



5-2012

Economic Aid and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland and the Border Area: Respondents' Perceptions of Awareness, Fairness, Trust Building, and Sustainability

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Recommended Citation

Karari, Peter; Byrne, Sean; Skarlato, Olga; and Ahmed, Kawser (2012) "Economic Aid and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland and the Border Area: Respondents' Perceptions of Awareness, Fairness, Trust Building, and Sustainability," *Peace and Conflict Studies*: Vol. 19 : No. 1 , Article 1.

DOI: 10.46743/1082-7307/2012.1132

Available at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/pcs/vol19/iss1/1>

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Abstract

Intractable ethnopolitical conflicts emanate from the social, political, cultural, and economic marginalization of some community groups. To address these conflicts, the affected groups are often provided with life changing opportunities to enhance justice, equality, dignity and freedom. In the past, Northern Ireland has been a turbulent sea of violent conflict between Unionists and Nationalists. To address the underlying root causes of the conflict, economic aid through the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the European Union (EU) Peace II Fund is aimed at facilitating sustainable peacebuilding, reconciliation and community development. In this study, 95 community group leaders, civil servants, and community development officers in Derry, Belfast and the Border Area were interviewed to explore their perceptions about the impact of economic aid in terms of fairness of the application criteria, awareness of both funds, trust building and sustainability. The findings inform future conflict transformation interventions geared towards sustainable peacebuilding, reconciliation and community development in Northern Ireland.

Keywords: *ethnopolitical conflicts, European Union (EU) Peace II Fund, goodwill, International Fund for Ireland (IFI), nationalists, Northern Ireland, Provisional Irish Republican Army's (PIRAs), reconciliation, trust building, unionists*

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**Economic Aid and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland and the Border Area:
Respondents' Perceptions of Awareness, Fairness, Trust Building, and Sustainability**

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Abstract

Intractable ethnopolitical conflicts emanate from the social, political, cultural, and economic marginalization of some community groups. To address these conflicts, the affected groups are often provided with life changing opportunities to enhance justice, equality, dignity and freedom. In the past, Northern Ireland has been a turbulent sea of violent conflict between Unionists and Nationalists. To address the underlying root causes of the conflict, economic aid through the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the European Union (EU) Peace II Fund is aimed at facilitating sustainable peacebuilding, reconciliation and community development. In this study, 95 community group leaders, civil servants, and community development officers in Derry, Belfast and the Border Area were interviewed to explore their perceptions about the impact of economic aid in terms of fairness of the application criteria, awareness of both funds, trust building and sustainability. The findings inform future conflict transformation interventions geared towards sustainable peacebuilding, reconciliation and community development in Northern Ireland.

Introduction

The ethnic conflict in Northern Ireland has deep roots dating back to the seventeenth century when British settlers occupied the Irish natives' land during the Ulster plantation (Bew, Patterson, and Gibbon 2002). The 1919 War of Independence and the resulting ongoing violence between Protestants (Unionists) and Catholics (Nationalists) intensified, leading to the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 that formalized the partition of the island

into Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State (Ryan 2007). The 1922 Special Powers Act gave the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) excessive powers to maintain law and order that led to the further marginalization and vulnerability of the Nationalist community (Dohoune 1998). A new turbulent wave of violence popularly known as the Troubles erupted in the 1960s when the Civil Rights Movement agitated for equal access to resources and services such as education, jobs, housing and voting rights among others (Arthur 2000). The Troubles can be linked to the nature of zero sum territorialism in Northern Irish politics (Senehi 2008). The 1980 Hunger Strikes resulted in the escalation of the Provisional Irish Republican Army's (PIRAs) armed struggle. According to O'Leary and McGarry (1993, 2007) the Troubles led to the death of approximately 3,000 and injured more than 30,000 people. However, the declaration of reciprocal ceasefires by Republicans and Loyalists in 1994 saw the winding down of the Troubles and a reduction in violence culminating in the 1998 Belfast Agreement (BA).

Despite the end of violent conflict, the social and economic impact of the Troubles was devastating (The Portland Trust, 2009). There is a high level of structural inequality in the social, political and economic sectors and unemployment is chronic and pervasive (Ibid). Catholic male unemployment is nearly three times greater than unemployment among Protestant males (Byrne and Irvin 2001). Further, between 1979 and 1988 employment in manufacturing fell by 40 percent (The Portland Trust 2009). Economic disparity was a source of deep resentment, mistrust and suspicion between Unionists and Nationalists. For example, Senehi (2008) asserts that historical injustices, stereotyping and destructive stories are deeply rooted in the world view of both groups and are passed transgenerationally. Civil wars are not only caused by ethnic hatred but also by social, economic and political marginalization (O'Dowd and McCall 2008).

Moreover, Northern Ireland is described as consciously underdeveloped (Coakley and O' Dowd 2007), as inhabited by opposing forces of Unionists and Nationalists (McGarry and O' Leary 1995), characterized by deep rooted and complex conflicts (Arthur 2000), and resentful generations (Kaufman 2006) that are linked to the laborious, slow and grueling peace process (Gallagher 2007; McEvoy 2006). Northern Ireland's people are in need of new economic opportunities. According to Ho-Won Jeong (2005), economic aid is a means of addressing resource-based ethno-political conflicts. Economic aid can facilitate equality thereby helping to address historical injustices and structural violence and enhancing sustainable development. Economic aid is perceived by the international community as essential in addressing the emotional and symbolic roots of protracted conflicts by putting community grievances aside and focusing instead on the conditions that have perpetuated the conflict (The Portland Trust 2009).

As Kaufman (2006) asserts, constructive community engagements can nurture fertile opportunities for peacebuilding. However, Byrne and Ayulo (1998) note that the goals of economic aid are not always compatible with conflict resolution. Reconciliation is not always directly proportional to the economic injection of external funds (Kaufman 2006; Kumar 1997; Ryan 2007; Mac Ginty 2008). Sustainable reconciliation depends on the building of meaningful relationships between opposing forces (Lederach 2006) and the introduction of social capital (McCall and O'Dowd 2008; O'Dowd and McCall 2008). Consequently, Byrne and Irvin (2001) describe how single identity funded projects can be a springboard toward the enhancement of meaningful social relationships. If the conflict-nurturing conditions are addressed, then cross-cultural conflict resolution projects can lead to sustainable peacebuilding (Byrne 2001)

The IFI, the EU Peace I (1994-1999) and Peace II (2000-06) Funds were meant 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 economic inclusion (Buchanan 2008; Byrne 2001; McCall and O'Dowd 2008; Racioppi and Sullivan 2007). Byrne and Irvin (2001) also contend that economic aid is a vital bridge in transforming the Northern Ireland conflict because it enhances cross-community contacts and reduces social isolation that results from economic inequalities. Moreover, Jeong (2005) relates peaceful reconciliation to holistic or comprehensive peacebuilding strategies. External economic aid also enhances local networks and community homogeneity, balances structural inequalities, and relates sustainable peace to genuine reconciliation (Lederach 2006).

