

INVESTING IN PEACE: REFLECTIONS ON THE WORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND FROM 1986-2011



Mr. Paddy Harte

The International Fund for Ireland, which was set up by the British and Irish Governments in 1986 under the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, has been funded by the United States of America, the European Union, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The International Fund enjoys the support of 31 countries, which is truly remarkable. It is one of the most successful examples of the Irish Diaspora at work in a very tangible way; a point ably captured in the Fund's 2002 Annual Report where Hon Russell Marshall from New Zealand notes "As a member of the Irish Diaspora, New Zealand was delighted to be invited to join the Fund, and to lend its weight to the search for a permanent peace between the communities of the North, which had given so much to New Zealand's early history".

The International Fund for Ireland (IFI) had come into existence as part of an Agreement which did not have whole-hearted support in either part of the island at that time. It also came in the wake of many false dawns. While this had the effect of making life difficult for the fledgling organisation it would, in my view, come to be one of the drivers of its success as it became clear that the IFI was part of a much larger story – and the beginning of something really significant for this island.

The International Fund for Ireland (IFI) was set up with two main objectives. Firstly, its intention was to promote economic and social advance, and secondly,

to encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between Unionists and Nationalists throughout the island of Ireland. The Fund's mandate was to concentrate its efforts mainly in Northern Ireland and the border counties within the Republic of Ireland (heretofore referred to as 'Ireland'). The success of the Fund has been, to a great extent, due to the organic way in which it has grown and its adoption of an emerging strategic approach to achieving its objectives. Through this process of organic growth, strategic positioning and relationship building, the International Fund has developed into a very unique conduit capable of reaching into those communities still in need of the type of support which it has become so effective at delivering. Contrary to the aphorism "a rising tide lifts all boats", it is increasingly evident that the rising tide does not lift all boats, and the IFI still has an important role to play.

Context and Structure

It is very important to remember that the environment in which the IFI came into existence was very different to that which exists today. On the international front, the Fund encountered some challenging times in early 1988. For example, not all of Irish-America was in favour of the Fund and a vigorous debate grew in the U.S. Congress when it made its first contribution. This debate was not helped by a growing national deficit in the U.S. and by reports that the Fund was funding inappropriate projects. There was also strong anti-Fund lobbying in Washington coming from the extremist sections of both communities in Northern Ireland. On the domestic front there was also some very strident opposition. There was strong hostility and criticism from the Unionist community who saw the Fund as either a "slush fund" for the nationalist SDLP¹ or as a vehicle for American "blood money". It was seen as an attempt to bribe the community to accept an agreement. Similarly, the Republican community saw the Fund both as part of the Anglo-Irish Agreement

which they considered to be a “sell-out”, and at the same time, a threat to its own fund-raising efforts in the United States. Meanwhile, the violence and political instability continued to polarise communities.

There is evidence from the IFI's Annual Reports of the late 1980's that there was a lack of clarity surrounding the work of the Fund in its early days. It was not exactly clear what it was trying to achieve beyond the broad expression of its objectives. Nor was it clear whether it had any long-term perspective. My own recollection of the early years is that the Fund was attempting to provide economic interventions to stimulate job creation while, at the same time, establishing itself as the first cross-border body since the setting up of the Foyle Fisheries Commission in 1952.

Throughout the “Troubles”, violence and unrest had always been underpinned by economic and social disadvantage and so, from the outset, the IFI used economics as the basic tool for promoting reconciliation between the divided communities. There are four reasons why this was the correct approach at that time. Firstly, one of the most acutely felt indicators of social injustice was – and remains – unemployment and so investment in job creation could be easily measured by everyone. The Fund very sensibly changed from the term “creating jobs” to “assisting in the creation of jobs”. Secondly, economic activity could be carried out on essentially neutral, non-contentious ground. Thirdly, it was thought that economic regeneration would provide tangible evidence to people in divided communities that working together brings mutual benefits. Fourthly, in order to convince international donors that the Fund was achieving its objectives, economic projects could provide very visible and quantifiable results.

This approach was essential during the early stages of intervention. It addressed the source of a very strongly felt injustice while at the same time enabling all the stakeholders to track how the work of the Fund was progressing. In a similar way that Robert Schuman's European Coal and Steel Community,

established in 1950 after World War II, prepared the ground for the future European Union², the IFI used economics at the local level in the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland and in the border counties of the Republic to bring Protestants and Catholics, and people from North and South, into relationships which, it was hoped, would lead to job creation and economic regeneration.

It is important to remember that there was no blueprint for this approach. This was before INTERREG or PEACE came into operation, and so the IFI was engaged in work that was essentially leading-edge and innovative.

In his book, *Leading Change*, John Kotter points to the need to have a “guiding coalition” of expertise and influence at the heart of any change process. From the very outset, the Fund established a network of expertise and influence which stretched from U.S. Presidents, Prime Ministers, Taoisigh, Government Ministers, leading figures in business to senior public and civil servants. When one considers that the IFI has had the support of U.S. Presidents from Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan through to Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, British Prime Ministers such as Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair and David Cameron and Irish Taoisigh from Charles Haughey to Enda Kenny, as well as people like John Hume and Tip O'Neill, one gets a sense of the importance of its role in the peace process. Yet, at the outset, the Fund delivered its support directly through government channels which essentially meant very little change to the status quo. Since these initial attempts to address social and economic disadvantage were not meeting expectations, it became clear that alternative approaches from outside the current operating system were required. Critically, the Board of the IFI was independent and worked outside the current operating systems.

