Executive Summary

The Peace Impact Programme (PIP) aims to build sustainable peace and prosperity within communities of greatest economic and social deprivation, where there are low levels of engagement in peace building and limited benefits from the Peace Process. It is funded by the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Programme was implemented at a time when the Peace Process in Ireland was faltering with ongoing political stalemate, growing levels of alienation in both Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) communities, renewed outbreaks of violence on the streets linked to the flags protests combined with an economic recession and austerity programmes on both sides of the border. In this context both the overall objective of the PIP programme and the work supported under phase 1 were timely and relevant to the situation in Ireland during the period of implementation (Jan 2013 to March 2015).

PIP identified three programme outcomes: 1) increased contact, dialogue, sharing and integration among project participants, 2) the development of sustainable, exemplar community organisations and 3) underpinning the Peace Process. PIP has made a significant and durable contribution in all three of the areas. The various PIP projects have facilitated a range of dialogue and relationship building work, particularly intra-community, but also supported inter-community work and dialogue and relationship building between communities and statutory agencies. This evaluation has found that the programme has made an important contribution to the Peace Process by targeting its resources at the right areas and communities and by supporting projects to develop appropriate and locally owned responses.

PIP has supported a total of 56 projects on both sides of the border (41 in Northern Ireland and 15 in the Southern border counties) with a total spend of almost £4.4m ($7.1 and €5.5) This level of activity was particularly significant in this period given that the IFI was one of the few funders supporting peace building work of this nature at this critical time in the Peace Process. The level of funding tended to be relatively small with an average grant of £78,500 (€98,000). Despite this, the groups managed to use their grants effectively to deliver extensive programmes of activity. The short term nature of some of the projects (6 -12 months), however, has reduced the potential of the projects to achieve even more and this aspect should be reviewed in the next phase of the programme.

PIP was administered in Northern Ireland (NI) by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) and in the Southern Border Counties (SBCs) directly by the IFI's Local Development Officers (LDO's). There is clear evidence that the pro-active targeting strategy adopted by PIP, the flexible approach, the scale of the funding and the level of mentoring and support provided to the projects was critical to the success of the programme. PIP provides a model of how this type of work can be facilitated with relatively modest resources and how local communities can be supported and mentored so that they can take ownership of the work. The selection of CFNI as the implementing agency in NI has been important as CFNI has the credibility and a track record of working in these communities, plus the experience, institutional memory and know-how to work effectively with the diverse groups supported under PIP. Likewise, in the southern border counties, IFI has a

credible track record of engaging with communities in the successful delivery of projects over the past twenty years. The fact that these funds were from the IFI, and seen as independent, was also considered to be important by some projects working on sensitive issues.

The evaluation found that this targeted support has been effective and has had important impacts on critical issues in PUL and CNR communities. By implication, the IFI has demonstrated that there is a need for more flexible and responsive funding mechanisms which can allow for risk taking and which provide scope for projects to be creative and respond to the context in which they operate. The areas targeted by PIP tend to feature ongoing community tensions sectarian incidents, significant levels of ongoing or residual paramilitary control, large numbers of marginalised young people and alienation from both the political process and the Peace Process. Projects highlighted the need for programmes which respond to the local context; address these core issues and which promote local ownership and sustainability. There is strong evidence that PIP has targeted the right communities and that the approach used has facilitated and supported locally owned work which is highly relevant in these contexts. The evaluation has identified several examples of important shifts among target constituencies and there is evidence that some groups have taken important steps to heal internal division and to improve community relations.

The programme has channelled funding directly to the projects on the ground, either by working through recognised groups in these areas or by supporting the establishment of new structures where necessary. Projects had scope to respond to the unique context in which they operate and were allowed to work at their own pace. This has created good working relationships and a sense of partnership between the IFI/CFNI and the projects.

Overall there is a good degree of alignment between key issues impacting on local communities and project activities supported by PIP, including work with 'at risk' youth, efforts to develop local leadership and build capacity in areas where paramilitaries are gate keepers and exert pressure on the local communities, as well as initiatives which address contentious issues and sectarian tension. This work is particularly relevant as it reduces the sense of powerlessness, challenges existing power dynamics which sustain divisions and opens up community structures to people who have been or feel they are excluded or who self exclude. The core of this work is mediation and dialogue and opening channels of communications among these stakeholders. This low key approach has proved to be very effective in reducing the levels of violence and facilitating dialogue with individuals and groups who have not previously engaged.

