Local International Learning Project

**FLASHPOINT MANAGEMENT:
CAPACITIES FOR CRISIS RESPONSE
IN INTERFACE AREAS**

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international conflict research

INCORE

Recent events have shown the continued difficulty in dealing with interfaces or flashpoint areas, such as in North Belfast, or the Bogside/Fountain area of Derry/Londonderry. In light of these difficulties INCORE sought to consider some of the issues that are faced by interface areas. The aim of the conference was to provide an opportunity for constructive discussion concerning present and future management of these areas. Through the participation of the three international practitioners who have been involved in these types of initiatives in their own countries, INCORE facilitated an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and models both within Northern Ireland and from the international context. The visit consisted of a one-day conference followed by a series of meetings with interested parties to consider the issues in more detail.

Flashpoint Management is one of the five streams contained within the Local International Learning Project (LILP). Each of the five streams examines lessons drawn from both practitioner and policy perspectives. This report represents a summary of the main issues and questions that were identified at the Flashpoint Conference.

Morning Workshops:
Short presentations were made by each of the speakers, followed by time for discussion and questions.

***Nigeria: Hon. Akin Akinteye, Director,
Visions of Peace and Civic Education,
South West Coordinator of Conflict
Resolution Stakeholders Network***

Visions of Peace and Civic Education was founded in 1998 as an independent non-profit, non-governmental organization. Its mission is to contribute towards a just peace in Nigeria by promoting constructive, creative, cooperative and non-violent approaches to conflict transformation and the education of the civil society. Akin is also Deputy Majority Leader of the Oyo State House of Assembly and is the Chairman of the Conflict Resolution and Community Development Committee of the House.

Akin Ainteye's presentation focused on the model he has employed to address local conflicts in Nigeria. In the peace projects in which he has been involved, an adapted version of Lederach's "Triangular Model of Three Levels of Leadership" (Lederach, J. P., "Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies" Washington D.C.: Institute of Peace Press 1997) has been employed.

The process of the peace projects was then described. i) The first step is to research the conflict in order to determine the cause of the crisis, how it has been managed so far (if at all), and what do local residents see as a solution. ii) Conciliation visits to all parties involved are then made. An essential part of this is to let people know what you are doing in their community. This is vital if you are to have any legitimacy within the communities.

iii) The conciliation visits are followed by an analysis of the conflict in order to assist in the planning of the intervention, which is in the form of workshops. iv) The workshops are focused on giving skills to people to solve their own problems. A number of people from a particular occupation, within one community are chosen to participate in the workshops, parallel to this people from the same occupation from the 'other' community also go through the training process. v) From this, a number of people from each community, who have taken part in the training, are taken to a neutral space where they take part in a series of joint workshops and trainings. The participants analyse the conflict, and it is hoped that this will lead to discussions concerning possible solutions. vi) From the participants involved in the joint workshops a 'peace monitoring committee' is formed. The aim of the committees is to monitor the peace, and deal with community issues and conflicts. Once a month the committees meet with the trainers for feedback and to assess whether any further training is needed.

Northern Ireland: Chris O'Halloran, Project Worker, Belfast Interface Project (BIP)

Established in 1995, the BIP seeks to establish effective means of addressing the major issues facing communities living near or affected by interface areas. BIP is committed to supporting communities by working with development and policy. They circulate information on interface areas, and facilitate dialogue and collaboration, encouraging co-operation across the sectarian divide.

In Belfast there are 25 'named' interface areas, some with formal peace-lines and others without, yet in reality there are many more unmarked boundaries. When families and individuals living near interface areas were interviewed, one BIP survey found that the most important issue on both sides was concern for their young people. By the age of 10 or 12, many children have already been socialised to avoid crossing interfaces due to concerns for safety. Yet although interface areas have often been the location where children have been socialised into sectarian violence, it is not necessarily the local youth committing the violence; many come into the area and engage in violence, and then return to their respective communities. Nonetheless, each new act of violence continues to breed fear and animosity between the two communities.

