

A publication of the Consortium of Pobal and the Community Relations Council

PEACE III Theme 1.1 CONFERENCE



L-R Duncan Morrow (CEO, Community Relations Council), Jim Dennison (Director, European Programme Community Relations Council), Councillor Naomi Long, Lord Mayor of Belfast, Paddy McGinn (Manager, Pobal) and Jim Fitzpatrick (BBC's The Politics Show) open the PEACE III conference at Spires Mall Belfast.

Learning the Lessons Planning for the Challenges Ahead

10th December 2009
Spires Conference Centre, Belfast

Community Relations Council



INTRODUCTION

The conference was opened by **Mr. Paddy McGinn** on behalf of the Consortium of Pobal and Community Relations Council who outlined to the conference part of the Consortium's overall support role to the local authority led partnerships. The Consortium has been working with the partnerships for over two years where together they have jointly faced many challenges and made significant progress. This conference was an opportunity to discuss and acknowledge the progress made and lessons learnt to date while also identifying the challenges ahead for the next 12 months.

The overall objective of the event was outlined as primarily to acknowledge and take stock of the progress made to date; identify the lessons learned and impact of work to date that has addressed sectarianism and racism, with particular emphasis on sharing this learning across all the partnerships so that good practice can be adopted and passed on.

A warm introductory welcome was provided by the **Mayor of Belfast City Council, Councillor Naomi Long**. Naomi recognised and thanked all players for the vital restless hard work and massive contribution that goes on in interface areas in Belfast to make peace a reality. Political institutions lie in the community foundations in which they are elected and so local work has an important impact at the macro political level. Naomi alluded to the vital work of peace building and reconciliation, while also dealing with sectarianism and racism as key to our economic prosperity and vital to our future sustainability in making society more stable. The key theme for Naomi's term of office is "Belfast without barriers" and whilst people automatically think about the peace walls, barriers exist also in people's minds – barriers that prevent them from being fully inclusive within society and divide them from others within society. The aspiration for Belfast is to create a stable, open, safe, diverse, welcome inclusive society where difference can be embraced and celebrated.

HIGHLIGHTING LESSONS LEARNED

Three Peace Partnership presentations were made highlighting how supported projects are making a practical and tangible difference under the areas of sectarianism, racism and cross border work.

1. Sectarianism Theme

Ms Hazel Francey, Belfast City Council discussed how our traditional history of defining our territory creates issues of segregation and social deprivation within the Belfast area. Despite the Peace process and establishment of the Assembly, sectarian motivated violence is still high and 10 new barriers have been erected and many more increased and heightened. With over 70 divisions Belfast, has the highest number of sectarian interfaces in Northern Ireland. Since EU Integration the demography of Belfast has changed and this gives rise to additional challenges, particularly given our history of antagonism to difference. One of the challenges for the Partnership is to build and create shared cultural spaces and develop actions to open up the city and prevent further polarisation.

George Newell from Ballymacarret Arts and Cultural Society discussed the Changing Attitudes Programme which works with groups in North/West Belfast and Inner East Belfast. The main aim of the programme is to challenge sectarianism and racism by creating understanding that despite different attitudes and perspectives people often have the same values and can all live together.

2. Racism Theme

Ms Justyna McCabe from the Challenge for Change Project funded under the Southern Cluster Partnership highlighted the various problems experienced by the Black Minority Ethnic (BME) Community from prejudice, discrimination to racism. The presentation highlighted how the Challenge for Change Project aims to facilitate greater involvement of people from BME communities in civic, community and political life, and increase community cohesion.

3. Cross Border Theme

Mr. Garry Martin, Donegal County Council gave an excellent input into the informative learning process engaged to identify the key issues and challenges within Donegal CDP Peace and Reconciliation Partnership. The key to a successful cross border project is like any other relationship – there needs to be a ‘common spark’, something in it for all parties. Engagement should not be forced; it should be natural and organic. To deliver an effective cross border project you need to be aware that it takes time for trust and understanding to develop, sectarianism is experienced differently in different areas, the jurisdictions have different regulations such as currency differences and different organisational cultures.

THE FUTURE – MAINSTREAMING PEACE AND SUSTAINING PARTNERSHIP

Three Panel Speakers made presentations on mainstreaming peace and sustaining partnership.

1. **Mr. Pat Colgan, SEUPB** pointed to the uniqueness of this conference event as it includes a good mix of the various actors including the funders, the implementers, local authorities and the community and voluntary sector. He congratulated and gave tribute to the Consortium of CRC and Pobal for organising the event.

