



THE
Corrymeela
COMMUNITY

OVERARCHING THEMES THE CORRYMEELA COMMUNITY BELIEVES TO BE RELEVANT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRONGER AND MORE COHERENT POLICY ON THE PROGRAMME FOR 'COHESION, SHARING AND INTEGRATION'

In responding to the OFMDFMNI consultation about the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Programme Document we welcome the fact that, through relatively recent political agreements, there is now the possibility to make fear, destructive conflict and violence a thing of the past as well as model new co-operative ways of working together for the wider 'common good'.

We look to the combining of:

- the energies of committed cross party political leadership;
- public services provided on an equitable basis;
- the voluntary and paid commitment of civil society organisations to collaboratively engage with one another

to generate a robust public sphere (Edwards, Civil Society 2009) where citizens from diverse backgrounds are: affirmed as equal members of one increasingly **cohesive** and diverse society; enabled to **share** the best of their traditions and cultures without threat or fear; encouraged to enrich and **integrate** the wider shared society.

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Reconciliation practice is hard work and complex. It is about processes and structures (Lederach, The Little Book of Conflict Transformation, 2003) that have:

- relationship building between people from diverse political beliefs, diverse communities, identity groups and governments at its core;
- structural work that addresses the need to offer equitable treatment for all and secure the place of each citizen regardless of background and tradition also at its centre.

Against a painful and violent history as a backdrop, and against a background whereby most, if not all of us, have, at times, moved towards those we think we are like and away from those we were told we were different to, all people from diverse political, public and civil society experiences do not find this easy work. Yet, if we are to generate a cohesive, shared and integrated society it is important and essential that we have a shared societal vision to move us forward together.

In search of the above goal we looked for a well crafted policy document. However within the current document:

We regret that, although this Executive signed off the SEUPB Framework for the Peace 3 Programme in May 2007¹ that contained the Hamber and Kelly principles² of reconciliation practice and that drew

¹ The main aims of the PEACE III Programme are to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation by assisting operations and projects which help to reconcile communities and contribute towards a shared society for everyone. The programme is divided into two main priorities. These are:

- Reconciling Communities
- Contributing to a Shared Society

It delivers these priorities through "themes" - these themes are:

- To build positive relations at the local level
- To acknowledge the past

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on the 2005 'Shared Future' policy, no reference is made to these reconciliation principles that underpinned the securing of substantial further European Union monies.

We regret that there is no set of clear definitions given for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (see page 3 in our fuller response document enclosed). While important aspirations, they would benefit from definition and underpinning values such as equity, diversity and interdependence (Eyben et al, University of Ulster, 1997), the values established by earlier extensive evidence based research by questionnaire, organisational audits and local community studies.

We would want any revised Policy draft to:

- Define the terms, Cohesion, Sharing and Integration;
- Establish underpinning values that all would work to;
- Centrally name the work of reconciliation and the needs of victims;
- List the five principles of reconciliation (Hamber & Kelly, Democratic Dialogue, Belfast, September 2004);
- Acknowledge the task of reconciliation as still being central;
- Honour the major financial support that has been offered to Northern Ireland by the European Union, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other major philanthropic sources that supported diverse peace and reconciliation programmes and activities over the past years.

While welcoming the CSI Draft Programme, we regret that this document does not recognise the considerable efforts of civil society, in some cases since at least 1965, often aligned with the willingness of far sighted public servants and supportive political representatives on these islands, regionally and locally, that has gone before.

We regret that this document offers few links to earlier research evidence about the role and significance of many reconciliation initiatives, large and small in scale³.

It is our view that the progress secured in Northern Ireland can, and is, being drawn on internationally. However this CSI policy needs to respect the diverse internal and external actors that, in addition to local political leadership, have promoted and secured a way out of conflict and a priority on healing and reconciliation.

If there was a more open acknowledgement by Government of the potential partnership they could promote with those same internal and external partners then this could be a new stage on progress to a more open and mutually respectful society.