Consequently, this article investigates the perceptions of 98 respondents in Belfast, Derry, and the Border Area about the extent to which the EU Peace II Fund and the IFI have promoted peacebuilding efforts. These images and perceptions are important in analyzing the impact of economic aid in trust building, creating awareness about both funds, and the sustainability of projects and funding application criteria. An overview of development aid, ethno-political conflicts, and peacebuilding and conflict transformation is now provided to build a platform for the analysis of our respondents' perceptions.

Economic Aid, Ethno-political Conflicts, Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation

Ethnic violence can be traced to fear, rage, resentment and hatred, and justified as revenge for past injustices (Petersen 2002). Moreover, symbolism, rituals, collective and social memory and history also promote intractable conflicts (Horowitz 1985; Cairns and Roe 2003). Violence is justified as revenge for past injustices as well as for an ethnic group's political and economic exclusion. Social memories are immortalized through rituals and ceremonies (Arthur 2000). The fear of domination by the "other" draws groups into violent conflicts in a bid to preserve their identity. Ethnic hatred and animosity among long-time neighbours can be traced to stories, myths and symbols of identity (Kaufman 2001).

Education can also be important in reducing or erasing the negative effects of collective memories (Cairns and Roe 2003). A case in point is the integrated school movement in Northern Ireland where the school curriculum facilitates gradual peacebuilding and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that addressed bitter memories through forgiveness or Ubuntu (Ibid). Hence, dealing with memory is complex and requires patience, the building of trust, confidence, tolerance and social integration of the once marginalized and vulnerable groups (Arthur 2000).

The Rwandan example demonstrates that ethnic conflicts can also be linked to colonial history, ethnonationalism, polarization and political realignments that culminated in the 1994 genocide (Mamdani 2001). Sustainable peace should address the root causes of these political and ethnic polarizations. Intractable conflict can also be linked to polarization between the centre and the periphery (Galtung 1971). In such a case violent conflict becomes an avenue for the marginalized to fight for justice and equality. Similarly, the human needs approach indicates that conflicts arise due to unmet basic human needs (Burton 1997). Social institutions should be restructured to facilitate effective and equitable service delivery to mitigate such conflicts (Lederach 2006). The greed and grievance approach relates protracted ethnic conflict to the war economy in which the elites sustain war for profit (Berdal and Malone 2000). Economic motives that nurture intractable ethnic conflicts should be addressed to facilitate sustainable peace.

Home-grown approaches rather than unilateral western models can address intractable conflicts in communities (Argenti-Pillen 2003; Mac Ginty 2008). Peacebuilding is an art and a skill that is learned and can be achieved through our own creativity so that moral imaginations can be devised to facilitate peacebuilding initiatives (Lederach 2005). Sustainable peace requires an integrated approach to conflict resolution because there is no one single method for conflict resolution when the nature of conflicts is different (Reychler

and Paffenholz 2001). Understanding the nature of conflicts facilitates informed interventions towards conflict management (Ross and Rothman 1999). Intractable conflict can be transformed from adversarial to integrative using a “piece by piece” approach that follows four levels of facilitating dialogue, namely: the positional dialogue approach, the activist approach, the problem solving approach, and the human relations approach (Rothman 1992).

Sustainable peace is beyond conflict resolution and must involve reconciliation (Bar-Siman-Tov 2006). Reconciliation addresses the root causes of problems, expressed needs, and the building of trust and confidence to nurture sustainable peace (Lederach 2006). Contemporary conflict resolution goes beyond state diplomacy and requires reconciliation involving all sectors of the society in the peacebuilding process. Sustainable peace requires the restoration of impaired relationships through the creation of a dynamic, conflict responsive peacebuilding infrastructure (Ibid). Reparations and legal systems cannot address deep resentments among the victims of atrocities. Reconciliation through testimonies and forgiveness among the victims and the perpetrators institutes the healing of victims and the restoration of their lost dignity (Minow 1998).

External economic aid and economic policy are also an integral part of the peace and nation building process in states emerging from conflicts through resource mobilization and the revival of essential institutions that meet the basic needs of peripheral populations (Kriesberg and Dayton 2009). Sustainable peace requires the building of strong socioeconomic institutions to replace the Wilsonian liberal democracy approach and market-based economies (Paris 2004). Demilitarization and incentives provided by elections can be an alternative to continued violent conflicts (Lyons 2005) while powersharing through international mediation facilitates inclusiveness, self-determination and provides an alternative to protracted conflicts (Sisk 1996). Effective powersharing depends on adequate

leadership, the equitable distribution of resources, home-grown decision-making, and the gradual integration of liberal approaches.

The aforementioned theories are important in explaining the nexus between economic aid, on the one hand, and trust-building, reconciliation, and community development in Northern Ireland on the other. The theories are also helpful in framing an analysis of the respondents' perceptions about trust building, funds application criteria, project sustainability, and awareness.

Methodology

During the summer of 2006 the second author carried out in-depth semi-structured interviews with 98 respondents including community group leaders, civil servants, and community development officers in Derry, Belfast, and the Border Counties of Cavan, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Monaghan, and Tyrone. The time frame of data collection constituted approximately two months, and each interview lasted about 90-120 minutes. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the initial participants. The second author contacted the initial study population through letters, emails, and telephone calls. He knew some of the participants through previous research while others were new. Purposive sampling, which focuses on potential participants who meet the inclusion criteria, was chosen because it is less time consuming and less expensive, the level of accuracy is high and the sample is more representative of the study population (Daniel 2012). Snowball sampling was also used to recruit subsequent study participants and the procedure was carefully administered to ensure that the final study sample was representative of the target study area.

