

Draft NICVA response to the consultation on the Third Programme to Support Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties.

1. Background

- 1.1 NICVA (the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Operational Plan for Peace III. NICVA and our members in the voluntary and community sector have been engaged in conversations on the design and delivery of Peace III since 2004. For the most recent discussions on the operational plan we organised four consultation meetings, in Belfast, Derry, Omagh and Portadown, which were attended by over 250 people. Our comments are informed by the outcome of those meetings and our wider engagement with Peace programmes since their inception.
- 1.2 The third Peace programme and its Operational Plan (OP) were warmly welcomed by the voluntary and community sector. The sector was aware that there would be less funding available in this round and that it would be spread over seven years as opposed to three. Therefore the design of the programme needed to encompass the best elements of Peace I and II, avoid the mistakes of previous programmes and, crucially, focus on building real peace and reconciliation. In terms of delivery it was clear that a new approach was needed. The current model of delivery was not sustainable with a vastly reduced amount of funding. All of this meant that voluntary and community organisations had to approach Peace III from a different perspective than its predecessors.

2. What are your views on the overall objective and strategic objectives of the Programme? Is this the correct focus for the Peace III programme?

- 2.1 NICVA and participants at our consultation seminars were in broad agreement with the objectives of '*Reconciling Communities*' and '*Contributing to a shared society*'. The objectives reflect the issues raised during our consultation in spring 2006 which saw the voluntary and community sector calling for Peace III to have a sharper focus on peace building, reconciliation and conflict resolution.
- 2.2 NICVA believes that the 'A Shared Future' document was an important development in the peace and reconciliation process and we are pleased that Peace III has been developed with 'A Shared Future' in mind. However it should be borne in mind that dealing with the past, building peace, creating the right environment for reconciliation and ultimately creating a shared future, is a long-term project which needs to involve government and civil society at all its levels. The 'contributing to a shared society' aspect of Peace III can play an important role in this. However it must be complementary and additional to mainstream government funding for 'A Shared Future' and not be seen as the money which government will use to fulfil its 'A Shared Future' obligations, not least because the suggested allocation of €80-€130 is not nearly enough for this.

2.3 There is also an argument that such a sustained focus on community relations will be at the expense of equality. NICVA is quite clear on its position on this. A shared future cannot be created in an unequal society. Inequality in all its forms is one of the biggest threats to building peace and reconciliation. Therefore we are pleased to see measures such as the inclusion of equality as a cross-cutting theme and specific mention of excluded groups such as women and minority ethnic communities. By the same token the creation of a society which is equal but separate is also unacceptable.

3. What are your views on the programme's approach to the five cross-cutting themes?

3.1 There was general agreement that the cross-cutting themes of '*equality, cross-border co-operation, sustainable development, poverty and partnership*' were the right ones. However what was less clear was how to ensure that the cross-cutting themes are mainstreamed across the programme. There was a suggestion that each of the cross-cutting themes be included in the scoring for project selection. While this idea has merit, there are a number of things which need to be borne in mind. Firstly, if each project application is to be assessed on how it meets each cross-cutting theme, then the cross-border theme presents a problem. NICVA and our members are aware and supportive of the cross-border nature of the Territorial Co-operation measures of which Peace is one. However we do not think it is practical or realistic to expect every project funded under Peace to be cross border. We understand that derogation from the Commission means that this does not have to be the case. Therefore scoring applications based on cross-border criteria will disadvantage projects that will only operate on one side of the border.

3.2 Secondly, if cross-cutting themes are part of the scoring for applications then they must appear as a question on application forms and/or in guidance for applicants. Much has been made of the red tape surrounding previous Peace programmes. One of the best lessons Peace III can learn is to streamline the bureaucracy as much as possible. A key aspect of this will be a less complex application process. Questions should not be included for their own sake. Therefore questions on cross-cutting themes should only be included if they are also an integral part of the monitoring and evaluation process. For example, if the application requires project promoters to show how the project impacts on equality, then it follows that the project should be asked to prove how they are delivering on this. Although this may suggest a burden on small groups, bearing in mind the more strategic nature of funding in this programme, it is unlikely that many small groups will be involved in applying directly to the programme and larger projects should be better able to demonstrate how they are meeting cross-cutting themes in their project delivery.