The Board of the Fund is made up of individuals who have expertise in business and community development. This group of individuals has been drawn from both the Protestant and Catholic communities – three from Northern Ireland,

and three from Ireland – with an independent Chairperson. Except in very exceptional circumstances, neither the British nor Irish Government has the power to interfere with the decisions of the Board.

As such, the Board, under the chairmanship of John B. McGuckian, was able to establish its Disadvantaged Areas Initiative and Flagship Programmes, and start to directly influence the way the funding was being used. It adopted a hands-on approach by working directly with, and responding directly to, communities. It also put a very high value on the creation of what former Chairman, Willie McCarter, referred to as “a way of working together” (quoted in McCreary, 2008:50). This concept pervaded all aspects of the Fund, and was indicative of the style of leadership which Willie McCarter nurtured. This style positioned the Fund as being “connected to but not of government”, and this became its hallmark.

"connected to but not of government"

In carrying out its work, the Fund used public and civil servants, on a part time-basis, to work on the various Programme Teams and on the Advisor Board. These Teams were drawn on a North-South basis from experienced personnel who had the necessary expertise. The benefit of this was two-fold; not only had the Fund the use of some very expert people, but these public and civil servants themselves had the experience of meeting their opposite numbers, as well as people from the other community dealing with matters independent of their respective Governments. This developed along-side a government policy aimed at encouraging more engagement between government and the grass-roots. This was a new departure for government on both parts of the island - and is the essence of “being connected to but not of government”.



Navan Fort, Armagh – One of the first 'Flagship Initiative's' supported by the IFI. Copyright: IFI

In the beginning, the Fund was a top-down rather than bottom-up initiative, and its own lack of consultation prior to setting up resulted in very little involvement by either the communities or, by extension, the Governments. However, the Board of the Fund commissioned a strategic review in the late '80s which resulted in the introduction of the aforementioned Disadvantaged Areas Initiative. A central element of this Initiative was the appointment of a team of locally-based Development Consultants who would liaise with the local community and assist in identifying and developing suitable projects. The Development Consultants went into places where government would not or could not go and they gained access to, and engaged with, communities as well as with both governments at every level.

The structure of the Fund with its guiding coalition – an independent board with a mixture of credibility, expertise and influence – was to play a significant role in the processes of change advocated.

The IFI's Vision

The vision for the IFI evolved from the early commentary by the first chairman of the Fund³, Sir Charles Brett, where he attributed the creation of the Fund to a “muddled, but benevolent, desire to believe that money could buy peace, even in Ireland” (quoted in McCreary, 2008: 19) to John B. McGuckian's view of the Fund as providing “real scope for peaceful, constructive change through working together” (quoted in McCreary, 2008: 28) and eventually to Willie McCarter's view that the Fund's vision was to create “a way of working together” (quoted in McCreary, 2008: 50). In George Bernard Shaw's play, *Back to Methuselah*, there is a line which catches the prevailing value of the Fund. “You see things; and you say, 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say, 'Why not?'”

From the outset, the work of the Fund was seen as being part of something greater; a larger story about new ways of addressing the political complexities of this island, North-South and East-West. This is captured in the 1994 KPMG Management Consultants Report where it describes the work

of the Fund as “providing a unique experience of working together for a common purpose across traditional community divides in Northern Ireland and across the border”. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 was part of an on-going attempt to change the approach to these complexities, and the IFI has, in turn, been part of this process. In a sense the Fund gave practical effect to the Agreement, and while it is acknowledged that there is a place for the grand gesture and the “state of the nation” speech in this process, the success of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and subsequently the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement, is in fact the result of the aggregate of marginal gains.

It is due to all of those individual and community initiatives where everyone could get involved, at whatever level, in a positive and practical way and the Fund played its part in this process. This point is echoed by Sir George Quigley in Alf McCreary's book, *Fund of Goodwill*, where he describes the Fund as “something that was strictly focused on real objectives that were helping real people in real ways” (quoted in McCreary, 2008: 17).

"the Fund began a journey that would make it a very innovative force in conflict transformation."

As previously noted, in the early years the Fund saw its mission as providing financial assistance to redress the social and economic disadvantage experienced in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. There was a vicious circle in that the disadvantage was caused by the political instability which, in turn, exacerbated the disadvantage. The Fund, at this time, had a short-term perspective and was, in essence, a reactive funding organisation which responded to a very broad range of projects. However, within a relatively short time, it began to see itself as a development organisation with a longer term perspective and became much more proactive. It realised that, to fulfil its real agenda of peace-building, it would have to become involved

in encouraging long-term relationships within and across all the communities and governments. It began to focus on economics with a purpose, not economics purely for job creation. From then on, it provided economic opportunities which encouraged positive interdependence between communities and thus, by removing some of the local economic grievances, the Fund began a journey that would make it a very innovative force in conflict transformation.

I use the term “conflict transformation” because this is the only term that does justice to the major impact and the sustainable legacy left by the IFI. I make the distinction between this and other terms that are often used in describing this work such as “conflict management” which is essential to the immediate stability but, nonetheless, a containment tool and “conflict resolution” which is focused on getting a solution to the immediate problem once it has been stabilised. Conflict transformation, however, is a holistic approach which covers both of the other forms, but then goes on to alter the overall structure and context in which the conflict exists as it begins to address the underlying causes.

While the Fund is seen mostly as operating in the area of reconciliation and conflict resolution both of which deal with the more immediate causes, what is not so clear is its involvement in conflict transformation and in dealing with the root causes of the conflict. In this regard, it has been a pioneering force in transforming the architecture of the structures of government and changing how they interact with civil society – both vertically and horizontally. The foundations for the suite of cross-community and cross-border bodies that exist today and the level of cooperation which the island now enjoys was, in my view, firmly established by the architecture of the International Fund.