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- To create shared public spaces
 - To develop key institutional capacity for a shared society

² <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/dd/report17/ddreport17.pdf>

³ <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/cgi-bin/htsearch>

We list some examples of the body of practice and policy development the Corrymeela Community has been part of and that inform our existence as a cross community voluntary agency committed to reconciliation since 1965. We are, and were, not alone in this work and urge the diverse parties of the NI Executive to acknowledge and learn from the considerable body of innovative reconciliation practice that exists in many towns, villages and cities locally in any subsequent CSI re-drafting.

Looking back to a time before the 'Equality and Good Relations' legislation this work implicitly covered all the categories that then entered the legislation. Since the legislation we have explicitly drawn attention to these themes, both in equality and good relations terms.

The lens of experience we bring, in common with many other groups includes:

The Corrymeela Community has worked since 1965 to promote work, practices and policies rooted in a respect for difference, a wish to tackle inequality and challenging essentialist beliefs of a religious, political or ethnic nature that would narrow the base of this diverse society.

We have consistently attended to:

the duty of political leadership through organising political conferences starting with the political conference in 1966 when the first public discussion of Catholics and Protestant being involved in Government equally together were named and explored (T. O' Neill, Corrymeela, April 8, 1966); the hosting over many years, up to the mid 90's, of **private and public meetings between diverse parties** when Governments and Civil Society were searching for an inclusive peace process; the development of curricula for **teacher education and residential inter schools programmes** about mutual understanding and community relations, history, citizenship and politics since 1966; the development of innovative **youth work training programmes and local and residential learning practices** supportive of mutual understanding and inclusion since 1966; creating year long opportunities for **volunteers** from 18 years upwards with diverse educational backgrounds to work with volunteers from around the world in a residential 'serve and learn programme' since 1970; the **development of at least 500 volunteers annually** in one year, three month, week long, weekends and day support roles. For some volunteers the ability to have this experience accredited offers them increased access opportunities to undertake further skills based training courses, as well as further and higher education; the development of internationally and locally acclaimed community based and residential '**future leadership**' programmes for young people from all social backgrounds since 1970; the development of a new **Face 2 Faith** programme for young people from diverse faith traditions locally (currently from the Muslim, Christian and Jewish traditions) with similar cohorts of young people from the United States and South Africa. more recently **using the experiences of reconciliation practice locally** to facilitate meetings between: young Israeli and Palestinian students; between Sikh and Muslim; and between teenage survivors of parents killed in various bombings associated with 9/11 in New York; the 7/7 London bomb; bombs creating death and destruction associated with various incidents in Madrid, Buenos Aires, Gaza, Israel as well as locally;

At a track two and track three diplomacy level (Montville, 1980) Corrymeela has, since 1965, convened, facilitated and supported numerous **seminars, conferences and working groups between diverse actors in the conflict** including members of victims groups, community representatives, cultural groups, faith leaders, local politicians, members of the British and Irish Governments, paramilitary organisations and organisations representing prisoner interests; the '**political co-operation in divided societies**' study conference organised by Corrymeela and Glenree (Gill & Macmillan, 1982) to critically explore diverse political models that might be imagined for the resolution of the NI conflict;

the quality of the future provision for **long-term prisoners** (1979; heinonlinebackup.com/hol/cgi-bin/get_pdf.cgi?handle...17);
the establishment of the **voluntary housing movement** (1974, www.nifha.org);
meetings initiated between **disabled police officers, former 'time served' politically motivated prisoners and victims** open to meeting with these different parties.

At the same time Corrymeela sought to stand with those whose needs in the midst of conflict were often slipping off the policy response table. This work was with support groups working with historically excluded people at diverse times in recent history such as the **early single parent support groups** (formerly Gingerbread Groups); **carers groups**; **LGBT support groups** that pre-dated the current Rainbow support groups; groups highlighting the need for new approaches to involving **people with special educational needs**, especially in support of the L'Arche Community and innovative **inter-generational** residential learning programmes.

