The international community has adopted a wide range of strategies in attempts to de-escalate and settle a number of ethnic conflicts (Pearson, 2001; Sandole, 2007). Humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping forces, and economic aid have been employed to build the peace in societies after violent conflict (Jeong, 2005). For example, international non-governmental organizations may work to empower former child soldiers in the transition back to their communities, while international funding agencies tackle social exclusion and economic deprivation (Byrne, Irvin, Fissuh and Cunningham, 2006; Senehi and Byrne, 2006). Multilateral institutions have provided over \$109 billion to states transitioning out of protracted violence (OECD, 1999). International donor agencies seek to remedy economic policies which have exacerbated political, psycho-cultural, historical, and socioeconomic cleavages that are the root cause of violent ethnic conflict (Byrne and Irvin, 2002). In this study we outline how the recipients of international economic assistance themselves (this case in Northern Ireland) perceive how that aid sustains and promotes development and peacebuilding.

Our study describes relationships, people, processes and setting in order to understand the complexity of this case study. The stories of the respondents reflect how they perceive the economic assistance to be working in Northern Ireland. In the summer of 2006, when the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) had been functioning for twenty-one years and the European Union's (EU) Special Support Program for Peace and Reconciliation (or "Peace Fund") for nine years, the first author interviewed ninety-eight interviewees in Belfast, Derry, Dublin and counties Cavan, Donegal, Fermanagh, Leitrim,

Monaghan, and Tyrone in the Border region. Over a nine-week period he interviewed senior civil servants who administer both funds, funding agency development officers who oversee both programs and community group leaders who have received economic aid from one or both funders.

We begin with a review of the role of economic assistance in the peacebuilding process after ethnic conflict, and in the Northern Ireland conflict. Next, we explore respondents' perceptions of the role of economic assistance in the Northern Ireland peacebuilding process. To conclude we explore the findings as they relate to the role of economic assistance in building the peace dividend in Northern Ireland.

Economic Aid, Development, and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

In the aftermath of protracted ethnic conflict, the international community uses foreign aid as a peacebuilding mechanism on the assumption that the root causes of ethnic conflict are thus being addressed (Carmert and James, 1997; Kaufman, 2000). Economic intervention seeks to target socially excluded communities closely aligned with spoiler groups that can use violence to destabilize and destroy nascent peace processes (Darby and MacGinty, 2000). Properly targeted foreign aid given toward the end of a protracted ethnic conflict could be an integral component of a post-conflict peacebuilding process (Irvin and Byrne, 2000). Research into the need to consolidate peace processes by economic means is relatively recent (Anderson, 1999; Brynen, 2000; Jeong, 2005). The economic situation sustaining an escalation of ethnic violence, the links between economic aid and peacebuilding, and the role of economic aid in maintaining peace have been comparatively neglected (Reychler and Paffenholz, 2001; Väyrynen, 1997). Findings as to whether economic assistance can contribute to sustainable economic development, community empowerment, and reconciliation remain mixed (Byrne and Ayulo, 1998; Byrne and Irvin, 2001, 2002).

External foreign aid on its own is not a panacea for transforming relationships into a culture of peace; it may in fact be detrimental as group egotism shapes and reinforces rather than diminishes difference (Ryan, 2007). Economic aid as a part of a track in a multi-model and multi-level contingency intervention model that involves a multiplicity of actors in a coordinated peace system is more effective in transforming conflict and building trust (Byrne and Keashly, 2000). Such an organic intervention process builds new cooperative relationships through joint-venture economic projects that promote contact at the local level and which tackle structural inequalities. This process may often be coupled with problem-solving groups and storytelling interaction to co-create new relationships and assist societies to recover from trauma (Senehi, 2000, 2002)

Lederach (1997) provides an analytical framework that taps into the indigenous culture's approach to creating and sustaining transformation and which moves people toward restructuring relationships. Middle-tier elites play an important role in forging and sustaining the transformational peace system over time as they have significant connections both to the upper tier elites and to the grassroots (Byrne, 2001; Lederach, 1997).

The integrated framework suggests that we are not merely interested in ending something that is not desired. We are oriented toward the building of relationships that in

their totality form new patterns, processes and structures. Peacebuilding through the constructive transformation of conflicts is simultaneously a visionary and a context-responsive approach (Lederach, 1997, p. 85).

The deep-seated hostility present in the “national question” in Northern Ireland is manifested by symbolic factors (such as flags, anthems and emblems, and marching) as well as contentious issues such as police reform, punishment beatings, and the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons (McGarry and O’Leary, 2007). Many members of both communities live socially-distanced in segregated areas (in some cases enclaves) and attend different schools and churches. The economic marginalization of the Nationalist working class has played an important part in Catholic opposition to British policy in Northern Ireland (Byrne and Ayulo, 1998). Uneven development in the case of Northern Ireland was, Hechter (1975) postulated, exacerbated by “internal colonialism”, resulting in stratification between a dominant group and a subordinate ethnic group in an economically disadvantaged peripheral population. Between 1920 and 1972, Unionist populist economic policies discriminated against Nationalists, thus exacerbating alienation, mistrust and unemployment, contributing to segregation and sustaining sectarian politics (Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, 1995). Discriminatory policies and practices ensured there were few opportunities for nationalists who were less educated and 2.5 times likely to be unemployed (Irvin, 1999). Discrimination in job opportunities, employment and housing was one of the key factors in 1968 in mobilizing the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) (Maney *et al.*, 2006).

The 1970s saw the decline of staple industries such as agriculture, linen manufacturing and shipbuilding that witnessed a recession in a sluggish global economy that aggravated Northern Ireland’s declining economy (Dixon, 2000, 2007). However, British government economic policy dealt with the symptoms and not the underlying structural roots further escalating marginalization and economic deprivation within working class Republican and Loyalist communities that resulted in a dependency on public sector income (Bew and Patterson, 1985). A robust and large security force was also needed to manage paramilitary violence so that the war economy that emerged out of the Troubles necessitated major British government economic subvention (Tomlinson, 1995, p. 73). Economic deprivation was a critical component in sustaining the community support for rival paramilitaries (Byrne, 1995).