Exemplary of some small successes in building community relations was an interview project, showing the need for continued single identity and collaborative work. BIP's initial plan was to conduct interviews on both sides of particular interfaces. Unpredictably, many participants requested that they see what the 'other side' was reporting. They then decided to respond back with comments, BIP acted as an intermediary, and in some areas exchanges of questions and responses grew to ongoing face-to-face dialogue. However, not all groups responded as such, and other severe problems continue to exacerbate the sectarian divide.

A 1995 survey showed major problems in interface areas included substandard housing, lower levels of education and lower income. Predominately due to the heightened levels of violence, residents in these areas have limited access to many necessary services as well. BIP responded by conducting reviews of several statutory agencies involved, and the results showed a general lack of leadership and the need, therefore, to develop strategies to extend services into these underserved areas.

Sierra Leone: Sahr Gborie, West Africa Programme Coordinator, Conciliation Resources

Conciliation Resources provides management support and capacity building for local partners involved in community based conflict transformation work and advocacy on peace related issues.

Sahr Gborie gave an overview of the conflict in Sierra Leone, emphasizing the role of civil society in post-conflict transition, and the importance of respect for human rights. Peacebuilding was seen as an essential element in resolving the conflict at the grassroots level, as it addressed the human side of the conflict, facilitating positive changes in people's attitudes.

A number of 'models of peace' used in Sierra Leone were outlined. Peace Committees were established to build social cohesion through engaging in peace monitoring. The Peace Committees were established in order to enable interventions in community conflicts before the outbreak of violence. In order to do this, community mechanisms had to be strengthened and so a series of workshops took place to train local community members to become peace monitors. The training involved conflict resolution and mediation skills.

Grievance Committees were a mechanism established in order to address the reintegration of ex-combatants. The reintegration of ex-combatants into society is a vital process. However, there are a number of challenges, including the reluctance of communities to accept people involved in the violence back into the communities. The committees, made up of peace monitors, local traditional leaders etc. facilitated dialogue through the creation of forums aimed at beginning the process of reintegration for ex-combatants.

Youth Drop-In Centres were also established. Many young people were directly involved in the violent conflict in Sierra Leone, with a large number being recruited as child soldiers. The centres are therefore a vital means through which young people involved in the conflict and those that were not to meet and begin building relationships.

South Africa: Larainne Kaplan, former coordinator of Peace Monitoring Forum

Following her time as coordinator of the Peace Monitoring Forum, Larainne began working for the Human Rights Committee as a researcher until April 2001. At present she is the gender violence programme coordinator for SWEAT (sex workers education and advocacy taskforce). A non-governmental human rights organisation that promotes the health care, human rights and safety of sex workers.

Larainne Kaplan started by stating her belief that the South African peace monitor model could be *'adapted to suit other conflict situations'*. Participants were encouraged to relate the South African peace monitoring process to their own situation and to see how the model could be utilised in other contexts. Monitoring within the South African context refers not only to observation, but also incorporates actual intervention activities as well.

A brief explanation of the Peace Monitoring Forum's (PMF) work was given. This included an overview of their aims and objectives and the work of the flashpoint or rapid response management group. Members of the PMF came from a variety of local NGOs and sought to improve communication between key role players, and provide crisis intervention, witnessing and observation of rallies. One area of the process discussed was that of the PMF's relationship with the South African Police Service (SAPS) – a

relationship the PMF thought to be very important to develop prior to the Election Day.

There were many lessons learnt from the experiences of the PMF peace monitors and certain recommendations were set forth: a code of conduct, regular debriefing sessions after monitoring, and the need for contact with party leaders prior to all events. The primary concern of the PMF was to help create an atmosphere of peace surrounding the election process.

Additionally, the continued role the UMAC Community Safety Forums was discussed. The Safety Forums provide an opportunity for key players such as the police, local government and government departments to come together to discuss local criminal justice issues.

For contact details for the speakers please contact INCORE.

Afternoon Workshops

For each workshop there were a number of guiding questions.

Community Development on the Interface

- What are the obstacles to community development?
- What are the dangers of 'separate' or single identity work development?
- Can we sustain separate development as a long-term option?