The study focused on the respondents' awareness of the IFI and the EU Peace II Fund, the fairness of the application criteria, sustainability, and the building of community trust and goodwill that constitute the cornerstone of sustainable peace, reconciliation and development in Northern Ireland and the Border region. Direct quotations from the interviewees are used

to preserve the originality and authenticity of the respondents' voices. A coding schema was used to differentiate the views from various respondents, to facilitate the cross-referencing of data, and to accommodate the multiplicity of interviews. For example B, D, and BA are used to refer to the study areas of Belfast, Derry and Border Area respectively while numbers such as 1, 2, and 3 are used to distinguish different respondents within a study area. For example B1, D1, and BA1 refer to respondents 1 from Belfast, Derry, and the Border Area respectively. This coding ensures that cross-referencing of the data is done without compromising the anonymity of the respondents.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How aware are you of the roles of European Union Peace and Reconciliation Fund and the IFI in peacebuilding and community development?
2. Did you find the funds application process fairly straightforward matching your local and expressed needs?
3. Is your funded project sustainable beyond the five-year term of funded support? Has the fund support for your project economically empowered you or your community?
4. Have the EU fund for Peace and Reconciliation and the IFI helped generate an atmosphere of trust and goodwill in Northern Ireland?

The rationale for using semi-structured interviews is that interviewing facilitates the ability of people to symbolize their experience through language (Seidman 2006). Interviewing facilitates access to people's consciousness, behaviour, feelings, and thoughts, allows them to share their world, to find out what is going on, why people do what they do, and how they understand their world (Rubin and Rubin 1995). This process provides a safe space that allows victims of structural violence and historical injustices to share their feelings that have been denied or suppressed and to reconstruct their life history (Gonzalez 2009). Interviewing accommodates interpretation of words, phrases, and gestures thereby

establishing genuine dialogue through which healing and conflict transformation is possible (Ibid). Interviewing also facilitates social advocacy in which critical social researchers endeavor to explore, discover, understand, reveal and act on social problems (Rubin and Rubin 1995). The interpretive feature of interviewing accommodates the complexity of human life and the diversity of realities in the social world (Rubin and Rubin 1995). These qualities justify why interviewing was used in our research in Northern Ireland and the Border Area. The second author comes from the island of Ireland, has written extensively on this topic, and he experienced the Troubles. The other authors come from countries emerging from protracted conflicts including Kenya, Russia, and Bangladesh and have firsthand experiences of ethno-political conflicts.

Findings

The following section presents the results of this study. Four major guiding themes are used to describe the findings: (1) awareness about the roles of the EU Peace and Reconciliation Fund and the IFI in peacebuilding and community development; (2) the straightforwardness of the funds application criteria; (3) the sustainability of community peace projects after the funds end in 2013; and (4) the impact of the EU Peace II Fund and IFI in generating an atmosphere of trust and goodwill in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties.

The Funding Application Criteria

The application criteria for both funds are important in the process of peacemaking, reconciliation and community development because our respondents perceived it as the basis of either inclusion or exclusion. This study indicates that the criteria/process used in the application process to both funds was exclusively predetermined, overly top-down, and virtually disconnected with the expressed needs and realities of local communities. The respondents' perceptions indicate that the criteria should be community focused in terms of

the expressed needs of the target groups and the overall goal/s of their peace projects. The participants indicated that criteria founded on exclusion would nurture continued tensions and misperceptions among community members, which may jeopardize the peace process. A Belfast community group leader (B7) described the criteria not only as bulky, frustrating, and bureaucratic but also as challenging in terms of its link to the peace process:

The criteria were often unrelated to the realities on the ground. It's hard...virtually impossible...very bureaucratic...abstract, convoluting sometimes-even contradictory. Some of the smaller organisations... had neither the know-how or the money to pay for professionals to fill in these application forms for them...the heavily bureaucratic administrative approach...set the bar far too high for people. Sometimes that resulted in people...offering to deliver a programme that was way beyond their capacity...consequently not being able to deliver it and that sort of led to funding being withdrawn, and on some occasions it led to a lack of credibility...there was an issue about the fit between those who compiled the criteria and those of us who are actually working on the ground. There were also 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, and sectarian discrimination has been removed, from their hearts...I don't think the European methodology for doing it was particularly helpful... it was bureaucratic, top heavy...did not fit the reality on the ground.

A Border Area community group leader (BA9) decried the marginalization of small community-based organizations by the application criteria due to their lack of financial organizational skills:

I mean the process is quite complex...for a small organisation looking for a small amount of support it is a daunting task, and in particular where they have only voluntary people in voluntary organisation and they have nobody with time to do it... For a group that is looking for a fairly large amount of money I suppose the end justifies the means, but if you are looking for a small amount for something and not exactly sure what you are looking for, and maybe a group that is not very strong, that is the problem I would see with it, that it is more user friendly to groups that have the experience of dealing with it, and who have been through the mill before.

The respondents indicate that both funds' application criteria are detached from the actual reality on the ground. They express an immediate need to actively involve the community in the design, planning and the dissemination of the application criteria that reflect the expressed needs of the target communities. The respondents perceive inclusion as a great foundation towards the ownership of the peace process by the communities living in Northern Ireland, and the Border Area. For example, a Derry community group leader (D3) describes the current criteria as a top down approach that limits the fulfilment of the target beneficiaries' expectations:

Well...it's bulky...it seemed to me that some questions were repetitive... So it is a bit frustrating...their requirements that you have this jargon in this particular box ...So overly bureaucratic would be one of my comments. What was engaging was how are we who are applying going to deliver the peacebuilding, the reconciliation agenda that we are saying that we are going to do.

The way forward towards building sustainable peace in Northern Ireland, as perceived by the respondents, is to localize the criteria design and involve local people actively in designing the criteria that are community friendly to promote their ownership of and adaptability to the peace process. Thus, the application form criteria may prioritize some segments of the community while marginalizing others, aggravating suspicion and animosity that both funds are supposed to address. For example, a Border Area community group leader (BA10) articulates that the criteria should be based on the expressed needs of the target communities not one that is imposed by the funding agencies.

The victims...that suffered most from the conflict....Those were the very people in those areas who had a lack of investment; they didn't have the capacity to complete the application forms. They were left disenfranchised, disempowered from the very programme that they were meant to be for them...a lot of them have ended up spending five thousand pounds, to secure fifty thousand pounds, on consultancy....I have seen groups...running around looking for five Protestants or five Catholics to create an inter community programme....To me that is institutionalising sectarianism....Jesus if I come

up with this component and that component to meet their criteria, I'll get funded. So people get inventive but the original objective is lost, and then as soon as the funding ends everybody morphs back to where they came from.