Interventions and Building Bridges

There is an old Irish proverb which states that “The longest road out is the shortest road home”. As discussed earlier, when the Fund was initially set up, there was no long-term perspective. The

prevailing view centred on short-term solutions to the problems that were being addressed by the Fund. In addition, in the early years the Fund avoided holding open meetings or inviting consultation. This was understandable because the Fund’s resources were always limited. The Fund was also anxious to avoid creating unrealistic expectations and so it developed a range of key programmes which targeted activities that would deliver the objectives of the Fund. Initially, it had a very strong economic focus in Investment Companies, Business Enterprise, Tourism, Urban Development, Agriculture and Fisheries and Science and Technology programmes, with the Disadvantaged Areas Initiative bringing a focus to disadvantaged communities. These were complimented by the Flagship, Community Relations and Wider Horizons programmes – all of which provided the Fund with a clear opportunity to get its message across in the towns and villages where it operated, and make a visual impact. Many of these towns and villages had suffered urban decay due to the lack of investment from 1970 onwards and frequently, especially in Northern Ireland, through bomb damage. The Fund tried to address this problem through, for example, its Community Regeneration Improvement Special Programme (CRISP) and Border Towns and Villages Programmes⁴. These programmes were about the commercial regeneration of the centre of towns. They were very visible projects; with such visual and tangible results being crucial to embedding any change.

These programmes, however, had a strong focus on working together to achieve economic results and, as such, didn’t go far enough in the creation of neutral spaces where both communities could shop and interact together. It is possible that there was a lack of relevant research which would have supported the use of public space for reconciliation work during the 1990s; albeit this type of research did emerge later in the 2000s. The research initiative *Place making in a Pluralist World: Using Public Spaces to Encourage and Celebrate Social Diversity* by Courtney Knapp is an example of this and the mission of the Fund would have been better served had it finished the work it had started, and pump-primed this type

of work in key areas under its *Sharing this Space* Strategy⁵. There are so many innovative projects around the world which have used public spaces to improve the interaction of people within their environment and there is a strong sense that the Fund's work could have been enhanced through the development of this aspect of its work.

The Wider Horizons Programme, which takes young people on vocational training programmes in overseas locations, has been very successful in broadening opportunities and counteracting the notion of 'my' space / 'your' space. Many of the young people who have engaged with the scheme have remained friends long after their time on the Programme has finished. In retrospect, it could be argued that the Programme should have a regular follow-up element attached in order to sustain the very valuable work. Returning to their original environment having completed such a programme as Wider Horizons presents difficulties for participants, and a follow-up programme may have been advisable in order to galvanise the positive effect of the experience⁶. Furthermore, the Programme to a large extent fails to address social mobility. This could have been achieved by engaging with young people from a more diverse social mix. Young people involved in the Programme could still see the glass ceiling and, while many of them did indeed become better equipped in dealing with their own environment, not many of them acquired the confidence to challenge this ceiling. Yet, this would have been the real game changer. While the horizontal breaking down of the barriers has been achieved to some extent, the vertical barriers remain.

In later years, the Fund shifted its focus to a more people-based approach in the Building Foundations, Building Bridges, Building Integration and Leaving a Legacy Programmes. It has been suggested that the Fund should have been concentrating on its current suite of Programmes at a much earlier stage. Rather, I would contend that the Fund has responded to its environment in a very timely manner, and should continue to pursue this new agenda, especially now that it has become directly involved in the education



The Tyrone-Donegal Partnership Wider Horizons group who graduated from the Multi-Media Boston Programme in Summer, 2012. Copyright: IFI

sector through its very successful Knowledge through Enterprise for Youth (KEY) and Learning and Educating Together (LET) initiatives and, latterly, in the Sharing in Education Programme.

Short-Term Accountability vs Long-Term Development

The Fund was always willing to go the extra mile to support innovative approaches and to work with people who had fresh approaches to progressing the work of the IFI. This became evident with the introduction of the Disadvantaged Areas Initiative when John B. McGuckian is quoted as saying, "We intend to build on the success of that Initiative and to supplement it with other innovative and imaginative schemes". It is important to remember, however, that the Fund was established under the Anglo-Irish Agreement and, while it addressed the social and economic consequences of the political and social injustices of the time, its mission had to be in line with that of its sponsoring body, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which had at its core the creation of a politically stable democracy.

Because of the Fund's focus on economic regeneration as a tool for peace-building, it had to put in place business models of best practice such as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound)⁷. These types of measurement and outcomes were, almost by definition, short-term whilst the main aims of the Fund could not be achieved in the short-term. The IFI had, for example, a policy of not revisiting projects;

while at the same time, it also resisted considering second projects proposed by an organisation that had already benefited from funding. As time went on, people increasingly came to the view that there were no quick-fix solutions and, as such, concluded that this was a long-term process. In fact, the Fund had started something that it could not walk away from, and it set about building long-term developmental relationships and partnerships. Somewhat accidentally, because of the way it was structured – operating on a project to project basis – and the fact that it received funding on a bi-annual as opposed to a multi-annual basis, this meant that the Fund had a short-term mentality which brought the benefit of a sense of urgency to get things done. This, in turn, brought with it a level of flexibility and responsiveness.

