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Northern Ireland: Case Study

By Brandon Hamber and Gráinne Kelly[104]

A TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Date	Event
NORTHERN IRELAND – PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PROCESS	
10 April 1998	**Good Friday Agreement**, which puts an end to the Northern Ireland conflict – known as the Troubles – which started in 1968 • Creation of a democratically elected Northern Ireland Assembly • Creation of a North/South Ministerial Council • Creation of a British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Governmental Conference • A consultative Civic Forum, comprising representatives of business, trades unions and other civic sectors in Northern Ireland to act as a consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues.
14 October 2002	**Suspension of the Assembly** Northern Ireland Assembly suspended, largely but not exclusively, about difference in relation to the decommissioning of weapons by the IRA.
21 March 2005	**Shared Future – Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland** Policy Framework to ensure that relationships rooted in mutual recognition and trust are the essence of reconciliation.
26 September 2005	**Decommissioning Confirmed** International monitors confirm the IRA has completed the disposal of its weapons.

[104] Professor Brandon Hamber is the John Hume and Thomas P. O'Neill Chair in Peace at Ulster University based at the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE). He is also a member of the Transitional Justice Institute at the university, and is a Visiting Professor of the African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. Correspondence to b.hamber@ulster.ac.uk. Ms Gráinne Kelly is a Lecturer and Course Director of the MSc in Applied Peace and Conflict Studies at Ulster University, based at INCORE.

Date	Event
22 November 2006	**St Andrews Agreement** Included a timetable leading towards the restoration of devolution and power-sharing in Northern Ireland, which had been under direct rule since 2002.
7 May 2007	**Northern Ireland Assembly Re-established** The Democratic Unionist Party enters power-sharing government with Sinn Fein. Ian Paisley (DUP) is first minister, with Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness as his deputy.
June 2007 - October 2009	**Consultative Group on the Past** The eight-person group published a report *Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland: The Recommendations of the Consultative Group on the Past* with 31 recommendations including establishing a Legacy Commission to integrate reconciliation, justice and information recovery processes, conducting public acts of remembrance, and, most controversially, £12,000 recognition payments to relatives of those killed during the conflict. Those recommendations are yet to be implemented.
5 February 2010	**Hillsborough Agreement** The Agreement allowed Westminster to devolve Policing and Justice powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly. It also addressed ways to progress on difficult issues such as parades, improving Executive functioning and dealing with outstanding matters from the St Andrews Agreement.
February 2011	**Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Document** The devolved government in Northern Ireland pledged to work for a 'shared and better future for all' in its Programme for Government 2008–2011. In pursuit of this goal it launched a consultation document in 2010 entitled Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration which challenged the assumption that division and segregation is a 'normal' pattern of living. Never implemented.

Date	Event
2012 - 2013	**Protests in Belfast** Protests by some in the Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist (PUL) community began on 3 December 2012 following the decision by Belfast City Council to fly the Union flag only on designated days above City Hall, and different forms of protest continued throughout 2013.
23 May 2013	**Publication of Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy** A Strategy developed by the devolved administration, T:BUC included specific projects and commitments aimed at improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society. Currently being implemented by the relevant government departments.
23 December 2014	**Stormont House Agreement (SHA)** SHA revived many recommendations pertaining to dealing with the past that included setting up structures to: collect the stories of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, investigate outstanding Troubles-related deaths, enable victims and survivors to receive information about Troubles-related deaths, and implementation of the Reconciliation Group to oversee archives and information recovery. The document has remained part of all-party talks since but is yet to be implemented.
17 November 2015	**Fresh Start Agreement** Roadmap for the implementation of many aspects of the Stormont House Agreement (SHA) (including those on parading and flags) and a plan for ending paramilitarism and tackling organised crime. Did not address the aspects of dealing with the past in the SHA.
January 2017	**Suspension of the Assembly** Disagreement between the major parties fueled by accusations (and rebuttals) of wrongdoing in relation to Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme by the First Minister, as well as accusations by Sinn Fein that Unionists failed to address issues of inequality and earlier commitments to further recognise the Irish Language in Northern Ireland.

Introduction

Reconciliation is a wide-ranging concept and is used in different ways in various political contexts. This report outlines some of the challenges facing how the concept is specifically used in Northern Ireland. The report will not give an extensive introduction to the Northern Ireland conflict, nor can it claim to be an exhaustive exploration of the topic, rather we aim to track how reconciliation as a concept has moved in and out of the peace process in Northern Ireland largely from a policy perspective. We also consider how reconciliation has been operationalised at the community and political levels, as well as the challenges facing its use and definition. In the conclusion of the report we highlight some of the priority issues and challenges ahead.

The report is built from the authors' experiences of studying reconciliation in Northern Ireland (as well as participating in and running various reconciliation initiatives) over the last two decades. As such the report draws on our previous research (Devine, Kelly, & Robinson, 2011; Hamber & Kelly, 2005a; Hamber & Kelly, 2005b; Hamber & Kelly, 2007; Hamber & Kelly, 2008; Hamber & Kelly, 2009a; Hamber & Kelly, 2009b; Hamber & Kelly, 2016; Kelly, 2012a, 2012b; Kelly & Braniff, 2016; Kelly & Hamber, 2004; Kelly & Hamber, 2005a; Kelly & Stanton, 2015), as well as 24 qualitative interviews with community practitioners, government representatives, political party members and policymakers conducted during May and June 2017, for the specific purpose of informing this case study.[105] In addition, as part of the research we attended and spoke at the Northern Ireland Executive's Together: Building a United Community Strategy (T:BUC) Forum held on 15 June 2017. This forum focused on the topic of reconciliation in relation to the implementation of T:BUC (this strategy is discussed at length later).[106]

As noted, the paper addresses reconciliation largely from the policy perspective in Northern Ireland. The paper begins with a brief outline of some of the key policy processes and issues, both addressed and outstanding, linked to the peace process. Reconciliation as a concept is then defined largely through the prism of debates concerning the 'working definition of reconciliation' developed by the authors.

[105] In this report we have extracted some broad thematic issues raised in these interviews, and in the interests of space do not provide a detailed analysis of all the interview material.

[106] In this report we broadly draw on the themes raised by the 180 community representatives present at the forum who discussed the issue in small groups.

Thereafter the paper reviews policy making in relation to reconciliation, looking at this through various sub-sections such as community relations, dealing with the past and gender. The paper then goes on to look at reconciliation in practice through two levels of engagement: community-level reconciliation and political reconciliation. And finally it turns to the way forward, arguing for coherence and intersection at the practice and policy levels in terms of reconciliation and the need for visionary cross-party political leadership to move the process forward.

Background

The most recent iteration of the persistent tensions between the mostly indigenous, Catholic Irish and the settled Protestant populations on the island of Ireland manifested itself in violent conflict in which emerged in the late 1960's in Northern Ireland. This period saw the rise in the civil rights movement demanding an end to economic and political marginalisation of the Catholic population by the dominant Unionist classes. The wider territorial and constitutional debate of whether Northern Ireland should remain as part of the United Kingdom or should unite with the Republic of Ireland was at the heart of the wider conflict.

Quickly turning violent by the early 1970's, with the rise in both republican and loyalist paramilitaries and the long-term, sometimes pernicious, presence of British soldiers on the streets, the conflict (known colloquially as 'the Troubles') resulted in over 3,600 deaths and thousands injured by the time a peace accord (the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement) was negotiated in April 1998. The Agreement resulted in the establishment of a local devolved Assembly with an explicit commitment to "endeavour to strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement within the framework of democratic and agreed arrangements." (Northern Ireland Office, 1998)

Nearly two decades on from the 1998 peace accord, Northern Ireland is a relatively peaceful region, and various elements of the Belfast Agreement have been implemented in full. Despite a rocky start to devolution with the Assembly collapsing several times between 1999 and 2006, from 2007 (until very recently, with the suspension of the Assembly in January 2017) a time of 'settled devolution' has been evident (Morrow, Robinson, & Dowds, 2013). To reach this state, a range of subsequent agreements were made including:

- The St Andrews Agreement (2006) which resulted in the restoration of power sharing after its suspension in October 2002;

- The Hillsborough Agreement (2010) which allowed for the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Executive, some agreements on parades and outstanding matters from the St Andrews Agreement;

- The Stormont House Agreement (2014) which specifically dealt with identity issues (e.g. around flags and parades), addressed welfare reform, and made a comprehensive set of proposals around dealing with the past; and

- A Fresh Start: the Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan (2015) which outlined measures to implement the Stormont House Agreement, although it did not address the issues of dealing with the past.

That said, the consociational model of power-sharing which was at the heart of the agreement is not functional at present, with the local Assembly in suspension since January 2017 over disagreements between the two major parties; a number of small but persistent dissident republican and loyalist spoiler groups remain; issues of truth and justice remain unacknowledged and unresolved; and inter-communal tensions over cultural and political identity issues periodically erupt into violent unrest and disorder in mainly urban areas.

Reviewing the list of conflicts settled in 1990s, Northern Ireland represents somewhat of an anomaly due to its location within the European Union (albeit not for much longer, with the decision of the UK electorate to 'Brexit'), its comparative high level of GDP, its functioning welfare and social services systems and its broadly educated population.

