

A Strategic Review of the  
Impact of District Partnership  
Expenditure in Northern  
Ireland

Executive Summary

Consulting  
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*This report contains 27 pages*

## **Contents**

Introduction	page i
Our Approach	page v
Conclusions	page ix
Recommendations	page xix

## Introduction

This report seeks to identify the impact of the District Partnerships on the aims and objectives of the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (SSPPR). In addition it will try to assess the additional process benefits which were expected to ensue from the use of this form of delivery mechanism. These expected benefits are set out in more detail below.

## Background

The Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation for Northern Ireland arose as a response by the European Union to the opportunities presented by the first paramilitary ceasefires in the autumn of 1994. The European Commission set up a task force to look at further ways of giving practical support to Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. The Task Force came to the conclusion that the European Union had a clear interest and vital role to play in maintaining the momentum for Peace and Reconciliation, not only for the benefit of the region affected, but also for the wider benefit of the European Union as a whole. The Commission then adopted a proposal for a Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation which was subsequently endorsed by the European Council of Heads of Government at Essen in December 1994.

The Northern Ireland Partnership Board (NIPB) was established in 1996 as one of the intermediary funding mechanisms responsible for the delivery of the Special Support Programme of the Peace and Reconciliation (SPPPR) in Northern Ireland. The overall aim of the programme is to help build a stable society, develop the economy and encourage cross-community and community relation based activities. The rationale behind the formation of district partnerships was to;

*'harness the energies and talents of local groups in pursuit of common goals' and to 'benefit all communities in an equitable and balanced way while concentrating on those areas and people who have suffered the most from the conflict'* (The European Commission 1995 ).

The aim of locally based partnerships is to build relationships and encourage activities which will contribute to the process of peace building in Northern Ireland. The empowerment of local people and the development of local projects to meet local needs is at the heart of the programme.

It is important when considering an evaluation of the District Partnerships that we should take into account the overall objectives of the SSPPR. The Programme has a twin track approach to promoting peace and reconciliation through boosting economic growth and social inclusion. The Strategic Aim of the programme is:

**“To reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation by increasing economic development and employment, promoting urban and rural regeneration, developing cross-border co-operation and extending social inclusion.”**

Its twin Strategic Objectives are as follows;

**“to promote the social inclusion of those who are at the margins of the social and economic life”**

and

**“to exploit the opportunities and address the needs arising from the peace process in order to boost economic growth and advance social and economic regeneration”**

It therefore has both economic and social objectives, which are also meant to be mutually reinforcing.

### **Northern Ireland Partnership Board**

NIPB was established to administer Sub-Programme 6 and has full responsibility to agree the action plans for each District Partnership within the resources available (There are 26 Partnerships in total one for each District Council area ).

The specific role of the District Partnership as a delivery mechanism can be summarised as follows:

- representing and voicing the concerns and needs of all the different stakeholders;
- supporting and developing a peace building vision;
- becoming a positive model for wider community relations within the District Council area.

These specific aims are an important aspect of our evaluation of the Impact of District partnerships, as it is these which should set it apart for the other delivery mechanisms within the SSPPR. It is therefore the Partnerships ability to achieve these aims through the delivery processes adopted which will indicate the added benefit of adopting this form of decentralised delivery mechanism.

Each District Partnership is comprised of council representatives (elected members) (one third), representatives from the voluntary/community sector (one third) and other interests such as business, trade unions and local statutory agencies (one third). There are 27 district partnerships in total spread across Northern Ireland, including the Northern Ireland Partnership Board. As stated above the NIPB is responsible for approving strategies and action plans submitted by the district partnerships. However, the district partnerships have prime responsibility for the delivery of the action plans which are expected to meet the overall objectives contained within the sub-programme. This aspect of the programme has caused considerable friction between the NIPB and District Partnerships, and for this reason it is worthwhile setting out the description of this process in the SSPPR document.