Once the Fund began to accept that it was, in fact, operating economic regeneration “with a purpose” and that it was getting into long-term relationship-building where SMART objectives were not entirely fit-for-purpose, the Fund was presented with a further dilemma: Should it stay with the business model that had very clear measurable outcomes even though these outcomes were not entirely compatible with long-term relationship-building which remained the ultimate objective of the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

Development organisations often find themselves with this dilemma and must constantly ask the question – “what is our core purpose, what are we here to do?” They must always go back to first principles for the answer to ensure that their long-term objectives are not compromised in favour of short-term business model objectives. And for the Fund, this was exactly the challenge it faced – balancing the need for short-term win-wins with a longer-term perspective. To its benefit, the Fund was not solely dependent on EU Structural Funds for support and so it was much better placed than the PEACE and INTERREG programmes to address the long-term requirements of peace-building. This freedom enabled the IFI to nurture projects and thus help sustain them over the long-term. This

was extremely valuable to communities that had no background or experience of developing and managing a project. The Fund could nurture the community and guide them through difficult times. Eventually the Fund employed a very effective combination of urgency with a long-term view and a flexible operating approach which enabled it to avoid the typical funders’ dilemma of giving priority to projects which can spend quickly rather than projects that could really make a difference. It managed to marry the urgency of delivering projects while keeping a close eye on the prize of relationship building.

Acknowledging the Importance of Short-Term Gains

While the Fund was developing a long-term perspective, it always had to be mindful that while the donor countries were very appreciative of the long-term dimension of the work, there was always pressure for the short-term successes. The donor countries understood the timescale involved as they had considerable experience in reconstruction and regeneration of societies that had been affected by conflict but they also needed evidence of progress.

Short-term gains or confidence building measures are essential to the creation of the momentum needed to fuel any change process. It is very important that achievements are celebrated in an on-going, tangible, visible and very inclusive manner. Apart from creating momentum, these milestones recognise the sacrifice people have made and, in many cases, the risks they have taken to better their community. They also communicate to other people that things can change and working together can deliver more sustainable results than working alone. As the old Irish proverb goes “Ni neart go chur le cheile”; which translates into “There is no strength without unity”.

The Fund certainly understood the value of short-term gains and celebrating milestones through public events. While these events can appear to be frivolous, when people commit themselves on a voluntary basis into a political volatile and sometimes

threatening environment, it is critical that this is fully recognised at the appropriate time. The Fund, especially in the early years, used announcements, launches and openings to recognise and celebrate community achievement and to publicise good news stories in a very effective manner. I think it is safe to say that the role of the Chairman of the Fund as the public face of the organisation gave it a personal and accessible feel with a single recognisable figure. This was most evident in the term of Willie McCarter.

From the perspective of the stakeholders, short-term gains are essential when creating the momentum for any change process. However, in some ways they can force the pace and create “illusions of progress”. On the island of Ireland, both cross-community and cross-border work was particularly vulnerable to this pressure. The expectations about achieving success in this arena were very high and, at times, the political pressure was quite strong. In the early years, there were cases of declaring success too soon. If we take the analogy of bridge building in relation to achieving peace and reconciliation in marginalised communities, the situation often occurred where, when constructing the bridge, too much attention was paid to the “connecting part” of the bridge and not enough attention given to the foundations and

pillars so necessary when building a sound structure. This inevitably results in weak infrastructure and a bridge with no sustainability. In the same way, if the social infrastructure of the parties embarking on cross-border or cross-community work is not sufficiently developed, then the process will suffer the same fate as the bridge and is doomed to failure or a very short life.

In the end, the Fund became very effective at bridge building in terms of nurturing its structures. The civil and public servants from both Northern Ireland and Ireland who served on its various programmes have got to know each other because of their work for the Fund. This person-to-person contact on both sides of the Border has been very helpful in the whole North-South part of the Peace Process.

As previously noted, there is always the risk with short-terms wins that victory can be declared too soon. When the Fund launched its five-year Strategy, *Sharing this Space*, in 2006 it also announced that the Fund was entering its “sunset” phase. I felt at the time that this gave the message that once the Strategy was implemented the work of the Fund would be complete, and it would wind-up. This created a self-fulfilling prophecy and to adopt the



The Youth for Peace - Moving Forward Together Project: providing opportunities for contact and dialogue between young people aged 12-25, from Unionist and Nationalist backgrounds across areas of Monaghan, Belfast and Fermanagh. Copyright: IFI

Irish Independent's headline of the 1 May, 2008 for a later event "Ireland is at Peace" – victory was being celebrated too soon on many fronts.

Communicating the Right Message

In the book, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, David Kahnemann talks about how we draw conclusions and make judgements based on the usually limited available information for which he coined the phrase: "What You See Is All That There Is (WYSIATI)". In order to get your message across it must be communicated to your target audience constantly and in as many forms as possible. In the case of the IFI, its constant communication strategy meant that its core message of "peaceful, constructive change through working together" became an acceptable thing to be doing. The Fund had a very complex and fragmented target audience. However, it was very effective in gaining the right publicity for its work. This was important to the donor countries as it provided evidence that their donations were being put to good use⁸.

"I have worked with some remarkable community leaders and without them no real change would have been possible"

In the early years, because it had had a baptism of fire, it was important that the IFI kept its core message of peace-building, and its role as part of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, well below the radar. Once it gained the confidence of the community it could give a stronger voice to its core message. However, the message of what Willie McCarter referred to as "its broad international support" was always to the fore as this was a huge confidence building measure.

