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Uncertain Times

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CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Communities across Northern Ireland and the southern border counties have been dealing with a continued level of uncertainty, which has led some to feel unsure about their future.

Although progress has been made in many of these communities since the signing of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, with many taking significant steps towards peace building and reconciliation – a lack of leadership is threatening to weaken this progress.

The International Fund for Ireland has continued to engage with these communities, offering support to boost community leadership aimed at building trust and confidence within. There is a need for continued collaboration and partnership to ensure this engagement not only continues but provides fruitful long-term outcomes for communities most in need.

The peace we enjoy today should not be taken for granted. There are many real life issues, which are affecting the long-term sustainable future of communities. Border communities, for example, are feeling particularly anxious about what their future will look like post Brexit. Many border counties have only recently initiated community reconciliation, after years of engagement

with the Fund on the benefits it could have for their community and the local people who live and work there.

The continued lack of an NI Executive and Assembly is leaving many communities unsure of what the future holds. This uncertainty is being exploited to incite violence and recruit a new generation of young people into paramilitary activity.

This edition of Fund Focus explores the theme of uncertainty in our communities with a particular focus on some Border counties, the challenges they are facing and how they are working towards positive engagement to dispel these insecurities.

The International Fund for Ireland is the only organisation engaging with some of the most disengaged in society. We are transforming lives and going where others will not in order to rebuild trust and prevent the escalation of tensions and polarisation. It is vital, to ensure sustainability of these communities, that long-term

partnerships and collaborations are sought to ensure lasting support from a range of organisations, individuals and political advocates.

Our work is far from complete. Our programmes are working towards bettering the lives of people so they can contribute positively to the communities they live in. These projects have long-term ambitions to create sustainable working communities that will flourish and no longer feel they have been left behind. This, for many, is still a long way off and the International Fund for Ireland is committed to continuing this work – we do however need others to join us.

The essential work of the Fund is only possible because of our donors, the United States of America, The European Union, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and we remain grateful for their enduring support and encouragement.

Paddy Harte
CHAIRMAN

IFI Invests in Nine Community Projects

Deepening divisions across Northern Ireland and the southern border counties require urgent support at a critical time in the Peace Process.

This insight comes on the back of the IFI's latest funding allocation, which will invest €1,133,026/€1,359,631 into nine projects, which are working with the most polarised communities who have not felt the benefits of peace and reconciliation.

The funding has been allocated to a range of initiatives across the Peace Impact Programme (PIP) and Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP). These groups face many challenges and are working hard to remove the influence of paramilitaries and offer alternative paths of engagement for opportunities and positive life choices.

Paddy Harte, Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland says: "External challenges such as the ongoing uncertainty of Brexit,

the lack of a functioning NI Executive and the rise of hardline dissidents have created a considerable void, which is having a very negative impact upon communities.

"It comes at a critical time in the Peace Process where we want to see communities flourish instead of returning to darker times of the past. We are transforming lives and going where others aren't in order to give those communities the tools to rebuild trust and prevent the escalation of tensions and polarisation.

"Our programmes are making important inroads to help resolve legacy issues, encourage dialogue around difficult conversations as well as tackling deprivation, employment skills, mental health issues, drugs and alcohol abuse and paramilitary activity."

For further information on the latest funding visit www.internationalfundforeireland.com



Above: (Back Row) Hilary Singleton; Allen McAdam; Sadie Ward-McDermott; (Front Row) Bernie Butler; Paddy Harte (Chair of the Fund) and Avila Kilmurray.



Peace in an Irish Town

By Conal McFeely, Creggan Enterprises

Derry, in the North west of Ireland, has been in the national headlines extensively recently – and for all the wrong reasons. This city has been at the heart of so much that has transpired with regard to Civil Rights, the Conflict and indeed the Peace Process. It is spiralling and regressing into a more troubled place while Brexit bubbles under the surface threatening to tip everything into chaos.

Helping us to ‘Self-Help’

Communities within deprived areas like Derry have, through necessity, pioneered and refined community development and ‘self-help’ mechanisms to create indigenous economic and social opportunities.

If policy makers committed themselves to following principles of community development, social enterprise and peace building, we could tackle the legacy of conflict, and disadvantage, and achieve a more socially just society. Conversely,

ongoing austerity policies risk economic stagnation and erode vital layers of social cohesion – essential for peace.

