

1. Introduction.

NICVA (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action) has recently held four seminars to discuss the possible design and delivery of the third Special Programme to Support Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties (Peace III). The seminars, held in Lisburn, Belfast, Omagh and Derry were attended by 112 representatives from voluntary and community organisations. This paper outlines recommendations for the design and delivery of Peace III based on the outcomes of these seminars, previous consultation sessions and discussions as well as our experience of engagement with the processes and structures during both the preceding Peace programmes

2. A Suite of Funding.

2.1 NICVA believes that the available structural funds in NI (Peace III, Interreg and Employment and Competitiveness) should be viewed as a suite of funds alongside mainstream government funding. We believe that taking a strategic approach to the funding available from these sources will be beneficial for both the sector and government alike. This will involve identifying what kinds of work need to be supported and determining which type of funding is the most appropriate. This approach is also compatible with the move towards developing a Structural Funds programme which is more aligned to Member States' priorities.

2.2 If this approach is to be a success it will involve open and honest discussions between the voluntary and community sector, officials from relevant Departments and the SEUPB about areas such as priorities, future developments and types of work likely to be supported. Programmes such as Peace III and Competitiveness and Employment should be designed in tandem and the current timescale for consultation on the Territorial Cooperation and Competitiveness and Employment Operational Plans should make this possible. For example we know that Peace III will only receive funding from ERDF. This means that the training and labour market intervention work currently supported by Peace II will no longer receive support from Peace. If the 'suite of funding' approach was to be adopted discussions could be held about the most appropriate place to support this activity. NICVA is keen to talk to the SEUPB and DFP about how this idea can be progressed. We understand the complexity of this given the unknown outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review, but feel that an attempt must be made to look at the whole package together.

3. Design of Peace III.

3.1 It is felt that Peace II was largely designed behind closed doors. NICVA is aware that SEUPB have planned a number of consultation sessions for the design of PEACE III including a preliminary consultation on strategic questions, the development of a consultation toolkit and other participative methods of engagement. While we welcome these moves we are concerned that the initial consultation will be so short and over the summer period.

Government's guidance on consultation provided by the OFM/DFM states that consultation should have a minimum of eight weeks with 12 weeks being the recommended best practice. However we appreciate that the timescale for the design of the programme is extremely tight.

3.2 In order to ensure that that Peace III is designed in a more transparent and open manner than its predecessor we would **recommend the creation of an external advisory team**. This group should bring together the responsible government departments in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, representatives from the European Commission and social partners from north and south. Ideally this group would have been in place before the initial consultation but should now be involved as early as possible in the design of the programme that will be consulted on in September.

3.3 **We would also recommend that the consultation process should be layered to include small local events**. The creation of an advisory team will also help facilitate this process as it will create a 'pool' of people who can be called upon to participate in such consultations – as was evidenced by the Taskforce on Future Funding of the Voluntary and Community Sector.

4. Priorities and Principles for Peace III.

4.1 We know that the amount of money for Peace III is relatively limited and participants at the seminars voiced the strong opinion that work support under Peace III must be very tightly focused on peace and reconciliation. There is not enough money to achieve results through funding work with indirect impacts, as has been the case in previous funding rounds.

4.2 **We recommend** that the programme should have a stronger conceptual base than previous programmes and promote actual discussion of ideas surrounding peace building and conflict resolution, which was largely absent from Peace II.

4.2 **We recommend** that Peace III should support actions which seek to reduce inequalities, incorporate a democratic and human rights dimension, involve women and engage with civil society, especially the most marginalised, in developing their own agendas and articulating needs and their experiences.

4.3 **The field of grassroots leaders involved in peace building needs to widen**. The growing level of attacks in Northern Ireland on those from minority ethnic communities make this an opportune time to widen accessibility of funding to building a peaceful society and promoting reconciliation for all living in Northern Ireland, not just along the Unionist/Nationalist axis.

4.4 The focus should not be so much on the categories of work, but whether the work at its core can demonstrate that it is aiming to build peace and promote reconciliation. In essence we need to increase the spread of

those with a vested interest in peace-building. As a norm projects should be demonstrably cross-community, with a distinct but limited role for work focusing only on one community in particular circumstances. Where this latter type of work takes place, applicants must be able to justify its particular need, it must be transparent and it must set out steps for progress in working with the 'other community'.

4.5 A new programme should:

- Have an international dimension and foster international linkages – in order to be informed by and to inform reconstruction and reconciliation in conflict zones in Europe and further a field.
- Promote citizenship.
- Have scope for innovation, risk and creativity.
- Seek to build social capital.
- Seek to involve women in the peace settlement.
- Take on board difficult issues arising from the conflict and its legacy, such as in the areas of victims, violence, truth, justice and policing.
- Meet the needs of excluded young people at risk of exposure to violence.
- Tackle social inclusion, poverty and inequality in areas affected by conflict.
- Develop cross-border linkages.
- Build in systems for mainstreaming once it is over.