Building Community Leadership

While making a presentation to Apple employees in 2000, Steve Jobs said "People with passion can change the world for the better". Throughout my

time with the Fund I came across many people who were driven by a passion to better their communities. However, the lack of support for leadership at community level in the early years of the Fund meant that these people struggled to get a voice in the midst of political instability, oppressive security presence and terrorist campaigns. Nonetheless, throughout those years, many people took a significant amount of personal risk and experienced a lot of unwelcome attention from within their communities through their involvement in work with the Fund. In my experience, people with a passion for their community will always be the spark that ignites community spirit and they form a very precious part of economic and social regeneration. It is vitally important that these very valuable people are supported.

In the Southern Border Counties, local politicians played an important role because people were involved with them. This meant that the community here engaged with their government in their efforts in community development. However, in Northern Ireland, for many years, people at the grassroots level had no relationship with their political representatives. For a long time the paramilitary organisations were the real holders of power within the communities. This lack of engagement with political representatives left people bereft of any empowerment. The Fund recognised the need to develop effective community leaders in marginalised areas. Leadership is a very illusive thing and it is easier to recognise it in retrospect than it is to predict it. However, it is also possible to recognise it in action and to nurture its development.

I have worked with some remarkable community leaders and without them no real change would have been possible. The Fund has been instrumental in addressing the dependency relationship between the people and the political system which existed for so long, by moving it towards a relationship of collaborative partnership. Creating collaborative partnerships or community leadership, rather than supporting individual activists, will result in a more sustainable leadership. This approach echoes the

6th century Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu's view of leadership, and the Fund's Community Leadership Programme which was launched in 1996 adopted this approach with some notable successes. Embedding leadership within the community also helps to address the inevitable burn-out that arises at various stages of the community's life.

Traffic Lights to Roundabouts

There is a line in the poem *Paradise Lost*, "*Who overcomes by force, hath overcome but half his foe*", which captures the unsustainability of the persistent use of force, political or otherwise, in addressing social disadvantage. Force can be seductive because it can create an illusion of progress. The illusion is very difficult to unravel because what appear to be successful outcomes are both immediate and very visible. The concept of changing from the use of a traffic-light system to a roundabout system is a very effective way of tracking progress along a continuum measuring participation in civil society, and this must be the ultimate prize in any democracy. This charts the progression from a situation where government does things *to* people, to where government does things *with* people. At traffic lights, the decision-making rests with the traffic light. It tells the driver when to stop, when to get prepared and when to go. However, in the case of a roundabout, an environment exists in which the driver must take responsibility for the decision-making.

At the centre of the "Cycle of Disadvantage" (a term often used in the Fund's literature) is the alienation and lack of engagement felt by people in marginalised communities. As already noted, in the very early days of the Fund's work, government very much did things "to" people and not "with" people. Consultation or bottom-up working was a relatively new concept. While there are historical reasons for this, it is exasperated by the very low level of trust that existed between all sections of society. The environment was highly political and the terrorist activity made the situation extremely difficult. Also, the culture, both in the South and in the North, was centralised to a very large extent and so the process of consultation was an alien concept.

Furthermore, while representative politics did exist in the South, the political culture was very much one of clientelism. Consequently, the independent nature of the Fund was not always welcome, as local politicians found it difficult to accept that they did not have a say in how funding was allocated. However, because local politicians do have an important role to play in representative democracy, it was essential to ensure that they became active stakeholders in the process and the Fund managed this very well without compromising its very valuable independence. This was achieved by ensuring that the support which politicians lent to the Fund was acknowledged at every possible opportunity, and that political representatives were kept informed of the work of the Fund without being part of the decision-making process. Essentially, it was a contract to consult but not to be influenced.

When, in time, consultation was introduced, there was confusion as to who it should involve and what exactly it meant⁹. The person conducting the consultation often saw this process as a contract to listen but not to be influenced by anything said by the person who was being consulted. The person consulted, on the other hand, always has the expectation that he or she was influencing the decision process. There is a widely held view that everyone has a right to be consulted. However, in the same way as the roundabout requires that the road-user has the required driving skills, consultation requires that those who wish to be consulted must take responsibility for their part in the process. If this does not happen, consultation will amount to a very inefficient, time wasting process. It must be said, however, that there are exceptional circumstances when consultation is not the only useful strategy in affecting change and sometimes the only solution is to simply "Go for it"!

The concept of traffic lights and roundabouts is important here because it enables us to chart the movement along the continuum. Compared to traffic lights, a roundabout represents a much more sophisticated mechanism. It must be well designed and fit for purpose in order to guide the road-user. In

turn, the road-user must display not only technical skill, but effective decision-making and sound judgement. Authority and responsibility rest firmly with the driver and, most notably, respect for fellow road-users is key to the whole process.

The Fund worked very hard in establishing its credentials in this regard. As stated earlier, in the initial years the Fund worked directly through government channels which resulted in very little change in the status quo. In the early 1990s success stories began to circulate, mainly through the Disadvantaged Areas Initiative. The signs of the financial investment became evident and there was a more realistic public appreciation of the constraints within which the Fund was required to operate. With every success story it became clear that a huge amount of inter- and intra-community activity had taken place and this would survive way beyond the initiative and would become part of that engagement in participative democracy that sets the scene for a return to representative democracy.

"first money on the table"

In designing the structure of the Fund, the independent Board, the Advisory Committee and the Programme Teams, the architects of the Fund began to lay the foundations for the fit-for-purpose roundabout which is still constantly evolving. It is possible that in the early stages of the Fund, technical skills were to the fore as these were the skills deemed necessary for economic regeneration at that time. The traffic light was used and we have already considered why this was the right thing to do at the time. However, economic regeneration itself or job creation cannot address deeply held convictions and suspicions and so the drivers on this road to peace needed to develop more complex skills, especially that of respecting fellow road-users.