However, the legacy of the conflict can be found in all sectors of the society, albeit some communities and geographical areas bore the brunt of the violence more directly than others. The deep furrows of division between the two main communities can be found in housing, education, social, cultural, sporting and religious life, for example:

- There are 109 'peace walls' across Northern Ireland (Nolan & Hughes, 2017). The Department of Justice owns some 52 peace walls (down from 58 in 2012) and the Housing Executive a further 20. These structures, often over eight-foot brick walls that had stood for over 30 years, continue to separate communities and progress to remove them has been slow;

- Positively there is steep decline in the proportion of 'single identity' housing wards (above a threshold of 80 per cent of one religion), from 55 per cent to 37 per cent (Nolan, 2013, 2014). However, just over 37% of the 582 wards in Northern Ireland could be described as extremely segregated, as they have a density of over 90% from one of the two main communities (Nolan, 2013). Shared Neighbourhoods programme have been established since 2008 involving 30 neighbourhoods, 20 further neighbourhoods were engaged since 2011, and 10 addition 'urban villages' are to be established (Wilson, 2016), although these are small, though important, initiatives in a society where residential segregation remains profound;

- Only 7 per cent of pupils in Northern Ireland attend the 63 integrated (mixed Catholic and Protestant) schools (Wilson, 2016); and

- 'Culture wars' continue in Northern Ireland (Wilson, 2016) with almost daily reports of contestation over flying of different flags, marching and parading disputes, and the demarcation of territory.

To this end, 20 years on from the peace process, despite significant progress, social divisions and polarisation remains. Yet, there is a willingness towards more sharing and integration among the majority of the population (Morrow et al., 2013). Social survey research shows that over 90% of people think workplaces should be shared spaces; over 80% would prefer to live in a mixed area; and over 70% of people express a preference for integrated schooling (Morrow et al., 2013).

THE PEACE MONITORING REPORT OF 2014, PERHAPS BEST CAPTURES THE COMPLEX PICTURE OF SUCCESSES AND FAILURES IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE PROCESS

Twenty years on from the paramilitary ceasefires, Northern Ireland remains a very deeply divided society. A fault line runs through education, housing and many other aspects of daily existence. These facts however do not provide the complete picture. There is another side to the balance sheet. In some ways huge progress has been made. Levels of violence are at their lowest for forty years. In the past year no British soldier has been killed, no police officer has been killed, no prison officer has been killed, and there was not one sectarian killing. In fact Northern Ireland is emerging as one of the safest places to live in these islands (Nolan, 2014, p.8).

That said, it is difficult to disentangle the full legacy of violence in Northern Ireland. Paramilitaries continue to exercise social and political power in some communities and, although directly attributable politically-related deaths have decreased significantly, other legacies of past violence continue. For example, although it is difficult to fully establish direct links to the conflict, Northern Ireland has a 25% higher overall prevalence of mental health problems than England (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2014).

Numerous studies have found a high prevalence of trauma-related psychological problems linked directly to the conflict that linger into the present and have trans-generational impacts (see among many others, Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability, 2006; Gallagher et al., 2012; O'Neill et al, 2014; Ferry et al, 2015; Ulster University, 2015).

In terms of direct violence, according to official police figures in the last 10 years, 272 largely young people have been shot and 523 assaulted in what is locally known as 'paramilitary style' shootings and attacks. Such attacks by paramilitaries are targeted at predominately young men and teenagers who are allegedly involved in criminal activity in communities. The number of shootings and attacks of this nature have remained fairly consistent over the last 10 years, suggesting little change in local paramilitary control of some communities.

Suicide is another issue that has been linked to the legacy of the conflict. A review of the suicide trends over a 40-year period in Northern Ireland found a steep upward trend in suicide rates after the 1998 Agreement, and these have been associated with the conflict in a number of ways (Tomlinson, 2012).

When it comes to the issues of domestic violence what is clear is that certain kinds of masculinities fashioned violence against women (McWilliams and Ní Aoláin, 2015) and conflict-related violence has often diverted from a focus on domestic violence (Mental Health Foundation, 2016). The total number of domestic abuse incidents in Northern Ireland has increased nearly every year since 2004-5, with 28,465 incidents from June 2015 to June 2016 (Mental Health Foundation, 2016). Although it is difficult to correlate this increase with a post-Agreement legacy of political violence in Northern Ireland directly, the increased trend remains suggestive.

Defining Reconciliation in Theory and in Practice

As in many divided societies, the language used and the words chosen to describe events, issues and objects, is fraught with controversy and sensitivity. The term reconciliation has not escaped such contention in Northern Ireland and its popularity continues to wax and wane over time. In the earlier period of the conflict, the discourse of human rights, justice, punishment and restitution seldom overlapped with the wider debates on relationship building and healing divisions within the society. The former was largely framed as 'political' while the latter was viewed as being a 'softer' issue, generally described as the task of 'community relations'.

Even in the emergent stages of the violent conflict, there was a recognition that work was required to sustain strained relationships, mend broken ones and build a new across sectarian lines. At a policy level, institutional structures were established by the British Government to take responsibility for supporting community relations, and a Community Relations Commission, modelled on a UK body to address racism was established as early as 1969. Its existence was short lived as it fell foul to local politicians' disinterest in dismantling the sectarian voting blocs which ensured their survival.

During the height of the violent conflict of the 1970s and 1980s, there was little significant focus on supporting inter-group contact or relationship building, beyond token projects within the education system (such as the broadly superficial Education for Mutual Understanding initiative, see Smith & Robinson, 1996) and cash-strapped community-based projects which were vulnerable to the fluctuating tensions between communities as atrocities were committed by both paramilitary and state forces.

In 1987, the Central Community Relations Unit was established with the remit of formulating, improving and reviewing government policies on inter-communal relationship building. Policies on equality, cross-community contact and supporting 'cultural traditions' followed. Most significantly, legislation to address discrimination and inequalities in employment and the workplace were addressed which, over time, has resulted in greater equalities between the two main communities, albeit that historical imbalances and differentials in employment patterns remain (Nolan, 2013, 2014).

In 1990, a government funded, but independent body, the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council was established with a remit of promoting better community relations between the two main 'traditions'. Alongside policy development and advocacy functions, it acted as a grant maker and capacity-builder for established and emerging community-based projects, mainly engaged in

contact-based relationship-building work. For many this was a significant advancement in reshaping relationships in the conflict (Frazer & Fitzduff, 1994), while others accused the government of promoting an assimilationist agenda that applied little more than a 'sticking plaster' to the conflict (Hughes & Donnelly, 2002). Republicans criticized community relations work too, claiming that it misses the root causes of the conflict, i.e. British occupation (Coiste na n-Iarchimí 2003a, 2003b).

In the post-1998 Agreement context, the Council took a more prominent role in supporting victims/survivors work and facilitating dialogue on the thorny topic of conflict-related memorialisation and commemorative practices. Initiatives to support the growing population of former political prisoners, particularly following the early release scheme established by the 1998 Belfast Agreement mainly fell to other funding bodies, particularly the European Union (EU) Peace and Reconciliation Programme, as well independent donors such as The Atlantic Philanthropies.[107]

The introduction of the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland in the immediate period following the republican and loyalist paramilitary ceasefires of 1994 also injected enormous sums of money into peace and reconciliation work in Northern Ireland. The introduction of this significant funding stream targeted at grassroots peacebuilding efforts placed the language of reconciliation more prominently within both the political and community discourses.

In 1995, the European Commission distributed over $550 million via local intermediary funding bodies and local councils, to over 13,000 projects, focusing on job creation, social inclusion, urban and rural regeneration and cross-border cooperation. Although broadly deemed to be successful as a community and economic development programme, questions were raised as to the programme's effectiveness in addressing the root causes of the conflict and its ability to confront the more challenging societal issues of deep division and mistrust between and within communities.

It was argued (Harvey, 2003) there was "insufficient embedding of concepts of peace and reconciliation in many measures of the programme" (p.12). Despite the criticisms directed at the vagueness of what constituted peace and reconciliation activity, the European Commission deemed the programme to be of significant value and two years on from the Belfast Agreement, a second tranche of EU funding, with a value of around $700 million was allocated to the region in 2000 and began to be distributed the following year. Priority areas included economic renewal, social integration, locally based regeneration and development strategies and cross-border co-operation. Significantly, three 'distinctiveness criteria' were introduced, which each supporting project had to meet to qualify. These were: addressing the legacy of the conflict, taking opportunities arising from the peace and promoting reconciliation.

Following an initial four-year tranche of funding (2000-2004), a two-year extension of financial support from the European Union (2004-06) provided an opportunity to refocus the objectives of the programme. At the time there was significant criticism, including from the authors of this report, that despite one of the criteria for funding being the promotion of reconciliation, there was little clarity on what this meant in practice.