- 4. What are your views on the Programme's approach to project selection including the targeting of named areas and groups and the development of strategic projects?**
- 4.1 NICVA is pleased to note that reconciliation criteria will now be 60% of the total scoring for Peace III. We also note that using the definition of reconciliation developed by Hamber and Kelly will help to ensure that the distinctiveness criteria explained are applied consistently across application and monitoring processes.
- 4.2 NICVA also supports the idea of strategic and targeted funding. We believe that focusing spend on agreed areas of need and on projects that can show a real impact on peace and reconciliation could be a very effective way of spending what is a limited amount of money. However we do have some real concerns about the nature of strategic projects and their inclusiveness.
- 4.3 During our consultation this topic was the most controversial and most difficult to discuss. There is very little detail in the OP on what might actually be considered a strategic project, how the areas to be targeted will be decided and who will be involved. It would be fair to say that voluntary and community groups supported the idea of strategic projects in theory but were very concerned about how they would roll out. Time and again we heard that it was difficult to answer the question until more detail was provided. However, there are a number of key issues that arose. Firstly it is absolutely essential that the areas to be targeted are the right ones and the involvement of local people in their selection is one way of ensuring this. Secondly there is a fear that the partnerships developed to design and deliver new projects will be lead and dominated by local Councils and that this might lead to the exclusion of voluntary and community organisations in some areas.
- 4.4 NICVA and our members recognise the right and responsibility of locally elected representatives to have a say in what happens in their area. However there is still a need for the independent voluntary and community sector to have a voice. We note that there is a strong commitment to partnership in the OP and we firmly believe that this should mean real social partnership at all levels of the programme. We recommend that SEUPB draw up robust guidelines for the establishment of partnerships clearly setting out minimum standards for membership and rules of engagement. Partnerships which do not meet the guidelines should not be considered for support.
- 4.5 EQUAL has shown us that the best partnerships are those that have invested in developing the capacity of members to work together to an agreed programme. We are pleased to note that the OP acknowledges the need to assist local authorities in the development of applications and allocates this role to CRC and Border Action. We recommend that the Monitoring Committee, perhaps through a partnership sub-group, take an active role in monitoring the partnerships. It should ask the proposed new Technical Secretariat based in SEUPB to oversee the development of real partnership including developing training and other capacity building measures which try to ensure that the partnerships work well together and develop the best projects for their area.

4.6 The issue of thematic, regional projects was also of concern. NICVA welcomes the specific mention of the need to include women, young people, older people and minority ethnic communities in peace building. However there is very little detail on how regional thematic projects involving these communities of interest should be taken forward. This needs to be made much clearer in the OP and across the programme. We also suggest that SEUPB draw up guidelines for partnerships considering making an application, which advises them on the thematic groups that should be included in all projects. This would ensure that the inclusion of excluded groups is mainstreamed across the entire programme.

5. **What are your views on the content of each priority?**

5.1 NICVA believes that the priorities for the new programme are the right ones. They are well focused on peace and reconciliation and reflect the transitional challenges that will be faced in light of the RPA. As mentioned in 4.6 we are pleased to note the inclusion of women, young people, older people and people from minority ethnic communities in this programme. We especially welcome the inclusion of older people and people from minority ethnic communities for the first time. NICVA believes that in order really to build peace and reconciliation we need to widen the vested interests in peace building beyond the traditional unionist/nationalist axis. Everyone who lives in Northern Ireland and the border counties has a stake in building a new society. This includes older people who have a wealth of knowledge and experience of living through the best and worst of Northern Ireland and people and families who have recently chosen to make this their home. Both the UK and Irish governments have international obligations, under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, to ensure that women are involved in all areas of peace building. Involving women in a meaningful way in the Peace programme helps fulfil this aim. Moreover gender should be a key consideration in the decision-making structures of the programme including the monitoring committee and any partnership structures.

5.2 We broadly agree with the draft allocations for each priority. However there were a number of concerns raised about the practical out-workings of each priority. Some consultees felt that priority one was geared towards the voluntary and community sector and priority two was about supporting government programmes. If social partnership is to underpin the programme this should not be the case. All social partners should feel able to be involved in every aspect of the programme.

