

# Community Relations and Community Development

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## **Introduction**

*A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations Northern Ireland* makes a number of recommendations relating to community development/community relations and the interface between the two. The aim of this paper is to:

- present a summary of community relations/community development issues identified in *A Shared Future* (ASF) and the recommendations supported;
- provide an overview of debates/issues highlighted in current literature that relate to the promotion of community relations/community development in Northern Ireland;
- provide a summary of the present context for community relations/community development in Northern Ireland – including a summary of key policies and social actors;
- make recommendations on the translation of objectives contained in ASF and relating to community development/community relations into actions that are likely to contribute to overarching objectives.

## **Summary of Community Development/Community Relations (CD/CR) theme in ASF**

In relation to the CR/CR theme three priorities for action are identified in ASF:

- The Community Relations Unit in OFMDFM and the Voluntary and Community Unit in DSD will increasingly develop linked strategies

- Identification of best practice in the development of coherent CD and good relations practice
- All projects, whether single identity or cross community, will in future be tested in relation to the quality of the outcomes and the potential to promote the building of good relations.

ASF acknowledges the contribution that has been made by an ‘active and effective’ community development sector during the last 35 years of conflict in supporting disadvantaged communities (2.8.2). It also recognizes that effective community development work will be a ‘key factor’ in efforts to create a more peaceful society (2.8.3). The point is made, however, that in order to maximize potential, community development activity will need to ‘shift up a gear’ (2.8.3). During the conflict years, community development work tended to be largely reactive as it responded to the safety needs of communities during times of increased segregation. ASF states that it is now ‘imperative’ that CD practice seeks to ‘build relationships between the communities and to work to reduce tension and violence associated with sectarianism and segregation’ (2.8.3). In this respect, CD, ‘single identity’ and CR work in divided communities must become an integrated programme of activities and this must be reflected in closer working relations between the Government agencies with responsibility for CD and good relations (2.8.4).

ASF details the context for harnessing CD and CR work as follows:

- The community/voluntary sector has made a major contribution to the achievement of better relations between communities but there are major obstacles to be overcome in the achievement of community development that sees community relations at its core (2.8.5).
- It is important that the capacity of the community/voluntary sector to deliver community development should be maintained and reinforced (2.8.6) but it must be strengthened through mechanisms that also reinforce the delivery of good relations outcomes (2.8.7).
- Skills development and a review of support services for the community/voluntary sector are considered important priorities (2.8.7), though the terms of reference for each need to focus on good relations outcomes.

- A one size fits all approach to the problem of CD/CR is not likely to be effective as different communities have different needs that are likely to require bespoke solutions (2.8.9).
- Sections 2.8.10 to 2.8.15 of ASF focuses on the rationale for single identity work and the contribution it can make to enhancing good relations. Whilst it is accepted that SI projects can build confidence within communities that enables them to engage with others on a cross-community basis, there is also a danger with SI projects that they can ‘reinforce entrenched attitudes and stereotypes’. ASF makes the point that all CD programmes should ‘*be required to identify how they will address sectarian or racist behaviour to enable communities to work more effectively together and identify the expected good relations outcomes of their work*’ (2.8.13).

### ***Proposed Action***

In relation to the overarching plans for action ASF proposes that the Triennial Action Plans to be developed by 2006 should include detailed proposals for how government will progress an integrated approach to CD, good relations and reconciliation. Measures identified will be influenced by best practice in reducing division and building relations and this should be drawn from the collective experience of the many voluntary and community organizations that have demonstrated expertise in CD work that is sensitive to the promotion of good relations. With regard to the overarching theme of reconciliation Government will draw on the work of key organizations with this remit (2.8.17).