The British and Irish governments signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 to promote cross-border security and economic and political cooperation to the benefit of disadvantaged areas around the border (Byrne, 2001). Article 10(a) of the Agreement stated that:

The two governments shall cooperate to promote the economic and social development of those areas of both parts of Ireland, which have suffered most severely from the consequences of the instability of recent years, and shall consider the possibility of securing international support for this work.

The United States (U.S.) Congress also agreed to support both governments’ efforts through the creation of the International Fund for Ireland to promote cross-community cooperation, economic activity and reconciliation. This act highlighted its belief in the

connection between economic development and peace, as enshrined in the law authorizing U.S contributions to this Fund:

The purpose of this act is to provide for the United States contributions in support of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, such contributions to consist of economic support fund assistance for payment to the International Fund ... as well as other assistance to serve as an incentive for economic development and reconciliation in Ireland and Northern Ireland ... in which all may live in peace, free from discrimination, terrorism, and intolerance and with the opportunity for both communities to participate fully in the structures and processes of government. (quoted in Byrne and Irvin, 2001)

The idea that the IFI would assist in forging jobs and economic opportunities in Republican and Loyalist working class communities, suffering economic deprivation and the highest levels of unemployment, resonated with the U.S. view that economic development was a key peacebuilding mechanism to transform the Northern Ireland conflict (Cox, Guelke and Stephen, 2000).

In addition, the 1993 Downing Street Declaration, the 1995 Joint Declaration for Peace, and the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA) facilitated cooperation on agriculture, trade, and industrial development through executive action between the British and Irish governments (Arthur, 2000). The GFA was institutionalized by simultaneous referenda in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Its impact was assisted by President Clinton's support of U.S. business to encourage economic prosperity and a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland (White House, 1995, p. 2).

Shortly after these political initiatives and the reciprocal Loyalist and Republican paramilitary ceasefires, the European Union (EU) created a special task force to formulate an economic assistance package to provide economic resources to encourage cross-community ties and to bolster political agreements on the ground (Cochrane, 2000). Thus, the first EU Special Support Program for Peace and Reconciliation (Peace I) involved the community and voluntary sectors in meeting the needs of groups in those deprived areas hardest hit by unemployment and violence. Peace I's strategic aim was to "reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation by increasing economic development and employment, promoting urban and rural regeneration, developing cross-border cooperation and extending social inclusion" (EU Special Support Program, 1995, p. 2).

Peace I was criticized for being passed and implemented too rapidly, which resulted in a lack of focus and clarity in objectives and problems with indicators and measures used to evaluate the Program's peacebuilding effectiveness (Harvey, 1997, p. 3). In addition, the EU Court of Auditors found that the evaluation of project applications and the post-grant monitoring of projects in Peace I did not "ensure sound financial management in all cases," while its selection and appraisal procedures "lacked common criteria and an effective methodology" for targeting social groups and community-based projects (EU Court of Auditors, 2000). Moreover, research on Peace I is mixed. The most positive analyses confirmed that properly-administered economic assistance can build sustainable development and the self-esteem of local communities, with funding agency development officers acting as a strategic lynchpin between the grassroots and the civil servants

managing both funds (Byrne and Ayulo, 1998). Working class Nationalists supported the activities of the IFI and EU Peace I in promoting economic prosperity and peace (Irvin and Byrne, 2000). On the other hand, other study participants felt the tug of bureaucratic control over their entrepreneurial efforts and believed that economic assistance had built single-identity groups rather than cross-community contact (let alone reconciliation) and that it had actually excluded the socially marginalized from real economic development (Byrne and Irvin, 2001, 2002). These findings indicate the need for greater understanding of the impact of economic aid in building a participatory democratic peacebuilding system.

Peace II (1999-2006) was designed to address some of the concerns about its forerunner. It took a bottom-up approach to facilitate Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in implementing the program to foster sustainable economic development, and cross-community reconciliation. The Peace II program “carries forward the distinctive aspects of the EU Special Support Program for Peace and Reconciliation (1995-1999) ... with a new economic focus” to reinforce progress towards promoting reconciliation and building a stable society (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2003).

People’s Perceptions of Peacebuilding and Community Development

A definite trend since the early 1990s has been the burgeoning increase in the number of community groups interested in addressing conflict related tensions in Northern Ireland (Fitzduff, 2002). Economic aid from the IFI or EU Peace I and II programs have supported many of these newly established community groups. The economic aid givers’ intent is to facilitate the empowerment of local community groups in initiating project work focused on grassroots-level community issues. The perceptions of our ninety-eight respondents regarding the project work’s success in achieving peacebuilding and community development goals are the focus of this study.

Analysis of the interview narratives revealed three broad themes. First, participants discussed the suitability of international economic aid for development and peacebuilding tasks in Northern Ireland. Second, community group leaders described the role of such aid in realizing their organization’s potential for engaging with local communities in sustainable development and authentic peacebuilding. Third, community group leaders and civil servants who manage both funds provided numerous descriptive stories illustrating the funded project work’s success in development and peacebuilding. Weaving through the interview narratives were both positive and critical descriptions of international economic aid’s efficacy in promoting community development and supporting peacebuilding ventures.

Perceptions of the Role of Economic Aid in Northern Ireland

The Constructive Role of Economic Aid

Community group leaders attempted to elucidate economic aid's constructive role in Northern Ireland on five fronts. First, community group leaders revealed that international funding allowed for increased risk-taking by permitting project work not necessarily supported by statutory institutions. A Belfast community group leader explained this point as follows:

[the government is] not great at risk-taking. But, with the European monies we have been able to have new concepts and try them out. And what we've been fairly successful at doing over the past ten to fifteen year or so is bringing that into the core of what we do as well.

