Abstract

This paper evaluates the usefulness of the ‘distinctiveness criteria’ in directing European Union structural funds in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland towards peacebuilding goals. While the criteria are judged to have successfully added a peacebuilding framework to the programme, a number of weaknesses, both operational and conceptual, are found. The article argues that their impact would be sharpened by a stronger focus on evaluation at the micro and meso levels, as well as a more thoughtful qualitative application of the criteria that links actions to the challenges of peacebuilding. The relevance of the conclusions to other areas in conflict is briefly considered.

Introduction

A low-level, violent conflict began in Northern Ireland in 1969. For almost 30 years the conflict exacerbated divisions between nationalists (who generally seek to unite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland) and unionists (who wish to maintain Northern Ireland’s position within the United Kingdom). Northern Ireland is in transition from a conflict to a post-conflict society. The transition is marked by:

- The contentious and incomplete implementation of the Belfast Agreement negotiated in 1998;
- Poor relations between the nationalist and unionist communities illustrated by a growing tendency towards highly segregated housing (over 90% in public housing areas) and provision of services;
- A shift from formal violence to growing numbers of violent sectarian incidents which have heightened tension at a series of interface areas across Belfast and Derry and in some rural areas.

A large proportion of the middle classes are apathetic and appear to be comfortable in a culture of silence and avoidance, a culture reinforced by an education system that is almost completely segregated along religio-ethnic lines. Despite the apathy of many in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) towards Northern Ireland, the relationship between the two parts of the island remains a divisive one, which the Belfast Agreement addresses only in part. Cross-border divisions continue to exacerbate cultural differences and distrust and to perpetuate political conflict in Northern Ireland (O’Dowd & McCall 2004).
The resolution of the conflict at the political level through the full implementation of the Agreement remains a challenge that impacts on, and is affected by, peacebuilding work. The challenges for peacebuilding at the grassroots, middle and elite levels of society are many and are summarised by a group of practitioners and academics (European Centre for Conflict Prevention 2004) as:

- Managing violent disorder and anti-social behaviour at a local level;
- Containing localised outbreaks of violence to avoid a knock-on escalation of violence in other areas;
- Developing strategies that reduce opportunities for perpetuating violence at a local or regional level;
- Addressing socio-economic issues that feed cycles of conflict;
- Moving beyond conflict management to help reduce negative perceptions and build long-term trust between communities;
- Promoting reconciliation where the roots of conflict remain in dispute (in this case the border) and where reconciliation frequently has competing interpretations.

Whether the European Union (EU) Programme for Peace and Reconciliation II (Peace II) will create a process that can begin to address these challenges should be a measure of its success. The conclusion of this article returns to this question. Having introduced the ‘distinctiveness criteria,’ the article examines how they are applied, and considers whether their application ensures that funds are channelled towards activities that have a peacebuilding impact. It draws conclusions about the effectiveness of the criteria at an operational level, makes observations about how their application could be improved, and on whether the Peace II Programme has lessons for efforts to apply ‘Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment’ (PCIA) elsewhere.

The Peace II Programme and the Distinctiveness Criteria

The Peace II programme funds thousands of projects that are run by local and regional community and voluntary organisations, enterprises, development agencies, statutory agencies and a variety of groups. Its five key focus areas or ‘priorities’ aim to promote, through the range of activities they fund: economic renewal; social integration, inclusion and reconciliation; locally based regeneration and development strategies; contact and engagement with people from other regions or countries; and cross-border cooperation (between Northern Ireland and border counties of the ROI). In recognition of the legacy of the conflict in border areas of the ROI (which has been isolated from a natural hinterland by a closed, high-security border and which served as the base for many paramilitaries), the predominantly rural areas adjacent to the border with Northern Ireland participate in all parts of the programme. The fifth priority is specifically focused on developing cross-border contact.

All five priorities are broken down into a series of ‘measures’, each with specific objectives and each the responsibility of an ‘Implementing Body’ which administers funding and provides development and monitoring support to projects. Local partnerships (local government, business and third sector), ‘Intermediary Funding Bodies’ (generally local NGOs) or government departments act as implementing bodies depending on the measure. A cross-border ‘Managing Authority’ oversees the programme’s implementation and coordinates the activities of implementing bodies.
The programme aims to ‘reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation’ (European Commission 2000:41). Reflecting these goals, the programme’s priorities are all to be pursued ‘in light of three specific objectives’ (European Commission 2000:41-44). They are known as the distinctiveness (and reconciliation) criteria and they aim to:

**Address legacy of the conflict**: to encourage actions or projects that will address specific problems (legacies) generated by the conflict in order to assist the return to a normal peaceful and stable society;

**Take opportunities arising from peace**: to encourage actions which have a stake in peace and which actively help to promote a stable and normal society where opportunities for development can be grasped;

**Pave the way for reconciliation**: to build an inclusive process and to promote actions that will pave the way for reconciliation.

The criteria, at least in terms of their aspirations to use development funding to build peace, are an instrument of PCIA – a means of assessing and evaluating the impacts of proposed and completed development projects on structures and processes that increase the likelihood that issues will be dealt with peacefully and structures and processes that increase the likelihood that issues will be dealt with violently (Hoffmann 2001:7). If activities strengthen the former they have a peacebuilding impact.