Similarly, a Belfast group leader (B17) indicates that sectarianism and discrimination in the allocation of both funds could jeopardize the peace process in Northern Ireland:

It is very orientated towards the majoritarian community, the Protestant and the Catholic, even the language used in it would be very orientated towards those communities...minority ethnic communities have been affected by the Troubles and have been here all through the Troubles...and should be part of any sort of new peacebuilding initiatives. This organisation was present for the whole notion of community relations to be widened in Northern Ireland to take into consideration the minorities communities as well.

Consequently, the respondents express a need to simplify the application criteria and to consult with the community to come up with criteria that are acceptable to, and command ownership among members of the community. The participants indicate that the criteria should be designed with the active involvement of the community's gatekeepers who are aware of the expressed needs of the people. They observe that the criteria should also be inclusive of Northern Ireland's multi-cultural society. Hence, the participants observe that the application criteria need to be revised to be people friendly and focused on the goals of peacebuilding, reconciliation and community development. These perceptions indicate that the final application forms are misguided leading to wrong implementations and perhaps poor results in some cases.

Prospects of Future Project Sustainability after the Phasing out of Both Funds

Some of the respondents are pessimistic about the prospects of their future project sustainability. The meaning of sustainability should be understood from a vertical rather than from a hierarchical perspective. For example, a Belfast community group leader (B2) articulates that the target communities have experienced and survived past suffering and must be actively involved in finding a lasting solution to the challenges they face:

There's been this fuss about what sustainability is...it needs to be mainstreamed, where people recognise that there is an overall responsibility from the Assembly, to victims of the conflict, to ex-prisoners who are trying to get their lives back, and their families return to getting their lives back together, or to communities like this, disproportionately affected by the conflict. There is a long-term investment needed by Government in that. And that is going to require taxpayer money. There is no point in falsifying this whole thing and putting in the word sustainable, in as much as pensions, health service...has to be publicly funded...you only start to begin to scratch the surface and then the money is pulled. Like our youth project... absolutely brilliant, growing and growing, using drama and art, as a way of therapeutically intervening in the families of who have lost brothers, sisters or parents through violent circumstances. They're at it for two years and then the funding are pulled...We didn't have a sustainable exit plan...So then those kids that are affected by violent trauma during the conflict, where are they going to go, they are going to go and re-enact the violence they have seen in their past.

The future sustainability of peace projects in Northern Ireland is quite elusive.

Consequently, the participants indicate a need to genuinely consult with community groups towards initiating meaningful and purposeful sustainability projects. The participants' perceptions indicate that both funding agencies may have overly concentrated more on economic development rather than on social sustainability. A Derry community group leader (D2), for example, observes that community sustainability should be viewed from a holistic perspective—from both an economic and a social basis:

If we are looking at community sustainability purely on economic measures, then quite a number of these projects will not be sustainable. But if you are looking at community sustainability around active citizenship, community confidence, and peacebuilding, these are things that also need to be measured....Tying into the system is another instrument, normally when people talk about community sustainability they tick your sort of annual report, the financial report. I also think we need to be looking at a social report. We need social indicators, we need to be looking at social auditing, and if we could have, community sustainability, as opposed to financial sustainability, that means that communities are going to become at ease with themselves...networking with each other...supporting the small businesses there. It is going to make the place more attractive to bring investment...a good place to live, work and play and educate children....I think the community development process was sacrificed on the altar of commercial viability...that does not help peacebuilding and community sustainability.

Another community group leader from Derry (D9) who observes that sustainability would not be possible without funding voices this view. Instead of dependence on non-sustainable economic aid, he argues that skills training including reforms in the education curriculum could provide an impetus for future sustainability of the peace process:

Where it is sustainable is in giving people skills through the training process and giving people skills to take beyond what they have learned here and beyond the value of the funding application and to keep using them. Also a lot of the resources we have developed that we have tried to tie in through the department of education to the national curriculum so that they are sustainable beyond any development money.

Consequently, the participants indicate a need for community self-determination and independence if sustainable peace and community development is to be achieved. For example, a Belfast community group leader (B9) feels that community dependency on both funds has compromised the sustainability of community projects. He argues that there is a need to break the cycle of dependency and venture into productive activities that would generate alternative income and facilitate the future sustainability of community projects:

People have become dependent upon EU funding to actually do their work...the legacy of the EU money has been that it has created jobs and now people are under pressure to sustain and they can't...So I think there is a responsibility for centres such as ourselves...to actually draw people into our work and not necessarily through giving them funding, but to help resource them in other ways...to sort of develop services and sell their services, but that takes time...there is a real gap there I think for developing what we know and what we have learned so that people don't have to start from scratch again.

These respondents' perceptions indicate that both funding agencies and the devolved Northern Ireland government need to integrate the sustainability component into the peace process to ensure sustainability after 2013 when the funding ends.

Generation of Trust and Goodwill between Communities

The generation of trust and goodwill promoted by both external funds constitute a vital springboard towards building sustainable peace, reconciliation and community

development in Northern Ireland. However, some respondents felt that both funds constitute an effort by foreign agencies to “buy” peace rather than to build genuine peace between both communities. For example, a Border Area community group leader (BA11) perceived trust and goodwill in the following way:

I don't know if money can ever create trust... there were some areas there that don't want to change or whatever, and there would be others seeing money being poured into these organisations, why should it be poured into them, people would be saying, its peace money and reconciliation money and they are not trying to reconcile... Sometimes it can create distrust as in well why did they get it, they are not doing with it, what is meant to be done with it. I think trust will take time... money, right jobs and better prospects will relax people more and trust will come with that.... But it's not just the money it will be time and that money used the right way.

This observation indicates that the generation of trust and goodwill is a process that builds in time so that as the expressed needs of the communities are met, relationships are built and maintained. Money alone cannot buy trust but if it is invested wisely as per the wishes, hopes, and expressed needs of the target beneficiaries, there is the possibility of achieving eventual economic growth, the satisfaction of basic human needs, and peacebuilding. This observation is shared by a Derry group community leader (D13) who is unsure about the validity or sincerity of building trust and goodwill through both funds:

I do believe that they are genuinely trying to get people to think clearly and strategically as to how this should work. The difficulty I am having with it is that they want to give work on that their money is giving a result, that they will see peace at the end of it. The difficulty I have is that they now have put restrictions and constraints on it, as well, which means that you can only do certain thing within the mindset of the funder.... I know we have to be accountable and I know that a lot of the money has been abused, but the reality of it is that we have actually ended up tying our hands in some way.