The Fund had come to see the importance of giving people the power to change their own situation and to this end it took the position of "pump-priming innovative and imaginative initiatives" and adopted a policy that became known as "first money on

the table". This was a major empowering tool. It recognised that too many development organisations made the provision of money to communities and organisations dependant on other monies being available from other sources. By putting its money "first on the table", the Fund enabled communities to negotiate with other potential funding sources. While this required a great degree of risk management, it was nevertheless a powerful leverage instrument and was exactly what was required to achieve the development objectives of the Fund. The use of "first money on the table" was very carefully managed and was only possible in light of the concept "connected to but not of government". The Fund worked very closely with other funding bodies, including government, to get as complete a picture as possible about their views of the Fund's work and where possible to accommodate their concerns. This required a considerable investment in building up trust. The relationship became symbiotic as projects supported by the Fund often resulted in tangible regeneration which in turn, helped advance the development remit of the other bodies while at the same time fulfilling the remit of the Fund. This enabled the Fund, at least to some extent, to influence the approach of the other funding bodies and achieve policy advancements in the direction of the peace-building process. These changes instilled confidence in communities by providing funding that they otherwise would have been unable to access and at the same time brought them back onto the government's agenda. Through the support of the 31 donor countries, the Fund has brought international recognition and support to communities in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland.

Teachable Moment

In his book, *Human Development and Education*, Robert Havighurst asserts that, the ability to change behaviour will be more likely when the time is right. He calls this the 'teachable moment'. When circumstances combine to make people more receptive to new ideas or learning the teachable moment can be said to have taken place. This implies a state of readiness. In the book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie

points out that you must deal with people from where they are and not from where you would like them to be. While there are certainly times when it is appropriate to set the pace for communities involved in development work, it will only have sustainability when the major issues are dealt with at a teachable moment – and there is a convergence in development objectives among the community and the development organisation.

"This implies a state of readiness"

There are certain contexts where the teachable moment flourishes especially in arenas of common interest. In my own personal experience growing up on the Border, like many of my friends I had friends across all sorts of community divides. Almost invariably these friendships came about through sport. It is in this context that I felt that a proactive approach to designing mutual understanding programmes through sport would be a very worthwhile initiative. Initially, the Fund was not very encouraging; however, after a long period of persistence, the Board of the Fund agreed to support a Football4Peace Ireland project in 2007. There is also a strong role for the performing arts in developing mutual understanding. This became apparent through Brian Friel's play, *The Home Place*. Once again, projects like Shared Past-Shared Future, co-delivered by the Ally Theatre in Strabane, Co. Tyrone and the Balor Theatre in Ballybofey, Co. Donegal, managed to address sensitive issues around sectarianism in a teachable moment context.

Throughout my time in the Fund, it was always necessary to draw up the Work Plan for the incoming year which involved target projects, budgets and timeframes. It became clear if the Plan rigorously adhered to the focus it was possible to claim significant progress when the achievements were measured against the outcomes of the Plan at the end of the period. However, the danger here was that it risked not addressing the real prize which was sustainable progress towards peace. This can only



The communities of Carntogher and Kilcronaghan (in County Derry/Londonderry) celebrate the launch of the Reconciling Communities Project, July 2011. Copyright: IFI

be properly achieved if the development body has a hands-on relationship with the community. The ability to recognise a teachable moment is critical to fostering truly effective and sustainable development. It is a very skilled craft which requires a high degree of preparedness, an acute awareness of the prevailing circumstances which impacts the local situation, a supportive network and a canny sense of timing. The Fund's use of Development Consultants, the Board's trust in their judgment and their own credibility both within the community sector and within government, was critical in this process.

The teachable moment can easily fall victim to the need for short-term gains unless those managing the projects have the ability to keep many balls in the air at once, and are able to judge which projects are coming to the fore for the right reasons. It is also my opinion that the Fund's structure with its independent Board, programme teams and its "way of working

together” played a significant role in creating the teachable moment in the establishment of the six cross-border Implementation Bodies.

While the role of formal education has been central to the debate on sectarianism, it has nevertheless remained a very delicate issue. While the *1948 Butler Education Act* began to address social injustice across the UK, religious segregation remained in Northern Ireland. With the benefit of 20:20 vision, the Fund should have involved itself in the education sector much earlier than it did. The theme of “Learn, Work and Live Together” in its 2009 and 2010 Annual Reports sets a very welcome tone, and the Interim Evaluation of the Sharing in Education Programme is very encouraging. It is possible, however, that the teachable moment for the Fund’s involvement in education may have come too late in its life. Education is the design shop for every society and in Northern Ireland it is one of, if not the most significant, barrier to cross-community integration. Again, the Fund has started a very important journey which it could continue to develop in its own unique way.

Bright Spots

It was relatively straight-forward to identify models of best practice in successful economic regeneration and to replicate them in areas of disadvantage. The Fund did this very successfully for over two decades. However, when the Fund changed its economic strategy to *Sharing this Space*, such examples of best practice were not readily available and the organisation did struggle as it switched focus. For example, even the term “sustainability” takes on a whole new meaning and it is much easier to measure in economic terms than in reconciliation terms.