International Alert et al, who have worked with partners to apply PCIA, or what they refer to as tools for conflict-sensitive development, argue that few attempts have been made to apply the tools, and where they have been applied, few attempts have been made to evaluate their impact on the dynamics of peace and conflict (2000:5-6). The Peace II Programme has arguably piloted a form of PCIA (even if not consciously so). The relevance of the findings presented in this article to the development and application of PCIA is considered in the conclusion.

**Evaluating the Distinctiveness and Reconciliation Criteria**

The assumption behind the criteria is not questioned. In other words, if the criteria were being effectively implemented to achieve their objectives (i.e. to address legacy, take opportunities and promote reconciliation), it is assumed that the programme would contribute to ‘peace writ large’. Given this assumption, the evaluation of the distinctiveness criteria centres on two questions. First, are there adequate activities in place to ensure that the objectives of the distinctiveness criteria are pursued (i.e. how are the criteria operationalised)? Second, do these activities ensure that funding is actually channelled towards projects that have an impact on addressing the legacy, taking opportunities arising from peace and paving the way for reconciliation, and what do these peacebuilding activities and projects look like?

**How Are The Criteria Operationalised?**

For maximum impact, one would expect the criteria to be applied to the process of assessing projects and to the process of monitoring and evaluating projects.

**Assessment process**

Table 1, which is based on guidelines that appear in the Operational Programme (2000), outlines the goal and objectives of the distinctiveness criteria and the activities in place to ensure that they are applied.
Table 1 suggests that the effectiveness of the criteria depend heavily on implementing bodies’ interpretation of the legacy of the conflict, opportunities offered by peace and of the types of actions that pave the way for reconciliation. One might therefore expect implementing bodies to undertake in-depth analyses of the conflict and its legacies and of new opportunities to underpin peaceful relations, and to promote reconciliation. But a standard approach to applying the criteria to the assessment process was recommended. The guidelines for distinctiveness say that projects eligible for assistance ‘should focus on the needs of areas, sectors, communities and/or groups adversely affected by political unrest, and should demonstrate that they will contribute to the programme’s specific objectives on legacy and opportunity’ (European Commission 2000:45). Table 2 outlines these areas, sectors and groups. In November 2002, in response to queries from implementing bodies, the managing authority recommended that the legacy and opportunity objectives ‘are social and economic and will be covered by the range of indicators produced for areas, sectors and groups’ in the assessment process (SEUPB 2002b:9).

Using these guidelines, implementing bodies have employed quantitative indicators to assess the degree to which applicants meet the distinctiveness and reconciliation criteria at the assessment stage. Guidance packs published by implementing bodies and advice to applicants tended to outline how projects based in deprived areas and involving particular sectors and groups would be more eligible for funding.

In 2003, the Managing Authority argued that the fact that one-third of rejected applications were rejected again because they failed to meet the distinctiveness criteria was ‘a positive sign that targeting was working effectively’ (House of Commons 2003:29). A review of how implementing bodies applied the criteria reinforced the impression that the targeting of areas, sectors and groups is the predominant interpretation of the distinctiveness criteria of the Managing Authority and implementing bodies. The review concluded that some implementing bodies reported that they urged projects to interpret ‘legacy’ and ‘opportunity’ in other ways than just through the targeting of areas, sectors and groups. However, the documented evidence was sketchy. ‘Direct targeting’ appears to be the most clearly understood of the overall distinctiveness criteria (Justice Associates 2003:22).

Therefore, some implementing bodies require applicants to target areas, sectors or groups and to highlight how their actions will go some way to addressing legacy, opportunity and reconciliation within these categories. However, most implementing bodies assess projects solely on the former. The difficulty is that these indicators do not clearly assess how a project’s actions will address the legacy, take opportunities and pave the way for reconciliation. Whether a project that is very successful in targeting the ‘right’ areas, sector or groups, will, through its activities, address the conflict’s legacy, take opportunities and promote reconciliation may be unclear.

The operation of the criteria during the monitoring and evaluation process may reduce the emphasis on targeting. It is considered next.
Table 1. The Distinctiveness Criteria: Objectives and Outputs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOAL (Macro Goal)</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Outputs / Activities in place to ensure success of distinctiveness criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To use the Peace II economic and social fund ‘to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation.’</td>
<td>1. <em>To address the legacy of the conflict:</em> address specific problems generated by the conflict in order to assist the return to a normal peaceful and stable society.</td>
<td>During the application / assessment process:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1) Applicants must outline how their activities address the legacy of the conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) Targeting: applicants must show relevance to areas, sectors, groups and communities suffering the legacy of the conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3) Implementing bodies should reject those that have not met this distinctiveness criteria (either objective 1 and 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4) Implementing bodies can accept projects with the proviso that they change or develop activities that ensure that they more effectively address the legacy of the conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td>2. <em>To take Opportunities Arising From Peace:</em> encourage actions which have a stake in peace and which actively help to promote a stable and normal society where opportunities for development can be grasped.</td>
<td>During the application/assessment process:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1) All projects have to outline how their activities take opportunities that arise from relative peace (i.e. show that it could not have happened without peace and/or that it is building a community that will have a stake in peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) Targeting: applicants must show relevance to areas, sectors, groups and communities able to take opportunities arising from peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3) Implementing bodies should reject projects that have not met the distinctiveness criteria (either objective 1 or 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4) Implementing bodies can accept projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td>3. <em>To pave the way towards reconciliation</em></td>
<td>During the application / assessment process:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1) All projects must outline the extent to which their project will help pave the way towards reconciliation and/or will add further dimensions to the project to ensure that this goal is ensured (if required by the implementing body).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) Projects can be rejected by the Implementing Body on this basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3) Implementing Bodies can fund projects on the condition that activities are added or changed to enhance the project's impact on paving the way towards reconciliation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Monitoring and evaluation procedures