In response to this lack of clarity, in January 2003, the authors of this case study embarked on a research project focusing on reconciliation in Northern Ireland.[108] We were motivated in part by the absence of any agreed definition of the term 'reconciliation' in the region, despite increasingly common usage. The study explored how reconciliation was understood and implemented, politically and at the grassroots level, in different areas of Northern Ireland (for the detailed results see Hamber & Kelly, 2005a; Hamber & Kelly, 2008; Hamber & Kelly, 2009a; Hamber & Kelly, 2009b; Kelly & Hamber, 2005b). As part of the data gathering process, we presented a 'working definition of reconciliation', applicable to societies emerging from conflict in order to stimulate discussion, gauge opinion and to frame the wider reconciliation debate.

In developing the definition, we explored a number of definitions from the existing literature, including dictionaries, handbooks, academic journals, and books by practitioners.[109] Our working definition assumes that building peace requires attention to relationships and that reconciliation is the process of addressing conflictual and fractured relationships. This includes a range of activities and means not only reconciling broken down relationships (as the term reconciliation confusingly

[107] From 1991-2014, and well beyond, Atlantic invested nearly $570 million in Northern Ireland, primarily for the peace process, to "address the legacy of violent conflict, protect and expand human and civil rights, spur economic growth through higher education, create a stronger ageing sector and transform children's services through prevention and early intervention" (see The Atlantic Philanthropies, 2015).

[108] This research, done under the auspices of Democratic Dialogue, was entitled "Community Reconciliation: Realising Opportunities, Meeting Challenges and Ensuring New Innovation into the future." It was funded by the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation under Measure 2.1 (Reconciliation for Sustainable Peace), administered by the Community Relations Council (CRC).

[109] We acknowledge the specific contributions of a number of texts in that effort (ADM/CPA, undated; Assefa, 2001; Bloomfield, Barnes, & Huyse, 2003; Hamber & van der Merwe, 1998; Lederach, 1997; Porter, 2003; Rigby, 2001; van der Merwe, 2000; van der Merwe, 2002).

implies), but also building new relationships were they have not previously been formed. It is a voluntary act that cannot be imposed (Bloomfield et al., 2003).

Our 'working definition' proposed that the reconciliation process generally involves five interwoven and related strands:

1. Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society.
   Developing a vision of a shared future requires the involvement of the whole society, at all levels. Although individuals may have different opinions or political beliefs, the articulation of a common vision of an interdependent, just, equitable, open, and diverse society is a critical part of any reconciliation process.

2. Acknowledging and dealing with the past.
   The truth of the past, with all its pain, suffering, and losses, must be acknowledged, and mechanisms implemented providing for justice, healing, restitution or reparation, and restoration (including apologies, if needed, and steps aimed at redress). To build reconciliation, individuals and institutions need to acknowledge their own role in the conflicts of the past, accepting and learning from it in a constructive way to ensure non-repetition.

3. Building positive relationships.
   Following violent conflict, relationships need to be built or renewed, addressing issues of trust, prejudice, and intolerance in the process. This results in accepting both commonalities and differences, and embracing and engaging with those who are different from us.

4. Significant cultural and attitudinal change.
   Changes in how people relate to one another are also key. The culture of suspicion, fear, mistrust, and violence is broken down, and opportunities and space open up in which people can hear and be heard. A culture of respect for human rights and human differences is developed, creating a context for each citizen to become an active participant in society and feel a sense of belonging.

5. Substantial social, economic, and political change.
   The social, economic, and political structures that gave rise to conflict and estrangement are identified, reconstructed or addressed, and transformed. This strand can also be thought of as being about equality and/or attaining equity between groups.

See Appendix A for a summary of the working definition.

Although we did not explore these formally in the research interviews, two additional points are important in understanding our working definition. First, **a reconciliation process always contains paradoxes, tensions, even contradictions.** It is neither neat nor easy and at times can seem incongruous. Lederach (1997) notes that aspects can stand in tension with one another — such as the articulation of a long-term, interdependent future on the one hand and the need for justice on the other. Fostering economic change may also require a change in resource allocations within a country (say, resources moving from the wealthy to the poor), but at the same time, reconciliation requires building relationships between the same such groups.[110]

Also, we cannot escape the fact that reconciliation is a morally loaded concept and that **different people bring their own ideological biases.** An individual's understanding of reconciliation is generally informed by his or her basic beliefs about the world. Different ideologies of reconciliation can be identified (Hamber & van der Merwe, 1998; van der Merwe, 2000; van der Merwe, 2002). Thus, we need to be aware that individuals will interpret differently the dimensions of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is the process of addressing these five strands. It is not solely about the outcome of doing so (say, a mended relationship), because the social, interpersonal, and political context is continually changing. This is, by definition, complex and incomplete, and paradoxes and ambivalences will persist as noted. Reconciliation is thus by nature conflictual and dynamic (Hamber & Kelly, 2009). Therefore, reconciliation concerns the process of addressing the five strands we have outlined, but is simultaneously about trying to deal with the complex paradoxes and tensions between them.

Our view of reconciliation has therefore shifted over time to seeing reconciliation not merely as a cumulative or interrelated outcome of delivering on each of the strands but the capacity to manage the paradoxes and tensions inherent in the process of addressing the strands, as well as dealing with the tensions between each strand (Hamber & Kelly, 2009).

Although the working definition was developed to aid the research, and potentially help prioritise what might needed to be done in shaping a reconciliation agenda, in the face of criticism to define reconciliation more concretely the SEUPB officially adopted the definition as a core component of the PEACE II+ extension funding programme.

[110] One of the interviewees noted that 'loss' is an important part of reconciliation, learning to give up on certain issues in the interests of a wider good.

To this day, many in the community and voluntary sector will recognise this definition as an addition to the funding criteria for the PEACE II+ extension as they had to argue how their project met the definition to receive funding. We obviously welcomed the more concrete definition being taken on board, but it also posed new challenges around the simplistic, tick-box manner in which the definition was utilised, which did not allow for the dynamic nature of reconciliation, as we had conceptualised it.

Two successive tranches of funding (PEACE III, 2007-2013[111] and PEACE IV 2014-2020) have been provided by the European Union, with a greater emphasis on larger-scale, partnership-led projects focused on two main strands of work, framed as 'reconciling communities' and 'contributing to a shared society' (SEUPB, 2007). Under PEACE III, the Hamber and Kelly working definition of reconciliation was disaggregated in to a range of high level thematic foci that ran through the programme, namely: building positive relations at the local level; acknowledging the past; creating shared public spaces; and developing key institutional capacities for a shared society. The programme has been increasingly aligned to the policy priorities of the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly, which have themselves, as will be shown in the rest of this report, been criticised for their lack of ambition and vision when it comes to reconciliation.

After nearly 15 years of discussion on the definition of reconciliation, which we have had a significant part in shaping, key questions remain. We have found in the course of undertaking the research for this project that many still recall our definition and look upon it favourably as the only substantive attempt to define reconciliation, but equally others in Northern Ireland remain perplexed by the concept and have no knowledge of some of the previous policy developments that have taken place.

Making Policy for Reconciliation

Reconciliation as a concept has a relatively long history. Although significant contributions have been made internationally in conceptualising and operationalising reconciliation at local, group and political levels (see all the contributions in Salter & Yousuf, 2016; and others, for example, Baines, 2007; Bar-Tal and Bennink, 2004; Bar-Tal, 2009; Bar-Tal & Cehajic-Clancy, 2014; Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse, 2003; Clark, 2014; Lambourne, 2014; Philpott, 2012; Staub, 2013; Wallis, Renee and Kent, 2016), our focus here will primarily be on the Northern Ireland context.

[111] The PEACE III Programme was a distinctive programme part-funded by the European Union (€225 million from the EU with further national contributions of €108 million) through its Structural Funds programme.

That said, as with the wider international literature and discourse, the concept has moved from a more theological and individualistic understanding of the term (Clegg & Liechty, 2001; Love, 1995; Morrow, 2003; Stevens, 2004; Thomson, 1998; Wells, 1999) to a wider societal understanding, embedded within policy and practice documents and activities (ADM/CPA, undated; Aiken, 2010; Beirne & Knox, 2014; Morrow, 2016; Porter, 2003).

Although other understandings of reconciliation in the Northern Ireland context have been posited (see ADM/CPA, undated; Porter, 2003), as a term it still largely remains as was observed in 1994 'vague and ill-defined' (Hurley, 1994, p.2), at least at the level of public policy. The extent to which reconciliation has gained significant local ownership or a common understanding of what it entails is harder to quantify – but the research that informed this report suggests some knowledge of our working definition (at least for those with considerable experience in the community sector) but equally both wariness and weariness in using the term. In the interests of brevity, we have not provided a full review and use (and avoidance) of the term reconciliation in Northern Ireland, rather below we consider some of the major policy developments that have taken place.

Community Relations and Peacebuilding

Over the decades of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, a complex set of interventions were utilised to address some of the fundamental causes of the conflict — including access to power, inequality and discrimination, as well as to address the estrangement of the two main communities. Early interventions (1970 to 1990) and pieces of legislation introduced by the Westminster government included the establishment of, among others:

1. The Ministry of Community Relations and an independent Community Relations Commission in the 1970s;
2. The Fair Employment Act of 1976 and the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act of 1989;
3. Targeting Social Need to address areas of social and economic differences which contribute to divisions in the population;
4. The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989; and

5. The establishment of an independent Community Relations Council to support development work, promote qualitative inter-community contact, address segregation and support and fund development and intervention work in 1989.