Governmental institutions are, by nature, conservative and outside funding was perceived as allowing riskier leading-edge project work.

Second, international funding has served to reshape local politics. A Co. Monaghan community leader believed funding had initiated increased democratic practice amongst local political institutions.

Things now have changed radically to my mind. There is a new County management in place and they have got more money from somewhere and they have published their development plan. They had an all-day session here ... where people ... are able to meet the officials who are writing these plans. It's revolutionary in the island - being invited in. For instance, I heard they are being quite frank with people, you know, about their plans. People could look at how is this going to affect my house and so on. And ... the County Council set up community forums that people are elected onto from the community sector. So that is all great stuff. But I would put that part of it probably down to the European Fund and to the IFI - those kinds of fundings.

Third, recognizing that many community organizations are staffed by people lacking experience and familiarity regarding strategy in the development and peacebuilding fields, economic aid has also facilitated the creation of extensive support structures to work with community organizations. Essential to this has been the provision of development officers able to help navigate community organizations through funding application requirements and assist in project design. A Belfast community organization director explained this situation in the following way:

A lot of the local community groups were getting help from these development officers. It is very, very important because some of these community group people are doing it on a voluntary basis and are giving up a lot of time and will not have the expertise or the confidence to write what is expected in the application forms. So yes, those development officers we've talked about are the types of people that have been important to especially smaller local community groups.

Other positive comments were made about the Intermediary funding bodies responsible for implementing parts of the funding program and are responsible for processing applications and selecting projects. A Derry community group leader perceived the intermediary funding bodies as flexible and supportive in her organization's project work with local women. This is what she had to say on the issue:

One of the good things about the program was the requirement of asking for targets. Then these targets, if after a year they needed changing there was always a listening

ear. The intermediary funding bodies were always very good at listening to you if the targets had to be changed.

Fourth, numerous participants clearly identified economic aid as instigating elevated levels of community development work. A Derry city civil servant described how the aid promotes community development:

The IFI money has created community owned infrastructure, which just has been an amazing platform to do economic regeneration on.

This has also been the experience of some community centers across the border. Community centers serve an important social and peacebuilding role in communities by providing space for public celebrations, meetings, and dialogue. For example, a Co. Cavan community development worker notes that funding has allowed community centers to be financially sustainable:

Traditionally the community centre would have been seen as a social outlet but now there are a lot of places trying to turn them into enterprise businesses that can stand alone to cut out the fund raising and the burn out. Having said that, they are in the very early stages of enterprise development and it is all very new. But definitely there has been a huge drive to try and make community centers and community facilities more sustainable.

Fifth, economic aid has supported a wide variety of peacebuilding activities between Unionists and Nationalists in Northern Ireland. Participants perceived that with each successive funding program peacebuilding criteria have become increasingly demanding. A Derry community development worker shares his perceptions of funding application criteria as follows:

I was at a presentation and the leader said in relation to, I'm not sure if it was Peace II or the imminent Peace III, he said if you are not about peacebuilding, don't apply. Don't use it as a leg up for a project that could otherwise be funded from some other funding measure that supports capacity building. So if what you are about is capacity building or some kind of community project that is good, but if it's not about peacebuilding, apply to someone who will fund that.

A Co. Monaghan community leader described a further criteria requirement of economic aid – inclusiveness:

I think one of the overarching objectives of the funding from the very beginning was that it had to be inclusive. The activities of the project being proposed and funded had to have inclusive elements in it and I think it focused groups to think more inclusively and more openly about their activities and the way to do business.

Inclusion of those naturally avoided because of conflict-induced mental prejudices may require incentives like those offered up by international economic aid.

The Struggle to Meet the Goals of Economic Aid

Other participants, however, expressed concern regarding the role of funding monies in the development and peacebuilding processes in Northern Ireland. Community group leaders and civil servants with funding responsibilities voiced several sharp criticisms

regarding the ability of economic aid to meet its stated goals. Details of four concerns arising from the interviews are outlined below.

First, several participants believed a reconciliation process reliant on economic aid to be inherently flawed. A Derry community group leader believed the best peacebuilding work to be unpaid and not contingent on funding programs.

So what we are doing nobody is paying us to do - there is no money in it. But it is day-to-day work where two communities can work together. And I think you can't force two communities to work together. You end up simply saying, we came together for this application, we'll get the money and then we'll go back to our own sort of separate things, and you get a false thing that has actually happened.

He sensed that cross-community criteria requirements are forcing reconciliation processes that need to happen naturally. Another project director from Co. Monaghan believed that authentic healing processes couldn't be dictated by funded project work.

I'm not very clear like most people about the peacebuilding side of it. I have a favorite phrase about peace, "Reconciliation of conflict happens by stealth. It doesn't happen by targeted programs or anything else."

As to how this type of philosophy can translate into effective community group work, a Derry participant believed his success was easily explained – "simply by being on the ground talking to people". In the mess of everyday life opportunities arise to break down barriers to healing.

Second, participants perceived excessive controls and inefficiencies within funding bureaucratic structures. A Co. Fermanagh academic pointed out a lack of communication within the bureaucracy as a hindrance to development.

At a practical level the biggest frustrations I have had is the resistance and the inability of getting through to these multiple bureaucracies who are all funded individually and don't talk to each other... In a small place like Northern Ireland, why don't the different departments co-ordinate their programming and talk to each other?

A Co. Monaghan religious leader took a slightly different angle. He lamented that inappropriate bureaucratic requirements inside funding application procedures had caused significant suffering amongst community group leaders.