The mainstreaming of peace can be identified in firstly the obvious cessation of the conflict. Secondly and most importantly and engrained in the Peace Programme is that it is about changing the hearts and minds of people and the divisions within society. At another level the work with local authorities and organisations is attempting to mainstream peace. The fourth issue is the policy agenda at the end of the programme into the future, after 2013.

The five key dimensions to sustaining partnership involves: Participation, Openness, Shared Ownership, Representative and Mutual Respect. The challenge to move from Peace II to PEACE III has been challenging. As this is probably the last Peace Programme as the likelihood of having a Peace IV is not very high, the core issue for PEACE III is addressing the legacy of the Peace Programmes. Setting up the clusters has been an extraordinarily difficult exercise and it is important to acknowledge this achievement particularly as the clusters are on a voluntary basis. Great tribute and credit was paid to those involved for helping make this happen as it is a remarkable achievement and positions us very well for the future.

2. **Dr. Tony Crooks, former CEO of Pobal** detailed the stages in mainstreaming as obtained from experience gained during the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme in the Republic of Ireland. The presentation defined the principles and elements of partnership and concluded by detailing the benefits of partnership when based on trust.
3. **Heather Moorhead from Northern Ireland Local Government Association** presented the partnership approach with regard to local government reform in Northern Ireland. The need for a more holistic approach has been identified to tackle issues of concern and these are seen as best dealt with at a community planning and local government level. The vision is to agree upon what we want to achieve and then plan together as to how we achieve the outcome using a citizen focus. In essence there is strong agreement on the need for a partnership approach.

An interactive dramatic input was provided by Smashing Times Theatre Company in a Theatre Forum on the theme of racism. Many attendees participated in the drama, attempting to change the course of actions.

The presentations are downloadable at www.pobal.ie and www.nicrc.org.uk

LEARNING THE LESSONS AND THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Dr. Duncan Morrow, CEO of the Community Relations Council was tasked on behalf of the Consortium with setting the context on the conference proceedings, and the following are the key points from his address:

The EU Peace Programme for the eligible region of Northern Ireland and the border counties has amounted over the 15 years to one (if not the) most generous international funding packages ever available to support peace within the region.

- There is a real risk that if we just manage crisis when the money goes the crisis returns.
- This level of investment allows us to create a new type of 'norm'. The Peace Programme is not about just delivering a programme of activities; it is about an investment for our future.
- The conflict has designed where we do things (live, work, play) and with whom. At some level shared communities needs to question whether such decisions are by choice or driven by fear. Conflict has also left a legacy of differential relationships not just to each other but also to public services.
- The process of peace is not just about meeting and chatting but about real change in people's lives. It involves changes in our practices, principles, approach, procedures, rituals, creating new norms.
- Partnership is a tool where we all sit together and decide not just how I get the best share of the cake but how best the cake is to be distributed in the best interest of everyone and thereby make the biggest difference and maximise impact. Local Authorities have a critical role here as they have responsibility as the leading civic institution.
- Sectarianism and racism must be tackled together as they are intimately linked. The issue of how we live with difference and how we integrate with others will continue into the future.
- Claims to territory and the implications of saying an area belongs to "us" but not "you", is significant in where we live but also means that it closes down the use of services by others such as the use of swimming pools or football pitches within an area. It affects where investment goes as certain areas considered "closed" as half the population can't use it.
- Opening up territories to everyone should be part of the agenda and the future direction.
- The real goal is that we learn to work together differently, problem solving through partnership while improving their area for the betterment of everyone. This is what is meant by the new normal and the opportunities that PEACE III Theme 1.1 can create.

SUMMARY OF GROUP WORK

The Consortium collected the points raised by the participants in the group work session. The following is the record of their views on the three questions discussed:

Question 1: What have you learned about peace-building from the activities your partnership has undertaken to address sectarianism and racism? (positive or negative)

POSITIVE

- There is a general acceptance and agreement that we do not want to return to the past. This creates a genuine interest and willingness to engage and progress. Building relationships are core and fundamental to the sustainability of the peace process.
- The process of developing the Plans identified the issues/problems that were not even recognised as existing.
- Confidence is growing within the Programme at a partnership level to addressing the hard issues. There is a willingness to get involved at an individual level and in many cases there is Board buy-in.
- It takes time to build trust and maintain support. The PEACE III programme is a legacy to the work done under Peace I and II and the relationships previously established. There is now a network of cross community and cross border groups and workers.