We have promoted and sustained a number of **inter-church initiatives and inter-faith dialogue**; we have consistently been involved in **North South and East West Programmes of reconciliation** education;
members and friends of the community **have assisted in the creation of the Glenree Community**, in establishing Coventry-Iona -Corrymeela linkages, in the development of the Irish School of Ecumenics, and in linking local people with reconciliation centres in diverse European Centres, with programmes in Bosnia and Serbia and reconciliation programmes in places such as South Africa, Cameroon, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Argentina, El Salvador, Gaza, Israel, Japan, South Korea as well as in diverse programmes in urban and rural areas of the United States and Canada.

Members and supporters of Corrymeela have been involved in **trade union reconciliation** programmes; in managing **innovative controlled and maintained sector** inter-school programmes and in **Irish Medium** education; in the establishment of the **Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association**; in establishing a number of **integrated schools** and in **support to pilot refugee and asylum seeker** programmes as well as considerable support to local International Development programme and project linkages with developing countries.

Some members and supporters, from all traditions, have been **direct family members of victims of the conflict** and have sought to have the needs of all victims acknowledged. A former Centre Director of Corrymeela was one of two invited independent witnesses to the decommissioning of IRA weapons, in September 2005.

Other members have been involved in working in support of **vulnerable and violent young people**. Several of these programmes have been highlighted as best practice examples internationally and locally.

The Community gave **refuge to hundreds of children** from the Greater Ballymurphy area because of violence in the summer of 1970 and has consistently offered a **short-term sanctuary facility for intimidated people** and families from all sides of the conflict.

It is out of this longstanding and broad experience that our response emerges.

As only one of many organisations in this sector we regret that this CSI Policy document does not acknowledge this civil society legacy that has been a significant part of what became known as the Peace Process, when wider politics was unable to be so agreed and co-ordinated as now.

To return to the CSI Document

We regret that the experience of victims is not central in this document. For us there can be no new ways forward together in the future unless we find ways to openly and honestly acknowledge the past together, with all its pain and hurt, and honour those who have died or been injured in all that we do.

In a society where the contribution of women has been undervalued, this policy proposal omits this most important group of people. For a document claiming to be rooted in equality and human rights this is a major omission.

In all our earlier work we were of the view that whilst local communities, faith traditions, community organisations and broader society were essential to developing a new and shared society, this also needed the **leadership of political and state / public institutions and we return again to this central need for political leadership.**

1. We have concerns that this document does not sufficiently commit political leadership and public institutions, within their own ways of working with staff and in delivering services, to promote reconciliation as well as make it possible for civil society and local community organisations to play their part as well. This document appears to lay this duty on local communities primarily. This is something we challenge strongly.

2. This document seems to ignore the previous policy achievements, admittedly established under Direct Rule (A Shared Future, 2005), and therefore potentially not as widely welcomed and supported locally as programmes promoted by a devolved all-party local administration might eventually be.

3. We regret the scant attention paid to the need for an audit and challenge function specifically around programme targets established across all Departments. In the earlier Shared Future Policy of 2005 these targets were stronger than those apparently established in this current document and they fall far short in their scope and in the ways in which they are audited and accounted for.

4. In this document there is a failure by our elected government to make the case for joining up work on addressing reconciliation and promoting ease with difference, tackling inequality and securing sustainable regional economic development⁴.

We acknowledge that many in civil society have, to date, also failed in that regard and we commit ourselves, as a result of this consultation, to do more in this regard.

The more recent work of Gaffikin and Morrissey⁵ re-emphasises these inter connections. Successful economic regions need to have high levels of ease with difference (reconciliation) and low levels of inequality. The proposed CSI Programme appears to us to continue the 'silo-ing' of community relations, reconciliation and trust building work outside other equally important and linked areas of work-addressing poverty, inequality and economic development.

If we cannot build a society, with political and civic leadership across the board, that promotes these three strands- reconciliation has to be explicitly central to policies that address poverty and economic

⁴ **The Other Crisis - Restoring Competitiveness to Northern Ireland's Regional Economy**

Frank Gaffikin; Mike Morrissey in *Local Economy*, 1470-9325, Volume 16, Issue 1, 2001, Pages 26 –45

⁵ **Community Cohesion and Social Inclusion: Unravelling a Complex Relationship** Frank Gaffikin & Mike Morrissey

development- in an integrated manner, this society will slip in economic terms and the old inter-communal fears will dominate and drive people apart.