The programme’s five priorities are each divided into a series of ‘measures,’ all of which are monitored for the achievement of ‘outputs, outcomes and impacts’ identified at the beginning of the programme. The distinctive criteria are not included in this monitoring system. Instead, they are treated as a horizontal principle (SEUPB 2002a).

An output-focused approach is taken to examine the extent to which each measure has achieved its objectives. Implementing bodies monitor and record the cumulative achievement of outputs and results for activities funded under their measures. The achievement of outputs and results (generally quantitative) are recorded in a central database and their achievement is taken as an indication that objectives are being reached. For example, if the objective of a measure is to strengthen cross-border economic development opportunities, outputs tend to refer to the number of businesses or other organisations involved, and results to the number of cross-border partnerships and networks created. Whether these results actually achieve the objective, and whether this objective addresses the legacy and builds a community with a stake in peace, are not questions considered by the monitoring system.

Some implementing bodies will produce evaluations that explore the extent to which the outputs and results of their measures actually achieved the objectives and they may even consider the peacebuilding impact. These should, but do not always, feed into the macro-level evaluation which will be commissioned by the Managing Authority at the end of the programme.

Table 2. Areas, Sectors and Groups Targeted by the Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas</th>
<th>Areas with high levels of relative deprivation; border areas; areas that have suffered disproportionate levels of violence and that suffer from high levels of community division, segregation, displaced persons, or destruction of infrastructure.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sectors</td>
<td>The private and entrepreneurial sector and projects that encourage the start-up or development of business in these sectors (especially ICT &amp; business services); projects that target other legacies of the conflict by encouraging investment; and developing sectors especially affected by conflict – tourism, the arts, sport and new business sectors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups and Communities</td>
<td>Communities in deprived areas or deprived communities in relatively affluent areas; distinct groups that have suffered disproportionately, such as ex-prisoners and their families; ex-security force members seeking employment; victims, including the disabled, and their families; displaced people, young people and older workers whose job prospects are restricted; and other groups facing continued and significant disadvantage as a result of the conflict and community division.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation, Mutual Understanding and Respect</td>
<td>Reconciliation, mutual understanding and respect to be facilitated/enhanced between communities in Northern Ireland and between communities in the North and South. Each project should highlight the cross-community and cross-border elements. If the focus is on a single-identity community, the promoters should highlight how it will ultimately improve cross-community relations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Operational Programme
This approach is appropriate for an evaluation narrowly focused on accountability. But by excluding the distinctiveness criteria from these measure-level indicators of achievement, and by not requiring in-depth analysis of the impact of each measure, let alone their impact on peacebuilding, this type of monitoring system will fail to establish whether the money has achieved the programme's most fundamental goals: its peacebuilding goals. With this monitoring system, the formal evaluation of the distinctive impact will take place at the macro level. It will focus on the most clearly quantifiable ‘indicators of change’ from Table 1. Whether the legacy and taking of opportunities were successfully addressed would be indicated by a high percentage of projects funding activities in targeted areas and including targeted groups and/or sectors; successfully paving the way for reconciliation by the percentage of projects that are cross-community versus single-identity. The number of projects rejected on each measure because they have failed to meet the legacy, opportunity or reconciliation criteria would also be an indication of the extent to which the criteria are working successfully. Table 3 outlines this approach.

This evaluation would tell us something about the success of implementing bodies in directing funding towards areas, sectors and groups defined as suffering the legacy of