We sorely need more robust and inclusive processes at the heart of government, and new strategies promoting wider community dialogue, particularly with disaffected constituencies and those alienated from the Peace Process.

I have absolutely no doubt that a no deal Brexit, will result in a variety of socio-economic impacts for the working

class communities as well as increased polarisation, division and destabilisation between and within communities.

Brexit has created a climate of fear mongering. Add this to the Stormont impasse and an inability to deal with the legacy of the past and Brexit has created a near intractable situation which only fills communities with despair and uncertainty. All this contributes to the inevitable unravelling of the Good Friday Agreement as well as damaging North-South and British-Irish relations decades in the making.



MAIN IMAGE: Londonderry/ Derry has been at the centre of conflict over the years with unrest in the Creggan estate.

BELOW: Singer and actress Bronagh Gallagher pictured with Marie Newton (left) and Sharon Austin (right) whose stories were featured in the publication 'Beyond the Silence', by the IFI funded Unheard Voices project, which is part of Creggan Enterprises.



Community Need

There is also growing isolation and alienation within communities and groups and constituencies deemed to be outside the Peace Process. Creggan Enterprises works quietly with many groups and individuals outside the established mainstream to ensure inclusive opportunities, challenge gatekeeping, resolve disputes peacefully and to encourage dialogue.

Community feedback and experience tells us that the following supports are required within our communities:

- Community infrastructure to address social and economic exclusion, stimulate business, employment and social innovation.
- Social enterprises and inclusive development vehicles.
- An inclusive and independent cross-sectorial Intermediate Labour Market.
- Robust community dialogue in the wake of recent violent events - inclusive processes which challenge positions, propose restraints and create opportunities to further progress towards achieving an end to all armed conflict.
- Support for initiatives which effectively, respectfully and sensitively deal with the past.

- Development of educational initiatives and cultural partnerships.
- A targeted wrap-around support for those most in need (including the working poor).
- Well-being services and initiatives – preventative, early intervention, crisis and ongoing support addressing all aspects of physical and mental health.

Taking Risks for Peace

Creggan Enterprises believe that communities and civic society must take the lead when it comes to peace building. Grassroots community development organisations should be empowered, trusted, resourced and supported to make those crucial and timely interventions most needed by their communities. Partnerships and calculated risk-taking are key to this process. The International Fund for Ireland (IFI) took a calculated risk on

Creggan Enterprises (CE) almost 30 years ago, and this has resulted in a significant positive impact for this community and the wider region. CE is not only a sustainable flagship social enterprise (and registered charity) which provides a much needed economic measure to regenerate the area – it is also involved in a broad spectrum of social programming and peace building which helps to address many of the underlying issues affecting our community.

The IFI continue to take risks. They see the clear benefits of supporting grass roots community development and peace building. We are aware that a much grander scale of intervention is necessary to address the systemic failure to build a sustainable economy in the North West. A key economic driver is essential to provide the foundation for a peace building platform.

CASE STUDY: Digging Deeper

Community and Restorative Justice's 'Digging Deeper' Project operates in the Newry and South Armagh area and currently faces number of complex challenges around the future. Funded through the IFI's PIP Programme it focuses on outreach with marginalised communities who typically have never engaged in peace and reconciliation activities.

Ewan Morgan, Project Co-ordinator says: "Through our intervention, especially with disaffected members of border communities, there is an element who would be happy to take advantage of any vacuum, political or economic, caused by Brexit. This is a real issue but we must continue to advocate an inclusive, peaceful approach."

Since the Good Friday Agreement change along the border has been remarkable with seamless crossing for economic and social interaction. The project is working hard to negate detrimental effects that Brexit could bring.

"The farming sector here operates in one of the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland and current challenges around the border corridor will increase rural isolation further. We provide opportunities to create connections, common interests and encourage networking alongside training and upskilling to tackle the effects of rural isolation."

A lack of understanding by Brexiteers around border issues alongside progress that stems from the Good Friday Agreement is deeply concerning.

"All of our research indicates that Britain leaving the EU will have a negative impression on the border area, whatever the outcome. It will be felt economically and socially across all classes, creeds and generations. Policing in the Community Meetings, the recently formed South Armagh Community Council and Brexit events are all measures helping us to prepare for whatever the future holds."



Project Participants from 'Digging Deeper' on a study visit.

The project has made an impact on surrounding areas bringing many cross-border residents together.