The subsequent Belfast/Good Friday Agreement provided for a new opportunity to address inter-communal relations, with a clause in the Northern Ireland Act of 1998 requiring all public authorities to 'have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group' and to 'proactively address good relations'.

This legislative duty to promote 'good relations' added some additional complexity to the terminology used in Northern Ireland, which had most commonly, to this point, been centred on the language of community relations. While community relations has, more traditionally, implied a focus on relationships between Protestants and Catholics specifically, the term 'good relations' appeared to encompass a broader understanding of relationships between and across multiple communities and identities, including new immigrant communities to Northern Ireland.

During the period of direct rule from Westminster (2002-2006), an ambitious policy framework entitled A Shared Future was introduced in 2005 (Community Relations Unit, 2005). It declared that "relationships matter and are central. Moving from relationships based on mistrust and defense to relationships rooted in mutual recognition and trust is the essence of reconciliation."

However, with the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2007, the two main political parties, Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), seized the opportunity to quietly retire the document, because "it's integrationist ethos did not commend itself to the Sinn Féin / DUP partnership when devolution was restored" (Nolan, 2014, p.107). When the new consultation document, Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, was published in 2011, it appeared its title did not live up to its content, and it was widely rejected by those active in the fields of peacebuilding for being 'anodyne' (Nolan, 2014). No references (other than in case study descriptions) to the term reconciliation were used in the document.

In 2012/2013 Belfast was the site of intense rioting and protest following a decision to only fly the Union flag on designated days above City Hall. The Executive of the new Northern Ireland Assembly came under increasing pressure to address relationships between the two main communities, a pressure added to by the pending visit of President Obama to Northern Ireland in 2013.

In 2013, a new Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy was published (Office of the First and deputy First Minister, 2013). The Strategy, or so it is stated, "*reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society" and it outlines a vision of: 'a united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation – one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance*' (p.2).

Overall, the strategy, compared to any of its predecessors, uses more robust and ambitious language in its headline statements. It also introduces a new, albeit somewhat confused lexicon of good relations, sharing and also reconciliation. It seems to be ambitious on one level (working towards reconciliation, discussed below) but also moves away, for example, from integrated education to shared education (a strategy for sharing facilities and classes while maintaining the existing segregated schooling system), as well as promoting shared spaces. The strategy also tends to see 'good relations' as a process of managing good neighbourliness rather fully removing social and community divisions that cause the problems in the first place. This is captured by Paul Nolan, and is worth quoting at length:

The document pays scant attention to theoretical concerns and does not even define 'good relations'. At times the term seems to be used interchangeably with the older 'community relations', although usually the latter refers to relations across the sectarian divide whereas 'good relations' takes in the various minority ethnic communities…but 'United Community' does not elaborate and infrequent references to communities other than Protestant and Catholic mean that for the most part the focus remains on their inter-relationship alone. Indeed, the strategy assumes the permanence of the two blocs. 'Good relations" is presented not as a way to eliminate division but rather to ensure that relations between these two fixed entities can be positive (Nolan, 2014, p.107).

When it comes to the issue of reconciliation specifically, the T:BUC uses the term somewhat liberally and certainly more extensively than in previous documents. The word 'reconciliation' appears 26 times in this policy document, and is connected to 14 robust paragraphs. For a term such as reconciliation, which many will still not use in Northern Ireland, this is, perhaps, surprising. Broadly speaking it is woven into the vision of the document, as well as being one of the objectives of most of the actions that are proposed. Reconciliation, however, is never defined.

That said, reconciliation is largely seen as valuable in two ways in the document.

Firstly, reconciliation is seen as a potential consequence of various interventions. The following, for example, are linked in T:BUC to promoting reconciliation: 'cross-community sporting events'; addressing 'a legacy of hurt and division'; 'educational opportunities for our young people to learn more about our history'; 'removing interface barriers and other structures of division'; 'more co-ordinated and shared service delivery models'; and developing 'a capacity to commemorate in a way that heals and not hurts, in a non-triumphalist manner'.

Secondly, reconciliation is seen as key to social and economic progress. Reconciliation, at least in terms of vision, is linked to building 'a modern, well-equipped society' (along with good relations and equality of opportunity); reconciliation is said to be essential 'to continue to progress towards a united community'; and facilitating reconciliation (in relation to removing physical barriers between communities and facilitating sharing) will 'bring immense benefits for relationships on an individual and local community level but can also bring economic benefits to wider society'.

To this end, reconciliation (along with tackling discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity, social inclusion), is core to the vision of uniting or at least bringing communities closer together, and ensuring some form of social renewal and economic progress as a result. Reconciliation, at least in terms of the statements made in T:BUC, is recognised as a key process for transforming the social and political context.

At the same time, on closer scrutiny, the document reveals that the types of strategies proposed fall short of the lofty aspirations contained within. Put another way, when it comes to the notion of reconciliation T:BUC as a policy demonstrates a gap between vision-based policy and mainstreamed programmatic practice. Some of the headline actions read like a programme for a funding constrained philanthropic organisation, rather than a long-term government mainstreamed strategy for social change. Some of the key programmes T:BUC commits to are:

- Establishing ten new shared education campuses;
- Getting 10,000 young people, not in education, employment or training, a place on the new United Youth volunteering programme;
- Establishing ten new shared housing schemes;
- Developing four urban village schemes;
- Developing a significant programme of cross-community sporting events;
- Removing interface barriers by 2023; and
- Pilot 100 shared summer schools by 2015.

The headline actions outlined in the Strategy are steps in the right direction, but they are not sufficient to address the full weight of the problems outlined in the Strategy itself. For example, according to the Department of Education, there are 308,095 pupils enrolled in primary and post-primary schools. Although one cannot calculate with complete accuracy, and for illustrative purposes, using these figures it would suggest that:

- 100 summer school/camps engaging 100 pupils each at post-primary level (there are 142,547 pupils in post-primary) as the Strategy recommends would only reach 7% of pupils; and
- Across the school going population (and assuming every child in each participating school was involved), the proposed 10 Shared Campuses would, only reach 1-2% of the total primary and post-primary student population. If we restricted the proposals on Shared Education to post-primary pupils only, 3-4% of the total pupils in society would be reached over five years.[112]

Figures are more favourable, however, if you restrict the focus to specific groups. The Strategy recommendation for 10,000 one-year placements in a new 'United Youth' programme—if restricted to the 46,000 unemployed people under 24 years of age mentioned in the Strategy this would affect a more sizeable proportion (22% of unemployed youth). But this narrowing is then based on an assumption that such individuals have a disproportionate responsibility for negative attitudes across communities—something we do not know as a fact and which risks stigmatising such individuals.

[112] This figure is reached by assuming that each school has 261 pupils (the number of pupils divided by the 1,180 in of schools in Northern Ireland) and 20 schools are involved, in other words 5,220 pupils involved of the 142,547 pupils. Granted Shared Education is discussed as 'a model' in the Strategy, but the full practical, economic, and community relations case for scaling this up to the entire education system relative to investing in transforming and gradually integrating existing schools has not been made.

This does not mean such activities are redundant or ineffective. On the contrary, it has been well-established in international social psychological research that under certain conditions contact between groups can promote positive views of the other (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Any increased contact between those representing different perspectives is to be welcomed. Sustainability of these connections is crucial within this deeply divided society.

Recent research on shared education in Northern Ireland notes that an environment that seemingly reinforces a mono-cultural order can limit the potential of such programmes (Hughes, 2013). The author notes: "it is hardly surprising that pupils, who meet with peers from the 'other' community for short periods (albeit sustained over time) and in a highly-structured setting, struggle to develop friendships that can be maintained outside of the school setting." (Hughes, 2013, p.206)

In other words, contact programmes taking place within the overall segregated context the Strategy itself talks about are—despite positive potential—essentially a sticking plaster on a system that is largely not conducive to creating positive attitudes between groups.

The findings of the qualitative interviews for this case study were clear. Many of those we spoke with argued that a more robust strategy to address decades of social separation is needed. It was noted that, while the T:BUC Strategy articulates a lofty vision for reconciliation, the types of programmes that are proposed to achieve this goal are piecemeal and disconnected and are not fully embedded and mainstreamed across all government departments.[113]

Of course, there are many reasons as to why the context cannot be changed instantly, and some of our interviewees argued that 'sharing' is all we could hope for in the short term and any process had to be gradual, although we must foster contact where we can even if limited. But in analysing the T:BUC Strategy document, as the current mainstay of reconciliation and 'good relations' policy, one if left wondering if the goal is one of 'thin' integration or deeper social transformation as the Introduction of the Strategy asserts.[114] Is Northern Ireland settling for a society where the dominant communities are going to remain separate and, hopefully, equal, but co-existing in 'negative' peace? In short, is the Strategy in its current form capable of delivering the profound change it calls for or tinkering around the edges of social change.

[113] One interviewee argued this would only be possible if a Department of Reconciliation was setup.