### **Background**

The voluntary and community sector is uniquely placed to contribute to tackling both the vertical sectarian divisions and the horizontal social class divisions in Northern Ireland. The sector is in essence about integration across divisions and tackling inequalities in an inclusive manner. The relationship between CD and CR has, however, been a contested one. Proponents of the former argue that CD is rooted in empowering civil society and is closely identified with community action (community relations, community service) community organization (community education) and community work

(community care and community economic development) (Knox and Monaghan, 2001). In the late 1980s, community relations became a policy priority for government, thus raising the profile of activity that was previously seen as *one* dimension of community development. The fact that effectiveness of community relations was deemed contingent on the structures and networks that had been established during the course of community development work and that funding for CR increased at a time when CD resources were diminishing led to some consternation and concern amongst CD proponents that the ‘tail was wagging the dog’ (Knox and Monaghan, 2001). The problem was compounded by the perception that the ‘top down’ CR agenda, which focused primarily on religious division, obscured underlying problems of disadvantage and powerlessness. Moreover, the packaging of the problem as one of *community* relations was interpreted as the State distancing itself from the contribution it may have made to the perpetuation of conflict and placing responsibility for the task of resolving essentially political problems in the hands of communities. Hall asks the following questions:

- Why does community relations funding not speak to the questions of power and privilege and access? Would the funders allow it to be utilized to this end?
- Underlying the community relations agenda is the assumption that the State is an honest broker, but is this really the case?

Hall (p.10).

The defensive ‘them and us’ nature of the CD/CR relationship in a divided society has been exacerbated by the competition for resources, advancing one position over another. Communities which have evolved in antagonism can perceive that the advancement of one threatens the other (CRC, 2005). This reinforces the fear that community relations somehow undermines community development and has a hidden agenda, and turns the process of community development, which is one of democracy and inclusion, into a process of outbidding in the mode of a zero-sum game. This raises questions about whether a process committed to improving the quality of life for all is in fact consistent with self-assertion and is open to the danger of what Amartya Sen has called ‘plural monoculturalism.’

### ***Interconnectedness between CD and CR in practice***

The relationship between CD and CR was considered in 2 major projects undertaken in 2001. The first (Knox and Monaghan, 2001) provides a 4 part typology of interpretation:

- **Integrated** – where CD and CR informs activities equally and the emphasis is on building community capacity whilst simultaneously building relations;
- **Major/Minor** – where CD is the main thrust of the work undertaken and there is an undercurrent of CR work. According to this approach the fulcrum may shift more towards CR if participants demonstrate willingness;
- **Common Issues** – where there is no overt CR remit but issues, which are of common concern to both communities, form the basis of activities;
- **Reactive** – where the emphasis is on reacting to the circumstances that present at any given time. Characteristic of work in flashpoint/volatile areas, the emphasis tends to be on community safety.

Knox and Monaghan make the point that this classification is not likely to be exhaustive and within each of the categories there exist many ‘more nuanced’ interpretations (Knox 2001). In an analysis of community groups/organizations whose activities were classified against one of the themes, it was found that ‘several struggled to come up with projects which they perceived as *effective community relations* activities’ (p.17). Parallel research undertaken by Hall (2001) also suggests many and varied interpretations of the CD/CR relationship with the opinion of the community activists who participated in the research reflected on a continuum ranging from an assessment of an incompatible relationship through one that is mutually reinforcing.

The difficulty in defining the relationship is related at least in part, to the language of CD/CR and in particular, the perceived interpretation of the concepts embodied in the lexicon of CR. Community Relations is seen by some as a contentious, loaded and limiting term and has been ‘rejected out of hand’ by some community development workers (Hall, 2001). The problems can be summarized as follows:

