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# Societal Fractures

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## CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

In the 20 years that followed the signing of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, the majority of communities affected by sectarian violence have started the process of rebuilding trust and confidence in one another.

With the support of the International Fund for Ireland, many of those who opposed or were marginalised by the political settlement are starting to engage in constructive dialogue and transformation.

Yet as hard as it is to bring conflicts to an end, it is even more difficult to gain full implementation of agreements. The absence of prolonged and entrenched violence today should not be taken for granted nor misunderstood as the end of the job.

Peace in Ireland remains fragile. There are very real disconnects between communities that continue to limit reconciliation, social integration and democratic participation. These enduring fractures are complex to resolve and are exacerbated by political uncertainties and polarisation.

The prolonged mistrust between Northern Ireland's two largest political parties and a perceived return to identity politics have placed a significant strain on those who are working to stabilise communities. A further concern is the movement of some opportunists to further divide people for their own agendas.

This edition of Fund Focus explores the societal fractures that endure and the critical need for the Fund and others to remain engaged with communities that are vulnerable to destabilisation. The recent past has shown that polarisation and the failure of politics come at a heavy price.

Against such adversity and with limited resources, the International Fund for Ireland is playing a pivotal role and enabling people to take important

measured risks. Our appetite for this work has never been greater, but the Fund alone is not equipped for the scale of challenges that may emerge during an indefinite political vacuum.

At this stage of the peace building journey, there is more at stake and society has more to lose if there is an absence of political will and adequate resources to resolve the fractures that continue to divide society.

The essential work of the Fund is only possible because of our donors and we remain grateful for their enduring support and encouragement.

**Dr Adrian Johnston**  
CHAIRMAN

## International Fund for Ireland commits £3.3m/€3.9m to 19 community projects

The funding, approved at the organisation's Board Meeting in County Louth, includes more than £2.5m/€2.9m that is allocated across 15 projects within the Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP). These initiatives assist young people to take better control of their lives, reengage in training and avoid being drawn into criminal or sectarian activity.

The remaining funding, £810,000/€974,000, has also been allocated across four projects in the Peace Impact Programme (PIP), which assists marginalised communities to resolve complex issues relating to identity and the conflict.

Dr Adrian Johnston, Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland, said: "We still live in a deeply fractured society and political uncertainties are adding greater pressures to communities that are working hard to move forward. The risks taken by groups we support cannot be taken for granted. In many difficult

areas, the Fund and these groups are delivering the only interventions that are preventing the escalation of tensions and polarisation. In challenging circumstances, their ambition and vision deserve to be equally met with political action and leadership.

"With the limited resources available, the Fund is making important contributions that support stability and progress, particularly among communities that had not previously recognised a peace dividend. However, the Fund alone is not equipped for the scale of challenges that may emerge during an indefinite political vacuum. Each generation should expect a better life than the last. That can only happen if there is political will and adequate resources to help resolve the legacy issues that continue to blight communities."

For further information on the latest funding package visit: [www.internationalfundforireland.com](http://www.internationalfundforireland.com)



ABOVE: (Back Row) Paddy Harte, Siobhan Fitzpatrick, Allen McAdam, Billy Gamble, (Front Row) Dorothy Clarke, Dr Adrian Johnston (Chairman of the Fund), and Hilary Singleton.





Brian Rowan (third from left) chairs a discussion panel at recent Feile an Phobail in West Belfast.

# The 'Impossible' Becomes Possible

by Brian Rowan

When politics fractures the cracks elsewhere become more visible and obvious.

Political failure brings attention not just to the hill at Stormont, but to the unfinished nature of our peace.

The blemishes are more easily seen, as in Derry/Londonderry and in East Belfast in recent times. We should neither understate or overstate what happened. There is a need for context.

The fracture in our politics and the recent street violence do not represent a return to the past and to the hell and the hurts of a decades-long conflict.

Rather, these things are a reminder of what still needs to be done; that politics

and peace building are long processes. We are reminded of the need for leadership; how important an ingredient this is; leadership both in politics and within communities.

In recent weeks, that leadership was evident in the Shankill and Falls areas in Belfast.