"We believe the South Armagh Community Council and the Policing in the Community Meetings will sustain long-term, as they are now in the hands of the local community with our support when required. Communities have felt the benefits of our project and are eager to maintain the success in the future."

CASE STUDY: Youth Diversity

The legacy of The Troubles has resulted in a lack of trust between some communities in the border region but thanks to the positive influence of the 'Youth Diversity' project, young people are feeling empowered to become role models in the area.

The project is led by Dundalk Youth Centre in partnership with the Tí Chulainn Centre in South Armagh and enhances cross-border, cross-community engagement and youth leadership. It targets young people through peace building, capacity training and develops skills and learning in cultural diversity and leadership.

Kevin Moran, from Youth Diversity says: "Currently, living close to the border has a minimal impact on people's lives. The majority of residents are oblivious to what Brexit really means. There is huge uncertainty surrounding the future."

Participants from the project took part in a special youth conference on Brexit in Dundalk. There were wide-ranging discussions on the potential challenges for young people that may arise from the UK's decision to leave the European Union.

The conference included a number of facilitated discussions where young people shared their views on how Brexit could affect them. Education, health services, transport, employment, social and leisure as well as peace and reconciliation were among the many topics that were covered.

The project also engages with the Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist (PUL) community in the Southern Border Region. Engagement with community leaders, key school personnel in Protestant faith schools and organisations that support PUL communities has been instrumental. A number of initiatives have evolved over the last couple of years including an identity exhibition and many of the young people are still actively involved with the project today.

"Rural isolation is also a key challenge and without this project there would be no youth provision at all. Issues such as alcohol, drug abuse and anti-social behaviour are major problems and we provide positive intervention on a weekly basis.

"We see the project progressing through volunteering opportunities, youth representation and peer education. Those involved get fulfilment from organising community activities for other young people.

"Everyone can see the positive impact young people are making in the area. We are encouraging participants to take more responsibility in their community and in years to come we will reap the benefits of all their hard work and dedication."



ABOVE: Participants from the project pictured at the youth conference on Brexit in Dundalk with IFI Board Member Hilary Singleton (right).



**North Connaught Youth & Community Service
Personal Youth Development Programme**

Over 50 young women aged 16–25 from the border counties of Cavan, Donegal, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo gathered at Lough Rynn Castle in Mohill, County Leitrim for a cluster event designed to encourage entrepreneurship. The ‘Own Your Own Future’ event allowed participants to sample bite-size sessions of what a career could look like across a wide range of disciplines including beauty therapy, childcare, fashion design, hairdressing and health and fitness. Award-winning hat designer and Leitrim native, Jennifer Wrynne was one of a number of female entrepreneurs who shared their experiences, offering advice and encouragement to the participants. Pictured are: IFI Chairman Paddy Harte with Stacey Carr-Kennedy, Donegal, Amy O’Hara, Tubercurry, Alice Smith, Sligo and Shannon Connolly, Cavan.

**Kilcooley Women’s Centre
Personal Youth Development Programme**

The new CATALYST youth project is designed to promote the personal wellbeing and social development of young people aged 16–25 years deemed vulnerable. It aims to increase and enhance knowledge, skills and experiences to reach participants full potential as valued individuals and active citizens with the ability to engage with others taking a good relations approach. The official launch took place in Clondeboye Estate, Bangor with a series of speakers coming together alongside participants to launch the two-year programme. Pictured are: (L-R) Allen McAdam, IFI Board Member; Tracy Harrison, Head of Children and Young People Services at Kilcooley Women’s Centre; Kirsty McDowell, IFI Youth Project Manager and Ards and North Down Mayor Richard Smart.



**Creggan Enterprises and Unheard Voices
‘Twenty Years of Peace Conference; Progress
and Possibilities in Northern Ireland’
Peace Impact Programme**

The Londonderry/Derry project was part of a visiting delegation from Northern Ireland to Yale University in the USA. They were invited to attend and participate in a conference examining 20 Years of Peace. The project’s recent BBC programme ‘The Life After’ was screened followed by a discussion. The project highlighted how their work has made a difference to those affected by the lasting impact of trauma and economic deprivation through The Troubles. The conference examined the future of Northern Ireland in light of the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. Other attendees included former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, Senator George J. Mitchell and General John de Chastelain. Pictured are: Kevin Hipsley, Creggan Enterprises, former Senator George J. Mitchell and Carol Cunningham, Unheard Voices.