- The flexibility of delivery approaches gives the scope to respond to a broad range of needs. There is a need for innovation and creativity. One size does not fit all. Integration projects look at more innovation ways of engaging with each other on a cross border, anti-racism, anti-sectarianism basis. Church-faith based programmes are ready to come together to discuss issues once the space has been created.
- Peacebuilding requires genuine partnership working. It needs to build on effective practice and concentrate on building communities – not just about spending money. Successful peacebuilding needs to be located within the communities to establish a sense of ownership. Therefore the importance of shared public spaces and shared projects cannot be underestimated. Small grants projects can make a big difference. Also Debriefing sessions produce better applications.
- A common approach is needed for understanding and addressing racism. The BME community are often consulted but not given any input. The Peace Plans are an opportunity to create a mandate to embrace diversity and multiculturalism.

NEGATIVE

- It is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of PEACE III. Much of the work will be difficult to measure – importance of applying the Aid for Peace correctly. The slow pace of the programme only highlights that there is no quick fix to many of the issues.
- Timeframe – unrealistic objectives set to tight timeframes. Time was needed to build relationships within the partnerships themselves so that they became comfortable expressing themselves.
- Spending targets under N+2 takes priority over development work and achieving goals.
- There is a huge change from PEACE II to PEACE III – tackling more hard line issues, difficulty in linking racism and sectarianism to PEACE III. There is a lack of appropriate skills and capacity to deal with certain issues. Overall there is a need to develop capacity to enable and deal with effective engagement on hard hitting themes. This lack of capacity is also evident within community groups. They find it difficult to tackle some of the hard issues, carry out all the administrative work and meet targets. Groups can often become disengaged from the work.
- Peace Plans were written prior to the formation of the partnerships and so it can be difficult to get institutional and political buy-in. Concern was expressed about the exorbitant consultant fees charged for producing Peace Plans.
- There is a large diversity of issues and many different approaches to partnership. Difficult to engage with ethnic minority communities as they are a small percentage of the population and are potentially very vulnerable. Racism can occur not only at individual level but at an institutional level.
- Too much bureaucracy makes it difficult for groups to engage. Delays with the issuing of guidance notes meant that the goal posts were constantly changing. Audit and accountability requirements are viewed as a lack of trust in the local authorities/district councils given that these public bodies have existing accountability systems and audits in place.
- There are areas that people won't go into due to fear. It can be very difficult to engage with people/groups that don't want to engage. There are other issues and attitudes at play that are transgenerational attitudes of hate.
- It can be difficult to ensure that all members of the partnership have a representative mandate from their community/organisation rather than an individual tokenistic approach.
- Historically we are a society that does not adapt to change easily or accept 'others'. There is a need to 'walk before we run' as we are undergoing peacebuilding and simultaneously great changes are occurring within our public administration and processes.

Question 2: Considering our discussion, what are the main challenges facing Peace Partnerships in the delivery of their peace-building activities?

- Some people are holding onto the old processes of Peace I and II and are uncomfortable with digging deeper. PEACE III has moved away from 'hand-holding' to enabling communities to do projects for themselves.
- How do we change organisational cultures? There is a need to tackle institutional sectarianism or racism and how it sustains divisions.
- How do we capture the learning of the groups and plan for Phase II – evaluation is a major challenge, what are the outcomes and outputs of PEACE III?
- The meeting of N+2 targets while delivering peace activities is a challenging balance act. Tension exists between bureaucracy, accountability, creativity and capacity building. Bureaucracy is stifling community engagement. High level of funding criteria and bureaucracy can hinder work as the real, most deserving grassroots groups who have the potential to make a really big difference miss out on funding due to the complexity of the bureaucracy. This can lead to a feeling of neglect and resentment among groups.
- In some cases Peace Partnerships are overly involved in the small grants applications, assessment and spend rather than looking at the macro impacts of the funding on the ground.
- How do we deliver lasting change by engaging local communities and volunteers in peacebuilding work? It can be difficult to engage with those that need to be engaged with. There is a need in some cases to bypass the gatekeepers. Within the community and voluntary sector of the Republic the same self-appointed people are on all the various fora, putting others off participating.
- Partnerships need to be fully committed to addressing peace issues. How best to get the money onto the ground, to cover a diverse range of needs, get the best return and make the biggest impact. Accessing "no go areas" remains a challenge. It is also a challenge to support communities who are addressing truly challenging issues such as the silent sectarianism within the border counties.
- Some participants of cross community and cross border projects face hostility from within their own community.
- If members of 'so called partnership' do not feel equal, how can we expect people in communities to experience equality?
- There is competition for participants with other programmes. There is a need for co-ordination to ensure duplication does not occur.
- There is a need to target middle class areas (work to date has mainly targeted working class areas). The divide is not as visible but underlying attitudes exist. They are the people who will mainly hold high level positions of power now and into the future.
- Make local relationships better and push the boundaries for engagement encouraging local groups to collaborate rather than work independently. Don't confine relationship building to long distance relationships.
- The Impact and uncertainty of RPA – breaking up established partnerships and institutional change. Do the benefits of realigning the partnerships justify significant upheaval to progress and disrupting progress on the ground? There is a danger of taking 'the eye of the ball' and giving less time for ensuring sustainability and mainstreaming of peace and reconciliation work.
- There is a need to acknowledge and be aware that there are differing perspectives and understanding of what reconciliation is. These differences can be due to county tension, political situations, unprecedented political and community tension, and uncertainty within the partnerships themselves. In some cases there is a general denial within communities that sectarianism and racism is an issue. There is even a tendency to minimise these issues to the extent of not highlighting it within the peacebuilding process.
- Economic recession is making people less tolerant to difference and creating tensions with regard to the social welfare policy, particularly in attitudes towards other minority communities.