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Table 3. Logframe for an Evaluation at the Macro Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Output/Activity</th>
<th>Indicator of ‘success’</th>
<th>Sources of verification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Legacy</td>
<td>Targeting of Areas</td>
<td>% of projects concentrated in: deprived areas; areas that suffered high levels of violence and disturbance; areas with significant inter community tension;</td>
<td>TSN wardlevel data on relative deprivation; History of the Troubles project data and Police data; % of each community living in certain areas; level of conflict currently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Legacy</td>
<td>Targeting of Sectors</td>
<td>% of projects involving sectors outlined as suffering the legacy of the conflict;</td>
<td>Data from applicants about sector in which project is concentrated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Legacy</td>
<td>Targeting of Groups</td>
<td>% of projects involving victims, ex prisoner groups etc.</td>
<td>Data from applicants about sector in which project is concentrated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Legacy</td>
<td>Application of</td>
<td>% of projects rejected for not meeting the distinctiveness criteria</td>
<td>Data from implementing bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Opportunity</td>
<td>distinctiveness criteria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation</td>
<td>Application of</td>
<td>% of projects rejected for not meeting the reconciliation criterion</td>
<td>Data from implementing bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reconciliation</td>
<td>reconciliation criterion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation</td>
<td>Application of</td>
<td>% of projects that are cross-community versus single identity</td>
<td>Data from projects and IBs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reconciliation</td>
<td>reconciliation criterion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the conflict and/or in a position to take the opportunities arising from peace, and in targeting projects that pave the way for reconciliation. This, in effect, evaluates how successful some of the activities (outputs) designed to achieve the distinctiveness objectives, in this case targeting, have been. The Managing Authority published the information in Table 4 (SEUPB August 2004) to highlight the extent of the programme’s success to date in targeting distinctiveness.

There are two difficulties with this analysis. The first is the degree to which the information accurately reflects the success of the targeting. The second is more fundamental and questions how far targeting indicators take us to understand the impact of the programme on peacebuilding. As for the first, missing from the above is information about the extent to which some projects target areas, sectors and groups, and some projects target none of the three. Furthermore, the exercise relies on programme’s database. Information is often based on data provided to implementing bodies by projects at assessment stage: it reflects projects’ intentions and does not automatically reflect what ultimately happens.

As for the second, this system reinforces the impression created at the assessment stage that targeting areas, sectors and groups will ensure that activities contribute towards building peace. This raises two issues:

- Could a project based in a disadvantaged area that has experienced a high level of conflict and primarily benefiting marginalized groups aggravate inter-community relations and/or reinforce the legacy of the conflict through its activities?
- Even if a project outlines the activities that will address legacy, take opportunities arising from peace and promote reconciliation, without mechanisms to assess how well it achieves this peacebuilding objective throughout its life, it may fail to take these objectives seriously.

These scenarios would be unlikely to materialise if the distinctive activities were monitored by projects themselves and by implementing bodies throughout the lives of projects. Does this happen? The answer is not clear from the macro-level analysis and it requires a closer look at projects.

A sample of 20 projects that have been running for over a year was taken from two of the programme’s measures. Projects funded under Measure 5.3 (cross-border reconciliation) and 5.1 (cross-border economic development) were selected for a number of reasons. First, an independent report found that of the three types of implementing bodies, the ‘intermediary funding bodies’ (IFBs) have applied the most consistent and thoughtful process to the use of the distinctiveness criteria (Harvey 2003). As Measures 5.1 and 5.3 are implemented by IFBs (ADM-CPA et al 2003), there is a stronger likelihood that projects will have identified a number of concrete ways in which they will address the legacy, opportunity and reconciliation criteria. Second, Measure 5.3 is one of the two in the programme that specifically mentions ‘reconciliation’. This increases the likelihood that projects funded under it have been assessed for the legacy, opportunity and reconciliation activities. Third, the author has considerable knowledge of Measures 5.3 and 5.1 and full access to project files, being connected with the cross-border consortium responsible for their administration.
### Table 4: Targeting Distinctiveness: Breakdown in Areas, Sectors and Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREAS</th>
<th>% of projects</th>
<th>% of value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantaged area(s) experiencing or which have experienced relatively high levels of violence</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area(s) such as sectarian interfaces where inter-community conflict and dispute is high and community relations are correspondingly poor</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantaged area(s) whose image and attractiveness as an investment location has been adversely affected by local violence or community tension</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area(s) suffering the effects of physical dereliction (including damaged infrastructure) as a consequence of the conflict</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area(s) isolated by border closures</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area(s) with high concentrations of displaced persons as a result of the Troubles</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area(s) where social and economic development has been inhibited by the conflict</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other area(s)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUPS</th>
<th>% of projects</th>
<th>% of value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victims of conflict i.e. the surviving injured and/or disabled – either physically or psychologically – of violent, conflict-related incidents and those who care for or are related to them, along with close relatives who mourn their dead.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-Prisoners and their families i.e. qualifying prisoners who were or would have been released under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaced persons i.e. those who have involuntarily moved from areas of violence or interface areas and communities in which there is a concentration of displaced persons.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people, women and older workers insofar as they have been prevented from fulfilling their potential in society or in the labour market</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Members of the security and ancillary services facing additional employability needs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Groups/Communities</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTORS</th>
<th>% of projects</th>
<th>% of value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship including ICT and Business Services</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arts and Sport</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Sectors</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Analysis based on 2,138 projects with a combined value of £312 million (May 2004)*
An analysis of project applications, assessment reports, contracts or ‘letters of offer’ from the implementing body and interviews with the project promoters was used to establish whether it encouraged projects to take a distinctive approach beyond assessment stage to inform the full implementation of all projects. As predicted from this analysis, applications under the cross-border economic development or cross-border reconciliation theme that are strong on the targeting of areas, sectors and groups tend to score highly on the distinctiveness criteria. The design of the application form is in part to blame for this emphasis. It asks applicants to outline how they will address the legacy of the conflict and take opportunities arising from peace in the context of one or more of: i. an area showing the effects of conflict and/or community polarisation as a result of conflict; ii. a sector adversely affected by the conflict and division and/or suffering structural adjustment as a result of peace; and/or iii. a community and/or groups economically or otherwise disadvantaged by the conflict. Applicants are scored separately for all three (areas, sectors and groups), but must score highly in at least one of the three and must ‘pass’ the section to be funded.