5.3 There was a particular concern around priority two – *creating shared public spaces*. We cannot stress strongly enough that that measure must be applicable to rural **and** urban areas. While the issue of investment in shared spaces may be easier to identify in an urban context, it is vital that rural communities are also enabled to revitalise contested spaces and eliminate boundaries and divisions. This priority also raised questions about additionality and complementarity. The reference to the commitment to

supporting projects in the North-West as part of the British Irish Intergovernmental Conference in May 2006 caused particular concern. Much more detail is needed on what is meant by this but consultees felt this signified that government had decided what to do with this aspect of the Peace money before any consultation had taken place. Claims of government grab were levelled at Peace II and it is important that Peace III genuinely supports the principle of additionality. However we recognise that with such a limited budget this programme cannot get involved in large infrastructure investment projects and may be used as a leverage or match funding for such projects. Whatever the out workings of this initiative, it is imperative that the same principles of distinctiveness, partnership and the cross-cutting themes are applied to this measure as to the rest of the programme.

- 5.4 Our consultations also highlighted a contradiction in the assumptions underlying the structure of the programme. The programme has a sharp focus on peace and reconciliation and creating a shared future. Delivery of the programme is built round strategic projects led by local government. Yet the key area under priority two, *developing key institutional capacities for a shared society*, acknowledges that many local authorities and other bodies do not yet have the capacity to do this. This dichotomy further underlines the need for the monitoring committee and JTS to pay special attention to the decision making structures in the programme and the partnerships created to deliver projects.

6. In your opinion, what role if any should small grants play in the new programme?

- 6.1 In our consultations NICVA found unanimous agreement for the inclusion of small grants. It is important that this, which will probably be the last Peace programme, is also the most inclusive. The OP acknowledges this. Small grants are an effective way of including a wide range of stakeholders carrying out a diverse range of activities. They should form a central part of the programme as well as being included in strategic applications. Ideally each of the large strategic projects should incorporate a small grants element to widen local participation. However there are some important practical issues that must be considered. Small grants cannot be so small that the accompanying application and monitoring makes them more trouble than they are worth. We would therefore recommend a small grants programme that has a minimum amount of £10,000 and a maximum of £30,000. The £10,000 minimum threshold will bring the grants over the maximum limit of the Big Lottery Fund Award for All programme and the maximum should ensure that project promoters view the grant as a genuine peace and reconciliation focused small grant project. We also recommend that the body or bodies tasked with delivering small grants explores ways of ensuring that the application, monitoring and other bureaucracy associated with the grants is minimal whilst ensuring financial probity. This may involve employing staff to deal specifically with small grants or resourcing local voluntary/community infrastructure bodies to help applicants with bureaucratic responsibilities.

6.2 We are also aware that Peace III is subject to N+2 regulations. The strategic nature of the majority of the programme will mean that projects may take some time to come forward. We believe that this is unavoidable if we are to ensure that the programme is to have maximum impact. However an innovative and streamlined small grants programme could come online and begin to spend relatively quickly thus ensuring money moves through the programme while partnerships and strategic bids are being developed.

7. Summary of Recommendations.

Peace funding should be complementary and additional to mainstream government funding for 'A Shared Future' and not be seen as the money which government will use to fulfil its 'A Shared Future' obligations.

The cross-cutting themes must be implemented throughout the programme. However questions on cross-cutting themes should only be included on application forms if they are also an integral part of the monitoring and evaluation process.

We recommend that SEUPB draw up robust guidelines for the establishment of partnerships clearly setting out minimum standards for membership and rules of engagement. Partnerships which do not meet the guidelines should not be considered for support.

The Monitoring Committee, perhaps through a partnership sub-group, should take an active role in monitoring the partnerships.

SEUPB should draw up guidelines for partnerships considering making an application, which advises them on the thematic groups that should be included in all projects. This would ensure that the inclusion of excluded groups is mainstreamed across the entire programme.

All social partners should feel able to be involved in every aspect of the programme.

The principles of distinctiveness, partnership and the cross-cutting themes should be applied to Measure II as they are to the rest of the programme.

Ideally each of the large strategic projects should incorporate a small grants element to widen local participation.

We recommend a small grants programme that has a minimum amount of £10,000 and a maximum of £30,000.

The body or bodies tasked with delivering small grants explores ways of ensuring that the application, monitoring and other bureaucracy associated with the grants is minimal whilst ensuring financial probity.

An innovative and streamlined small grants programme could come online and begin to spend relatively quickly thus ensuring money moves through the programme while partnerships and strategic bids are being developed.

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