- Community relations, as a policy concept is both contested and controversial, and over the years has become politically loaded. For some Loyalists and Republicans, CR is seen as masquing a more insidious political agenda on the part of Government. For Republicans, this aims at persuading them to ‘buy into the State’ and for Loyalists it is interpreted as ‘the road to a United Ireland’ (Hall, 2001). Others argue that the presentation of division and segregation as a problem of relations between Protestants and Catholics exonerates the British Government from the role played by the State in the conflict (Hall, 2001; Hughes 2001; McVeigh 2002; Shirlow, 2005).
- There is a perception in the community/voluntary sector that CR, translated by funders, means relatively superficial and ‘soft’ cross-community activity that smacks of middle class ‘dogooderism’ (Hall, 2001; Knox and Monaghan, 2001; Shirlow, 2005). So defined, CR has little resonance in many marginalized, disadvantaged and segregated communities where CD workers define the ‘real’ challenge as dealing with deprivation, poverty and violence (Hall, 2001).
- Although some community and voluntary organizations are reluctant to have their work classified as CR because of the associated negative connotations, many support activity that could be classified as building relations and tackling manifestations of division, thereby linking to core CR objectives. According to NICVA’s database of the voluntary and community sector, 715 organisations in Northern Ireland currently identify their primary focus as being community development, while 129 identify primary focus as cross community or cross border. This latter category is, however, unlikely to include those whose primary focus is not CR but who incorporate an element of it into their daily work, or who do not wish to define their work as ‘cross community’ even though it may contribute to CR objectives. In some cases, the denial of CR on ideological grounds has implications for access to funding streams that are designed to support the type of work being undertaken by CD organizations. On the flip side, Hall (2001) suggests that it is possible to meet the CR objectives of a great many funders by paying lip service to shallow cross-community gestures while using the funds to pursue CD activities that may reinforce the ‘us and them’ competitive paradigm for community development funding.
- The term CR is also limiting in so far as it supports a bipolar analysis of the Northern Ireland problem that fails to take account of the many and

diverse relationships that people construct on the basis of identity criteria other than national/ethnic affiliation. An essentialist analytical framework that underplays the complexity of identity and the dimensions of the conflict not explainable by the Protestant/Catholic axis, seriously limits the possibilities of building social capital (Hughes, 2006).

One policy and funding response to the ‘irrelevance’ of CR for some communities/organizations has been the development of a ‘single identity’ focus – this too, as recognized in ASF, has not been unproblematic. First, the use of language again confirms a limited bipolar analysis of the problem as that of one community pitted against the other. Second, and related, like CR, the term ‘single identity’ is essentialist and, by definition, constraining. Third, evaluations of single identity projects suggest that, in some cases, funding is sought and used to support a political agenda that seeks less to foster good relations than to endorse ‘a cultural monolith in opposition’ (See Hughes and Donnelly (in press)). The term, ‘creating educated bigots’ has been used, somewhat disparagingly, to describe some single identity activity.

### *The funding context*

Although there is considerable overlap between CR and CD objectives and values, separate infrastructural and funding arrangements have evolved that serve to reinforce conceptual and policy silos. Organizations that overtly define their work as community relations are more likely to seek funding from CRC or other Peace II funders, while those who consider themselves to be undertaking generic community development work complain that there is no core funding available for neighbourhood animation work and they are forced to fit their activities into the objectives of funders such as the Big Lottery Fund, DSD BSP funding, parts of Peace II and other departments, such as, for example, DARD for rural development. (It is this latter complaint that has led to the formation of the Community Investment Fund as part of Positive Steps, mentioned below.)

In both CD and CR domains, the funding environment has been volatile, lacking in strategic focus and inconsistent – as a consequence the emphasis has been on short-term interventions, often funded from fixed-term EU funding programmes. HM Treasury in its Cross Cutting Review (2002)

recognizes that this is an inefficient way to spend public money. One consequence of the funding environment is to reinforce the sense of competition between CD and CR work that exists in the minds of some, as CD can be perceived as addressing the most pressing problems and CR as more of a long-term aspiration. However CRC (2005) asks: *“Just when will the long term turn into now? Because unless the longed-for victory happens, continuing to fund community development along unchallenged single-identity lines is a bottomless pit, in which a segregated and sectarianised society endlessly reproduces itself, cheered on by politicians, communities unwilling to change and supported by community development activists.”*

### **Opportunities for the development of a more integrated approach**

In addition to the tensions that have characterized the CD/CR relationship in Northern Ireland, there also exist a number of opportunities that can be harnessed in advancing the Shared Future objective to develop a more integrated programme of activities.

#### ***Bonding, bridging and linking social capital***

A more helpful ‘social capital’ paradigm now exists within which it is possible to reframe CD and CR in a way that reflects the interconnectedness of the policy domains and better facilitates the potential of projects funded under these banners to contribute towards the achievement of the overarching objectives contained in ASF.