*“A district based partnership within each council area will be invited to bid against the allocation for their area by way of a plan of action (s). This plan will detail the actions/projects which, in the opinion of the partnership, are best calculated to advance the aim and objectives of the initiative in the area. The actions may embrace some or all of the measures across the various priorities in the initiative.*

This statement would appear to give primacy to the “opinion” of the District Partnership. However, the document goes on to say in relation to the specific role of the NIPB that it should undertake the following;

*“ensure that an approved plan of action meets the criteria laid down” and,*

*“assess the value for money of all plans”*

The criteria which the first statement refers to are that each plan submitted must;

- *have a central aim consistent with the aim and objectives of the initiative;*
- *benefit all communities in the area in an equitable and balanced way while focusing in particular on deprived areas and sections of the population;*
- *have an early and visible impact; and*

- *consist of actions eligible under the sub-programme/measure objectives and selection criteria laid down in the programme, or other actions which the Partnership Board agrees will meet the aims and objectives of the programme.*

We can see therefore that whilst the District partnership does have primacy in identifying the actions for their area, that the NIPB also has an oversight role in assessing the overall consistency of the plan, and that individual actions either fall within the existing sub-programme/measure objectives or if not that in the opinion of NIPB they would meet the aims and objectives of the programme as a whole.

## Terms of Reference

The terms of reference required the consultants to undertake an evaluation to assess the impact of District Partnership expenditure by both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This is a challenging list of objectives and we have attempted within our analysis to address each of them. In particular you wish the evaluation to:

- identify the sub-programmes inputs analysed in various ways including peace & reconciliation, size of projects, geographic spread, District Partnerships spread, types of project, leverage of other funding etc;
- analyse the links between the sub-programmes rationale, aims and objectives and projects funded;
- comment on the quality and quantity of the projects funded;
- identify the beneficiaries, how they are benefiting; their experience and ownership of the partnership approach. In particular we wish to assess whether it is seen as transparent and accountable and if it has empowered local communities to help themselves ;
- assess the impact in relation to the TSN and new TSN PAFT, e.g. the role, impact and participation of women and the impact of the sub-programme on the 2 communities;
- assess the projects against value for money in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and economy and what synergies have been created with other funding bodies and funding;
- comment on the extent of dead weight and displacement;
- comment on the sustainability of the benefits of the sub-programme;
- compare and contrast the approaches and impact of different Partnerships including a number of detailed case studies;
- compare and contrast the changing roles, experiences and approaches of the District Partnerships over time;
- undertake a number of detailed case studies on the impact of District Partnership expenditure on particular socially excluded target groups and identify examples of best practice;

- comment on the partnership model in comparison with others as a delivery mechanism for programmes and projects.

## **Our Approach**

The main elements of our approach were as follows;

- Stage 1 - Project Initiation
- Stage 2 - Desk Research
- Stage 3 - Case Studies
- Stage 4 - Participant Survey
- Stage 5 - Analysis and Reporting

### **Stage 1: Project Launch and Assignment Planning**

The first stage of our approach provides an important opportunity to ensure that we fully understand your terms of reference and the scope of the evaluation. At this stage we would wish to meet with the Northern Ireland Partnership Board to agree the exact methodology to be utilised, a reporting mechanism and the key outputs for each stage of the assignment. The output from this stage was a detailed work plan for the assignment, detailing deadlines and the people to be interviewed.

### **Stage2: Desk Research**

At this stage we accessed all reports relevant to NIPB, SSPPR, and sub-programme 6 in relation to this study. We also reviewed all available monitoring data for the District Partnerships including the NIPB Financial database, the CRU SSPPR Applications Database and the Optimum Monitoring Questionnaire (OMQ) database. A full version of the OMQ can be seen in Appendix I of the main report. Unfortunately the response rates for the OMQ were much lower than we had expected and considerable effort was put in to an additional exercise to obtain sufficient returns to enable us to make a meaningful assessment of the impact of the Sub-programme. Through this exercise we, in conjunction with NIPB and the District Partnerships, managed to increase the number of completed OMQs from 405 to 806 almost doubling the number of returns available for analysis.