At the end of it there are at least six of us almost totally burned out. Now, a number of us have managed to reinvent ourselves and tried to get our energy and resources back again, but the cost to us personally has been enormous.

Other participants lamented the massive waste of funding monies on excessive and flawed evaluation procedures. For example, another Co. Monaghan community leader gave details of dissonance between people in upper-level funding policy-making positions and community workers on the ground.

there are people controlling the funds in Belfast who never come out to the Border areas, who have no idea of what it is like out here. So therefore they are sitting in offices in Belfast not having studied the areas or not even having listened properly to their own people on the ground telling them when something is good or when something is not good.

Understandably, those closest to the action believe they have valuable input for funding distribution decisions.

Third, a couple of community group leaders reflected on how the local community's view of organizations doing volunteer work is altered once they receive funding and have salaried staff. A Derry community worker described the process as follows:

There are other organizations where considerable funding has come in, you will see completely revamped offices, and great computers and great infrastructure but it then radically and negatively changes their relationship to the community that they are in, because I then hear people saying to us, "oh you see that there they are well paid they are on a very high wage," and they begin to treat maybe organizations that were in the voluntary sector as service organizations whose job it is to provide services to them.

Further, the same Derry participant expressed concern regarding widespread dependency on outside funding and worried about the community's reaction to the community organizations once funding is eventually cut off.

Fourth, and on a related point, some community workers perceived external economic aid as a means of political control over their peacebuilding and development ventures. A Derry community group administrator sensed a "very subtle type of political control" exerted over his agency in that they were excluded from key regional conferences because they were based within the Nationalist community. Another Derry participant described his perceived benefits of being denied project funding in the following manner:

we had asked those funders for money about six years ago and were turned down. And we said, "Look we don't define our work, the conflict defines our work." If it's not overtly cross community and fitting into a certain comfortable slot that they have decided upon then you are outside the pale. Now one consequence of all of that is that it is a very positive thing that we are outside of that funding cycle, we are free of that. We are usually close to broke but we are free.

Being outside the constraints imposed by receiving international economic aid, he felt free to assume control over community work and adjust his work according to personal preferences.

Potential of Project Work in Peacebuilding and Development

The creation of a wide variety of community organizations has been stimulated by international economic aid. Participants commented extensively on possible roles for funded community group work in both the development and peacebuilding fields. The community group leaders described the potential of funded project work and discussed any perceived connections or relationships between development and peacebuilding project work.

Community Organizations and Development Work

Community group leaders described development project work as having varied focuses and goals, and as incorporating a wide range of strategies. Several participants involved in economic development work believed economic growth to be a prerequisite to

peacebuilding progress. The participants' interview narratives revealed four broad categories of developmental potential.

First, the most prevalent description of project potential involved a community organization's capability to provide training and services leading to employment. A Co. Monaghan community development worker described his guidance work in preparing the unemployed for possible employment.

I would deal an awful lot with social welfare payments, employment rights, tax, all that kind of stuff, training courses for people, trying to move people on, progress them from maybe being unemployed into training courses and then into full-time work. So a lot of work on that. Our services completely free and confidential, a drop in service, and we have a neutral environment so people are always comfortable to come in.

Several other community leaders suggested training programs were valuable for Northern Ireland's employment woes.

Second, several participants believed project work concerned with personal development to be instrumental in motivating people to engage in economic activities as well as preparing for possible peacebuilding initiatives. For example, a Belfast youth worker noted the potential of development projects to build interpersonal skills and prepare youth for economic engagement – even across the sectarian divide.

An organization into community development prepares young people to be fit for the world of work and how to relate to their neighbor and how to work together within communities. But I think giving young people interpersonal skills for building relationships with their neighbor and all of that obviously goes towards economic engagement.

In a similar vein, a Co. Leitrim development worker argued that project work can address self-esteem issues and empower people:

We started a pilot project, a cross-border social group and it was to get people together on the cross-border, cross-community basis again ... These people, they weren't good enough, you know. In their view they weren't good enough to walk in the door of this office ... And it was all basically to build up their social skills. Everything you do builds up people's social skills, builds up the capacity within the people and the groups in the area.

Third, community group leaders believed their organizations were suited to assist local businesses in progressing towards profitability and sustainability. A Co. Cavan participant described the situation as she saw it:

Then this new phenomena of the enterprise type projects, whereas when IFI and the Peace funds came on board the first few years it would be getting a capital project in place – developing that. Now they are at the stage of developing their business. So I would see that as a growth area and there has to be a lot more of that activity to develop the businesses here.

Fourth, development project work was believed to be crucial in community capacity building – empowering residents to work cooperatively in bettering their community. A Co. Leitrim project worker described development project potential as follows:

you merge people within the area to come together to work on a common goal, it might be to get a playground in the area, it might be to get broadband in the area.

They are working on a common aim for themselves and for the betterment of their area and for themselves and for their children and their generations to come. Such cooperative initiatives instigated by community groups may result in the formation of healthy community decision-making processes.

Community Organizations and Peacebuilding Work

Most community group leaders and funding civil servants argued that aid-assisted community project work had an attractive peacebuilding potential. Since securing funds is ever more dependent on meeting “cross-community” criteria, community leaders are increasingly grappling with peacebuilding strategy and project design. This section includes a discussion on project work’s peacebuilding potential, perceptions of the required timeframe for peacebuilding work, and the prevalent debate over “single identity” project work.

Participants believed peacebuilding project work to empower communities in four broad areas. First, by far the most commonly highlighted strength exhibited by peacebuilding project work involved facilitating cross-community contact and dialogue. A Co. Fermanagh community group leader’s description of his project work is representative of many other peacebuilding projects:

Fundamentally our project is a very pure community relations project. It is in a society where people, when they do meet from two divided communities, don’t talk about difficult issues. Our program is clearly geared towards that leadership potential to open up those dialogues and debates that lead to a pluralistic and shared future. We can’t ignore the problems.