5. In the experience of the Corrymeela Community we, as citizens living here, have often taken the easier road of seeking the comfort that our historical traditions appear to offer each of us at times of unease. We have been diminished as people committed to reconciliation when we did so. CSI needs underpinned by a new societal culture of openness to others. In any forward looking society, especially one where the diversity is growing every day, it is time to create a more cohesive, shared and integrated society and underpin this aspiration with different programmes, relationships and structures that improve our quality of life through the greater acceptance and inclusion of newer citizens who have come here as well as those who, for a long time, may have lived here and been formerly excluded.

There are many gifts and values that the different identity traditions give us and there are also a number of lenses about how 'the other' has been portrayed, and even feared, that need questioned. This is a major challenge for middle class people. It is not only to be left at the door of people from working class backgrounds.

The shallow ground that is not so well tilled is the ground where we meet as strangers, at least initially uncertain of how to act and respond. This is the challenging ground for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration policies.

Here the future oriented task is to build **new events between different people** that, repeated, can **build new fragile platforms or structures on which new forms of meeting and engagement** can develop (Eyben et al, 2002). This is intensive, sustained and long-term ground breaking work that will deliver the aims of promoting a Cohesive, Shared and Integrated future society.

6. CSI must, in our view, be an across Government duty and responsibility, overseen by the First and deputy First Ministers with the support of all Ministers and audited and challenged by the primary leadership figures in the major parties.

Such work cannot only be left at the door of local communities, especially those with few resources or in places where there still resides fear and distrust. We are of the view that this current CSI Programme document does not envisage this being the task of all people, civil society groups and political, public and civic institutions.

For us, this is a societal task; this needs a societal political, public and civic vision within which those who are very vulnerable and those that experience deep problems and challenges can be supported and carried by the wider commitment and support of all.

7. This society, as so many ethnic frontier⁶ societies, has developed a culture of avoidance and politeness. The downplaying of the conflict that many have lived through since the late 1960's in this CSI document is an example of such avoidance and politeness.

In our experience as a cross tradition group, having a diverse governance structure and in hosting and in facilitating robust engagements between people from diverse state, community, religious, political and racial backgrounds, **avoidance of facing into the past in order to move forward in a new way together is a flawed approach. "...Opening up the body-personal and the body-politic to such truth**

⁶ Wright, F., (1987), Northern Ireland: A Comparative Analysis, Gill & Macmillan

about the past strengthens public will and public institutions in the commitment, “Never again.” (Shriver, Belfast, 2007).

Politeness is when sensitive discussions are not held between diverse people and people do not learn that such discussions are possible. Beyond politeness people can develop new relationships, understandings and structures that enable people to move into a more open, engaged and mutual future. Such dynamics reinforce old concepts of separateness; old notions of homogenous communities that this society needs to question as, within itself, we become more diverse.

Being together, with our different hurts and experiences, and seeking new relationships and structures that support all moving forward together is a central experience in the current Pilot Victims and Survivors Forum to which several of our members belong and from which wider society can learn.

If we are to secure a more open space for the benefit of all today, and our future generations, we must promote openness to difference and question public service models of delivery as well as community organisation models that perpetuate division and separation. This needs political and civic engagement.

8. Essentially our reading of this programme proposal is that OFMDFMNI see this priority as belonging to parts but not all of Government. There are many areas of practice supportive of reconciliation that all Departments could contribute to that are notable by their absence from this Programme proposal. Oversight and commitment on CSI must be the shared and agreed duty of the whole of Government.

Whilst the inclusion of interfaces, safety of vulnerable groups, sectarianism, race and hate crime, equality and disadvantage and shared spaces are welcome and important themes, they primarily draw on some aspects of Justice, Education, Social Development, Environment and Culture, Arts and Leisure and others are not named. This is why we come to the above conclusion.