**Stage 3: Case Studies and Key Informant Interviews**

At this stage we conducted a number of key informant interviews in order to gain an external perspective on the impact of the District Partnerships work to date. These included;

- Members of the Northern Ireland Partnership Board
- The secretariat for the NIPB
- representatives of the Intermediary Funding Bodies (IFBs)
- Department of Finance and Personnel
- European Commission

Six case studies were also selected at this stage to provide a spread of size, rural/urban split, deprivation and community background. For each case study interviews were conducted with the district partnership manager, a focus group was held with the Board Members and a focus groups with a sample of project promoters. The six case studies chosen where the following;

- Armagh City & District Partnership
- Belfast European Partnership Board
- Fermanagh District Partnership
- Lisburn Peace and Reconciliation Partnership
- Moyle District Partnership
- The District Partnership for Derry City Council Area

**Stage 4: Participants Survey**

A participant survey was completed with just over 600 participants involved in a range of different projects. The questionnaire was tailored to capture the impacts from a range of different types of project, these included the following;

⇒ Community Development Training;

- ⇒ Community Services;
- ⇒ Community/Local Infrastructure;
- ⇒ Community Relations;
- ⇒ Large Infrastructure projects;
- ⇒ Vocational Training; and,
- ⇒ Business Support.

This project typology illustrates one of the fundamental problems in evaluating a programme as diverse as the District Partnerships. A wide range of projects have been funded at differing scales and with many aims and objectives, which makes it difficult to reach an assessment of the overall impact of the programme.

### **Stage 5: Analysis and Reporting**

At this stage of the study we have brought together the findings from the different elements of the study to assess the impact that the Partnerships have had on the overall objectives of the Peace and Reconciliation Programme and in relation to the particular process benefits which the Partnership process is intended to provide. Each of the elements of our research approach is intended to help in the assessment of particular aspects of the District Partnership approach. To summarise the main elements and their focus is as follows;

- The Key Informant Interviews and Case Studies focus on the extent to which the District Partnerships have been successful in achieving their specific objectives of creating a peace building vision, targeting local needs and providing an inclusive approach.
- Our analysis of the Optimum Monitoring Questionnaire returns (n=805) focuses in on the concrete achievements of the Partnerships, looking at the types of impact that it has had through the projects which have been supported.
- The Participant survey (n=601) provides evidence with regard to the more qualitative issues which lie at the heart of the Peace Programme, in particular the achievement of reconciliation. It also however provides a qualitative check on the harder impacts identified through the OMQ, helping us to assess whether these projects have had an impact on their local communities.

It is only by bringing together each of these elements that we can begin to assess the impact of the District Partnerships. However, we should sound an important note of caution, because many of the impacts which arise from the use of the Partnership approach may be long-term in nature and relate largely to the building of trust between groups and individuals. Although our approach may capture some of this activity through our interviews and case studies it is nonetheless much more difficult to measure than say, the provision of training or the number of jobs created, however within the overall context of the Peace programme it may be seen as of greater fundamental importance.

## **Conclusions**

We summarise below the main findings with conclusions and make some recommendations for the way ahead for NIPB and the District Partnerships. The structure of the conclusions is as follows;

- Analysis of Financial Inputs
- Process Findings
- Targeting
- Impacts
- Impact Estimate for Expenditure to Date
- Sustainability

Our recommendations are set out as follows;

- Delivery Mechanisms
- Process
- Effectiveness and Impact

## **Financial Analysis**

Our analysis of the financial inputs of the programme involved interrogation of both the NIPB financial database and the Optimum Monitoring Questionnaire. These analyses provided the following insights into the priorities and expenditure patterns of the programme;

- 70% of partnership funds were allocated under social inclusion
- Social inclusion activities have higher levels of additionality because they are unlikely to be self-financing and there is less of a crowding-out effect because there are relatively few alternative funders in this area, outside of the Peace Programme.
- The higher average administration costs for the DPs relative to the other Peace programme delivery mechanisms are the result of the relative size of the funds being distributed and the proactive and supportive way in which Partnerships deliver their funds. More specifically

this relates to their proactive and supportive approach, which seeks to derive significant process benefits in a number of ways, such as;

- ⇒ the proactive targeting of disadvantaged areas;
- ⇒ the provision of project development support in areas with low community capacity;
- ⇒ the encouragement of applications from all sections of the community;
- ⇒ acting as a positive model for reconciliation in their area;
- ⇒ using local knowledge to identify the needs of the area;
- ⇒ working with the local community to develop appropriate ways of meeting their needs;  
and
- ⇒ developing a strategic approach to tackle the needs of the area.