Despite this emphasis, the implementing body has made a considerable effort to ensure that projects outline not only the legacy of the conflict, but also the activities that will enable them to address this legacy. In some instances these activities were translated into action points in the ‘letter or offer’ (or contract) agreed between the implementing body and the successful applicant. In other cases they were not, sometimes because the project was accepted for its strength in outlining the legacy but vague on how it would address it. Other project promoters argued that by achieving their narrower, specific goals related to the measures – the promotion of cross-border economic development or cross-border reconciliation through culture, heritage or social inclusion - they were taking opportunities arising from peace to address the legacy of conflict. Where projects were strong in addressing the key objectives of Measures 5.1 or 5.3 and mediocre on explicit or additional actions in their distinctiveness criteria answer, they tended to be approved and their letters of offer outline these measure-specific activities.

On reflection, the questions in the application process about ‘demonstrating need’ and about meeting measure-level objectives (both of which are allocated points) implicitly focus on the project’s role in addressing the legacy of the conflict and taking opportunities arising from peace. The objectives of each measure were designed, in theory, to address legacy, take opportunities and promote reconciliation. Activities that are sharply designed to achieve the objectives of the measure do, therefore, address the peacebuilding goals.

In the case of ‘paving the way for reconciliation’, it appears to be accepted that sustained cross-border contact and cooperation through activities that promote mutual benefit for all do ‘pave the way’. But Cooperation Ireland was keen to use the criteria to encourage greater engagement by promoters with the concept. A clause frequently appears in the letter of offer specifically requiring projects to include businesses or people from different communities and traditions. This will have been discussed with the applicant before the issuing of the letter. Another clause often appearing in the letter of offer for Measure 5.1 projects obliges projects to provide the implementing body with an outline of the actions they intend to take to pave the way for reconciliation. When projects struggled to do this, Cooperation Ireland suggested that they participate in activities that it would promote...
over the life of the programme. After most of the fund was committed, and with a clearer idea of the types of activities being funded, Cooperation Ireland, with TIDES Consultancy (Transformation, Interdependence, Diversity, Equity and Sustainability), has designed a series of flexible, interactive workshops, Peace and Reconciliation Workshops: The Business Case, which were rolled out during 2004 and 2005.

The role of the implementing body in deciding about the extent to which certain projects can undertake actions to promote reconciliation is clear from this analysis. In some areas, and for some communities and actors, cross-community work is more problematic than for others. Implementing bodies must encourage groups to reach out to other communities while avoiding putting the whole initiative at risk. Local knowledge and a reputation for neutrality are essential for implementing bodies in this context.

The cross-border reconciliation measure (5.3) differs in that projects find it easier to link their core activities to the distinctiveness and reconciliation criteria. Projects tend to score highly on distinctiveness provided they strongly target it (in areas and groups, in particular) and pledge to begin and/or sustain cross-border and cross-community contact between participants throughout the life of a project. Where groups or communities are not ‘ready’ to be involved in cross-border or cross-community activity, they may be directed to another implementing body (eg. one that funds capacity building) or be encouraged to include this step later in the project. The letters of offer almost always include as an objective to further mutual cross-border understanding or peacebuilding. This is pursued through various media (which can be accessed as an Appendix at catherine.lynch@dcu.ie). Therefore, where Measure 5.3 is concerned, peacebuilding and reconciliation goals tend to be more visible in the objectives. These are the objectives to which projects are held to account.

But what mechanisms ensure that these objectives are actually pursued throughout the life of the project? Cooperation Ireland and ADM-CPA require almost all the projects they fund to have an external evaluation at least once, and preferably twice, during their lives. As well as ensuring accountability, these external evaluations are, in theory, designed to assess the extent to which projects’ outputs and results actually achieve objectives and to outline how the project might better achieve them. But a review of evaluations suggests that they explore primarily the achievements of outputs and results outlined in the letter of offer. If an applicant outlined in detail how a project would address the legacy of the conflict, but these actions were not translated into outputs and results in the letter of offer, an evaluator would not assess, but assume, its achievement in this respect. Implementing bodies should ensure that all actions designed to meet these criteria are reflected in the letter of offer.

A recent paper has highlighted what this research confirms, that the evaluation culture in the Peace II Programme is underdeveloped (Taillon 2004). Evaluators tend to focus narrowly on the achievement of outputs and results, as outlined in the letters of offer, and rely too much on interviews with project promoters for data. In their defence, evaluators are often placed at a disadvantage by being appointed halfway through or at the end of a project. Project promoters and implementing bodies should appoint evaluators before a project commences. That way the promoter and the evaluator can agree on the information to be gathered to measure the achievement of objectives. This would ensure that the project’s progress in addressing
the legacy, taking opportunities and paving the way for reconciliation, through its activities as outlined in the application, will at least be assessed.