[114] "We cannot build a modern, well-equipped society in the absence of good relations, equality of opportunity and reconciliation. This Strategy sets out a vision for the kind of society we want to see and outlines the strategic framework that will shape action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance" (p.10).

Dealing with the Past

A further area where the issue of reconciliation is present is in the debate about dealing with the past in Northern Ireland. Space does not permit a full exploration of the machinations of the dealing with the past debate in Northern Ireland, which is enormous in breadth and reach (see for example, among many others Healing Through Remembering, 2006; Gormally & McEvoy, 2009; Lawther, 2013; Lundy, 2009, 2010; McEvoy, 2010). Below however we will briefly review how reconciliation is addressed in some of the main policies that have been developed focusing on the issue of dealing with the past.

In October 1997, the British government established a Commission led by a former head of the civil service, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, "to look at possible ways to recognise the pain and suffering felt by victims of violence." (Bloomfield, 1998, p.8) On the issue of reconciliation specifically Bloomfield notes that the Government should consider the possibility of supporting efforts towards peace and reconciliation originating in Great Britain and not just in Northern Ireland; as well as funding projects on reconciliation; and consideration should be given to a 'Memorial and Reconciliation Day', and building a peace and reconciliation bridge.

Controversially, the report made little mention of victims of state violence, although it did not rule out the possibility of establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. While a range of community and government processes to support victims unfolded in the immediate post-accord years, political tensions led to the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2002 and it was not until 2007 that the first major government-instigated initiative to look at a comprehensive approach to dealing with the past was established by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under the Labour government (Hamber & Kelly, 2016).

In early 2009, an eight-person Consultative Group on the Past (CGOP) published a detailed report containing 31 key recommendations, including the creation of a Legacy Commission with a wide remit to conduct a process of information recovery, review and investigate historical cases, and examine linked or thematic cases emerging from the conflict (Consultative Group on the Past, 2009).

It also called for a Reconciliation Forum to be established through which the Legacy Commission and other government bodies would tackle a range of societal issues such as sectarianism, conflict-related trauma, suicide and addiction, support the improvement of services for healthcare issues attributable to the conflict and facilitate and encourage the telling of personal accounts of the conflict (Consultative Group on the Past, 2009). The report also called for the annual Day

of Reflection, initiated by NGO Healing Through Remembering,[115] on 21st June each year to be renamed the 'Day of Reflection and Reconciliation'. All these proposals were put within a wider frame or vision, namely:

"The past should be dealt with in a manner which enables society to become more defined by its desire for true and lasting reconciliation rather than by division and mistrust, seeking to promote a shared and reconciled future for all" (Consultative Group on the Past, 2009, p.23).

Perhaps most importantly, at least from a conceptual perspective, the report noted that 'relationships matter and are the foundation for reconciliation' and that one of the main themes which emerged from the consultation was the desire for reconciliation, truth and justice (Consultative Group on the Past, 2009). The report talked of the importance of truth and acknowledgement to build reconciliation and that "a reconciling society takes collective responsibility for the past instead of attributing blame and avoiding responsibility". It also made mention of forgiveness noting: **"...reconciliation requires for its integrity and success two other elements, namely, a willingness for mutual forgiveness and a willingness to address the truth of the matters to which the mutual forgiveness is to apply"** (Consultative Group on the Past, 2009, p.54).

In other words, whatever 'dealing with the past' mechanisms were put in place, they would need to balance the sometimes contradictory and challenging processes of justice and reconciliation. The report itself was unequivocal that reconciliation is the goal of a 'dealing with the past' process. Perhaps as a reflection of a society not yet ready to deal with a complex past and robust process for building reconciliation, the recommendations of the report were quickly embroiled in public controversy associated with one particular recommendation concerning compensation payments. The comprehensive nature of the proposals and the likelihood of implementation was deemed to be dead in the water by the following year (Hamber & Kelly, 2016).

After a period of intense protest in Belfast starting in late 2012 mentioned earlier, the five main political parties were forced back around the negotiating table in 2013. After weeks of intense negotiations, the talks chairs, US Diplomat Richard Haass and academic Meghan O'Sullivan, drafted a Proposed Agreement to move the political process forward. Among other recommendations,

[115] Healing Through Remembering is an independent initiative made up of a diverse membership with different political perspectives working on a common goal of how to deal with the legacy of the past as it relates to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. For more information see www.healingthroughremembering.org

a series of new proposals to deal with the legacy of the past were put forward. These included the establishment of a Historical Investigations Unit (HIU), an Independent Commission for Information Retrieval (ICIR), and an Implementation and Reconciliation Group (IRG), as well as a proposed archive for conflict-related oral histories (The Panel of Parties in the NI Executive, 2013, p.36). The five main parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly failed to reach agreement on these proposals and, again, the comprehensive set of recommendations stalled (Hamber & Kelly, 2016).

In 2014, a new political crisis centering on the public welfare cuts proposed by the UK Conservative government brought the five main political parties in to a new round of negotiations. The resultant Stormont House Agreement (SHA) reached in December 2014 revived many of the recommendations contained in the Haass and O'Sullivan proposals, albeit with less detail. The recommendations pertaining to dealing with the past offered a way forward that included setting up structures to:

- Collect the stories of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland (Oral History Archive);
- Investigations into outstanding Troubles-related deaths (Historical Investigations Unit);
- Enable victims and survivors to seek and privately receive information about the (Troubles-related) deaths of their next of kin (Independent Commission on Information Retrieval); and
- The Implementation and Reconciliation Group (IRG) to oversee themes, archives and information recovery.

The agreement also calls for statements of acknowledgment by the UK and Irish Governments and political parties to flow from the process.

In terms of reconciliation specifically, 'promoting reconciliation' is said to be one of the key underlying principles of the agreement and it is noted that "promoting reconciliation will underlie all of the work of the IRG. It will encourage and support other initiatives that contribute to reconciliation, better understanding of the past and reducing sectarianism." (Stormont House Agreement, 2014, p10) However, overall the document is scant on detail and certainly does not contain any of the detail present in the previous Consultative Group of the Past (2009) proposals. It contains no clear sense of how reconciliation would be achieved nor makes any definitive claims that reconciliation will flow from processes such as truth-recovery.

In subsequent public discourse on the detail of the Stormont House Agreement the focus has largely been on the investigative and truth-seeking bodies. Reconciliation and the role of the IRG appear to have become the poor cousin of the proposed 'dealing with the past' package. If implemented (and at the time of writing, this is as yet unclear) this Agreement, risks further disaggregating the process of dealing with the past. It is not clear, for example, how the four new proposed bodies would relate to each other. Could victims end up telling their story to different units on multiple occasions? How will the IRG have oversight or link findings and processes together to 'contribute to reconciliation'?

In the absence of broad political consensus on all issues raised in the 2014 Stormont House Agreement, a new document entitled A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan (Northern Ireland Office and The Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP, 2014) was issued in November 2015 which marked some progress on a range of political and economic issues. However, the issue of dealing with the past was essentially parked, with the document noting that "it did not prove possible to resolve all of the key issues within the timescale" (p. 11).

The issue of how reconciliation weaves in and out of the dealing with the past debate in Northern Ireland is an instructive one.

Firstly, it appears, unlike other countries (for example, South Africa) dealing with the past is not always equated to, or linked with, reconciliation. Debates and attempts at truth and justice (despite the attempts by the CGOP to link them) often take place without any mention or link to reconciliation. As Pablo de Greiff, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence noted following a recent visit to Northern Ireland:

"With regard to truth, justice and reparations, efforts to date have relied heavily on judicial procedures, leading to inevitable 'fragmentation'. Judicial procedures are case-based and primarily about individual responsibility...The resolution of individual cases, narrowly conceived, while important, does not exhaust the work of truth and justice initiatives. Indeed, trustworthy institutions and the rule of law largely depend on clarity in this regard." (de Greiff, 2017, p.5)

Although Mr. de Greiff, was talking about the importance of patterns, structures, institutions, organizations, chains of command, and policies in dealing with the past – one could make a similar argument that a case-by-case legalistic approach to the past holds little prospect for relationship building outside of individual acts of reconciliation (if these are forthcoming). At the same time, the Consultative Group on the Past provided perhaps the most robust approach to linking dealing with the past to a bigger goal such as reconciliation, and the report received little or no traction. Perhaps this explains the anodyne approach to reconciliation in the Stormont House Agreement, and arguably, given the political tensions in Northern Ireland it is all that can be hoped for.

Reconciliation through a Gendered Lens

The role of women in the peace process and in peacebuilding work in Northern Ireland more broadly is also well documented and extensive (see among many others Donahoe, 2013; McEvoy, 2009; Cowell-Meyers, 2003; Potter, 2004, also see the Women and Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland article series[116]). Most of this however focuses on peacemaking and peacebuilding work more broadly. At times the idea of peacebuilding including face-to-face reconciliation initiatives is mentioned, but the literature tends not to address the topic of women (as well as gender more broadly) and reconciliation specifically. Nonetheless, the women's sector in Northern Ireland is also large and vibrant including numerous coalitions, networks and support centres, and there are many reconciliation initiatives different groups have been involved in other years. Focus on issues of masculinity, as a key dimension of a gendered approach, however, is less evident (Hamber & Gallagher, 2014).