Seen at the Woodvale Festival where a different stage was prepared and presented - for music; a place of conversation and a bonfire in a corner that seemed almost incidental and certainly not the centrepiece of events. The July story was not just the news and headlines

of hijackings, gunfire and explosions.

Then, look in on Feile an Phobail - the leaders debate with Sinn Fein, the DUP, SDLP, Ulster Unionists and Alliance all represented. Also, a legacy conversation in which the PSNI Chief Constable George Hamilton, Victims' Commissioner Judith Thompson and Professor Louise Mallinder joined Republican Sean Murray and Loyalist Winston Irvine.

I tweeted: This festival is doing what 2 governments can't do - in this [legacy] event and then in leaders debate bringing the key voices in to the one room. Well done @FeileBelfast.

Progress often gets lost in the headlines and in our taking for granted the peace and what made it possible; uncomfortable, challenging dialogue and conversations, then the ceasefires of 1994 and, then, the political agreement on Good Friday four years later.

The impossible became possible.

What is the learning from that period? Two things. An inclusive process and outside help.

Senator George Mitchell steering the politics, General John de Chastelain and an international commission to deal with the issue of arms and another commission headed by Chris Patten to address the issue of police reform.

Yet, the legacy question has been left to the political parties in Northern Ireland and to the British and Irish governments.

In peace building, it makes no sense.

In that recent Feile an Phobail legacy event, which I chaired, I said the debate has been and is far too political.

The weight of the past - that inability thus far to find an agreed process - is part of what causes those cracks and fractures at political and community level.

If politics is to be fixed, then there is a need to think back and to rewind to the processes that worked before; the widest possible involvement in any new talks process - including representatives from the Loyalist community - and those essential ingredients of international help and leadership.

Any process on the past must be shaped to deliver the maximum amount of information and help to ensure no repeat of the conflict period. It should not be some parade of shame, and we cannot have a Peace Process that releases prisoners and a past process that could send people to jail. Just think of the contradiction in that.

Given what has been achieved along the way, these are not impossible challenges. They need and demand political will and leadership - the uncomfortable dialogues and conversations and decision-making that have been essential to the politics and peace of this place over the past two decades.

By January 2019, two years after the resignation of the late Martin McGuinness as deputy first minister, will Stormont have functioning politics or will we still be in this indefinite political vacuum?

The answer is we don't know. Brexit has added to the uncertainty.

What we do know is that the outstanding issues to be resolved are small in comparison to those that had to be settled to achieve the political institutions of the 1998 Agreement.

The late David Ervine was part of those talks and, just recently, I listened to an interview I recorded with him in February 1999, which included this advice: "You cannot leave another negotiator with no bus fare home."

Politics is the art of the possible, and nothing that has created the cracks and the fractures of past months should prove impossible to solve.

At a community level, seemingly intractable marching disputes have been settled through facilitated dialogue.

In July, the Woodvale Festival did not get the attention it deserved for an initiative that offered a different way of doing things, and Feile an Phobail has managed to bring key voices in to the same rooms for uncomfortable conversations.

How do you repair the cracks in politics? Follow the example of some of what is happening at a community level.



Brian Rowan



## CASE STUDY: Swanlinbar

During the course of The Troubles, the impact of violence and marginalisation on southern border counties often went under reported. Today, rural communities in particular are still experiencing legacy issues relating to the conflict with social isolation, low employment and lack of investment a part of everyday life.

Cross-border initiatives encouraging engagement in rural areas remain a challenge but one project, 'Finding our Way', in Swanlinbar, Cavan has been working tirelessly to build trust, strengthen and upskill local people as well as attract cross-border visitors from both sides of the community.

The 18-month long project, managed by Swanlinbar Development Association was awarded €125,050 for a cross-community programme targeting all age groups and the border communities of West Cavan and Fermanagh.

Sharon Howe, Project Coordinator of Swanlinbar Development Association says: "Many residents feel that Swanlinbar is a



IFI Chairman Dr Adrian Johnston joins a cross community football tournament held by the Finding Our Way Project.

forgotten town. Opportunities tend to be outside with locals having long commutes, which becomes a barrier for participation in activities here. We've also seen growth in a new generation of Republican activities trying to garner support and instil old feelings of mistrust alongside a fear of the unknown through impending issues like Brexit."