The work of Robert Putnam (2000) launched social capital as a focus for research and policy discussion. He refers to social capital as the connections among individuals – i.e. social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam, 2000). The basic premise is that interaction enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to build the social fabric. A sense of belonging and the positive experience of social networks (and the relationships of trust and tolerance that can be involved) can, it is argued, bring benefits such as reduced crime, better health, higher educational achievement and better economic achievement (Putnam, 2000).

Reflecting the work of Putnam and others, social capital has been defined by 3 dimensions:

1. *Bonding* (or exclusive) social capital – refers to the strength of bonds that define relationships between individuals that belong to the same social group. Bonding tends to be inward looking and has the potential to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups;
2. *Bridging* (or inclusive) social capital tends to be more outward looking and encompasses people across different social divides (Putnam, 2000, p.22). It is characterized by less dense but more cross-cutting social ties;
3. *Linking* social capital – is characterized by connections between those with differing levels of power or social status e.g. links between the political elite and communities or between networks/groups defined by social class.

According to Putnam, these are not either/or categories to which social networks are neatly assigned – but ‘more or less’ dimensions along which we can compare different types of social capital (Putnam, 2000, p.23).

Social Capital certainly doesn’t capture the range of activity, values and aspirations contained within CR and CD but if the two policy domains were presented on a Venn diagram, it does offer a useful encapsulation of overlapping remits that reflect covariance of positive relationships and quality of life in a divided society.

In line with ASF objectives the Social Capital framework presents an opportunity for a greater degree of integration between CD and CR. Its contribution can be assessed in terms of the potential to overcome some of the obstacles to greater collaboration between practice assumed to fall within the CD and CR ‘silos’:

1. The emphasis in social capital is on relationship building. Not only does this reflect the aims and values of the community and voluntary sector but it resonates strongly with the overarching objective in ASF to move, ‘from relationships based on mistrust and defence to relationships rooted in mutual recognition and trust’ (ASF, 2005, p.15).

2. Because the emphasis is on relationship building at all levels of society, the nature of all relationships (not just those on a Protestant/Catholic axis) comes under scrutiny and the term ‘community relations’ assumes a meaning that is more broadly acceptable to those who may have difficulty with it as currently conceived. This is not to dilute the importance of recognizing and tackling religious sectarianism where such exists but to underline the value of doing so within a more integrated framework for community enhancement.
3. Within a framework for funding informed by a social capital model, the diversity of interests represented by CD and CR groups can be harnessed in a way that is enhancing rather than competitive. The emphasis on finding inclusive strategies to tackle social problems accepts the contribution that can be made within and between communities and by different interest groups;
4. The opportunity afforded by social capital for community groups and organizations to link into the processes of Governance and policy making has potential to address and dispel some of the fear and suspicions reflected in the CD analysis of CR as ‘top down’ and self-serving and presents a context wherein CR problems can more accurately reflect a community level interpretation.
5. If the indicators are used effectively, then the focus of funding voluntary and community organisations that undertake community development work could shift from the historic emphasis on auditing the process, to funding demonstrable outcomes which incorporate change in the trust, norms and networks highlighted by social capital theory. Used alongside robust qualitative evaluation of action, a fuller picture of the overall change and of the interaction between CD and CR could be developed.

### ***A funding framework***

A recent report by CENI (2005) argues that introducing social capital into the debate about performance indicators for community and voluntary organizations, challenges funders to recognize that community involvement and solidarity are important and challenges funded organizations to demonstrate their contribution to such civic involvement and solidarity.

The emergence of new forms of governance has focused attention on the role of civil society in Northern Ireland and new initiatives have placed emphasis on stake holding (whereby the intended beneficiaries participate in the development and implementation of policy), partnership management and the development of integrated strategies to address a totality of problems (CENI). Against this background, the relationship between funder and funded is less prescriptive than contractual, where the two parties work together to negotiate outcome measure that reflect programme objectives.