The role of community organizations in peacebuilding processes varies widely. While some organizations simply provide a “space” for people to engage with ‘the other’, other organizations dive into the emotional turmoil of healing. A Derry community organization’s administrator reflected on the complexity of the work her organization undertakes.

The project that I set up was set up in order to allow all of the different voices to be heard and what had happened to the people in order to re-humanize and also to hear the human and emotional detail of what took place and what happened to them. It was about validation and recognizing, and also allowing people to hear voices that they wouldn’t otherwise hear, also opportunity to confront the enemy and also to get rid of their own hurt.

As people on both sides of the sectarian divide engage with each other, the slow process of rebuilding trust and expelling fear begins.

Second, several community group leaders believed community organizations to be a natural conduit for the provision of conflict resolution/mediation services and training. A participant leading an organization providing conflict resolution strategy training described his work in the interface areas of Derry.

I have become involved in the whole mediation process behind the scenes working on the Parades issues, working on the flags and emblems issues. I have created my own monster in the sense that I have been involved in a lot of work particularly in our

local community here at interface level. But I am also working in rural areas working with the different groups there trying to keep the community in dialogue with each other. That is a lot of work that doesn't go public because of the very nature of it - sensitive, critical.

Sectarian parading has continued to create serious tensions as traditional marching routes often lead through territory whose residents predominantly adhere to the 'opposing' ethno-political group (Fitzduff, 2002). Mediation work has succeeded in altering marching routes or eliminating the playing of sectarian songs on sensitive segments of the route.

Third, several community organizations perceived the need to model representative democratic practice by recruiting board members and staff from both sides of the sectarian divide. A Co. Fermanagh community organization leader argued for strategic recruiting and hiring practices:

Yes, we make no bones about it. If a Protestant person resigns from the board we will recruit someone from the Protestant community back onto that board. Well some people would say well that is not democracy but then, you know ... to us it is because that part of the community must be represented on our board. For a sub-committee on our farming project, we told the sub-committee that if there was a vacancy on the board and we said ok we need two directors nominated onto the board. We need one Catholic please and one Protestant. So it was up to that section, those farmers seventy, eighty farmers in the room, to pick one from each community to come to represent, and you know it works, for us it works.

Fourth, several participants described the potential of community organizations to work towards healing and ideological transformation amongst youth. Community organizations have been given permission to enter the school system to conduct anti-sectarian work while others have used extra-curricular activities such as music and sports therapy to address the transgenerational effect of trauma on children in areas experiencing ongoing community conflict.

Resulting from decades of violent conflict, the study participants suggested that individuals who work to promote healing and reconciliation need to think in generational timeframes. A comment by a Belfast community leader is representative of many participants:

A lot of the good work is done in the communities – and it's important. A lot of people have given a lot of their time to help to heal, and to bring people together in their local communities. It's important, and it will probably take a generation to do that, those things are not done in two or three years, it takes time.

Working with the realization of how long healing will take can be exasperating. A Derry community group leader exposed his frustrations in the following segment:

at times you do feel as if you are hitting your head against a brick wall. Sometimes you feel as if you are fire fighting. If you do work at the interface and then it happens again, and again, you are wondering, "Well what was all that?" you know, you have to keep reinvesting.

However, viewing flare-ups in conflict and tension through a long-term lens (Lederach, 1997) may lessen discouragement for community workers as they imagine a desired future (Boulding, 1990) for Northern Ireland.

The interview narratives also revealed an ongoing debate over the efficacy of “single-identity” work – work focused within one particular group with few or any cross-community components. On the positive side, a Belfast community leader argued that single identity work was necessary in “hard core Republican areas or hard core Loyalists areas.” On the critical side, a Co. Monaghan community worker illustrated her beliefs regarding peacebuilding work:

There are two ways of approaching it. My take on single identity work is like teaching a guy to swim at the edge of the pool. He is lying on the concrete and you are telling him move your arms this way, move your legs that way. At what point is he ready to go into the water? This is the argument, “Oh no he needs a lot more work, and he is not ready.” The only way you are going to find out is by throwing him into the water and give him a hand then to swim.

She used the illustration to justify her expectations of having tight-knit, closed-off and homogeneous groups meeting even minimal cross-community criteria.

Relationships and Connections between Development and Peacebuilding Project Work

A dominant perception voiced by participants in this study is that development work is a prerequisite to peacebuilding work and that peacebuilding will naturally take place within or stem out of development project work. A Derry community group leader attempted an explanation: “I would see peacebuilding as being a natural fruit pit of genuine community development.” A Co. Fermanagh academic argued that directing Northern Irish residents down the path towards “peace and prosperity” requires the establishment of employment opportunities. He believed pure peacebuilding initiatives to be non-sustainable once international economic aid is terminated. He justified his position with the following comment:

In the darkest days of the violence in Northern Ireland it was the employment that kept people from being recruited into paramilitary violence. I would argue equally that in a place like Palestine or the Lebanon that an economic vision in the future will be a very central part of bringing sustainable peace and this has to start at the community level but it has to show a relationship with our increasingly globalized economy.

Several participants suggested that incentives were needed to draw Northern Irish residents out of their mental enclaves and into open engagement with “the other”. A Co. Cavan development worker explained how this might work:

Projects really have to have a carrot for people. You are not going to get two people who hate each other coming together unless there is really something of mutual benefit for both of them.

To this end, participants provided examples of how training sessions allowed friendships to develop between people of differing ethnopolitical backgrounds, how inclusive health resource centers encouraged relationship building, and how infrastructure development had facilitated networking between individuals and groups traditionally kept separate.