There is a strong undercurrent in both PUL and CNR communities that the political parties have lost touch with marginalised communities and have failed to provide the necessary leadership at critical times. A number of the PIP projects involved in this work have taken risks in this regard engaging with and mediating with armed groups who are willing to use violence and engage in punishment attacks, expulsion and murder. It is important that this work is sustained both by the PIP programme and by future peace initiatives.

The work to engage with these groups is particularly relevant in the current context and is critical to the long term sustainability of the Peace Process. Efforts to engage excluded

people, to give them a voice and to demonstrate that politics can work are particularly important in light of the increased levels of alienation on the ground and are critical to the long term sustainability of the Peace Process. Research and consultations carried out as part of the evaluation indicated a consistent pattern across the projects – that there had been improvements in several key areas such as internal cohesion, the engagement of disaffected youth, engagement of those opposed to the Peace Process, and in the promotion of employment related skills. A survey of project personnel (staff and members of the steering groups) indicated that over 90% felt that the project had helped build capacity to address contentious issues while 90% agreed that it had made a difference (50% strongly agreed and a further 45% agreed).

It can be difficult to identify impact in complex situation where PIP projects are being implemented and where external factors, particularly political developments, can easily set back progress on the ground. Nevertheless, the evaluation has identified important and significant changes at both personal and community levels and the work has also raised some important policy considerations and generated useful learning for the wider peace building sector. Inclusion is a key theme underpinning a lot of the PIP work with projects supporting the engagement of groups such as Protestants in the border region, women, and marginalised and at risk youth.

PIP has supported a number of initiatives to strengthen the engagement of the Protestant community and there are signs that this is creating a new openness and increased dialogue both internally and on a cross community basis. There is growing awareness at a global level that women have the potential to play a much more significant role in peace building and that strategies need to be developed along the lines created by PIP to facilitate this process and to overcome the barriers which often limit their participation. PIP has supported a number of initiatives which have facilitated engagement of new women in both PUL and CNR communities and in some cases provided a platform for them to undertake valuable work with marginalised young people.

Another important area of work has been the engagement of disaffected youth in both rural and urban areas on both sides of the border. While there are a range of Government and statutory initiatives targeting unemployed youth in both NI and the SBC, there appears to be gaps in this type of provision with programmes either excluding some young people or the young people not being willing to engage with statutory services. PIP has supported a range of initiatives which specifically target this cohort of young people and there is evidence that this has had a positive impact. Projects have reported increased engagement in the community, and reductions in anti-social behaviour, levels of recruitment to paramilitary groups and the number of punishment attacks and expulsions. There is clear evidence that the communities where PIP projects are located value this approach and that the participants feel that they now have a stake in their community and a positive role to play.

The work of PIP on core issues related to the conflict and in communities that are recognised as the most disadvantaged is particularly relevant and important in the current context. Projects have addressed a range of core conflict related issues including the ongoing problem of paramilitary domination in some communities, internal tensions and conflicts, sectarianism, the lack of engagement among certain groups and communities, issues around

cultural identity and disaffected youth. This evaluation has identified important progress in these areas and can conclude that the PIP programme is making a valuable contribution to peace building and is clearly underpinning the Peace Process.

A central theme in many projects was providing alternatives –alternatives to unemployment, alternatives to conflict and violence, alternatives to anti-social behaviour and alternatives to political isolation and exclusion. PIP has played an important role in several areas by demonstrating that there are alternatives to enable communities themselves to play a role in this regard. The evaluation found that the support to provide alternatives is bearing fruit and has the potential to make a real difference in these communities and in some cases at a wider societal level.

The interconnected problems in the communities where PIP projects were implemented is damaging community cohesion, eroding the rule of law and undermining the Peace Process. These communities feel left behind and the challenge is how to support and help them to address internal problems while moving towards reconciliation with the 'other community'. It will be important that any future work builds on this and includes more social and political analysis which encourages communities to examine and understand the underlying issues in their communities rather than blaming the 'other side'. However the reality is the PIP was only beginning the process of engagement in some areas/communities and that a more strategic and sustained approach is required over a three to five year period.