The above quote illustrates that some beneficiaries to temporarily fulfill the funds application criteria that have unilaterally been imposed on the community by both funding agencies could falsify their efforts in building trust and goodwill. As a consequence, there is

fear that the peace initiatives will fall apart and the society will relapse into political violence once the bond that holds the community together, both external funds, ends.

A Belfast community group leader (B7) perceives that people know what they want and it is always fair to facilitate community-based consultations to nurture goodwill and trust:

Trust and goodwill, they are rare because the legacy of hurt is palpable. We are a highly traumatised community...so the issue of trust could relate to a mass issue...it's an illusion to believe that we will end this historical issue by just creating jobs. We have a capacity for schizophrenia here where people can work in the work place together and return to total sectarianized communities. We can take our school children away on holiday, ten Catholics and ten Protestants to Disney World, they'll love it and they come back home to segregated communities....There is better work on the ground...building of trust and relationships between real people and real communities, the relation work, the network....Let's look at the structures of society and do the political right thing...the quality of that society will only be reflected in the quality of life that is in the hearts of the individuals, at the heart of that family, at the heart of community and the heart of that relationship.

As the above observation indicates, the generation of trust and goodwill can only be founded locally on genuine and real relationships among real people. The "real person" is hidden in the hearts of individuals and must be sought through genuine and localized outreach. However, a community group leader from Derry (D15) believes that to some limited extent, trust and goodwill are being achieved in the grassroots:

Well in those areas where they have given people the opportunity of talking and working together, definitely yes, but it's a very narrow field, generally I don't think they have made any serious difference. In the big ball game it doesn't matter. The conflict is so deep and it's so intense and what has happened is that the Protestants have lost most of the day, and I was having it that people who shot their soldiers and shot the policemen are now going to be in charge of the country and that has no end to me.

While talking and working together has nurtured trust building to some extent, the above quotation indicates that building and sustaining deep trust and goodwill remains elusive due to the protracted nature of the conflict. These respondents' perceptions indicate that reaching

out to the aggrieved communities is essential if viable transformations towards achieving sustainable peace are to be made. The metaphor “We have lost and they have gained” has sustained deep mistrust, tensions and resentment in the society. However, the same community group leader from Derry (D15) believes that there is still some hope for the future:

I work well with the Protestants and I don't have a problem, and they work well with me. But it is not in the area of good politics. If there is a project you might be involved with Protestants and it is grand, you know, and there is some kind of movement in trying to get Catholics and Protestants to be educated together in quite a number of schools and that is part of a process. Hopefully that has to help some in the future, children coming together and working together.

This observation indicates the need of a more inclusive peace process, a process that actively involves both communities and actively listens to them in a deep and profound way to deconstruct their concealed thoughts towards working together to implement an informed, meaningful and purposeful peace process. Our respondents' perceptions indicate that both funding agencies must “work with” and not “work against” both communities to promote grassroots ownership of the peace process culminating in the building of sustainable peace, reconciliation and community development.

Awareness of the IFI and EU Peace II Fund in Peacebuilding and Development

Having knowledge of something may be general rather than purposeful or meaningful to the subject. As a consequence, it would be significant to deconstruct awareness in relation to the impact of the IFI and the EU Peace II Fund in Northern Ireland and the Border Area. Does awareness simply entail that both communities know about the existence of both funds or that the community has informed knowledge about the meaning and purpose of both funds? This critical view is better understood through the observation of a Border Area community group leader (BA1) who articulated the following in her story:

I would be aware of I suppose more through the logos that I see around the place and stuff like that would be across the Border Area from Sligo, Donegal, various places that you would go and you would see various initiatives funded by IFI and I have also seen initiatives in Mayo funded as well.

Thus, the awareness of the existence of both funds through their logos may not be interpreted as knowing the meaning, goals and objectives of both funds. Instead, it may indicate the need for both funding agencies to educate and give appropriate information to the beneficiaries about the meaning of both funds to facilitate informed involvement and ownership of the peace process.

A Belfast community group leader (B2) attributes the people's lack of awareness of the IFI to its bureaucracy and inaccessibility:

For us we would be quite aware of the European Peace program and less aware of the IFI as a funding body. It is often seen as quite elite and separate to grassroots and community organisations from our perspective and very difficult to access so we know less about it. The European Peace programme because of its inception being about grassroots led by good people in touch with the community certainly meant that there is much more access, much more knowledge about the programme.

Consequently, the IFI needs to be accessible and to reach out to the beneficiaries. The respondents hold the view that awareness of both IFI and EU Peace II Fund initiatives can only be facilitated if a direct link with the community is established thus facilitating local communities' acceptance and ownership of the peacemaking process. In addition, a community group leader from Derry (D3) perceives that the awareness of both funds is more centralized among the funds' administrators but peripheral among the target beneficiaries:

How aware am I of them? I would say, in particular given my job, which includes capacity building, training and therefore it beholds me to know about funding streams. So there is that aspect of it I would know about Peace 1, 2 and potentially Peace 3 through as part of my job description to know about them and them and to know about the International Fund for Ireland.

These respondents' perceptions indicate that the awareness of both funds should be decentralized to reach out to all beneficiaries on the ground. However, the participants

indicate that there is less awareness among the new minority ethnic groups than among Unionists and Nationalists (the two majority communities). A Belfast community group leader (B2) observed that community groups not working directly with Unionists and Nationalists seemed to be excluded from the funding process:

To be honest I am not totally familiar with the whole differences...And this is the first time that our organisation received peace funding...originally it was assigned to projects and organisations working with the two majority communities, so ours was the first project to receive this Peace money working on minority ethnic issues. So honestly I am not aware of the whole ins and outs and the details of the differences between the two.

This observation indicates that if sustainable peace, reconciliation and community development are to be achieved in Northern Ireland and the Border Area, both funding agencies must reach out to all groups hence bridging the gap between the majority and the visible minority communities. Our respondents indicate the need to break down the barriers of sectarianism and exclusion and embrace inclusion while creating more public awareness about the meaning and the goals of both funds.