Some of the weaknesses in applying the distinctiveness criteria to the assessment and monitoring and evaluation stages of the programme are highlighted above. Yet it remains important to consider the perceptions raised in the projects themselves of the criteria and the degree to which, despite some of the operational weaknesses, the distinctiveness criteria have affected their design and implementation. This should help to answer the second evaluation question: *Is funding supporting projects which have an impact, through their activities, on addressing the legacy of the conflict, taking opportunities arising from peace and paving the way for reconciliation?*

### Impact of Criteria on Project Design and Implementation

The promoters of the same 20 projects were interviewed with a view to assessing the following:

- **Effectiveness:** to what extent did the criteria change the nature of the project during planning and implementation? Did they encourage project promoters to think about the legacy of the conflict on their group, sector or area? Did they encourage promoters to think about the impact of their proposed development project on relations between communities in their area and on addressing the challenges to peacebuilding?

- **What types of activities (beyond targeting) do projects undertake to address the legacy of the conflict, take opportunities arising from peace and make way for reconciliation?**

#### Economic measure

Many projects under Measure 5.1 are run by small businesses that see an opportunity in developing a cross-border partnership or joint venture. Others are local economic development organisations, chambers of commerce or regional economic development organisations that design programmes to help overcome the barriers to growth associated with the lack of contact across the border. Cross-border social economy projects are also eligible under the measure, as are actions that promote equality and diversity in the workplace. The rationale is three-fold:

- **The weakness of the private sector, in particular indigenous small- and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), in new business sectors in Northern Ireland and the border counties is a legacy of the conflict that cross-border economic cooperation can help to overcome;**

- **Economic regeneration resulting from this cooperation will provide the economic environment and employment to underpin peacebuilding;**

- **The measure should create a constituency of people and economic actors who have a stake in the cross-border cooperation and contact that peace has allowed. Contact should lead to the normalisation of relations between groups on either side of the border and to an increase in mutual understanding and respect. The Appendix, available on a website, outlines the responses of projects in more detail.**

A number of conclusions about the impact of the criteria on project design and implementation were drawn from interviews with projects funded under Measure 5.1:

- **The distinctiveness criteria have encouraged some promoters to include additional activities, some to extend their impact to different groups and communities, to ensure that the project is funded;**
The inclusion of the distinctiveness criteria have also helped to create a new type of project which is exclusively focused on relationship building within the socio-economic sector, and which would not have attracted funding under other economic development programmes;

- The need to target areas, sectors and groups, and the simple act of having to link a project in the application form to addressing legacy, taking opportunities and building communities with a stake in peace, have helped some promoters to consider that their project ultimately will have a peacebuilding impact;

- For others, the criteria forced them at least to consider the possibility that socio-economic activity is not unrelated to peacebuilding, an idea to which some in the business community are opposed;

- The rationale for the measure, and the way in which projects must meet its objectives, have helped to confirm the peacebuilding impact aspired to by the distinctiveness and reconciliation criteria; by clearly meeting the objectives of Measure 5.1 the project is addressing distinctiveness. This underscores the fact that the pre-defined objectives of programme measures are, in part, based on theories that define the legacy of the conflict, opportunities arising from peace and paths to reconciliation. However, it also raises an issue about who defines the legacy of the conflict that the measures are designed to address.

Reconciliation measure

Projects funded under Measure 5.3 tend to be promoted by community organisations, sports or arts associations, NGOs or public/statutory bodies such as museums, and to involve schools, youth and community groups, ex-prisoners, victims’ groups, women’s groups and/or sports clubs. The goal of the measure is to promote cross-border reconciliation through activities that promote culture, heritage and social inclusion. While the objectives are close to those of the reconciliation criteria themselves, and promoters may find it less challenging to present their activities as addressing the legacy and taking opportunity, they are trying simultaneously to promote the sustainability of their own organisations. The distinctiveness criteria are, therefore, important in differentiating the programme from ones that build capacity in the community sector.

A number of conclusions about the impact of the criteria on project design and implementation were drawn from interviews involving projects funded under Measure 5.3. (The appendix has more detail.)

- The criteria give some promoters credibility within their own organisations to add a robust cross-border and cross-community element to projects that frequently also focus on a single community;

- In other cases promoters more intent on developing their own single-identity community were left with little choice but to include a robust cross-border and cross-community element;

- The criteria gave some promoters credibility within their own organisations to focus on areas and groups that suffer disadvantage (targeting distinctiveness) where their activities would not normally do so;

- While many applicants under 5.3 may be more in tune with the goals of the distinctiveness criteria than those for other measures, the criteria do appear to influence promoters by asking them to think clearly about the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of the project in terms of legacy, opportunity and paving the way for reconciliation.
Many projects, and the programme measure (5.3) itself, are based on the assumption that contact between groups will serve to address legacy, take opportunities and pave the way for reconciliation. Evaluations do not tend to question this assumption.