All of these activities are fundamental to the role of the District Partnerships in delivering funding in a targeted and strategic manner. These processes have associated costs, however, we would expect to recoup these costs in longer-term benefits which will increase the overall impact of the programme, because of the changes within the community through empowerment and a strengthened social fabric and in the specific context of the SSPPR a reconciliation dynamic leading to peace and stability. In basic terms the additional delivery costs are the price you pay for the process benefits derived from this approach.

- The average admin cost of 17 pence per £ of programme funds distributed compares favourable with that for other proactive government agencies like LEDU (34.8p) and the Local Area Partnerships in RoI (46.8p)
- The partnerships have paid out just 45% of their total allocation to projects, with 55% left to be distributed in just over one year. This will be a challenging task.
- 29.2% of all grants awarded were between £1,000 and £5,000
- Over 80% of District Partnerships funding went to grants of less than £100,000
- 30% of funding went to projects which received between £20,000 and £50,000

## **Process Findings**

The overall key findings from the case study work we undertook, including the strategic level interviews, are as follows:

- The key impact was cited as the bringing together of political and community leaders from all communities- this would not have happened without the District Partnerships. The Partnership process is viewed by many as the most important impact of this sub-programme.
- It is important to state that not all partnerships have fully gelled and some still mirror the wider divisions in the communities they serve. This is not surprising given the depth of the sectarian divide in our society, and one of the most impressive aspects of the District partnerships is that so many have managed to rise above these sectarian tensions.
- Although it was stressed that the timeframe was initially very rushed and did not facilitate the optimum distribution of funds it was felt that it helped to ensure the development of personal relationships on the Boards and quicker distribution of funding
- The adoption of a more strategic programmatic approach for the second tranche of funding was seen as a positive development by most of our case studies. It made them think about the priorities and needs of their area.
- The original guidelines from NIPB were cited as being over prescriptive removing the scope for a locally based strategic approach to address needs in each area, however in all of our case studies they stated that relationships had improved with NIPB, and many of their issues dated back to the initial phases.
- Management role of NIPB removed the autonomy of the District Partnerships - this was seen as more of an issue in the first tranche.
- Some Board Members recognised the real concerns that NIPB had with regard to ensuring probity and accountability, and realised the potential negative impact of any indication of misallocation of funds or fraud. There was also a broader recognition that both NIPB and the DPs had been on a steep learning curve in the first year.
- We believe that the type of support that many of the DP Board Members felt they should receive could not be delivered with the limited staff resources of the NIPB, in particular the relatively small number of project officers.
- While the majority of our DP case studies have provided most of the process benefits set out in the SSPPR Document and repeated here on page ii of the Executive Summary, however,

there are a few which still have some way to go. The main success factors which we identified in those DPs which achieved these process benefits were as follows;

- \* personal trust and relationships built up during the hard work of assessing and selecting projects for assistance in the first tranche;
  - \* objective analysis of need across the partnership area undertaken by a third party;
  - \* a recognition of common needs and problems across both communities;
  - \* generosity of spirit by those within the largest community in that Council area;
  - \* a willingness to confront and deal with difficult and sensitive issues; and
  - \* working with other local actors such as Councils, LEADER groups, etc.
- There was an issues of under-representation of certain sectors on the Partnership Boards, in particular the agricultural sector in rural areas, which is also a reflection of the problems agriculture is currently facing. Comments were also made about the lack of statutory involvement, and that 1 or 2 members could not represent the broad range of public sector activities. However, there was no unanimity as to how this issue could be solved.
  - Some District Partnerships were seen as having a relatively low profile and in particular being confused and too closely associated with the Local Council. It was felt that this could have an adverse effect on their peace and reconciliation efforts in some areas.

Other key findings from the focus groups with Project Promoters are as follows:

- District Partnerships tend to be highly regarded by project promoters
- the main area of concern is over the feedback received regarding reasons for rejection and the size of grant allocated
- awareness levels within communities is cited as high
- the application process was seen as overly complex, and the monitoring and auditing requirements for even small amounts of money unnecessarily onerous.

In many ways the process has undoubtedly been the jewel in the crown for District Partnerships, and this is recognised by all the groups involved in our evaluation. It is important, however to

recognise that while this has been the case for the majority it has not been for all, however, this is only to be expected within the context of the history of conflict and mistrust in Northern Ireland.