According to Figure 1 below, 68 percent of the respondents feel that the application criteria are not straight forward while only 16 percent feel that the process is fair. Moreover, a further 16 percent of the respondents are unsure about whether the process is straightforward or not. In relation to prospects for future sustainability of the peace process, 50 percent of the respondents are pessimistic while only 19 percent are optimistic, and 31 percent are unsure about the sustainability process.

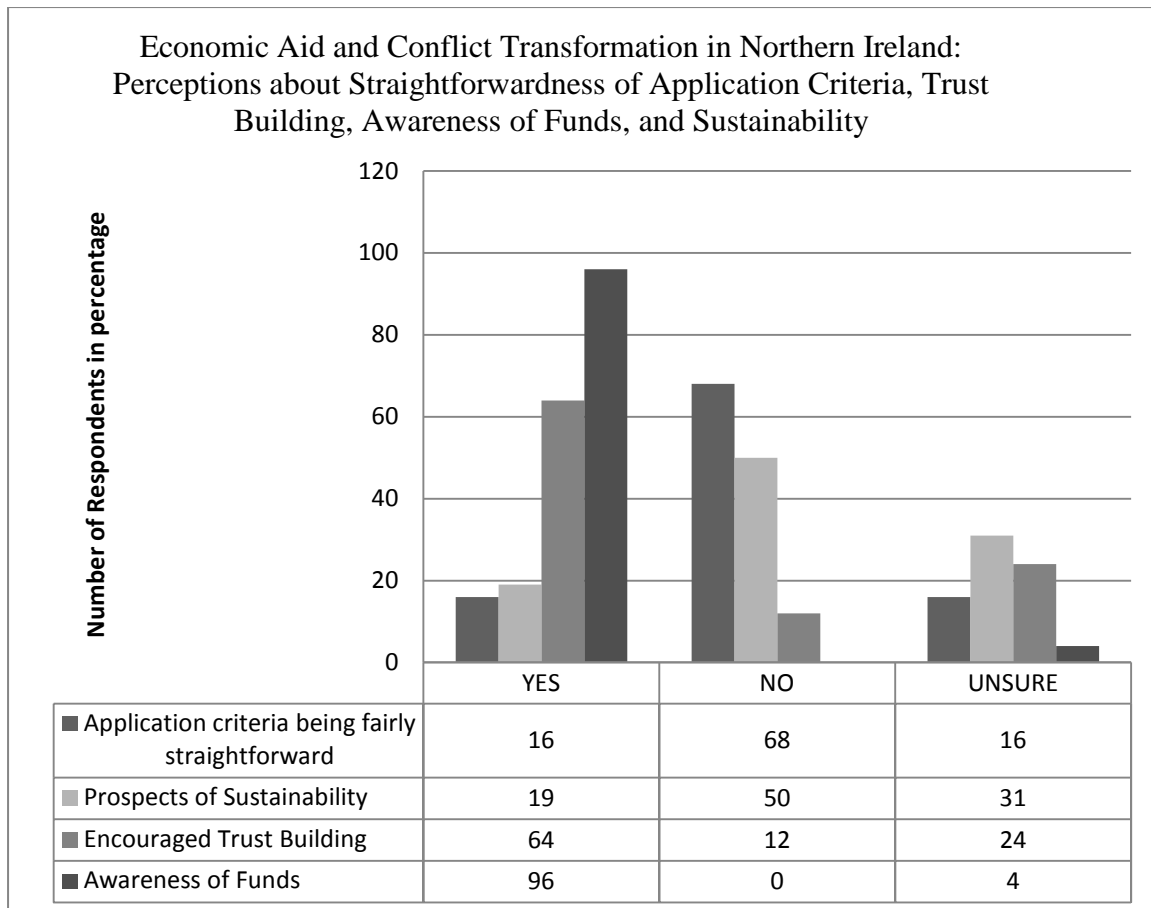


Figure 1. Perceptions of Economic Aid

Figure 1 further indicates that 64 percent of the respondents feel that both funds encourage trust building among the disputants in Northern Ireland and the Border Area. However, 12 percent of the respondents feel that trust building cannot be “bought” by aid while 24 percent are unsure if both funds actually facilitate trust building. In relation to the awareness of both funds Figure 1 indicates that the majority of the target beneficiaries know about the funds while only 4 percent are unsure about the existence of both funds.

This study was not without challenges. The main challenge in this study was to cope with perceived neutrality. The second author had first-hand experience of the Troubles, and had to take this issue into account. While interviewing the interviewees, he struggled with neutrality as an ethical principle in data collection and analysis. While he identified with both communities, his ethical convictions shaped his interpretations of the respondents’ stories.

Discussion

The aforementioned interviews indicate a variety of perceptions and images pertaining to trust building, project sustainability, awareness, and funding criteria. The following discussion centres on some analysis including recommendations about the way forward. Several observations can be made from the respondents' perceptions about the impact of external economic funding on the peacebuilding process in Northern Ireland and the Border Area. In particular our observations are based on the interpretation of the respondents' perceptions about the straightforwardness of the application criteria, trust building, awareness of funds, and sustainability.

First, while an overwhelming majority of the respondents are aware of the existence of both funds, there is a general lack of informed knowledge about the meaning of the funds. There is a need for both funding agencies to collaborate with community leaders and other stakeholders to educate the local people about the objectives, the mission and the vision of both funds. Both funders should reach out to visible minorities by breaking down the barriers of sectarianism and exclusion to ensure indigenous ownership and local adaptability to the peace process. In a case study of a Protestant and Catholic community in the highly segregated area of West Belfast, Knox (2010) observed, for example, that shared social economic policy is important in promoting community cohesion, integration and the social transformation of community groups. Mac Ginty and Williams (2009, 92-121) also articulate that effective conflict transformation should involve the provision of appropriate and innovative methods and approaches and assistance to those who experience violence to change individual attitudes and address structural reforms. Moreover, Jeong (2005) notes that economic aid should be geared towards facilitating equality, addressing structural violence and ultimately sustainable development. Conflict transformation can also be nurtured by constructive community engagements (Kaufman 2006) and equal access to social economic

benefits (Byrne and Irvin 2001). Consequently both donors and community leaders should embrace community education, sensitization, and awareness about community peace projects to facilitate a sense of inclusion, ownership, and sustainability of peace initiatives.