Often, we look to broadly researched and evidence-based strategies to inform us about what to do and how to design programmes that seek to address problems. However, sometimes there are what are referred to as “bright spots”; as in the book *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*, by Chip and Dan Heath. Amidst all of the

chaos, sometimes oases of normality can be found where life continues relatively normally. It is always worthwhile to try and identify these “bright spots” and to find out why they exist, even in very alienated communities. There are examples of this in a number of everyday things which appeared, on the face of things, to have very little to do with conventional peace and reconciliation work. In the midst of the turmoil there were people who managed to lead remarkably normal lives and some who managed to flourish even in an environment where the odds seemed to be stacked against them. Sometimes it was friendship which had developed as a result of working in a local charity, playing on a sports team or performing a musical or drama event. It is incumbent on us to identify the elements which cause these “bright spots” so that we can use the lessons learnt to light up the dark spots. I conducted my own survey by going to locations which I knew well and which had been badly affected by the Troubles, and I tried to identify what was the single most obvious thing about people who appeared to be coping in the middle of all this turmoil. In my experience, the incidences of “bright spots” seem to congregate around the family environment. Things like loyalty to family values, role models, involvement in civil society through sport, music and the arts, importance placed on education are all factors which have played a significant role in nurturing “bright spots”. It is worth pointing out that factors such as these do not require the implementation of a grand, broadly researched and evidence-based strategy. It is very often the case that the answers are to be found within the communities. It is a question of capturing the imagination and passion of the people in the communities. The performing arts, team sports and intergenerational work have all been especially effective in this regard.

It is possible that the Fund may have missed out on the opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas when changing its strategic focus as this may have identified “bright spots”. The very effective programme approach of the Fund meant that it operated within the boundaries set by the eligibility criteria of each programme, and possibly suffered



Launch of the IFI funded 'Shared Space' project at the Manor Cunningham Resource Centre in Co. Donegal, May 2009. Copyright: IFI

the fate of the "silo effect". Some of the most effective innovation comes from the sharing of information and experience across sectors of society and from adding alternative perspectives. It is possible that the Fund could have enriched its suite of interventions through the cross-fertilisation of experiences. However, a project like Family Matters, managed by the North-West Alcohol Forum, is an excellent example of this in practice and I am sure this is now a further string to the Fund's bow.

Conclusions: The Elephant and the Flea

In his book, *The Elephant and the Flea*, the management guru, Charles Handy considered large organisations as elephants, animals which are powerful and influential in their environment but who are slow to change or address niches. The fleas, on the other hand, are flexible and adaptive, with the ability to access niches – but they require the support of the elephant to flourish. Like many symbiotic relationships this works very well. The elephant has a major influence in the jungle but

needs the flea to get into all those little niches on its body that need to be attended to! The result is a happy elephant and a safe and well-nourished flea!

The International Fund for Ireland (IFI) emerged as a highly distinctive organisation in this regard as it "was connected to government but not of government". It was able to target disadvantage and social exclusion by creating investment in disadvantaged communities and by addressing divisions across communities and across the Border. The Fund has become a formidable development agency. It has developed a unique ability to penetrate communities that were once impenetrable, and to deliver effective supports which allow them to emerge from their isolation and disadvantage. The Fund's Annual Reports are testimony to its innovative approach to the social and economic regeneration of divided communities. It has fine-tuned many of its interventions and knows what works and what does not work.

A particular feature of the IFI was its unique ability

to build long-term relationships with organisations at local level in disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. This ability came from the flexibility of the Fund's independent Board, and the fact that its Development Consultants cut out excessive bureaucracy when working on projects. This enabled the Fund to be flexible in developing and supporting innovative projects while, at the same time, remaining highly accountable with what Willie McCarter referred to as "lean administrative structures that effectively deliver cross-community and cross-border programmes".

It is again worth drawing attention to the key role of the Development Consultants in the work of the Fund. These were people located in local areas who had very good knowledge of the problems facing people at grassroots level. As a result, the Development Consultants were able to proactively join people to projects which addressed key problems in those areas. This enabled the Fund to take a bottom-up approach in its development activities. The Development Consultants have been central to the success of a wide range of the Fund's social and economic-based programmes.

The Fund has been a very efficient flea to the government's elephant as it was able to access areas where the government was unable to operate effectively. The Fund was able to work with community leaders and, through the Development Consultants, gained credibility and earned trust. It was on the basis of this trust that Government, North and South, through its civil and public servants eventually gained access to communities which had for a long time been closed to them.

The way in which the Fund has facilitated the building up of important personal contacts between senior officials and politicians has made a significant contribution to the overall development of the Peace Process, and to better relations within the island of Ireland and beyond. Senior civil and public servants who have worked together have established good working relationships over an extended period and, in a similar way, the observers from the donor

countries (the USA, the EU, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) have interacted with their peers at Board meetings. All this activity has led to the development of informal working relationships and friendships which have been fundamental to the success of the Peace Process. Furthermore, the Fund's projects also developed space for politicians from both communities, North and South, to become involved in a low-key way with Fund officials, civil servants and in doing so, with each other. Again, these processes helped to build bridges between the two communities and have been a most important part of the Fund's operations¹⁰.

The Fund has pioneered the empowerment of the people of Northern Ireland and the Border Counties by giving them a stake in their own community and providing them with the skills to create shared spaces in their own local areas; thus making their community a better place. Finding the balance between top-down and bottom-up is key here and when we consider that the Fund came into existence in a very politically difficult environment and without any blue-print in either formal or informal consultations, it has succeeded in developing a remarkably robust engagement process which will prove to be one of its sustainable legacies.

To date, the Fund has invested €753m/£628m in over 5,800 projects, and in 2000, KPMG estimated that for each £1/€1 the Fund contributed, this in turn would leverage a further £2/€2¹¹. In the process, it has brought thousands of Protestants and Catholics into working relationships within the divided communities of Northern Ireland, and between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

In conclusion, the role of the International Fund for Ireland has been recognised as having made a significant contribution to the Peace Process on the island of Ireland but I believe that its full impact has not yet emerged. The Good Friday Agreement of April 1998 provided the context for devolution and power-sharing in Northern Ireland and 1999 saw the establishment of the six North/South Implementation bodies. The IFI deserves a

lot of credit for adopting the previously discussed round-about approach which supported the building of relationships between the civil and public servants who had worked in the Fund over many years, and by developing their capacity to work together. This is a significant legacy of the Fund and not yet well understood by many people.