## **Targeting**

This is an important aspect of the partnerships programme and an integral part of their rationale. Due to the local knowledge contained on the partnership boards we should expect them to be effective at targeting both deprived areas and target groups within their area. The evidence from our case studies indicated strongly that this was one of the key benefits provided by the partnerships, and was supported by project promoters as well as Board members.

- 65% of projects stated that they operate in a TSN identified ward
- the main recipient grouping was stated as youth/children (33%) the next most important group where women with 7.9% and people with a disability at 7.5%
- the main primary objective of the projects was cited as ‘promoting pathways to reconciliation by encouraging social inclusion’ (49%)
- 69% of projects are cited as cross community
- 43% of participants are male and 57% female
- 56% Protestant and 43% Catholic (n=805) compared to 40% Protestant and 60% Catholic for the Peace programme as a whole
- 25.3% of projects have a cross-border element
- 68.3% of projects are cross-community

The evidence from all our sources of evaluation information indicate that the Partnerships have been successful at targeting, and certainly many of the project promoters we spoke to represented vulnerable groups and those most affected by the troubles and the overwhelming impression from them was that the targeting had been successful. Perhaps it was just chance but there was no single target group that indicated to us that they felt they had been overlooked or had failed to get their fair share.

## **Impact Findings**

The District Partnerships projects have had a broad range of impacts including physical infrastructure, job creation and social inclusion activities such as childcare and advice and counselling. The diverse nature of the activities of the programme makes it very difficult to be definitive in relation to discussion of value for money issues, there are no readily available benchmarks

The following is a summary of the joint results from our analysis of the 805 OMQs returned by District Partnership funded projects and the 600 participant surveys we undertook.

### **Process Benefits (participant survey 601 responses)**

- 95% believe that the District Partnership model is a good way of tackling local problems
- 90% stated that it was important that DP support continued

### **Community Development Impacts ( participant survey 601 responses)**

- 65% of participants in community development training had not previously been involved in community development (n=131)
- 55% of participants involved in community development felt that the programme had helped to increase their self confidence ‘a lot’ (n=131)
- 56% of participants stated that the training provided had made the group a lot more competent in undertaking community development activities, of these 84% stated that it had made them better at “working with others” (n=131)
- of those respondents interviewed in connection with local community infrastructure projects 96% stated that the existence of the centre had improved their quality of life (n=103). The percentage for community services was 93% (n=222).
- 72% of participants thought that the District Partnership has had “a lot” of positive impact on the local community/ area (n=601)
- 72% of participants agreed that there has been a visible increase in community events and activities (n=601)

### **Environmental Impact**

- 75% of respondents agreed that the appearance of the area had improved (n=529)
- 58 New buildings have been funded (23,034 sq. Metres) (n=780 OMQ)
- 142 buildings have been refurbished (17,809 sq. metres) (n=780 OMQ)
- 116 sites have been improved (88,227 sq. metres) (n=780 OMQ)

### **Community Services Provided**

- 636 new accredited day-care places (n=780 OMQ)
- 1026 new pre-school education places (n=780 OMQ)
- 35,758 guidance/counselling hours (n=780 OMQ)
- 93% stated that the community service had resulted in improved quality of life (n=192)

### **Economic Impact**

- 72% agreed that more jobs and training area available in the area (n=525)
- 15% of those involved in CD training said it helped them to find a job (n=129)
- 18% of those involved in CD training said that it had helped them to find a better job (n=129)
- 764 full-time jobs provided by projects (n=780 OMQ)
- 527 part-time jobs provided by projects (n=780 OMQ)
- 428 jobs safeguarded (n=780 OMQ)
- 1,725 jobs generated by projects (n=780 OMQ)

### **Peace and Reconciliation Impacts**

- of those involved in community relations projects 79% stated that participation had changed their understanding of the views held by people with a different religion/ community background (n=32)
- 60% of participants agreed that projects funded by District Partnerships have resulted in closer co-operation between the two communities. (n=601)
- 58% of respondents stated that relations between Protestants and Catholics are better than three years ago. (n=601)
- 84% of participants had come into contact with a member of the other community as a result of the programme. (n=601)
- 63% said that they are more understanding of the views of the other community as a result of their participation. (n=601)

- 90% of interviewees agreed that the District Partnerships have had a positive impact on peace and reconciliation in their community (n=601)

The evidence from our participant survey sample is that the projects supported by Partnerships have made a difference to their perceptions and attitudes to the other side. More directly it has brought many of them into contact with individuals from the other community. There have clearly been reconciliation impacts on this group, although this may be because the projects, and consequently ourselves, were "talking to the converted". It is often those most in need of reconciliation who are least likely to participate in community relations type activities and therefore those involved in delivering such programmes have to find novel and innovative ways of engaging these people.