Second, this study indicates that the funds application criteria are bureaucratic, hierarchical, complex and detached from both communities. The funds criteria have nurtured continued tension and suspicion among the community that could jeopardize their participation in the peace process. Community leaders, donors and other actors in the peacebuilding process should involve and include the community in the design, planning, and dissemination of the application criteria to facilitate embracing realities on the ground as well as the expressed needs of the community. For example, Mac Ginty and Williams (2009, 72-91) observe that while local participation, ownership and partnership are important to legitimacy and sustainability, international organizations are elite led and nonparticipatory. In many circumstances local communities are passive actors in predetermined liberal paradigms. External funding agencies should facilitate a participatory approach that actively involves peripheral populations as active agents in shaping and controlling their destinies and engagement with the outside world. The active involvement and participation of peripheral populations in conflict transformation and development assist in giving local meaning to new ideas and institutions, hence, facilitating the ownership and sustainability of the peace process (Mac Ginty 2008; Mac Ginty and Williams 2009).

Some respondents interpret the funder's bureaucratic application criteria as a symbol of exclusion, which defeats the desired ideal of goodwill and trust building. The donors, community leaders, and other stakeholders, in order to facilitate trust building, goodwill, and the ownership and sustainability of the peace process, should embrace the inclusion and active participation of all the beneficiaries. Local communities have indeed power to absorb, negotiate, subvert and resist external pressure, which is a sign of people's participation in

development, as well as conflict resolution processes (Mac Ginty and Williams 2009). Sustainable conflict transformation and reconciliation is also promoted by building meaningful relationships between opposing forces (Lederach 2006), social capital (McCall and O'Dowd 2008; O'Dowd and McCall 2008), and single identity projects (Byrne and Irvin 2001). The respondents in this study emphasize the need for social and community auditing as core values in genuine trust building and reconciliation. In addition, Mac Ginty and Williams (2009) deconstruct the concept of social capital and observe that while war torn societies exhibit strong social capital, there is a need for a bridging social capital (social ties and shared beliefs that encompass multiple groups) rather than a bonding social capital (social ties and shared beliefs among a single group). In other words, the "right" form of social capital is directly proportional to effective peacebuilding and conflict transformation in countries that exhibit intractable conflicts. Again, the important lesson here for the donors and community leaders is that the inclusion, involvement, and participation of the local community in local peace projects is key in the sustainability, and in their ownership of the process.

Third, some of the interviews indicate the existence of a lot of pessimism among the target beneficiaries with regards to the sustainability of the Northern Ireland peace process. Consequently, both funding agencies should deconstruct sustainability by adopting a vertical rather than a hierarchical perspective of understanding that hails from the community's point of view. Meaningful, genuine and purposeful consultations should be made with the local community if viable long-term sustainability is to be achieved. The self-determination of the community is vital in promoting a meaningful sustainability of grassroots and home-grown peacebuilding and conflict transformation. The role of civil society as the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values is pivotal in promoting self-determination, political freedom and in resisting oppressive foreign development policies

(Mac Ginty and Williams 2009). The tools of civil society activism such as the media, trade unions, business, professional associations, and voluntary and church groups constitute key voices within the community especially in supporting or challenging the government and other development organisations (Ibid).

The respondents in this study clearly indicate that sustainability cannot be measured via economic indicators alone; rather it also needs to be monitored and evaluated through social indicators. Effective evaluation of sustainability in terms of trust building, reconciliation, and community development requires a multi-level approach. Thus, a multimodal and multi-level peacebuilding approach is essential in reconciling western and indigenous models of peacebuilding and conflict transformation (Byrne and Keashly 2000). The multi-track multimodal approach assists various actors to recognize that: (1) complex and dynamic conflict milieus demand a flexible and sensitive approach to building theoretical models based on practitioner and protagonist input; (2) conflict resolution and peacebuilding necessitate a multi-modal complementarity approach at multiple levels; (3) a variety of intervention activities and actors must be considered; and (4) local and external agencies are needed to select and coordinate a series of efforts to fit the specific conflict context (Ibid).

Moreover, Jeong (2005) observes that peacebuilding in post-conflict societies requires a holistic approach encompassing: design, security and demilitarization, political transition, development, reconciliation and social rehabilitation. Central to this approach is “coordination,” which acts as a fabric to bond various endeavours in the peacemaking and conflict transformation process (Byrne and Keashly 2000). Coordination is essential due to complexities and specialities involved in peacemaking and conflict resolution processes (Jeong 2005). Consequently, the donors and community leaders should embrace an integrative, holistic, multi-level or multimodal approach to accommodate the expressed needs

of all stakeholders, to create a sense of inclusion, and facilitate the ownership of sustainable conflict transformation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding.

Fourth, many respondents observe that unilateralism, exclusion and a rigid bureaucracy combined with the underlying assumption that peace can be “bought” with funds has resulted in the promotion of some “synthetic” peace projects and a likelihood of a relapse into chaos after the funding ends. Since 2007, major political milestones in Northern Ireland such as power sharing and devolution have concealed a highly polarised society characterised by sectarianism, community divisions and the legacy of protracted conflict (Knox 2010: 13-28). The Freudian “talking cure” is especially important in facilitating the ventilation of grievances and the establishment of history (Mac Ginty and Williams 2009: 46-71). The liberal peace facilitated through market, policy, and, institutional reforms are a springboard towards the transition to democracy and are especially important in addressing structural violence and historical injustices (Ibid). However, international organizations are mere “empty vessels” driven by the strategic, political and economic interests of the superpowers as they are caught up in the “soft power” struggle that makes them act in prescribed ways to reinforce the position of power holders and thwart attempts by power seekers to achieve a more egalitarian share of resources (Mac Ginty and Williams 2009, 46-71). Trust building and goodwill go beyond political realignments; they entail community leaders, donors, and other stakeholders reaching out and engaging in sincere and honest deliberations about the past and the future. Donors and community leaders must nurture trust building and goodwill by facilitating genuine consultations and cross-community relationships driven by mutual understanding and accommodation of bi-communal expressed needs and the willingness to address them.