Based on the work of CENI, a social capital framework has been adopted by DSD as a mechanism through which the added value of community and voluntary based activity can be measured. To this end, a 'toolkit' of indicators and outcome measures have been devised that reflect the bonding, bridging and linking dimensions of social capital (DSD, 2006) and Government has committed to the application of the indicators in any funding arrangements with voluntary and community organizations (Positive Steps). The DSD toolkit has provision within it for groups/organizations to be assessed according to their particular circumstances and the contribution they can make to building social capital. Outcome measures will be selected on a partnership basis between funder and funded with a clear view as to how best the applicant can contribute to programme objectives.

The value of this model is that it offers a single, though multi-dimensional construct to describe the outcomes of a diverse range of activity undertaken by community and voluntary sector groups, *'The concept of social capital offers a way of identifying the commonality underlying the diversity. Equally important, it challenges community and voluntary organizations to adopt inclusive strategies to resolve social problems and to address the divisions that are either the cause of such problems or a barrier to their solution'* (CENI, 2005).

Although the DSD model incorporates some ASF objectives (trust, understanding, ability to deal with separation) and provides a framework for integrating the work of CD and CR, from a Shared Future perspective there are some limitations. First, there are objectives contained within ASF that are not given expression in the toolkit. These include, 'equity', 'respect for diversity' and 'the achievement of reconciliation and tolerance', all of which are potential outcomes of building social capital and should be measured as a means of determining that 'bridging' has been achieved. It is worth pointing

out here that a potential downside of social capital is that groups and organizations with high bonding social capital may have the means (and sometimes the motive) to work to exclude subordinate others (Putman, 2000). A more integrative DSD framework could include operationalised definitions of additional bridging concepts, though there is work to be done in devising them that will entail high level interrogation of ASF objectives (Hughes, 2006, makes the point that a weakness in the ASF document is its vagueness in relation to some key concepts). Second, assuming that operationalised definitions can be arrived at, the emphasis on indicators and outcome measures underplays the importance of process variables and the need to define good practice measures that will promote and facilitate relationship building and ultimately a more inclusive and shared society.

### ***Good practice***

More than two decades of practice in both CD and CR and a burgeoning international literature provide evidence of the **processes** through which the vision articulated in ASF can be achieved. There have been significant developments in academic theory during the last few years (particularly from the discipline of social psychology) that point to positive and negative mediators and moderators of effective contact between groups in divided societies (see for example, Pettigrew & Tropp 2001; Tausch (in press)). Much of this work is based on meta-analyses of research in Israel, Northern Ireland and South Africa and other ethnically divided contexts. In addition, since CR became a policy priority in the 1980s much of the work funded through CRC, CRU, District Councils, EU Peace Programmes and many other funding bodies has been documented, evaluated and in some cases meta-evaluated (see for example, Knox and Hughes, 1996; Quirk *et al.* 2001). Taking together academic and practitioner research and experience, there now exists an extensive and to a large extent, untapped, repository of information and experience that could and should inform the development of good practice models and other ASF related resources. Investment in the development of such process related materials would be offset by the progress costs of groups engaging in trial and error as they seek to achieve outcome measures and/or not achieving their potential to contribute towards ASF.

Linked to the previous point, there is a need to complement outcome measures and evaluations with more sophisticated qualitative measures. The

latter seek to uncover enabling and inhibiting factors that facilitate or impede progress towards programme objectives. Learning generated by formative methodology is crucial to the development of effective policy, indeed it is only through such learning that a comprehensive analysis of progress towards ASF can be made.

### ***Policy commitment***

The absence of a strategic approach to funding has not reflected the strategic policy approach to the voluntary and community sector that exists on paper. This began with the *Strategy for the Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector and for Community Development* (1993) which contains a section on a sectoral strategy for community relations which was the responsibility of the central Community Relations Unit, effectively defining CR as a subset of CD.