And finally, while a rising tide does not necessarily lift all boats, the very special skills-set the IFI has developed, could continue to play an important role in peace and conflict transformation.

Note:

The views expressed in this article are entirely my own, and should be treated as a reflection of my experiences of the Fund over a 23 year period. I have tried to present some of the lessons which I have learned in this article, and I hope these lessons may be of use to those involved in this type of work in the future.

For me, it was a personal journey of discovery – as I am sure it was for everyone involved the development work of the Fund. It is something I feel very honoured to have been part of and I know that I have learned more along the journey than I ever imparted.

Paddy Harte lectures in leadership, change management and business development. He is currently Chairman of the Donegal Gathering Steering Group. Prior to this, he gained a wide range of experience in his role as a socio-economic development advisor to the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) for over 23 years. During this time, he was involved in a wide range of cross-border and cross-community projects. He has served as a board member of the Donegal County Development Board, Donegal Local Development Company (LEADER), Inishowen Rural Development Company (LEADER) and Tyrone Donegal Partnership where he advised and evaluated development initiatives. He was a member of the Donegal Employment Task Force and also served as a board member of Concern International. He is currently a member of the Board of the Tip O'Neill Diaspora Award Committee and of the Donegal Clinical and Research Academy. He is a recipient of The Donegal People of the Year Award and has been nominated for the Donegal Person of The Year for the past three years.

Endnotes

¹ i SDLP stands for Social Democratic and Labour Party

² The awarding of the 2012 Nobel Prize for Peace to the EU is a further reminder of the role of the EU in securing and maintaining peace in Europe.

³ There have been five Chairmen of the Fund over its lifetime: Sir Charles Brett, 1986-1989; John B. McGuckian, 1989-1992; Willie McCarter, 1993-2005; Dr. Denis Rooney, 2005-2012; .and Dr. Adrian Johnston, 2012 to present.

⁴ These were part of the Disadvantaged Areas Initiative.

⁵ Published in 2006, this is the current strategy to which the Fund operates. There is a sense though that it was not as fit-for-purpose in the Southern Border Counties in the Republic as it was in Northern Ireland. On reflection, it may have been more in keeping for the Fund to have continued to place the emphasis on economic disadvantage in the Southern Border Counties as that was the main legacy of the Troubles while on

the other hand, emphasising the mutual understanding and reconciliation focus in Northern Ireland. A more engaged process around the formation of the Strategy may have thrown more light on this and made it a more fit-for-purpose mechanism across the Irish Border.

⁶ A prominent community worker made the point that, while vocational training is a valuable part of addressing social disadvantage it can have the effect of creating a well-trained paramilitary recruit if the person has no on-going support in embracing diversity.

⁷ As the Fund was accountable for considerable sums of money, it had to have very stringent accounting and auditing procedures.

⁸ The Fund's message had to be communicated not only on the island of Ireland but across not only the donor countries. Reputational risk both at home and abroad has always, therefore, been a major consideration for the Fund; a risk it has managed well.

⁹ Indeed, the Fund itself engaged in very little consultation prior to its establishment and in the beginning, its activities were not well-tailored to the situation it was facing. Like the traffic light, it sought to direct solutions rather than, like the roundabout, facilitate a relationship-building process.

¹⁰ An outstanding example of this was the Island of Ireland Peace Park in Messines, Belgium.

¹¹ KPMG calculated that this leveraging would result in an investment of €1,626m/£1,356m from public, private and community sources over the Fund's 25 years.

References

Buchanan, S (2008). *Cost of Conflict, Price of Peace*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Ulster.

Carnegie, D. (1998). *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc.

Handy, C. (2003). *The Elephant and the Flea*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press

Havighurst, R (1953). *Human Development and Education*. New York: McKay.

Heath, C. & Heath, D. (2010). *Switch – How to change things when change is hard*. New York: Broadway Books.

International Fund for Ireland (2006). *Sharing this Space: The International Fund for Ireland's Strategic Framework for Action, 2006 – 2011*. Dublin & Belfast: IFI.

International Fund for Ireland (1988-2011). *Annual Reports*. Dublin and Belfast: IFI.

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Knapp, C. (2007). *Place making in a Pluralist World: Using Public Spaces to Encourage and Celebrate Social Diversity*, Project for Public Spaces – Placemaking for Communities, see <http://www.pps.org/about/>

Kotter, J. (1996). *Leading Change*. John P. Kotter

KPMG Management Consulting (2000). *The International Fund for Ireland: Assessment of the fund's impact on contact, dialogue and reconciliation between the communities and on employment*. Dublin: KPMG.

KPMG Management Consulting, Colin Stutt Consulting & Northern Ireland Research Centre (1998). *Assessment of the Impacts of the International Fund for Ireland, 1987-1997*. Dublin & Belfast: IFI.

KPMG Management Consulting (1994). *The International Fund for Ireland: Assessment of the fund's impacts on contact, dialogue and reconciliation between the communities and on employment*. Dublin KPMG.

McCreary, A. (2008). *A Fund of Goodwill – The Story of the International Fund for Ireland*. Dublin and Belfast: IFI.

Ury, W. (2000). *The Third Side: Why We Fight and How We Can Stop*, New York: Penguin Books.