Stories of Project Success in Peacebuilding and Development

Community group leaders and funding administrators reflected extensively on perceptions of project success in both development and peacebuilding project work. The descriptive stories provided by participants provide clear insight into economic aid's perceived ability to build peace in Northern Ireland. It is, however, important to provide a glimpse of the evaluation processes guiding the interviewed participants in their judgments of project success.

Project Evaluation

Community leaders described project evaluation processes as a struggle and revealed the inherent complexity of gauging success in both community development and peacebuilding. Participants gave details of both internal and external evaluation procedures.

Regarding internal evaluation processes, participants noted difficulties in moving beyond quantitative evaluation procedures and into qualitative procedures examining attitudinal, ideological, and behavioral change. Quantitatively, most community project workers tracked the number of people attending or involved in project initiatives. A Derry community leader had this to say:

I can only go by the number of people who have taken part in programs and do the quantitative type of analysis in the sense that more and more people are becoming involved in the types of work that we are engaged in - our training programs.

Though valuable in and of itself, the participant interviews revealed a longing for tangible evidence of the transformative power of their efforts. A Belfast community worker asked important questions regarding measuring change:

Here are very difficult notions about evidence of change. For instance, how do you quantify attitude change? How do you take people that have been nurtured in a sectarianism mentality all their lives, bring them through a sectarian awareness course, and then quantify at the other end of that six week course that all bigotry, sectarian views and discrimination have been removed from their hearts? Indeed, how do you, in any way, evaluate a journey for not just individuals but for people?

Furthermore, another Belfast community worker believed "changing a society is a complex thing - it has so many influences."

Some participants revealed a reliance on anecdotal evidence in measuring project success. A Co. Monaghan community leader stated, "We see small things and we hear word of mouth stories that would indicate that we are being successful." Other participants, however, identified intentional efforts to initiate authentic research procedures purposed with exploring change. A Belfast participant working with young children and their families gave details of his evaluative goals:

A lot of our feeling about this up until recently was fairly anecdotal. But we have begun to research the changes in attitudes and behavior of young children, of their family, of local communities, and we are beginning to see significant impact.

Another participant also desired to conduct qualitative research investigating the change occurring in his local community but conceded that “[i]t is a wee bit beyond me at the minute but I think there is huge potential.”

Regarding external evaluation procedures, community group leaders expressed concern over deficient levels of authenticity. A Co. Cavan community leader described deficiencies in the external evaluation practices of the funding agencies:

I felt that some of the evaluators weren't, to our knowledge, clued in enough. They seemed to making the evaluation to what the Peace program wanted rather than evaluating the project as it stood. They seemed to have a sheet that they squeezed everything into.

Other participants also viewed external evaluations as lacking substance and argued for revamped procedures allowing a true expression of their perceived successes and struggles.

Stories of Success in Development

Community group leaders perceived high levels of success in their funded community development project work. The study's participants noted a wide variety of significant advances in community development in five ways.

First, community group leaders believed one of the external funding's chief developmental success to be improvements to Northern Ireland's physical infrastructure. For example, a Co. Monaghan development project attempted to include hesitant Protestants in the funded development and peacebuilding programs by providing monies to renovate community halls.

We did the halls project with eleven halls in total and the maximum a hall could get was twenty-nine thousand euros. We viewed from the start that what the Protestant community needed was capacity-building but you couldn't get them to engage in capacity-building unless they had a project that would animate them and get them motivated. So the Protestant halls are small, the work that needs to be done to them in a lot of cases is small, so a small amount of money will do that. But it gives you the opening to go in. We were only giving them the money to do the halls provided they attended the compulsory training elements which were capacity-building, committee skills, how to run and manage a hall, and diversity awareness training – which meant learning about all other religions.

Other projects described by participants focused on developing roads and paths, building gyms to be staffed by ex-paramilitary personnel, and the construction of cultural centers focused on attracting tourists.

Second, community group leaders identified training project work as having significant impact on their respective communities. For example, one Derry community group has been successful in providing training for ex-paramilitary personnel leading to the attainment of heavy vehicle driver licensing. Several trainees are presently working as large bus drivers. Another project in Co. Cavan was successful in re-training residents of rural communities with farming backgrounds in the information technology sector.

Third, community group leaders viewed business development project work as supportive of new ventures in a challenging business atmosphere. A Derry community

development worker described a business venture in a “socially deprived” area of Derry lacking amenities and employment:

So because we had a number of people expressing an interest in the health and fitness area and going through the course and because there was a lack of facilities in the area there was not a bad culture in this city for sport and for health and fitness. We embarked on a wee business venture of setting up a health and fitness suite. We actually asked for some sort of grant money, we actually asked a loan from a bank, and we actually set-up our own wee social economy business which is offering a fitness suite, which allowed us to employ four people, where three of them were ex prisoners. In terms of business projects that were developed under the Peace money its one of the few right across Ireland that has sustained itself.

Fourth, funded community development efforts were seen as providing the disempowered and voiceless with the self-confidence necessary for engagement in development and peacebuilding processes. A Co. Fermanagh development worker explained as follows:

I think the work we have done in terms of community development has given people a mechanism, a voice. The empowerment work we have done has been very positive. Moreover, groups who have traditionally not engaged in political processes were empowered to voice their concerns. For example, a Belfast development worker described how his project work empowered a group of Belfast residents deafened by explosions in the Troubles to voice their concerns with politicians.

The project that we are doing at the moment on democracy ensuring that deaf people can participate in the political process I think has been very, very interesting. Its still in early days but its enabling us to bring deaf people to train them but also to give them the opportunities to meet with their politicians, be it local councilors, members of the assembly, Westminster, or Europe. They now have a voice; it's not the organization that's speaking for them. We are providing an opportunity for panels of politicians locally and they come to meetings and deaf people now are having an opportunity to ask them questions directly, and they are seeing the results of that, when questions are then asked in the parliament.