That said, Northern Ireland suffers from some of the main criticisms seen in other countries too, namely, that once the peace was settled, many women's groups, despite ongoing work at a community level, remain marginalised, under-funded and less visible in formal processes. Despite the fact that during the peace process build up in 1998, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), is largely credited with ensuring reconciliation and victims issues were embedded in the final agreement (Fearon, 1998; Kilmurray & McWilliams, 2011), since then it has been ongoing struggle to maintain women's voices at the political level.

This is, despite the fact that the leaders of the two largest parties in Northern Ireland are now female.[117] Concerns have been continually raised post-1998 that peacebuilding (and, by extension, reconciliation work) has remained "a male dominated arena with diminished opportunities for women to participate in discussions or the process around peace building" (Pierson & Radford, 2016, p.10).

[116] Available on openDemocracy, https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/women-and-peacebuilding-in-northern-ireland. This was also noted by several of our interviewees.

[117] Arlene Foster replaced Peter Robinson as leader of the Democratic Unionist Party in December 2015. Michelle O'Neill replaced Martin McGuinness as leader of Sinn Féin in January 2017. In addition, Naomi Long became the first female leader of the cross-community Alliance Party for Northern Ireland in October 2016.

Community relations policy, including T:BUC and the various other documents produced over the years, have been critiqued from a gender perspective. It is often the ethno-national division (broadly Catholic and Protestant) that tends to over-shadow other social division, such as gender and class (and the inter-sectional nature of all three). There is also little recognition, at least officially, of the need to address the differential impact of the conflict on women in most mainstream policy documents (Ward, 2013).

It has proven easier to secure funding to address ethno-national differences rather than community-based issues such as poverty or gender-based violence, or funds to explore the intersectional nature of such issues. Overall 'community relations' (not the concept of reconciliation specifically, but it could equally apply) has been critiqued for being gender-neutral, thus missing the ways in which community relations are shaped by gender issues and intersectionality of gender, conflict and relationships.

As Laurence McKeown (McKeown, 2011) notes in a report entitled Gender at the Interfaces:

"Structural inequalities influence the extent to which women can engage in social/communal/ political processes on the basis of: relative poverty; gender-based and socially prescribed obligations (childcare; family support; domestic duties/commitments); and the distinct socio-economic, political and social inequalities between men and women in post-conflict societies, where structures, systems and processes are often created and dominated by men and where women only find room for engagement as 'token women' or through dogged perseverance" (p.6).

Pierson and Radford equally provide an example in the way strategies aimed at community relations are gender neutral and therefore miss certain issues:

"...the Together: Building a United Community strategy which is focused on young people and shared spaces, building safer communities and on cultural expression. However, if a gender mainstreaming approach was taken, projects which focus on the marginalisation of young women and the gendered nature of safe space (particularly at night) could lead to innovative programmes" (Pierson & Radford, 2016, p.19).

In addition, when it comes to dealing with the past, equality policy to date has been criticised for being gender blind (Legacy Gender Integration Group, 2015). As was noted by Mr. De Greiff:

"The gender-related impact of violations and abuses has been understudied at an official level. Given the State's ambiguity with regard to the classification of the Troubles, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and related policy recommendations cannot be applied to Northern Ireland. More sustained and thorough analysis of ways in which the impact of violations and abuses manifests itself in the lives of women is required" (de Greiff, 2017, p.9).

Women, and a gender perspective more broadly, have rarely been associated with dealing with past debate due to an overly narrow focus on specific harms, often from a legalistic perspective, emerging from the conflict (physical) which often ignore issues such a socio-economic impacts (O'Rourke, 2013). At a policy level, Northern Ireland has also ignored many international developments. National Action Plans have been drawn up by both the British and Irish governments to implement UN Resolution 1325. However, as a recent report notes, the British government *"designates 1325 as an issue of foreign policy and therefore does not include Northern Ireland within its remit" (Pierson & Radford, 2016, p.8). The UK government Seventh Periodic Report to CEDAW notes: "The UK National Action Plan applies to the UK as a whole and addresses how we will adapt our policy, programmes, training and operational procedures to ensure that Women, Peace and Security is incorporated into our overseas work on conflict. As such, there are no plans to integrate provisions relating to the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Northern Ireland into the UK's National Action Plan. Nevertheless, some aspects of UNSCR 1325, such as women's participation in peace building and political processes, are relevant to all states. Also, the UK Government will continue to work towards increasing the representation of women in Northern Ireland in public and political life"* (2011, para 301).

The CEDAW Committee consideration of the UK (in 2013) expressed its *"concern at the low representation of women in the post-conflict processes in Northern Ireland and the failure to fully implement Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)"* (cited in Pierson & Radford, 2016). The Irish Government's National Action Plan includes some mention of a need to support civil society and encourages cross border engagement (McMinn & O'Rourke, 2012), but has been criticised for being "ambiguous in its recognition of the conflict in Northern Ireland" (Pierson & Radford, 2016), not to mention that practically, due to jurisdictional issues, it can do little to influence the involvement of women in local government, for example.

Women's groups however have been active in lobbying to have UN1325 implemented and there are multiple forums and activities that have taken place to further the issue.[118] That said, officially, as a number of interviewees pointed out in this research, this process has not managed to change the overall Assembly or government approach to recognising UN resolutions such as 1325.

[118] See for example Women and Peace Building Project, http://wrda.net/women-and-peace-building.html.

However, our policy review suggests that when issues of gender and reconciliation are raised, it is the issue of participation (especially in public life)[119] that gets the first mention. This is mirrored into the various policy documents where gender largely becomes synonymous with vague assertions about increasing women's participation in public life, e.g.:

- "Right of women to full and equal political participation" (Good Friday Belfast Agreement, 1998);
- "Advancement of women in public life" (Good Friday Belfast Agreement, 1998 & Stormont House Agreement, 2014 & Fresh Start Agreement, 2015);
- "Increasing women's representation in public and political life" (T:BUC, 2013); and
- The Fresh Start Agreement (2015) commits to "the development of a programme to increase the participation and influence of women in community development".

In short, as important as participation in public life is and should be promoted, the key agreements, strategies or policies focused on community relations and reconciliation fail to unpack key issues. These include complexity of male dominated communities, the squeezing out of women in local and community leadership, gendered experiences of the conflict, the legacy of paramilitaries from a gendered perspective, the impact of violent and certain types of political masculinities (Hamber, 2015), not to mention how these issues might overlap with other factors such as class, religion or access to resources (Rooney, 2006) in a context where tackling women's inequality has often been trumped by sectarian politics.

A gendered analysis of the Northern Ireland conflict, and its legacy, raises a plethora of issues for the peacebuilding agenda, as well as the concept and practice of reconciliation and dealing with the past. Despite significant activity, analysis and advocacy at the community level, a robust engagement with the specific issue of gender and the conflict has not made its way in to wider policy approaches and much work remains to be achieved in this regard.

[119] In terms of local politics, the 30% is similar to female MPs at Westminster, with the Scottish Parliament at around 35% and the National Assembly for Wales at 42%, see http://www.assemblyresearchmatters.org/2017/03/08/representation-women-public-life-northern-ireland-stand-now/

Community Level Reconciliation

Northern Ireland is, as Belloni notes, 'rich in associational life' and did not require external intervention to construct or hothouse a functioning civil society, as in other post-violent contexts. Community-based activities to support reconciliation processes have been active and evolving since the 1970's (Byrne, 2001), and a wealth of tacit knowledge of strategies and approaches has been built over the nearly fifty subsequent years (Kelly & Stanton, 2015). Currently there are 6127 voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations (NICVA, 2017). The voluntary and community sector remains an important employer in Northern Ireland, with an estimated 44,703 employees. This figure represents 5.3% of the total Northern Ireland workforce (NICVA, 2017).

The top five areas of work identified by respondents in the State of the Sector Survey were community development, education and training, health and wellbeing and children (6-13 years) and children (0-5 years), with community relations as a specific category coming in seventh (NICVA, 2017). In other words, not all these community and voluntary organisations work on peace related matters, although no doubt there is significant overlap in certain areas.

Particularly, in the last 25 years, through the EU peace funding – as well as other donors such as the International Fund for Ireland, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, The Atlantic Philanthropies, The Big Lottery, and local grantmakers such as the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (NICRC) and the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) – there has, comparatively speaking, been significant funds and support for peacebuilding and reconciliation work.

The community and voluntary sector has grown into, arguably, the most significant part of the reconciliation landscape. Although the word reconciliation is not used that frequently compared to terms such 'building community relations', 'good relations' or, more recently 'peacebuilding', extensive networks and programmes exist which aim to address the legacy of the conflict across the society.

But by way of example, the PEACE III Programme (2007-2013) aimed to 'reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society' and 'to promote reconciliation' by assisting operations and projects which helped to reconcile communities and contribute towards a shared society for everyone. It delivered these priorities through 'themes': building positive relations at the local level; acknowledging the past; creating shared public spaces; and developing key institutional capacity for a shared society.