This document was built upon in the production of *The Compact between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland* (1998). The Compact forms the ongoing basis of the relationship between government and the sector and articulates a shared vision, “*to work together as social partners to build participative, peaceful, equitable and inclusive communities in Northern Ireland.*” The Compact defines community development as, “*a collective process whereby members of a community come together to effect change and to address the needs within the community based on principles of self-help and inclusion.*” CR is not named but is clearly present as a defining force. The Compact is a high level document which establishes the principles for a relationship — the putting into practice of this relationship is done through *Partners for Change* (2001), which sets out how each government department will work with the sector. The second *Partners for Change* document 2005-2008 is now a year overdue, but will be themed around 3 areas: shaping policy development, building communities and investment in the sector. CR is clearly relevant to the ‘building communities’ theme.

In the first *Partners for Change* document 2001-2004 building communities was described as an aim, which included the statement: “*Ministers aim to build communities, recognizing that local ownership and involvement in planning, decision-making and regeneration processes are*

*necessary foundations upon which lasting peace, equality and prosperity can be built.*” CR issues are dealt with separately in the OFMDFM departmental section of the document and relate mainly to funding of organizations without any mention of an overarching strategy. The new *Partners for Change* is planned to incorporate recommendations from *Positive Steps* (see below).

The work undertaken by the *Taskforce on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector*, as contained in its report *Investing Together*, and government’s response in *Positive Steps* demonstrate a willingness to capitalise in a strategic way on the potential of the voluntary and community sector. *Positive Steps (2001)* recognises: “*Many voluntary and community organizations have played a key role in recent developments in human rights, equality and good relations. Real challenges still remain, however, in addressing the serious division within our society. The voluntary and community sector is well placed to help build better relationships within and between communities to tackle sectarianism and racism and helping meet the needs of victims and survivors.*”

*Positive Steps* offers a joined up framework for a way forward in working with the sector, including a new fund for community development, *The Community Investment Fund*. This coupled with support for capacity building allows organisations in the sector to compete on a level playing field to deliver services. Guidelines for the *Community Investment Fund* are currently in development and the opportunity exists to build in the objectives of ASF at an early stage.

The new *Partners for Change* document should set out the actions that will bring about the changes identified in *Positive Steps*. It should therefore be the focus for the delivery of greater joining up across departments in their relationships with the voluntary and community sector as they relate to ASF. It also offers a framework for shared actions between departments that have the greatest contact with voluntary and community organisations, DSD, DHSSPS, DARD, OFMDFM and DEL.

### ***Review of public administration***

Beyond *Positive Steps*, the responsibility for community development will be handed to local councils under the RPA. Councils will also have responsibility for delivering on good relations. This presents another opportunity for joining up policy and funding on CD and CR at local level across NI. Work on this area has already been undertaken in GB, particularly by the ODPM Select Committee, which has looked extensively at the role of local government in social cohesion. Its sixth report (2004) notes: *“Neighbourhood initiatives can be effective and avoid rivalries between communities if they are part of a wider strategy which is widely understood and subject to widespread consultation. However, they must be part of a wider strategy... The voluntary and community sector has an important role in working with local communities to promote social cohesion but there is a danger that they can increase segregation by working with only one community. Local authorities need to develop a strategy which identifies when it is appropriate to fund an organisation catering for only one cultural group. Grant conditions should otherwise require voluntary and community organisations to work across community boundaries. Every effort should be made to ensure that community centres cater for a range of cultural groups rather than separate centres being provided for different groups.”*

The current *Neighbourhood Renewal* initiative which uses a community development partnership approach to link communities with statutory services includes some areas where Catholic and Protestant neighbourhoods will be working together in partnership. The outcomes of this initiative should include measures of increased tolerance as a result of the cooperation between communities on shared goals.

However, one of Neighbourhood Renewal’s (2004) strategic objectives is *“Community Renewal – to develop confident communities that are able and committed to improving the quality of life in their areas.”* This makes no mention of creating outward looking communities linked to other communities, while the objective for Economic Renewal does make such a link in terms of the economy, *“to develop economic activity in the most deprived neighbourhoods and connect them to the wider urban economy.”* The initiative therefore may reinforce the danger of the ‘taken for granted community’ wherein a shared identity is assumed and defended in the struggle for recognition and resources – this may run contrary to the desired outcomes of ASF.