Due to the socio-economic contexts that tend to characterise interface areas, community development initiatives were identified as of particular importance. A number of people suggested that there is a misconception among communities in these areas that mixed communities are more prosperous than single identity ones. There is an assumption that community development builds self-esteem amongst interface communities, which is necessary for community relations work. As one participant put it 'community relations programmes are adapting to reductions in violence which results from community development programmes'. A number of problems that face community development in interface areas were identified; lack of resources; lack of a collective vision; and the fact that communities don't really care about the 'other' community, in particular participants noted community development has been identified as a Catholic concept.

Dialogue and Reconciliation on the Interface

- Who speaks for the community?
- How do you link community leaders/representatives who are engaged in dialogue activities to the wider community?
- What is the relationship between elected representatives and community representatives?

Who speaks for the community was a major focus of these workshops. There were a number of discussions around the role of the paramilitaries in who speaks for the community, however, the point was also raised that seeing communities as either being controlled by loyalists or republicans was too simplistic. There was general agreement that people who claim to be speaking for their communities may not always be the key players, but there was also recognition that it is very difficult to truly speak for a whole community and represent everyone's views.

There was special recognition of the increased difficulty of engaging in dialogue and reconciliation work in interface areas. Difficulties included the often contentious relationships between community and political

leaderships. One participant highlighted that political leaders are often not informed of dialogue initiatives between communities and are generally unaware of the processes taking place. The difficulty of differences in readiness and ability of communities to engage was noted as a problem; political and community development initiatives often create an uneven playing field. Another problem highlighted was the fact that most groups are formed to address socio-economic factors and hence they are struggling with the fact that they do not have a mandate for community relations work.

The group discussions concluded that it was particularly important to include all aspects of such societies in dialogue efforts, including the paramilitary groups. There is an assumption that interface initiatives revolve around violence, however when violence is minimal there is still an important reconciliation role that should be sustained.

Statutory Agencies/Service Delivery in Interface Areas

- Can you give a positive example of service delivery on the interface?
- Why was this experience positive, can we generalise from it?
- What do we expect from state agencies? What should they have in place?

There was overall agreement that there is a lack of services in interface areas. In addition it was agreed that we not only need to look at what services are withdrawn from interface areas, but also at what services are needed. For example, there was an identified lack of emergency plans and services in interface areas. Another important factor raised was the need to develop relationships between community groups and statutory bodies; the need for collaboration between the community, voluntary and statutory sectors

was seen as vital. In addition there is a need to provide communities living in interface areas with information about the services available to them.

Violence on the Interface

- Who (currently) *does* respond to violence on the interface?
- How do they respond to violence?
- Who *should* respond to violence on the interface?
- How should they respond?
- What is the role of community groups?

Violence on the interface was identified as one of the most immediate concerns. In particular participants identified how living on the interface changes perceptions of violence. Violence becomes normality. Participants further highlighted the different types of violence that exist in interface areas and the range of perpetrators. Though there was a recognised need to distinguish between youth and paramilitary perpetrated violence, it was recognised that this distinction is not always clear-cut. It was also noted that the smallest spark, such as the flying of a flag, could ignite violence. The role of the media was also questioned; participants drew attention to whether violence had actually increased in recent times, or whether the level of media attention has increased.

Themes & Key Issues:

Communication

The lack of communication between the various groups and sectors involved with flashpoints in Northern Ireland was identified as a major issue. The question of communication barriers was raised at many levels from community groups, to the public, statutory agencies, and government. There was an over all sense that there is little transfer

of knowledge between those who are involved in the problems associated with interface areas and other interested parties. It was felt that there is little coordination of networks of information regarding interface areas throughout Northern Ireland.

Community Involvement

Many participants pointed to the importance of ensuring that the community owns any process that is designed to manage flashpoints and that programmes/projects are designed according to public need. Hence stressing the importance of involving all levels of communities. This raised the question of maintaining relationships with community leadership structures and between the community and political leadership structures.

Context

A number of participants felt that factors specific to the Northern Irish case made the management of flashpoints and interfaces very difficult. An example raised was the role of paramilitary structures within the community that may prevent initiatives that are aimed at overcoming violence. Other factors identified as hindering such processes included socio-economic characteristics, such as high unemployment. An important part of the socio-economic context is the existence of differential capacity between communities on interface areas. There was general agreement that differential capacity has a definite impact on reconciliation and cross community work and can often lead to reinforcement of barriers.