Fifth, community development work was perceived as successful in providing essential supports and services in local communities. For example a Co. Cavan organization focuses on providing information to local residents:

We are based here in a development office, as we call it. We provide, number one, information for the community. Information is a tool for living, and if people are to get places they need information. Now that information can go into the social needs and for those who are socially in need we will give them supports to get whatever supports for them are out there - what they want. For example people leaving school and maybe looking for jobs, we will support them with their CV.

Other funded project work provided daycare service for working parents, health services for women in disadvantaged areas focusing on nutrition, sexual health, and alcohol awareness. Another Belfast project provided local transportation services for women who had not overcome the ingrained fears of traveling in the city.

Stories of Success in Peacebuilding

Participants shared numerous stories highlighting perceived peacebuilding successes. The interview narratives revealed a diverse range of target groups as well as extensive creativity in project approach and delivery. Stories told by participants tended to fall under one of five categories: paramilitary reform, training in conflict resolution practices, facilitating cross-community contact, dealing with conflict related emotional trauma, and working towards understanding through education and dialogue.

Several community groups described opportunities for transformation amongst former paramilitary personnel. One Belfast community group leader described how IFI funding had allowed his project work to focus on Loyalist paramilitary groups.

The current funding that we have now from IFI is to help me work with Protestant paramilitaries and Loyalist communities in general, that involves aspects of helping to empower them to participate in the civic and political realities of the Good Friday Agreement, which involves a realization that nobody actually won the actual war itself but that Republicanism is winning the propaganda war and cultural war. So there is a demoralization believe it or not and there is a sense which part of the security of peace and the consolidation of the peace and organization of the future is to have the whole community participating in the rebuilding of an inclusive society is to work alongside paramilitaries leaders in particular Loyalists communities in general to help them to with confidence, develop leadership skills, to encourage a different kind of vision rather than dealing with marginalization and loss.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, he believes the cessation of all paramilitary activities will be brought about with positive and supportive engagement. The same community group leader believed successful ex-paramilitary work to be dependent on project work aimed at cultural transformation. He argued that paramilitary recruitment thrives in demoralized communities.

It's hard unless people come and see it visually, it is hard to describe the demoralization in many of these communities and the level of social deprivation. Added to that is what I would call the atmospheric problems - that is the culture of violence, anger and aggression that can be seen in the loss of civic pride where the streets are just littered with rubbish and there's no sense of organized community, right through to bored young men who have maybe a computer in their bedroom, or a satellite dish, but who have a profound poverty of aspiration in their lives. So my work is to do what I have described, we have begun that. I already had two reports in to IFI this year that shows we have in five or six key areas where actually we've been able to use that money to build significant relationships with key paramilitary units who are now giving us permission to begin to work with the rank and file paramilitary members and to be able to identify the best among them who want to actually train, and initiatives in community development and community relations.

A couple of community group leaders gave details of innovative work in the field of conflict resolution. A Belfast community group leader conducting training work described an innovative program in which participants received free facilitation and health care training with the expectation that the participants would provide their services to their local

communities. The community group leader described the content of the facilitation course in the following snippet:

The facilitation training is a whole new course, they get an NVQ [National Vocational Qualification] level 3 qualification from it, so it's well accredited, well structured. They would spend from October to March here two mornings a week. It is very much peer learning in terms of facilitation, how to develop consensus, how to deal with conflict, how to work with the group and then they go out. The deal is this is free, but then they have to give back to the community. So they have to do a number of hours, and they have to go and choose their own community that they want to deliver programs to and then they are assessed on that. They have to put forward a portfolio etc. of their work. But on top of that they then get trained in these concrete health programs, so that they have that as a very specific subject area as well.

Providing project participants with a range of skills ensures relevancy and credibility in addressing needs in their local communities.

Reflecting international economic aid's stated goal of requiring a cross-community element to its funded project work, many community group leaders provided examples of increased contact between traditionally separated groups. A Derry community group leader describes a particularly interesting project reaching local youth:

The other project that we applied for funding for and were successful was with the Galway Hooker program. We bought a Galway Hooker sailing boat in Galway, refurbished it and brought it to Derry, and created a course for young Catholics and young Protestants to come and learn sailing and sea ferrying techniques. So using a very neutral interesting activity to kind of bring people together and there was an element of Irish language learning. There was a whole lot of stuff about learning about sea food and Irish language, folklore, about the sea and about metrology and about fishing, and sea based communities. That was an excellent success, a huge success, and was popular with the young Catholic Irish speakers as it was with the young Protestants who were experiencing Irish for the first time. So that was a success.

Having similar goals, a project in Co. Cavan perceived cross-community relationships being established through simple infrastructure projects like building a stonewall. Another Co. Cavan project leader noted similar outcomes in his training courses:

Bring in people of all religions to come down there and sit for twenty-six weeks next to your neighbor who is a Protestant who you have never sat beside before - by the end of it they are good buddies.

In some cases, community groups are taking the lead in modeling healthy cross-community activities and attitudes. For example a Belfast community leader revealed that some Nationalist community workers experienced in conflict transformation processes within their own community had ventured out and were attempting to lend their skills to those within the Unionist community. Another community group from Co. Fermanagh had a policy of retaining a 50/50 split of Unionists and Nationalists on all of its committees.

Community group leaders believed project work focused on healing for the victims of violence and conflict to be central to healing in Northern Ireland. Examples gleaned from the interviews reveal several approaches. One Belfast community group believed in the power of storytelling to transform relationships and had ventured to record some victim's

stories on videotape. Another Belfast community group leader believed that listening to victim's stories could identify required structural change.

The important thing is that we actually listen to them, hear what they have to say and start to address those outstanding issues. That affects policing, criminal justice, the judiciary and affects absolutely every strand of change that must be made to make sure that conflict does not happen again. Unless victim's experiences are recorded and understood then what do we know? We don't want a repeat of it.