***Section 75 and good relations***

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 states:

“(1) A public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity –

- (a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- (b) between men and women generally;
- (c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- (d) between persons with dependants and persons without.

(2) Without prejudice to its obligations under subsection (1), a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to northern Ireland have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.”

In essence the two sections of S75 may be viewed as representing a compromise within the Agreement between an analysis of the conflict based on inter-communal inequalities (part 1) and one based on inter-communal intolerance (part 2). Given the experience of implementing Section 75 so far and its relative absence of measurable outcomes after seven years, it may not be fruitful to place additional emphasis on the legislation as a mechanism for increasing tolerance as envisaged in A Shared Future.

A consequence of the outworking of Section 75 has been to strengthen ‘communities of interest’ across Northern Ireland. Although not normally considered part of the neighbourhood community development paradigm, these thematic communities have a vested interest in the growth of diversity and good relations and can equally be drawn into the delivery of ASF through funding mechanisms and policy frameworks similar to those for geographical communities. The role of minority ethnic communities is particularly important in the good relations context as a potential ‘leavening influence’ on the entrenched ‘two communities’ paradigm in Northern Ireland.

### *Service delivery*

Many voluntary and community organizations already deliver services to the public (currently to the value of approximately £70m (NICVA 2005)), often the result of needs identified through community development processes. The UK government's agenda is to increase the sector's role in service delivery and this offers a key link to ASF in ensuring that services paid for with public money are open and accessible to all citizens. Current funders of services rarely stipulate that shared services are a priority and unpublished research currently being completed by University of Ulster and NICVA indicates that services are provided in an open and accessible way more often despite than because of funders' guidelines. The sector can play a valuable role as broker for services on the ground, joining up in a way that is often very difficult for government. Government has just commissioned research on the cost of sectarian duplication in public services. In the context of a rationalization of services to reduce such duplication, the brokerage role of the sector could potentially be emphasized.

Government's Positive Steps document calls for greater collaboration and cooperation on the part of the sector to ensure the most effective and efficient use of limited resources to achieve the best outcomes. The document also contains a commitment to develop a strategy for support services in the sector. These two elements are mutually reinforcing and potentially offer a way to tie the objectives of ASF closely to the delivery of Positive Steps through support for the development of shared, cross-community support services which are accessible to organizations in each geographical area (perhaps along new council boundaries). Thus, even if organizations are unable or unwilling to engage with others at ground level, they would be part of shared infrastructure that offers potential for development of closer and more meaningful relationships in a CR context. Particularly if organizations are delivering services, they should benefit from being part of cross community infrastructural networks for support, development and cooperation. This offers an additional potential for policy development within the sector based on a diversity of views and experiences across communities and strengthens the networks element of social capital within the sector.

Consultation around the Peace II extension led to a refocusing on a clear definition of reconciliation adopted by SEUPB and additional weight given to the score for reconciliation potential. This focus should be extended to Peace III with ASF at its heart.

## Discussion

Arising from our assessment of the CR and CD policy domains and opportunities for an enhanced relationship, there are a range of issues that will require consideration and action if the vision of a more integrative policy approach articulated in ASF is to be achieved. These are outlined below.

First, it may be time for Government to re-evaluate the concepts of both community development and community relations in our current context. Neither as they stand really captures the roots of inequality and intolerance – in the sense that community development is overloaded in today's policy context with the weight of seeking local solutions to the inequalities caused in essence by global forces of capitalism and community relations has never been adequately conceived as a response to deep-rooted vertical, inter-communal intolerances which the state has essentially institutionalized. Related to this, it is important that Government recognizes that problems of community division exist not just in working class segregated communities but also in the minds of middle-class residents of mixed communities (many of whom are in positions of power and responsibility across Northern Ireland). The acknowledgement in ASF of the good work done by the community/voluntary sector and the exhortation that the sector should 'step up a gear' to meet the challenge of ASF is somewhat patronizing and serves to reinforce the notion that disadvantaged, marginalized communities are both the cause of the problems and the avenues through which they will be resolved.