Consequently, we need to question the role of third parties such as external funding agencies in conflict resolution and the transformational peacebuilding process in developing

countries. For example, did the signing of the BA make any significant contribution to trust building, reconciliation and development prospects in Northern Ireland? Quoting Darby (2006), Mac Ginty and Williams (2009) observe that the signing of a multiparty peace accord is unlikely to end violence and that trust building, reconciliation, and community development requires looking beyond institutional concepts such as conflict settlement and management, democratization, reconstruction, disarmament and reintegration. Instead, deeper home-grown mechanisms that actively involve whole populations in finding long-term solutions to protracted conflicts should be the focus of the intervention (Ibid). There is a need to bridge the gap between consociationalists who argue that opposing identities cannot be integrated and social transformationists who advocate for active participation and involvement of the civil society in greater peacebuilding initiatives (Knox 2010). The local community and their leaders should be empowered to appraise and monitor the impact of the western peace paradigms and to reject them if they do not resonate with their local realities (Mac Ginty 2008). Donors should respect the expressed needs of the local people and accommodate their ideas in local peace projects.

The unilateral, forcefully imposed and predetermined script of donor-driven peace leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Do we dismiss the liberal peace approaches altogether and persevere with its implications or do we embrace the liberal peace paradigm and continue to swallow the bitter pill? Lederach (2005), in his *Moral Imagination*, notes that while foreign aid has partially failed to facilitate sustainable peacebuilding initiatives, human beings have the capacity to imagine responses that while rooted in the chaotic nature of the real world are capable of rising above the destructive patterns and produce constructive patterns that do not yet exist. Consequently, foreign aid should not entirely be dismissed; instead, the donors, community leaders, and other actors involved in peacebuilding initiatives in Northern Ireland should be capable of working together to rise above and rehabilitate the

destructive patterns of the liberal peace paradigm towards nurturing a more people-friendly approach. Other scholars who share a similar perspective observe that properly targeted foreign aid has the potential of addressing structural violence and facilitating conflict transformation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding (Jeong 2005; McGarry and O'Leary, 2006a, 2006b).

Trust building and reconciliation are pivotal in reconstruction and community development (Mac Ginty 2008). However, "reconstruction" encompasses short-term relief and long-term development and extends far beyond physical reconstruction to include the provision of livelihoods, reformed types of governance, and the repairing of fractured societal relationships (Ibid). As illustrated by the respondents in this study, community development should not merely be a technocratic exercise of rebuilding shattered infrastructure but a political activity with the potential to effect profound social and cultural change and to remodel the nature of interaction between and among the affected groups. Conflicts are complex and require multiple lenses that focus on the immediate situation, underlying patterns and context, and the conceptual framework towards effective transformation (Lederach 2003). In other words, different lenses are required to see a particular portion of reality, and need to be integrated together in order to see the whole picture. Hence, as Lederach (2005, 2006) observes, while multiple lenses address specific aspects of conflict, they should be integrated together in order to see the whole conflict.

The civil society has a key role to play in bringing into focus the whole picture of a conflict, and is a catalyst for social inclusion and renewal of the political economy (Little 2002). Through civil society, the hegemony of unilateral political economy is challenged, thereby enabling public spaces that accommodate the voices of the marginalized and the vulnerable communities in the society to thrive (Ibid). The civil society constitutes a differentiated space in which a diversity of actors engage in a multiplicity of activities and in

which the construction of an alternative political economy is essential to challenge the bureaucratic structures and to accommodate the expressed needs of the vulnerable and marginalized groups (Little 2002).

In sum, while the beneficiaries perceive both funds in Northern Ireland to be bureaucratic and detached from the local reality, they also believe there is a need to embrace a grassroots-up approach that accommodates the expressed needs of the target beneficiaries to nurture trust building, reconciliation, and community development. The donors, civil society, community leaders, politicians, and other actors in the peacebuilding process must embrace shared perspectives towards the definition of the conflict, interventions, and the implementation of peace initiatives. Such an inclusive process will nurture understanding, forgiveness, reconciliation, conflict transformation and the mutual envisioning of a peaceful future.

Conclusion

This article indicates that the building of trust and goodwill in Northern Ireland and the Border Area still lies on a shaky foundation. The impact of both funds' bureaucracies continues to nurture suspicion and tension among the community. Rather than encouraging genuine participation in the peace process, the funds may have nurtured some synthetic cross-community projects that threaten the enormous investment that has been made in building a lasting peace in Northern Ireland and the Border Area. The sustainability of the peace process can be achieved through an authentic and meaningful dialogue and purposeful consultations with the community that would promote local ownership and sustainability of the Northern Ireland peace process.

Scholars have suggested different interventions in post-agreement societies including: liberal peace (Paris 2004; Gamba 2006), listening to local populations (Mac Ginty 2008), economic development (Nordstrom 2004), nation building (Williams 2006), cultural

promotion (Cramer 2006; Chabal and Daloz 1999, 2006), and giving war a chance (Luttwark 1999). However, it is important to note that not all of these recommendations may be applicable everywhere. Many have indeed failed to build peace or transform conflicts. So, what is the way forward? Mac Ginty and Williams (2009) observe that a sustainable impact would be achieved by focusing more on what is specific to any reconstruction “event” and less on what is generic. In the case of Northern Ireland, it is important that the expressed needs of the target beneficiaries be accommodated in the peacebuilding initiatives that would promote ownership and sustainability of the peace process.

In sum, it is important to note that people’s reaction to uncertainty impacts the quality of relationships and the peace process as defined by a law of diminishing expectations. Participatory decision making and democratic planning empower peripheral populations to promote their ownership over the peace process (Lederach 2006). One minor change can lead to a difference in the dynamic of conflict as self-realization and self-healing then radiate out to include forgiveness of self and nurture the necessary agency to take risks for peace. Sustainable conflict transformation and peacebuilding need different conceptual lenses that are culturally determined in a process that encourages and nurtures consensual agreement, relationship repair, “gentle action creativity,” trauma reduction, and a new kind of truth telling centred around healing and forgiving, promoting human dignity not humiliation, and hearing other constructive stories of peaceful relations (Senehi 2008). This discussion has indicated that economic aid is not a panacea for conflict transformation (MacGinty 2008; Ryan 2007). On the contrary, social and community capital is important in facilitating trust building, reconciliation, community development, and possible conflict transformation.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Jessica Senehi, Tom Boudreau, and Hamdesa Tusso and the reviewers of *Peace and Conflict Studies* for reading various drafts of this paper. This research project is supported by a three-year research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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