In a comprehensive and core policy approach issues of housing, health, community safety, victims, politically motivated prisoners, children’s welfare and youth development policies, young people and violent sub cultures, young people in prison, the care and support of families and the elderly feeling secure, exclusion policies in schools, cultural commemorations and education, innovation and enterprise, at least, need to be integrated.

In a comprehensive approach the contribution of the environment and agriculture to enhance opportunities for more people to learn, to develop skills and imagine new job creation potential; the role of Further and Higher Education being harnessed to people learning together and addressing both sensitive and challenging issues around CSI would be envisaged.

9. Facing into a more cohesive, shared and integrated future.

Improved relationships between all people whose primary identity is one of citizen is the only base on which a **cohesive and stable** local democracy will be secured. In a more cohesive ‘citizen based’ society then the multiple identities people also have can become **shared secondary** points of reference, **integrated** into life together and not in conflict with developing the common good.

Civil society organisations must question the extent to which they promote concepts of community that have essentialist or mono-cultural perspectives on community rather than perspectives that are complex and permeable.

One central theme for all Government is to build a renewed faith in, and support for, public order. Ambivalence to violence can no longer be the hallmark of different groups from all traditions here.

In a society where the significance and influence of religious groups is high, there needs to be a challenge function identified for them about how, drawing on how they benefit from charitable tax laws and, sometimes, public finance, they are contributors to a more open and interdependent society and the extent to which their values, beliefs and actions support that practice.

In a society where trade unions have, historically, been to the fore in challenging sectarian, racist and discriminatory actions they are a glaring omission from this document, apart from the good practice of Trademark, which itself builds on a long history of trade union practice.

The North - South and East - West dimensions of promoting a changed and more open society also needs explored as there are policies within all jurisdictions that each can learn from and imitate through the diverse North - South meetings of local legislatures, and British and Irish meetings structures.

10. Remaining separate, whether acknowledged or not, is to root relationships with others in open or hidden rivalry and hostility.

Experience in other societies of separate but equal developments prove that this is no equality at all. Separateness is never benign but always conceals hostility, violence and threat. Separateness is the enemy of good relations between different citizens from diverse backgrounds.

We believe that the nature of community or society that we should be aspiring to is one that challenges narrow and exclusive communities. Once you grant some privilege to gathering and not to dissociation, you leave no room for the other, for the radical otherness of the other, for the radical singularity of the other." (Derrida, 1997,14).

11. If we are to become a reconciling society at ease with difference, have lower levels of inequality and with the potential to become a successful diverse economic region capable of supporting our future generations of young people, our future together demands that we are much more diverse than just accommodating the historically competing political and religious traditions of the past.

One experience that the major parties here hold in common is the experience of being sometimes excluded and the alienation and hurt that this caused them. We fully understand that our political system means that, on the one hand, there are times when politicians have to be responsive to their identity related electorates and, on the other hand, increasing opportunities to work to a broader 'common good' approach.

In such a society, government will have potential conflicts of interest if it is seen to be both the promoter of policy and the agency that delivers those policies at the detailed local level. A strong, all party government needs a robust, and at a distance, critical civil society sector. Such a sector will, by its nature and focus, be very issue centred and each organisation will rightly campaign for its particular social issue and not always see the wider view.

In such a society there is a place for some specific 'arms length from Government' bodies whose task is to critically engage with the general flow of how policy is delivered in general as well as have its ability to attend to very specific local circumstances, in concert with local groups. This is not a task for central government, nor always for elected local councils either.

Concluding remarks

Despite all of the above critical comments we still honour the task of political leaders in a society emerging from conflict. They are to be respected because they placed themselves before the electorate.

We urge the present political leadership to promote and secure societal commitments to promote a more open society, above and beyond the important minima demanded by the existing Equality and Good Relations legal platform.

We encourage the Executive as a whole, to work towards a political, public and civil society compact that:

- **In Cohesion** terms, collectively makes the case for living together here justly as citizens;
- **In Sharing** terms, emphasises that people of all ages respect difference;
- **In Integration** terms, promotes interdependent and intergenerational relationships across differences of ability, gender, levels of caring responsibilities, marital status, religious belief, political opinion, origin, orientation and age.

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