Lack of Resources

The conference participants felt that there was a widespread lack of support and resources for work on interfaces. There were strong feelings amongst a large number of participants that resources must be allocated to interface areas regardless of the level of violence. Allocating resources to interface

areas only after they have become a flashpoint was seen as a barrier for building sustainable and peaceful communities. In addition to this, the point was raised that outside times of acute violence there is still important work to be done in interface areas, and that this is essential for sustainability. It was also put forward that allocating greater resources to areas that suffer from acute violence could encourage deliberate instigation of violence in order to receive resources. This view was, however, challenged by the vast majority who felt this was not the case. In particular many highlighted lack of government support, and the need for increased training in conflict resolution, both at a community and governmental level. Participants raised the possibility of training individuals who could act as 'monitors' in flashpoint situations, although there were concerns over the acceptance of local communities of such an initiative and whether they would be able to be acceptable within the context of interface areas.

Long term approaches

Many participants felt that there was a need for a more structured, long-term approach to the management of flashpoints and interface violence in Northern Ireland. For instance, the need to engage with protagonists leading up to times of heightened tensions, such as the marching season. One practitioner expressed that there is a sense that the approach, which has been adopted to date, is one of 'Fire Fighting' and that preventive action needs to be taken on a sustained basis. Lack of resources was seen as heavily tied into the limitations of this approach at present.

Media

Many of the conference participants felt that the media plays a very central role in interface areas. It was suggested by a few participants that violence has increased on Interfaces since

the Good Friday Agreement. However, the majority who felt that violence itself had not necessarily increased but that greater media attention has been given to interface violence in recent years, challenged this view. Consequently, public awareness about interface violence had been raised and this accounts for the perceived increase in violence. Participants also raised the question of the role of the media in sustaining violence and whether media coverage encourages further violent incidents.

Perceptions of Partiality

A number of discussions focused on the perceptions of practitioners. Though it was recognised that in order to work on both sides of an interface area practitioners should attempt to be viewed as impartial, this is particularly difficult in the Northern Irish context. In particular, it was pointed out that structured approaches such as forums, often come to be associated with one community or another. The question of legitimacy and the challenge of being both accepted by the community and viewed as impartial was an issue that many of the participants felt was important. Various participants felt that it was essential to build strong relationships both within your own community and with others in order to gain credibility. Transparency concerning your aims and your organizations work were seen by many of the participants as essential, not only for being accepted as impartial but also for gaining legitimacy for your work.

Police

A number of participants highlighted the need to further engage with the police in the management of interfaces. In particular, the role of communicating community initiatives was emphasized.

Youth and Children

Another serious question raised was the role of youth and children on the interface. Participants considered this question both from the role of youth in violence in these areas and from the perspective of the impact living on an interface has on children in terms of trauma. There was a strong sense of concern amongst participants regarding the lack of trauma support for both youths and adults.

INCORE: International Conflict Research

The overall LILP pilot programme was divided into five thematic streams, each of which was intended to examine lessons drawn from both practitioner and policy perspectives. The 'Flashpoint Management' Stream is the final stream in the pilot phase of the project. For further information on other LILP activities, see INCORE's web page http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk

INCORE (International Conflict Research) was established as a joint research institute of the United Nations University and the University of Ulster to address the management and resolution of contemporary conflicts through research, training, practice, policy and theory. The *Research Unit* undertakes, commissions and supervises research of a multidisciplinary nature, particularly on post-settlement issues, governance and diversity, and research methodology in violent societies. The *Policy and Evaluation Unit* is committed to bridging the gaps between theory, practice and policy. It seeks to ensure that conflict-related research and practice is incorporated in grassroots programming and governmental policy.

With funding from the Community Relations Council, INCORE initiated the Local International Learning Project (LILP). LILP aims to promote the exchange of models and ideas between Northern Irish and international practitioners and policy makers within the field of conflict resolution and community relations.

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