PIP has facilitated some important groundwork and filled a critical gap in the overall peace building architecture. With the roll out of TBUC in NI and a new Peace IV programme, there is a need for collaborative approaches to peace building at all levels: at a strategic level between policy makers and funders, at a regional/local authority level and at a grass roots community level. The IFI is strategically placed to work collaboratively with policy makers and funding bodies on both sides of the Irish border while retaining its independent role and continuing to take risks to ensure that the Peace Process is genuinely inclusive and reaching into the communities supported under this first phase of PIP. Such an approach would ensure that the IFI will continue to make a unique and complementary contribution to the peace building architecture in Ireland.

A number of PIP projects are dealing with highly sensitive issues with a strong political dimension; particularly those which work in communities dominated by Loyalist paramilitaries or so called Dissident Republicans. PIP projects have effectively managed the inherent tensions in this work which is challenging dominant power structures. The projects are working to change how groups interact with the local community and to open up community structures to the wider community. Based on consultations with projects and some external stakeholders, including the PSNI, there is evidence this work is effective and beginning to bring about change. The failure by government and the statutory sector to engage these groups can lead to a growing feeling that "politics doesn't work" and further alienation from the political and Peace Process. The onus is on policy makers and politicians to demonstrate that politics does work and to ensure people are engaged in or have access to the process and can have their voice heard. The political context on both sides of the border means that funding for work with groups opposed to or uncomfortable with the Peace Process or for work with a political angle will be difficult. The IFI has more scope to

engage in this sensitive work and can play an important role in this regard while remaining cautious about the purpose of the work and who it works with.

The cross border dimension of peace building has slipped down the agenda in recent years as there has been increased focus on internal issues and local problems in NI and the SBCs. Despite this there is recognition that the border remains an issue and that there is a cross border dimension to some of the issues on the ground. The IFI can play a valuable role in promoting cross border work and should strengthen this element in the next phase.

While the work is still in its early stages, in some areas there is solid evidence that PIP is already doing important and vital work to underpin the Peace Process in these communities. However there is a need for mainstream support which provides the more long term and integrated approaches necessary to really change these deep rooted issues. The IFI should ensure this work is sustained through: more long term support to projects, collaborative work with other agencies at both a local and strategic level, linkage of work to relevant policy instruments and a strategic approach to mainstreaming at a policy level where possible.

Recommendations

1. The IFI should continue the successful approach of pro-actively targeting communities and areas with low levels of capacity and engagement with peace building and maintain the strong focus on engaging those who are excluded from the Peace Process.
2. The IFI should continue to support and mentor these communities by developing new initiatives where necessary or by working through existing structures where capacity is low.
3. There is a clear need for independent funding which is flexible and targeted at the critical issues on the ground and the IFI should continue to play this vital role as an independent funder and take further calculated risks to support these efforts.
4. There is increasing need for collaboration at all levels: strategic, regional and community. The IFI should engage strategically with other funders and policy makers to ensure there is a good level of collaboration while, at the same time, maintaining its independence and unique risk taking approach which targets resources at those who are excluded from the political and the Peace Process.
5. The IFI should disseminate the learning from PIP and engage in a consultation process with other key agencies to ensure effective collaboration.
6. The IFI should work with all stakeholders willing to collaborate to help PIP projects transition from 'stand alone projects' to a situation where their work becomes mainstreamed.
7. The IFI should consider strengthening the capacity of any new PIP to enable cluster-work between groups and communities as this was a very successful aspect of the current programme.
8. The Peace Process is located within a wider context of Anglo Irish and cross border relationships and the IFI should work to strengthen the cross border dimension in the next phase of the programme.

9. PIP should continue to incorporate training and employment elements but should ensure this is not duplicating the range of training support available on both sides of the border and maintain a specific focus on those at risk of becoming engaged in conflict related issues (sectarian/interface conflict or engagement with paramilitaries).

10. The IFI should continue to be flexible in their approach to project delivery to enable those funded to be responsive to changing and emerging local circumstances within agreed programme framework/objectives and on a longer term intervention basis.

11. The IFI should review/rationalise the monitoring and reporting requirements to ensure consistency on a cross border basis in order to capture the key quantitative and qualitative aspects, the unique nature of the work and the learning emerging.