## **Impact Estimate for Expenditure to Date**

The projects supported by the partnerships have provided employment, childcare places, training and physical regeneration. We estimate that expenditure to date by the district partnerships, approximately £35 million, has had the following major impacts;

- 1,100 posts (full-time equivalents) funded directly and a further 1,200 jobs (full-time equivalents) generated as a result of their activities;
- 40 new buildings, 150 buildings upgraded and 100 sites improved;
- 1,000 new daycare places and 1,800 pre-school places;
- 60,000 hours of counselling and advice;
- 500 trainees into employment and 2000 into further training or education; and,
- 1300 qualifications obtained with approximately 30% at NVQ Level 1 or above.

These figures are estimates based on the grossed-up impacts of the 805 projects for whom we have impact data. They are grossed up relative to the expenditure to date of the Partnership boards. The numbers indicated above are roughly in the middle of the range of potential outcomes we identified in our sensitivity analysis. However, whilst they are not and could not be wholly accurate, as some of the activities funded have not yet taken place, they do nonetheless provide a reasonable guide to the scale of impact that the Partnerships have had.

## **Future Issues**

The key findings from the focus groups with Board Members and interviews with District Partnership managers are as follows:

- a main area of concern is the sustainability of the projects over the next 4-5 years, with a number of people commentating that this should be the sole focus of the next round of Structural funds
- the local knowledge held by Board members is seen as a vital ingredient to the success of the District Partnerships, both in identifying need and being able to bring together the right local people to tackle those needs, and it is important that any future delivery mechanism should ensure that this is safeguarded
- all those we spoke to deemed it essential that the partnership approach reflecting local needs should continue
- Boards should continue to take on the more proactive, strategic role based on the programmatic approach that has been developed during the allocation of the second tranche of funding.
- There is still a need for some clarity with regard to the respective roles of NIPB and the District Partnerships.

We have been involved in discussions with the NIPB with regard to their recommendations for the future delivery mechanisms, and whilst we are broadly in agreement with the overall strategy and approach we would wish to pose two questions which need to be answered positively before any new delivery mechanisms should be introduced;

- Will these new structures maintain the personal relationships and trust that has been built up and established within the partnerships and between the partnerships and the communities over the last 3 ½ years?
- Will they ensure that the same set-up costs in terms of delayed impact which affected the setting up of the District Partnerships does not occur in relation to any new structures?

If the answer is no to either of these two questions then we would argue that the current partnership model should be retained. However, if a wider partnership can be introduced in such a way that the answer to both questions is yes then we believe that this would be the best way forward. Although it is important to state that it would not be an easy process to bring together all of the local actors in one partnership even if it is only to decide on strategy. It is worth

remembering that the Mid-term Evaluation of the SSPPR recommended that the DPs be reduced in size to make them more effective. Also while the partnerships have helped to improve relationships between Councillors and representatives of the Community/Voluntary sector there are still significant differences of opinion with regard to the prioritisation of social inclusion, and the efficacy of community development approaches.

## **Sustainability**

This was without doubt the first words on everyone's lips when we asked about the future direction of the Partnerships and the Peace Programme. There were three elements to this issue;

- concerns about the potential loss of good projects due to a lack of funding or a break in the continuity of funding;
- issues around the sustainability of the impacts, in particular the temporary and funding dependent nature of many of the posts created; and,
- a realisation that support for projects in the next and last round of Structural Funds must focus on their sustainability i.e. projects must have a clear exit strategy.