The Distinctiveness and Reconciliation Criteria: A Useful Tool?

What can this evaluation tell us about the quality of the procedures used to operationalise the distinctiveness criteria? Can it tell us anything, more generally, about how development funding can pursue its development objectives and simultaneously have a positive impact on the systems and processes that make the peaceful management of conflict more likely?

Operating the criteria

The channelling of Peace II funds to areas, sectors and groups defined as suffering a significant legacy of conflict and well placed to take opportunities arising from peace has been relatively successful (Table 4), leaving aside questions about the accuracy of the project data. Targeting has been facilitated by the existence of objective data about the distribution of deprivation in Northern Ireland and about the intensity of violence during the conflict. This information may not be so readily available, or may be more contentious, in other places.

The preoccupation with ‘targeting’ at both assessment and monitoring stages appears to be at the expense of applying a more qualitative framework that asks projects to be explicit about how they will address the distinctiveness criteria through their activities. This may weaken the capacity of the framework to direct the funds towards the distinctive goals in two ways. First, the over-emphasis on targeting could dissuade applicants from articulating a local interpretation of the legacy and of what is needed to build peace (especially if it does not fit with that outlined in the programme’s literature). The problem could be compounded by the way in which the programme’s literature articulates the rationale for each measure in the context of the distinctiveness goals. Second, even when applicants explicitly identify activities to address the criteria, the monitoring and evaluation system does not encourage follow-through on the action; this could reduce the incentives for projects to pursue difficult peacebuilding work. The micro-level analysis suggests that these weaknesses have lessened the capacity of the distinctiveness framework to influence some, though not all, projects.

The micro-level analysis shows perhaps most clearly how important implementing bodies, their strategy and ethos are to the way in which the criteria are applied. A number of operational amendments that could strengthen their capacity to ensure the effectiveness of the distinctiveness framework have been identified.

Letter of offer: evaluation

Evaluation plays a critical role in determining the ability of distinctive and reconciliation criteria to make a social and economic development programme into one with a peacebuilding impact. The quality of the letter of offer between an implementing body and a project often serves as a starting point, and implementing bodies should ensure that activities and objectives that outline how a project will address the distinctiveness criteria,
however vague, are included in the letter. Evaluators, whether external or internal, should be appointed before or right at the start of the project to enable the project and the evaluators to agree on a system. They should explore the extent to which activities achieve objectives (and not just outputs), including the distinctiveness and reconciliation objectives of the project. Implementing bodies and evaluators should explore methodologies and indicators that help to highlight the achievement of more qualitative, peacebuilding goals. Such procedures would greatly improve the information and learning available about how legacies are addressed, opportunities taken and reconciliation promoted. They would also encourage projects to concentrate on making the links between their activities and peacebuilding throughout the life of a project.

Macro-level monitoring and evaluation system

Many implementing bodies aspire to such an approach, but they lack either the resources or the incentive to implement it. An amended monitoring and evaluation system at the programme level, one that evaluates the extent to which the programme has achieved its distinctive goals rather than just the success of targeting, would create this incentive for implementing bodies. The Managing Authority appears to have recognised this, and in a welcome development in 2004, requested implementing bodies to gather qualitative information about how projects are meeting the distinctive criteria. The capacity of implementing bodies to gather this information effectively, and whether it will extend beyond targeting, remains to be seen.

The literature proposes three components to a PCIA analysis: pre-programme strategic conflict assessment; conflict impact assessment at screening, assessment and evaluation stages, and a peacebuilding framework at these three levels. The operational improvements suggested pertain to the second component (the application of the criteria at screening, assessment and evaluation stages) and they are arguably applicable to the use of PCIA anywhere.

Conceptualising Peacebuilding

The evaluation has raised broader questions that are central to the debate about PCIA and its application to development and peacebuilding programmes. Are the distinctiveness criteria based on a sufficient understanding of what is required to build peace? Will directing funding to areas, sectors and groups defined as suffering the legacy of the conflict actually build peace? Are the conflict’s legacy and the opportunities arising from peace, as outlined for each measure, an accurate and objective depiction of reality? Does the programme help actors in Northern Ireland to address the challenges of peacebuilding outlined earlier in this paper?

For a programme with many economic and public sector actors, who have rightly or wrongly tended to see peacebuilding as being beyond their remit, the questions raised by the distinctive criteria may have been appropriate. While many in Northern Ireland agree on the challenges for peacebuilding, such as those outlined in the introduction, the root causes of conflict remain in dispute. In phrasing the criteria as addressing legacy, taking opportunity and paving the way for reconciliation, the programme designers may have generated a non-controversial application of a peacebuilding framework. The micro analysis reveals that some actors have engaged, at least temporarily, in the challenge of building peace and understand that their everyday activities can have a positive or even a negative impact on peacebuilding.