Types of programmes supported, among many others, included:

- The development of local council peace and reconciliation action plans to help combat sectarianism and racism;
- Assisting community groups to tackle signs of sectarianism and racism within their communities using creative arts;
- Developing partnerships to reduce sectarianism and racism, and promote leadership development and social integration with ethnic minorities;
- The collection of stories and narratives of the conflict shared through various means face-to-face and digitally to promote reconciliation and understanding;
- Capacity building with women to contribute to post-conflict transition, inter-community dialogue, storytelling and reconciliation;
- Increasing knowledge and skills in trauma awareness, conflict transformation and restorative justice;
- Programmes aimed at increasing participation in formal politics, often focused on women and young people;
- Building cross-community childcare facilities;
- Creating shared spaces such as community centres, sporting facilities and green spaces;
- Addressing contentious issues such as murals, flags and commemoration, as well as reimagine of murals;
- Projects addressing aspects of the current planning models which impact negatively on peacebuilding;
- Interaction, dialogue and meeting between groups and communities with different political perspectives; and
- Introducing new approaches to the study of conflict into the school curriculum.

The reach of this work is vast. By way of example, if you take one of the strands above, namely the collecting of stories about the conflict, empirical research (Kelly, 2005; Kelly, 2013) indicates that there are, or have been, over 60 organizations (and a small number of individuals) involved in story-gathering projects with identifiable, tangible outputs, and that the numbers of stories documented is, at a conservative estimate, at least several thousand (Kelly, 2005; Kelly, 2013).

Other donors have tried to focus specifically on what are sometimes called 'hard to reach' communities. For example, Peace Impact Programme (PIP), funded by the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), aimed "to build sustainable peace and prosperity within communities of greatest economic and social deprivation, where there are low levels of engagement in peace building and limited benefits from the Peace Process" (IFI, 2015, p.4). It is also noted the programme was designed "to be responsive and to deliver a range of sustainable reconciliation, integration, community development and economic interventions" (IFI, 2015, p.10).

PIP supported a total of 56 projects on both sides of the border (41 in Northern Ireland and 15 in the Southern border counties) with a total spend of almost £4.4m ($7.1 and €5.5) between January 2013 to March 2015. Many of the PIP projects dealt with, among others, highly sensitive issues such as dealing with ongoing paramilitarism, alternatives to anti-social behaviour, trying to breakdown political isolation and exclusion, facilitating the engagement of women and marginalised young people in community development and practice. Evaluation has found that the work was effective and "reduces the sense of powerlessness, challenges existing power dynamics which sustain divisions and opens up community structures to people who have been or feel they are excluded or who self exclude" (IFI, 2015, p.5).

Another high-profile example of a reconciliation and education programme is the Prison to Peace (P2P) programme. This programme first focused on developing a network of former political prisoners (from all the major former paramilitary structures loyalists and republicans) to share experiences and engage with one another in wider peacebuilding activity. An educational programme built from the stories of political ex-prisoners was then developed. A structured plan of ten classroom based lessons and a DVD was produced (CFNI, Undated), complemented by a workshop programme that allowed young people to speak directly with ex-prisoners. The overall aims of the P2P programme are to: *"prevent young people from becoming involved in and/or returning to violence through presenting the realities of the conflict and the prison experience*

from the point of view of those directly involved in the conflict; demonstrate to young people alternative ways of dealing with conflict which do not necessarily require individuals to give up their political aspirations or cultural identity; present young people with alternative 'bottom-up' perspectives on the conflict through a comprehensive and complex picture of the political ex-prisoner experience; and provide young people with an opportunity to engage directly with those who were involved in the conflict in panel discussions with ex-prisoners" (Emerson, Orr, & Connolly, 2014, p.4). There is clear evidence of the positive effects of Prison to Peace on young peoples' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, with the intervention group, compared to the control group (Emerson et al., 2014).

It is also important to note that many initiatives over the years have sought to engage groups with differing opinions, explore differences, commonalities, and engage in deep dialogue work. This has included encounters between former combatants and victims, victims with other victims, civil society, religious groups, academics, and many others (see among many others Healing Through Remembering, 2002; Murphy & Adair, 2004; Tyler, 2015).

At the interface areas, that is where large 'peace walls' separate communities, it is acknowledged that "under the radar, community workers on both sides of the interface had done considerable spadework over the years....to build relationships in an area which has seen high tension and many deaths" (Wilson, 2016. p.64).

Other programmes such as the integrated school movement have sought to bring children from different backgrounds together in joint schooling programmes, and more recently shared educational programmes. It has been shown that "The attendance of formally integrated schools specifically, or schools which had generally a mixed religious intake, also had a significantly positive effect on the attitudes of young Protestants to young Catholics" (Schubotz, 2017, p.7-8).

The list of important initiatives focusing on peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland is in-exhaustive and cannot be covered in this brief paper. However, it should be noted that, at the community level, reconciliation as the goal of the type of work outlined above is not necessarily how many community groups refer to what they do. In the Northern Ireland context we have found, both in our past research and in the most recent qualitative data gathered, that there is a degree of nervousness about promoting reconciliation, especially as a concept at the community level. At a community level participants tend to favour speaking more about 'community relations' or 'peacebuilding', and more recently the need to 'promote equality'.

The apprehension to using the term is not, however, because it is seen as 'soft' but rather that it is seem as a process which fundamentally changes social and political relations. In other words, it is a process which moves beyond simple co-existence and it something more profound and transformative. Our research has indicated that there is a feeling that many individuals and communities are not ready for such significant change and the process has to be experienced in a more gradual and incremental manner.

By using the concept of reconciliation, practitioners have indicated to us that people might be 'scared off' from engaging in initiatives which might move them at a pace with which they are not comfortable. In other words, community leaders and practitioners fear articulating a process with reconciliation goals as it might appear too deep, challenging or threatening (Hamber & Kelly, 2009). Instinctually they avoid using such terms, even if they are working towards a 'harder' concept of reconciliation which is both profound and transformative in its ultimate objective.

In our earlier research we found some readiness of practitioners to engage in such work (and there is evidence of groups continuing to engage in transformative, reconciliatory processes) but there also appears to be reluctance to describe their work in these terms when the wider political process is not creating conducive or supportive conditions for such interventions to thrive.

Gaps in knowledge also exist. Although many evaluations and case studies have been undertaken (by funding organisations or in annual reports) detailed outlines of 'good practice' or 'best practice' approaches undertaken by community-based organisations are not as numerous as one would anticipate (Kelly & Braniff, 2016). Despite extensive and well-resources community-based practice in Northern Ireland, there is also a surprising lack of locally-based 'indigenous' peacebuilding theory (Kelly & Stanton, 2015). There is, however, sufficient evidence to show that contact through the integrated 'community relations' approach has had a measurable causal effect in promoting more positive intergroup relations in Northern Ireland (Aiken, 2010). Aiken (2010) drawing on the work of Hewstone, Hughes, & Cairns (2008) notes:

Increased contact has been highly effective in helping to increase cross-community tolerance, trust, friendship, understanding and positive affect, while at the same time reducing negative perceptions of intergroup threat, anxiety, bias and prejudice. It also shows that an increase in cross-community contact has correlated with a decline in support for political violence and perceptions of group identity that are less highly polarized and monolithic (Aiken, 2010, pp.184-185).

In a recent 2017 report reviewing attitudinal data of the last twenty years it is similarly concluded: *"...that there is very little evidence to suggest that efforts to continue with programmes that encourage formal mixing or integration should be compromised. Increasing contact is strongly related to more positive attitudes towards each other"* (Schubotz, 2017, pp.7-8).

Furthermore, 20 years of attitudinal data from the annual Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey suggests an "underlying 'climate' of approval for greater inter-community engagement and tolerance in Northern Ireland has gradually improved" (Morrow et al., 2013). The same report goes on to note that *"this does not however imply that significant events do not and cannot set relationships back, and sustainable progress remains vulnerable to immediate political events"* (Morrow et al., 2013), e.g. suspension of the institutions, public disputes such as the flag protests 2012/2013. More worryingly, back in 2013, the report noted that *"The early evidence of deterioration in the perception of community relationships between 2010 and 2012 suggests that progress depends on a plausible holistic commitment to building a shared society that requires attention and cannot be taken for granted"* (Morrow et al., 2013, p.1).

So what does this all mean for reconciliation? There has been a massive investment in people-to-people peace and reconciliation work in Northern Ireland. Much of this is assessed as having affected positive changes in attitude for those who participate in such programme (elsewhere others have referred to this as the 'personal transformation model' see Hamber & Gallagher, 2014). However, it remains unknown the degree to which these programmes have a wider social impact especially in a context where social, residential and education division remains.

We have also found that work on community relations and reconciliation initiatives often runs parallel to political developments. Many of those we have researched or interviewed have spoken of the need to continue this work despite political setbacks. But what we know from the data is that external political factors (signing of Agreements or when the political institutions collapse) clearly influence public attitudes both positively and negatively. This suggests that creating a conducive and functioning political context is key to maintaining and enhancing attitudinal change.