The results from our analysis provided some confusing signals with regard to the scale and seriousness of this problem;

- 60% of projects claimed that they would not require any further funding (n=805)
- 90% of projects were promoted by groups which were already in existence prior to their application for funding

However the level of recurrent funding and the number of posts being funded directly by the programme would suggest that the first bullet point above may be overly optimistic, reflecting

what projects think funders want to hear. It is also important to realise that when we say we should focus on sustainability in the next round that that does not mean that only project which are self-sustaining should be funded. There may well be good projects which while that are not sustainable beyond the end of the funding are still worth doing for the benefits they will bring while they are in operation. The basic point is that the finiteness of their existence should be recognised, and they should cease to operate at the end of their funding period rather than find a continuing rationale for their existence.

## **Recommendations**

### **Delivery Mechanisms**

- The make up of Partnership Boards should be as fully representative as possible of the community and the various sectors operational within it, including statutory, voluntary business, youth and other interests specific to the area. Full political representation is also important. The key gaps identified in our evaluation were in relation to the agricultural sector, young people, people with a disability and statutory bodies. However while all of those we spoke to felt that there was a need for closer co-operation with the statutory bodies there were some issues about how this could be achieved. Many felt that putting more statutory representatives directly onto the board would upset the careful balances within it, and that some system of sub-committees was required to increase co-ordination.
- There should be greater co-operation of between Partnership Boards and statutory agencies in relation to the targeting of funding in order to ensure sustainability.
- There should also be greater co-operation between Partnership Boards and other funders to achieve greater co-ordination and to minimise administrative and other burdens on groups funded by more than one agency.
- The partnership approach in the form of a local board accessible to, and representative of, the community, aware of needs and able to target and focus resources should be continued. In particular, the importance of the trust and relationships that have been built up over the past 3 ½ years cannot be overstated.
- There are a number of benefits to be achieved through the establishment of a wider local partnership, in particular the agreement of common goals and objectives. However, there may be efficiency issues as the size of the decision making body is increased, and there would be inclusion issues if it were decreased. One key focus of any broader local partnership should be the reduction of monitoring demands on voluntary and community groups. That is not to say that they should not be accountable, however efforts should be made to reduce duplication of effort and ensure that monitoring requirements are realistic and achievable.

## Process Issues

- The programmatic approach should be continued to capitalise on the local knowledge of Partnership Boards while retaining the bottom up responsiveness to the needs of local groups. Some District Partnerships still need to recognise the benefits have an increased focus and not spreading their resources too thinly across a wide range of projects and programmes. With the more focused approach, rationalisation takes place i.e. the most important needs are met, impacts are more visible and they are easier to measure.
- Measures should be taken to enhance the profile of DPs within the community. In particular this should highlight the distinction between Partnerships and the local District Council and establish a distinct corporate identity. While physical separation of the two may not always be feasible or desirable greater awareness in the public consciousness would be helpful.
- The practice of employing project officers to work with groups and within areas of high need and low capacity has largely been successful and should be furthered, especially in areas where there have been perceived problems in relation to the equity of funding distribution.
- Mechanisms for providing feedback on the reasons for the rejection of applications or the amount of funding offered should be developed. There is a need for greater transparency in decision making.
- Those Partnership Boards which have not done so should consider conducting studies into the levels of deprivation in their own areas to enable more accurate targeting of funding. This is also an important way of tackling any issues with regard to disputes over the fairness of allocations between the two communities
- Sustainability should be a key consideration in the selection of projects over the next phase of funding. It is vital that any projects which are supported under the next round of structural funds support have a clear exit strategy in relation to funding. There are a number of ways in which projects might seek to ensure sustainability some of the forms that must arise in the future are the following;
  - **pure commercial investment**:- once grant has been provided firm should be able to generate jobs and income growth without further public sector intervention.
  - **community/commercial hybrid**:- profit making community owned businesses which recycle those profits into supporting other community services and activities. Many of the capital projects which were developed in the last tranche were based on this model and rely on rental incomes, etc. to support community activities.

- **mainstreaming**:- best practice community projects in the health, education and economic development spheres should be funded as part of departmental budgets
- **time-limited project**:- a project with a finite life time which is not intended to continue beyond the current phase of funding, and requires a clear exit strategy.

Doubtless there are other sustainable models, which we can identify. The important issue is that every project which seeks funding in the next round of structural funds should fit into one of these models.