A strategic, independent assessment of the conflict – the first component of PCIA – does not feature strongly in the Peace II Programme beyond the assertion that by targeting
areas, sectors and groups that disproportionately suffer the legacy of the conflict, the challenges of peacebuilding would be addressed. This may be so, in part because politicians in Northern Ireland, who do not all elevate peacebuilding above creating their own constituencies, had a large say in the design of the programme (Harvey 2003). This is likely to be an issue in many areas trying to transform conflict.

While the independent conflict analysis may be weak, the ‘distinctiveness criteria’ have added what can be seen as a peacebuilding framework, and the programme’s priorities and measures have been rationalised in terms of this framework. An increased emphasis on evaluation at the micro level, as recommended above, and on sharing the learning from evaluation, would go some way to strengthening this framework and to answering the broader questions raised by the evaluation. Implementing bodies could employ a peacebuilding framework at the meso level that enables them to assess the potential and actual contribution of their funded projects towards strengthening the architecture for resolving conflict peacefully. In this way they would evaluate all projects funded under one measure of the programme together. It may be advisable to ask projects to link their activities and objectives explicitly to ‘theories of change’ and to the challenges of peacebuilding outlined in the introduction. Once again, implementing bodies are likely to do this if they are endowed and encouraged to do so.

A more rigorous and thoughtful application of the framework along the lines outlined above, with some more challenging questions, will strengthen, and help to show more clearly, the impact of the distinctiveness framework. Some of these recommendations should be rolled out in the extension period of the programme (2005-2007).

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Endnotes

1 A majority of the people in Northern Ireland (71%) voted for the Agreement in 1998. However, only a bare majority of the unionist population voted for the Agreement, and one of its two main political parties, the DUP, is ‘anti-Agreement’. While the DUP has accepted aspects of the Agreement during the implementation process, there is reluctance amongst some unionists to share power with Sinn Fein (the nationalist party connected to paramilitaries, the Irish Republican Army, or IRA). Implementation has been contentious with the former demanding decommissioning of weapons before they share power and the latter demanding the reverse order. The new power-sharing institutions have been suspended since October 2002 and decommissioning has not been completed.


3 Following a war of independence, Ireland was granted independence (with qualifications including the retention of the King) by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. However, due to long-standing and sometimes violent opposition to independence by a significant proportion of the population (unionists) in the north-east of the island, Ireland was partitioned in the Agreement with one parliament set up in Dublin and another in Belfast. While many interpreted partition as a temporary arrangement, it was cemented in 1925 and by the Dublin parliament’s achievement of full independence from Britain in the 1930s. The 1937 Constitution of the Republic of Ireland included a claim to the right to govern the whole island. The Belfast Agreement (1998) endorses the principle of consent: the Republic of Ireland gave up its territorial claim over Northern Ireland, which will remain
part of the United Kingdom unless a majority of its citizens decide otherwise in a referendum (which can be called for by any parties, but must be legislated for by the Secretary of State). In return, parties agreed to set up a number of cross-border (North-South) bodies with executive functions which are accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly and to the Irish government, and a potentially powerful power-sharing assembly was agreed for Northern Ireland.

4 The Collaborative for Development Action project (2003) distinguishes between the specific objectives of individual peacebuilding projects and the ultimate goal that projects together aim to deliver, which is ‘peace writ large’.

5 The distinctiveness criteria are legacy, opportunity and reconciliation. Together they account for 30 out of the 100 points on which projects are assessed. While projects can either address the legacy or take the opportunities arising from peace (each worth 12 points), a project that meets both criteria will be more eligible for funding by virtue of scoring higher. Regardless of its score on the measure-level criteria, projects must ‘pass’ the distinctiveness criteria in order to be considered for funding.

6 This is based on the assumption that regional instability has been an important factor in the spatial distribution of economic disadvantage in Northern Ireland and that efforts to reduce relative deprivation address the legacy of the conflict in these areas.

7 Sporting activities have become associated with one or another of the largest communities, and this sector is therefore targeted as having a significant potential to take opportunities arising from peace to be a focus for reconciliation.

8 A further legacy of the conflict is the centrality of public sector employment to the regional economy and the relative weakness of the private sector (in Northern Ireland and the border counties of ROI). This legacy is linked to a shortage of local entrepreneurship and investment seen as the result of conflict and instability.

9 Measure 5.3 funds 54 projects in total. Measure 5.1 funds 80, of which 10 are small business plans.

10 Most projects, except those under small grants programmes, are allocated over £100,000 (far more than the average grant under the Peace I Programme of 1994-1999). Average evaluation costs are £3,000 or 5,000 Euros.

11 The data (listed in the reference section) are sometimes contentious in Northern Ireland, but are generally accepted.

12 Notwithstanding the influence of political actors, the programme designers have consistently engaged in public consultation, giving a considerable say to those interested in strengthening peacebuilding.

References

ADM-CPA, Cooperation Ireland & Community Foundation for Northern Ireland 2003, Building on PEACE, Monaghan: ADM-CPA.


International Alert, Saferworld, the International Development Research Centre for the OECD Task Force for Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation & the CPR Network 2000, ‘Peace and Conflict-sensitive Approaches to Development’, December.


Examples Data Used on Areas, Sectors and Groups for Northern Ireland