- An exit strategy needs to be developed to sustain or mainstream the peace work. The downturn in the economy makes it difficult to get institutional buy-in on the importance of this work.
- Need for a mechanism to share information of projects funded by different partnerships to avoid duplication and ensure complementarity.

Question 3: What do you suggest your Peace Partnership should do to address these challenges?

- More organisational structured engagement and buy-in from key decision makers from the top down.
- Adequate planning and management of the issues by the partnerships is essential.
- Consultation between partnerships. The need to share and disseminate best practice between the various partnerships. More networking opportunities. Need to create atmosphere of inclusivity where all feel comfortable expressing themselves.
- Evaluation is vital to ensure best value and evidence based data/outcomes to help promote the work and demonstrate its effectiveness and relevance.
- Systemic change needs to take place at all levels through effective communications. Communication is key with all stakeholders – the partnership members, groups, SEUPB.
- Councils need to have the ability (through their budget) to provide on the ground developmental support to groups to ensure the most deserving and most potential grassroots groups get assistance to develop and plan their projects and complete their forms correctly. Peace Partnerships shouldn't always take the easy option with already established projects but also build the expertise of other smaller groups who have little or no funding experience. Peace Partnerships should continue to involve stakeholders in a meaningful way. Ensure they have the right people on the partnership. In particular Peace Partnership should focus on work with young people and building the capacity of their partnerships.
- Possibly need to revisit the partnership model – partnership development. There is a need for the partnership members to work collectively with joined-up thinking, not just from their own "sides".
- Organise regular presentations from the community groups to the Peace Partnerships so they can get a flavour for what is being funded and the impact it is having on the ground.
- Partnerships should maintain the small grants but make it less bureaucratic. Flexible in approach and methodology.
- Build flexibility within the Peace Plans so they are able to react to differing circumstances and different issues within areas.
- There is a need to acknowledge that the whole country has suffered from sectarianism which needs to be addressed even if it's not tangible or obvious initially. In the Republic there is a perception that there are no problems and this leads to little real engagement. In other instances where groups do engage they may face hostility from within their own communities.
- Discussion at local level to integrate and mainstream sectarianism and racism. Commitment across all the partnerships is required for the BME platform to be addressed.
- There is still a training and capacity building requirement within the partnerships, especially relating to sectarianism and racism attitudes.
- Sustainability of projects has to incorporate volunteers and the community.
- Structures are required to facilitate the participation of new communities in the partnership process. Capacity building is required for all communities, including minority communities.
- A more focused direction and approach required from the SEUPB to the Partnerships. Communications from the SEUPB are in the form of meetings as opposed to in writing.
- Increased access such as viewing rights to the Peace database in order to share information about projects funded.



Smashing Times performers at the Conference

The Consortium of Pobal and the Community Relations Council has been commissioned by the Special European Union Programmes Body to support and assist the 14 Peace and Reconciliation Partnerships in the implementation of their peace and reconciliation plans under Theme 1.1. In addition, the Consortium is managing a global grant of €50m under Theme 1.2 of the PEACE Programme 2007-2013, 'Acknowledging and dealing with the past'.

If you have any comments or require additional copies, please contact:

Pobal: www.pobal.ie

Tel: +353 (1) 5117500

CRC: www.community-relations.org.uk

Tel: +44 (28) 90227500