The project offers a natural environment where all sides can come together and participate in a wide range of activities allowing new relationships to evolve.

Although many unlikely friendships are being formed, the thoughts of a reinstated hard border reignite negative memories of border checkpoints and the associated emotional, social and economic impact on the area.

Sharon adds: "Despite everything, the project is growing day by day. We plan to continue to use a social enterprise approach to help build a sustainable future for the whole community offering long-term opportunities that are not solely dependent upon outside funding sources."

## CASE STUDY: Ulidia Training

The current Stormont deadlock is undoubtedly adding to disillusionment felt within many communities across Northern Ireland. Ulidia Training, based in Ballymoney is one project, offering hope to a local community that feels abandoned by mainstream politics.

Against a backdrop filled with political uncertainty, the Ballymoney area also faces a number of other issues, which often makes engagement a challenge.



Kenny Blair, Project Coordinator for Ulidia Training says: "At the moment we are experiencing power struggles with some former paramilitary groups. These issues are having a detrimental effect on community relations. Unfortunately some of the good work that we've been doing has been put on hold because of intimidation of individuals and groups.

"Despite this, we believe that the project has helped empower the local community through a range of engagement and education initiatives. The project was initially single identity but we now enjoy excellent relationships with a number of organisations with both sides of the community."

Ulidia has played a pivotal role in strengthening relationships and engagement in the area. The group now engages regularly with the PSNI to address policing and community issues. They have also developed new youth associations in several areas, which will continue long after the life of this particular project.

Kenny adds; "Through the opportunities and training offered, we've also set up a successful social enterprise, which is thriving and supporting social, economic and community transformation. Skills that have been transferred across include banner and drumhead paintings, fabric painting, embroidery and leatherwork. The quality of the work being produced has also resulted in securing orders from businesses and sporting organisations across the UK and Ireland.

"Our ambition is to offer opportunities that will transform the area into a vibrant hub. We'll also continue to engage in sensitive conversations with the hope that those issues can be resolved so that the whole North Antrim community can move towards a better future."

LEFT: Pictured is (L-R) Kenny Blair, Ulidia Training coordinator; Scott Douglas, Ulidia Training participant; and Paddy Harte International Fund for Ireland Board Member.



**YESS Project – Personal Youth Development Programme**

Young people in Sligo recently celebrated success through a unique project that is turning lives around and enhancing community relations in Sligo. The 'YESS' project offers a range of courses and the latest saw eight young people achieve qualifications in Food Safety and Hygiene from St Angela's College. The certificate is accredited by the Environmental Health Officers Association of Ireland and enables participants to work in the catering, retail, food service and food industry sector. Pictured are: Participants in back row alongside Front row (l-r) Deirdre Gallagher, Foróige; Catherine Ryan and Dorothy Clarke, International Fund for Ireland; and Michael Hosey, St Angela's College.

**Imagine Project - Peace Walls Programme**

Residents from the Lower Oldpark and Cliftonville areas of North Belfast have shared their experiences living next to Peace Walls with the Imagine Project. 'The Peace Walls: An Oral History' captures the personal stories of residents who lived in the areas for thirty years or more. The unique initiative is part of a wider effort by the project to engage people in new dialogue around interface barriers. The project not only captures history of the area but also shares stories of poignant memories of trauma, friendship tragedy, segregation and resilience during The Troubles. Pictured are (L-R): Malachy Mulgrew and Sarah Lorimer, project coordinators and Billy Gamble, International Fund for Ireland Board Member.



**Shankill Women's Group / Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum – Personal Youth Development Programme**

Twenty eight young people recently took steps towards a brighter future at an event in Belfast Castle. The Empowering Young Women and YOLO projects, led by Shankill Women's Centre (SWC) and Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum (CCRF) respectively, joined forces over the last 12 months to enable young men and women aged 16-25 years old learn how to engage with society as well as build their confidence, skill sets and ultimately become more employable. The project recently secured further support from the Fund to extend the project for another two years. Pictured at the event are participants Darren Bradley and Tanya Faloon.