Second, consideration should be given as to how CRU and VCU might take a lead role in the delivery of ASF. This will entail collaboration between the two Units to develop a strategy that recognizes the interconnectedness and complementarity of CR and CD. A key associated task will be a high level interrogation of terms and concepts contained in ASF such that the lexicon of the document is available in operationalised definition.

The social capital concept with its emphasis on the benefits of bonding, bridging and linking social relationships provides a potentially helpful integrating construct for CD and CR - framing an *integrated* strategy within it should ameliorate some of the tensions that have hitherto characterized the CD/CR relationship. It is important though that attention is given to the local expression of social capital and that the limitations of this model are recognized. In essence, Social Capital offers a channel through which the overlapping remits of CD and CR can be articulated. It does not capture the

full range of CR and CD activity that can and should be supported if ASF objectives are to be achieved. The DSD toolkit which is based on a social capital model and reflects principles of partnership management and beneficiary stake holding provides a useful model for outcome evaluation of community and voluntary sector activity that incorporates CD and CR. However, the toolkit as it stands is inadequate and it should be strengthened to more fully embrace bonding and bridging concepts contained in ASF.

Third, recognition should be given to the need for formative or process evaluations to complement more quantitative, outcome driven, approaches. The former allow access to factors that can inhibit or enhance that achievement of ASF through an integrated CR/CD approach. Understanding these process issues is vital to the development of policy and practice in this area. Allied to this, the development of good practice models and associated resource material for community/voluntary sector activity aimed at advancing ASF objectives is essential if the costs of constantly reinventing the wheel are to be avoided. There exists in Northern Ireland an extensive repository of academic and practitioner information and experience (particularly in the many organisations with a dedicated CR/CD remit and the Women's sector) that could and should be utilized if we are to capitalize on decades of support for community level interventions and projects. Investment in the development of accessible resource materials would be of benefit to both funders and funded as they seek to negotiate and implement effective delivery mechanisms for ASF. A useful starting point might be a meta-evaluation of relationship building work undertaken during the last 2 decades.

Linked to the development of resources, consideration should be given to promotion and accreditation of community development skills. The skills strategy for the voluntary and community sector recommended in Positive Steps should encourage accredited community development training (such as that currently provided by UU and BIFHE) to include community relations skills at its core. The strategy should also consider the key role of cross community volunteering and the skills it requires.

Fourth, underscoring the importance of ASF to the development of more positive relations in Northern Ireland, all government initiatives in CR/CD should incorporate the ASF vision as a defining principle, thereby providing a joined up approach across all the government departments to community relations and community development work in the voluntary and community

sector. Reflecting the strategy, infrastructure organisations in the sector should have a cross community membership and committee representation and every voluntary and community group should have access to support services provided by such an organisation. Performance standards for support organisations should encapsulate this and funding should incentivise it. In addition, the governance benchmarks agreed in Positive Steps should incorporate the concept of sharing as a key part of the good governance of infrastructure organisations, especially where they are service providers. As part of this process, good practice lessons should be shared with and among infrastructure organizations to encourage and support development.

Fifth, in developing a more integrated approach to community relations and community development, attention should be given to the role of single identity initiatives. Research has suggested that isolated, reactive initiatives to single communities in response to sporadic violence or political claims by one community or another may serve to exacerbate problems of community relations. However, it is also important to acknowledge that many communities lack the capacity or confidence to engage with others and that a ‘single identity’ approach in such circumstances offers potential for community enhancement and bridge-building. Any new criteria for single identity work should reflect a strategic approach that recognizes the value of a single identity approach on a continuum that builds towards intergroup activity and, ultimately, reconciliation (a useful model is presented in the PEACE (CRC)).

Finally, we recommend that mechanisms are put in place at the highest level to ‘Shared Future’ proof efforts on the part of Government to promote a shared and reconciled society. In the absence of accountability measures at this level, the rhetoric of commitment outlined by Government in ASF rings hollow. No amount of monitoring and evaluating community/voluntary sector activity can compensate for a perfunctory approach within and between the institutions and organisations of Government. Nor can the community/voluntary sector, working in isolation, deliver the vision.

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