5 Structure of the Funding

5.1 The idea of strategic/targeted funding that sets priorities, and then commissions or asks groups to 'bid in' with types of work that will contribute to achieving the priorities, was quite well received by participants at the seminars. However the point was strongly made that if this approach was adopted the priorities absolutely had to be the right ones and be decided in an open and transparent way in full consultation with all relevant stakeholders. This approach also has the advantage of promoting subsidiarity. Projects funded under Peace III should be fully aware of existing initiatives in the area (either geographical or thematic) in which they are active and show how they are complementary and additional. Organisations should be encouraged to work together to deliver the optimum peace and reconciliation outcomes for the people and areas in which they work.

5.2 Small grants of up to £25,000 can have large benefits for the work of many organisations. In past programmes some IFBs made provisions for the delivery of small grants. This should be made more widespread in the new programme. Small grants delivered in the right way may encourage organisations, which previously avoided the programme because of the perception that it was for large bureaucratic organisations, to get involved in peace-building

5.3 NICVA would recommend that Peace III is a mixture of 'strategic/targeted' funding and an open call based small grants programme.

5.4 We would suggest that the funding should be grouped around the following elements:

- Work for peace and reconciliation between and within communities, tackling issues arising from the conflict and new issues such as racism — 50%.
- Economic and social regeneration of urban and rural communities most directly affected by the conflict — 35%.
- International dimension — 15%.

6. Delivery and Local Identity.

6.1 It is clear that the present structures for delivering Peace II cannot be sustained in Peace III. NICVA strongly supports the principle of social partnership and played a key role in the formation of the Local Strategy Partnerships. However, it is clear that with the reduced amount of money available under the Peace II extension, some partnerships are struggling to survive. With the proposed amount of Peace III being half that amount again and the different focus on cross-community benefit, it seems clear that LSPs cannot be used as a funding mechanism. The administration alone would eat up too much of the available funding. If government is committed to social partnership and if the LSPs are to have a life and a role beyond Peace II as was originally envisaged, then an alternative source of support must be found for them in the very near future as they will not survive long enough on current funds to await the transition to new structures under the Review of Public Administration

6.2 NICVA suggests that there should be one funding body for Peace III and that it should operate on a cross-border basis. Aside from the obvious benefits of reducing the amount spent on bureaucracy this would mean that the programme could be better coordinated and focused. It will be easier to get a clear overview of how the programme is being implemented and where it is having an impact. We understand that by virtue of its place under the Territorial Co-Operation objective Peace III overall will need to operate in a more cross – border manner than Peace I or II. Having a single delivery body will contribute to this.

6.3 However in terms of the type of projects supported **we also believe that this should mean that increased cross-border co-operation should be implemented at measure level.** If a measure has impact on both sides of the border this will contribute to the overall cross border nature of the Programme. It is not realistic or practicable to expect *all* projects to operate in both areas.

6.4 Despite the undeniable practical and strategic advantages of one delivery body, during our consultation sessions with the voluntary and community sector it became clear that local identity and local ownership of the Programme is extremely important. This was particularly true of the more rural areas. Participants pointed out that the nature of community relations in rural areas was very different from that in the urban areas and they strongly felt that only local people will know local issues and how best to impact on them. In many ways the LSPs provided a sense of decentralisation and local involvement. **Therefore we recommend that the SEUPB** explores ways of building more local expertise and accountability into its decision-making structures as they relate to Peace III.

6.5 Another advantage of a single delivery body is that it has the potential to deliver the programme in a more efficient manner. The problems associated with the bureaucracy of Peace II have been well documented and we would hope that a single body responsible for distributing all of the funding will mean that application, monitoring and financial auditing will be carried out in a much more streamlined and co-ordinated way. For example, a single body will mean no more double or treble audit, and less complication around publicity. One of the major administrative issues associated with Peace, and the one that causes the most problems for project promoters, is late payments. It has been suggested that this was less of a problem in Peace I when delivery bodies made direct payments rather than payments coming from a central payments unit. **Ideally this should be the case for Peace III.** However if this is not possible it is reasonable to expect that the process of releasing payments will be much smoother if the central payments unit has to deal with claims from one delivery body as opposed to 56.

6.6 In our discussion with the voluntary and community sector it became clear that **developmental support from the IFBs** during the application process was extremely useful, especially for smaller groups and groups with lower capacity. We recognise that this is a time consuming and resource intensive process for delivery bodies however the efficiency savings made by dramatically reducing the number of bodies could be deployed to ensure that this support be made available. This need not be provided by staff from the delivery body but could involve the delivery body resourcing and training local community networks to provide this service to organisations in their area.

7 Conclusion

NICVA and our members have publicly welcomed the introduction of the third peace programme and congratulate SEUPB, DFP and the Department of Finance for all the work that has gone into securing it. We recognise that SEUPB has also voiced its intention to develop Peace III in an open and inclusive manner. The voluntary and community sector is once again ready to fully engage in this process and NICVA is keen work with the SEUPB on all of the issues related to the design and implementation of the new programme.