- Board members and new Board members in particular should be provided with training in areas such as the appraisal of projects, team building, evaluation and monitoring techniques and community relations in preparation for their work. In particular, those partnerships that have had difficulties getting on should bring in some outside support to work on conflict resolution and team building. Busy partnership board members are not always able to go away for a whole weekends training and they therefore need to look at training which can fit in with existing commitments to the DP.
- NIPB should continue to adopt a more collaborative, less directive approach in its relationships with District Partnerships, facilitating their work and providing strategic guidance and advice in a supportive way. However, if it is to achieve this then as stated above more project workers will be required.
- Given the likely delay in the release of the next round of Structural funds it is important that District Partnerships should begin to engage with other local actors, in particular the District Councils and representatives of the Statutory Agencies in an attempt to provide an agreed local framework for a wider strategic partnership and to use this time to identify local needs and priorities.
- Any evaluations of individual District Partnerships should try to identify specific models of best practice in tackling the problems of particular target groups.
- Monitoring tools for the programme should be more tailored to the project type and the programme under which it is funded. There is also a need for a central responsibility to manage and quality control the data on the applications and impact monitoring databases.

## **Impacts**

- Any future partnership programme should identify at the outset a set of indicators for the programme and related targets.

- The one area where partnerships, along with the rest of the Peace programme, have failed to have an impact is in creating a “Peace Building Vision”. We believe that the main reason for this failure is a lack of definition in relation to what constitutes a Peace building vision. We feel that any future programme should engage with academics and others who have knowledge or experience of a conflict resolution process to establish a model against which the progress of the partnerships in establishing such a vision can be measured.

## **Conclusions**

Clearly this report comes out at an opportune time in relation to the ongoing discussions about the future shape and priorities for the Peace programme. In relation to those discussions we would make one basic point which is that social inclusion and community development are processes. More specifically, they encompass an approach to development both social and economic which is intended to ensure that it is those who most need the support and intervention of the public sector that receive it. The District Partnerships are an example of this approach in practice involving partnership, participation and empowerment of the local community. There are numerous examples of economic and physical regeneration strategies which, to borrow a phrase, have missed the target, such as the London Docklands Development Corporation. It may have done wonders from a physical regeneration perspective, but in relation to the social and economic development of the surrounding areas of deprivation it did little but increase their relative deprivation. If the focus of the next round of Peace programme funds is to be more focused on economic development then that is no rationale for not undertaking those activities in conjunction with a social inclusion approach. In particular, if the core objectives continue to be Peace and Reconciliation then these can only be achieved within a socially inclusive model of development, of which the District Partnerships are an important element.

It is also the case that, while some have pointed at the lack of clear links to peace and reconciliation in some social inclusion projects, the linkages between peace and reconciliation and many economic development activities are even more long-term and tenuous. In fact in many ways the main causal link is from peace to economic development rather than from economic development to peace, with the achievement of a peaceful and stable society providing greater opportunities for economic development. It would be ironic if our shift in focus from social inclusion to economic development were to lead to greater social unrest and violence directly damaging the economic development we had made our priority. An inequitable distribution of economic benefits or more importantly the perception of such an imbalance, could actually lead to even greater community tensions and therefore have a negative impact on peace and reconciliation.

The bottom line at the moment is that we have peace, if we define it as the lack of violence, both in relation to our own history and relative to other states and regions. The key question therefore is how do we maintain it, undoubtedly economic development is a part of it, and no one could deny that given the unfortunate events of the last few months in the clothing and textiles sector and at Harland and Wolff, but it is also crucial to ensure that those who are still marginalised in our society have the opportunity to share in any new economic growth and social inclusion approaches are the best way of ensuring that that happens. If all are to share equally in the benefits of economic development, and consequently impact on peace and reconciliation, then a socially inclusive approach is required of which a key element is partnership. Significant benefits from the partnership approach have already been gained, not least a better and more realistic understanding of the positions and issues which relate to the two communities, but also to the different sectors involved in the process. The Voluntary/Community sector now has a better understanding of the constraints and concerns which Government both local and central faces. Similarly, there is a realisation within Government that the Voluntary/Community sector has an important role to play in increasing the effectiveness of policy both social and economic by helping to better target programmes at the real needs of people in deprived communities. Both now recognise the different perspective and skills that the private sector can bring to bear. The District Partnerships have been an important catalyst in this process, however there is still more to be done, and the partnership approach needs to be deepened and widened to involve more of those at the grass roots level and also those within Central Government.