Following a slightly different path of victim-focused project work, a Derry community group had received funding for a rehab center supportive of those struggling mentally or with alcohol addiction as a result of the Troubles.

Moreover, several community group leaders highlighted educational and dialogue-focused activities interested in increasing understanding between Protestant and Catholic communities. Representing the beliefs of several participants was a statement by a Derry community organization leader:

I do think that it has an effect in that through the resources that the Peace program [has] funded we have been able to raise issues repeatedly with people, particularly young people, that just aren't raised otherwise. They are brushed under the carpet and not talked about and we are able to raise them in a way that engages them, at least to an extent, and in a language that they understand and in a way that is visually attractive and appealing to them.

To this end, a couple of community groups ran successful media projects aiming to increase understanding on both sides of the community divide. For example, a Derry community organization produces videos with the goal of "confronting controversial issues" and portraying key divisive historical issues in an educative manner leading to deeper understanding. In a similar vein, a Belfast civil servant funding director described the innovative use of media in incorporating peacebuilding activities into literacy classes.

One of the groups were using - again being literacy - bringing in local newspapers. But what they did was brought in all of the local newspapers. They had the Irish News, the Newsletter. This was a wholly Protestant community. Nobody had ever read the Irish News before. So what they were able to do was to look at the same story from two different angles. They were then able to develop literacy skills through reading stories and understanding and how to pick out: What's this story about? What's the angle on this story? Is there a different angle or is it the same story?

Discussion and Conclusions

Hopes are riding on community group project work's success in laying a foundation for lasting peace in Northern Ireland. Through a combination of development and peacebuilding initiatives, the IFI and EU Peace II programs are perceived as facilitating the empowerment of local community groups in breaking down conflict-induced barriers between Unionists and Nationalists (Byrne and Irvin, 2001). This study considers the perceptions of success amongst community group leaders regarding project work in promoting peacebuilding and community development.

Four main conclusions flow from the above analysis of the participant responses. First, evaluating success is perceived as difficult and a struggle for most participants – particularly in regards to peacebuilding initiatives. The transformation of beliefs, ideologies, and attitudes inherently resist quantification. However, community group leaders are nevertheless expected to account for their expenditure of aid monies through internal and external evaluative procedures. Participants revealed that anecdotal evidence and counting “bums on seats” is often the extent of internal reviews. External reviews were often perceived as non-relevant and unauthentic.

Northern Ireland’s community groups are definitely not alone in this struggle. George Downs and Stephen John Stedman (2002, p. 43) generalize about post civil war contexts: “it is difficult to think of an environment that is less conducive to the conduct of evaluative research.”. However, evaluation must not be ignored. Community organization staffs need evaluative feedback in order to fine-tune their programming. Further, funding agencies require stringent evaluation procedures to avoid waste, mismanagement, and corruption.

Community organization leaders hinted at possible improvements to evaluation procedures. Regarding internal evaluation, one community leader expressed the need for increased training and exposure to qualitative research methods suitable for organizational leaders. Qualitative methodology can be especially suitable for investigating complex phenomena (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007) such as personal or cultural transformation in the context of local community project work. Regarding external evaluation procedures, participants voiced a desire to have a voice in the creation of relevant and important evaluation questions.

Second, community group leaders perceived their organizational structure and mandate as appropriate for funded community development and peacebuilding work in Northern Ireland and the Border Area. International funding bodies such as the EU have intentionally bypassed central statutory institutions in hopes of sidestepping excessive governmental controls and increasing local control over aid expenditures. By choosing to endow the grassroots level of society with increased control, local community organizations are granted authority in determining much-needed development and peacebuilding ventures.

Furthermore, local control increases the probability of addressing localized nuances to needed development and peacebuilding as opposed to centrally-planned blanket programming. For example, employment training addressing local employment variables will be especially valuable. Personal development activities will be increasingly effective at building self-esteem and confidence when local cultural concerns are considered. Programming intended to facilitate increased contact between Unionist and Nationalist populations will more likely flourish when designed by leaders understanding the unique shading of local conflict dynamics.

Third, many community group leaders struggle to reconcile the traditionally tense relationship between the community development and peacebuilding fields. The tension perhaps stems from NGO activity in several African countries during the 1990s (Anderson, 1999). Countries such as Sudan and Sierra Leone, among others, have noticeably digressed since becoming independent and emerged from the 1990s in shambles despite large international investments of development money and energy (Junne and Verkoren, 2005; Schloms, 2003).

Peacebuilding organizations will sometimes argue that their work alone will ensure the suppression of a future need for renewed violent conflict (Junne and Verkoren, 2005). Conversely, aid/development organizations will sometimes argue that the injection of economic aid will naturally smother simmering tensions. Several community group leaders interviewed for this study, however, seemed to recognize that successful interventions by their organization will require an incorporation of effective community development and peacebuilding work.

Fourth, the majority of community organizations interviewed provided evidence of significant successes in their community development and peacebuilding project work. Community group leaders described a diverse set of target groups ranging from pre-schoolers to active paramilitary members who were involved in community development and peacebuilding projects. Wide-ranging strategies were perceived as effective in meeting project goals.

Most community organizations highlighted successes in facilitating communication and relationship-building across the bicomunal divide reflecting positively on increasingly demanding “cross-community” funding criteria requirements. Noting the inherent temptation to avoid messy cross-community work, many community leaders reflected positively on funding criteria. What remains to be seen, however, is whether project work can facilitate healthy confrontation, conflict resolution, and sustainable reconciliation between Northern Ireland’s Unionists and Nationalists.

Funding agencies need to also consider arguments for the allowance of funded “single-identity” work. Despite convincing arguments against it, single-identity work may succeed in bringing residents of select tightly closed communities into peacebuilding processes that would normally remain sidelined.

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