An additional concern for those we have interviewed, and also in the public T:BUC Forum we participated in as part of this research, was the decrease of funding and support to people-to-people work over time. **"...there has been a steady and deepening decline in the funding available for good relations, peace building and reconciliation work. The economies of both Ireland and NI have experienced significant declines as a result of the economic crash and the effects are still being felt most acutely in socially disadvantaged urban areas and isolated rural communities. Unemployment levels in both urban and rural areas have risen sharply and there has been an ongoing decline and erosion of social supports for disadvantaged communities, particularly impacting young people at risk: rural areas on both sides of the border have also suffered with ongoing emigration among young people."** (IFI, 2015, p.14)

In the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)'s 2016 Sector Forecast Survey a high proportion of respondents working in the community and voluntary sector (66.3%) expected the economic condition of sector to worsen in 2016. This is linked to unprecedented cuts that the sector has experienced, particularly in terms of government investment. Interestingly, a significant proportion of respondents (38.6%) stated that the Northern Ireland Assembly had a negative impact on the voluntary and community sector in the last 12 months (and increase of negativity over 10% from the 2012 survey).[120]

At the T:BUC Forum of June 2017, new concerns were also expressed, namely that (at the time of writing) the Assembly remained suspended and budgets had not been agreed for community work resulting in potential redundancies. Overall, these findings are fairly concerning, in that local governance through the Assembly is not perceived by the majority of those working in the sector as being positive for their work. New political crises are further hampering this. This trend is evident within the public too where it is noted, drawing on the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey data that: 'As the lifetime of post-agreement devolution has lengthened, public perceptions of the assembly's achievements over that time have become more jaundiced' (Wilson, 2016, p.12).

In conclusion, despite decades of community-based reconciliation work, and the positive impact of this, it would be challenging to argue that reconciliation (or community relations more broadly) as has been a joined-up community and political level in Northern Ireland. Given the significant investments made in these areas, it can be concluded that full return of this investment is not being realised largely due to a lack of political leadership and attempts to provide a holistic approach to reconciliation through a more concerted politically-driven and shared governmental approach.

[120] The proportion of respondents that stated the impact has remained positive decreased by a small margin (2.5 percentage points) is just under 20%.

Political Reconciliation

How reconciliation as a concept fits into the landscape of Northern Ireland politics is a complex and multifaceted issue. In this short paper we cannot do justice to the full historical role of the term, and therefore restrict our focus to a specific set of observations, research and arguments pertinent to the last number of years of the peace process.

In summary, reconciliation as a political ideal (albeit undefined and contested) has been ever -present within the political process, despite many people's objection to it as an achievable or even desirable goal. Most interestingly reconciliation – despite many politicians' uncomfortable relationship to the concept, serious political impasses and that it is seldom if ever used by unionist politicians in particular – has never fallen off the political map.

In the last decade of the peace process it has manifested in a complicated set of ways. This is embodied in the gap between the rhetoric of the T:BUC Strategy, first published in 2013, and what its actions can realistically deliver (as noted earlier). Routinely our research has found there has been poor leadership displayed in terms of grasping the nettle of reconciliation. As the peace process has moved further and further from the original 1998 Agreement, what has become apparent is that the term reconciliation has become intertwined with divergent views of the future.

In the last 10 years, at a public and political level, reconciliation has continued to appear in public discourse in association with a range of high profile events. On some levels the mere establishment of the power-sharing arrangement represents some form of reconciliation between the major political parties, even if the term is seldom used in this way. For example, when the power-sharing arrangements were re-established in 2007 (following the St Andrews Agreement in October 2006), First Minister Ian Paisley (leader of the Unionist Democratic Unionist Party) and deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness (of the republican party, Sinn Féin) were routinely referred to as the 'Chuckle Brothers' due to the images of them laughing together and the easy and rapport they often appeared to enjoy.

Needless to say, this sea-change in how republicans and unionists publicly engaged and collaborated with each other angered some who felt the time was not right for rapprochement. Although the relationship between McGuinness and the subsequent leader of the DUP (following Paisley's retirement from political life) was more strained, even during that term (2008 to January 2016) they shared numerous platforms (for example in the US on inward investment missions), albeit they were more business-like in nature, demonstrating a consistent change in tone and a willingness to work with former political enemies for common goals.

A number of more high profile events over the years (listed selectively below) have also been more directly linked to reconciliation:

- 2010 June: David Cameron's apology[121] for British Army killings on Bloody Sunday in 1972 (Burns, 2010, the New York times noting "this was an act of reconciliation to be listed alongside Hirohito at Arlington, F. W. de Klerk at Nelson Mandela's presidential inauguration and other penitents through the ages");

- 2012 June: The Queen and Martin McGuinness shake hands and meet (The Associated Press, 2010, entitled "Queen Elizabeth II, ex-IRA chief Martin McGuinness shake hands in reconciliation landmark");

- 2014 April: Martin McGuinness attends the Irish State President Higgins' state dinner at Windsor Castle, as well as a reception with various senior Sinn Féin members (Connolly, 2014, article entitled "Irish melodies herald era of reconciliation at Windsor");

- 2014 June: The Queen and Martin McGuinness meet again at a former prison where he was held (Philipson, 2014, McGuinness is quoted as saying *"The vast bulk of our people appreciate the effort Queen Elizabeth is making to peace and the reconciliation process"* and later that year in her Christmas Day message the The Queen spoke of the *"benefits of reconciliation"* and her visit to the Crumlin Road Gaol in Belfast as an example of *"a place of hope and fresh purpose");* and

- 2015 May: Prince Charles and Gerry Adams shake hands and meet (The Guardian, 2015, entitled "The Guardian view on the Gerry Adams handshake: a brave act of reconciliation").[122]

[121] Noting in the House of Commons "But the conclusions of this report are absolutely clear. There is no doubt. There is nothing equivocal. There are no ambiguities. What happened on Bloody Sunday was both unjustified and unjustifiable. It was wrong."

[122] Interestingly our interviewees had divergent views on the impact of public symbolic acts of reconciliation. Some felt they were very important to bring people along with the peace process and more were needed. Others saw them as 'phony' and papering over cracks.

From May 2015, (ironically after the launch of the T:BUC Strategy which has a substantial focus on reconciliation), it was clear that relationships between the two largest parties (the DUP and Sinn Féin) and partners in the power-sharing government, were significantly strained. With the retirement of Peter Robinson of the DUP and his replacement by Arlene Foster, new working relationships needed to be formed. Further changes within the leadership of Sinn Féin and the subsequent death of Martin McGuinness have added to these tensions. This has not precluded ongoing community work on reconciliation and also work on T:BUC itself,[123] but it would be hard to sustain an argument, that even basic co-operation, let alone a deeper process of reconciliation, is currently taking place at a political level.

Behind the current political impasse (at the time of drafting this report) there are numerous political difference, political power plays, accusations and aspirations which are beyond the scope of this report. Interestingly, we would contend that these are tied to the issue of reconciliation in so far as it is, as a concept, linked to what the end game of the peace process actually is, something which has become more acute as time has progressed since 1998.

There is a fundamental difference between the two main political blocs (nationalist/republican and unionist/loyalist) about the political future for Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is an 'agreement' between parties and not a 'settlement'. The 1998 Agreement does not settle the constitutional issue of where Northern Ireland belongs (as part of the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland) but rather sets up a local government structure which, broadly speaking, one section of the population sees as a process or step towards a united Ireland, and another as the cementing of the Union. As has been observed: *"Unionists saw Northern Ireland's legitimacy as founded on its constitutional status as part of the United Kingdom and in the Agreement they were given reason to believe that this formal constitutional position was on surer footing than ever. The principle of consent – that the status of Northern Ireland should depend on the consent of the greater number of its citizens alone – was accepted by the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), by the Irish government which removed its constitutional claim on the North, and implicitly by Sinn Féin. Accordingly, pro-Agreement unionists advocated the accord as a permanent settlement to the Northern Ireland conflict. Nationalists, by contrast, appealed to an institutional standard of legitimacy concerned with the quality of governance and were successful in attaining a range of measures aimed at ensuring that the governing institutions of Northern Ireland could secure their consent"* (Mitchell, 2009, pp.324-325).

To this end the deal itself, drawing on Henry Kissenger's notion, is often described as a form of

[123] See https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/together-building-united-community for update reports.

constructive ambiguity (Arthur, 2000; Aughey, 2002; Dingley, 2005; Mitchell, 2009; Ruane & Todd, 2001). The political realities and the so-called ambiguity of this deal, and the interpretation of it, are beyond the present scope but for this report the ambiguity within the agreement is key as it links back to why different parties are engaging in the so-called 'peace process'. In this context terms such as 'a shared society' or a 'reconciled' society have different meanings.

The more recent use of the term 'reconciliation' by Sinn Féin in its political discourse reflects some of the contestation that exists between those who have different political aspirations for the long-term constitutional arrangement for Northern Ireland. This is worth exploring in more detail as it demonstrates where and how reconciliation is contested within Northern Ireland politics.

An October 2012 statement from Declan Kearney, Chairperson of Sinn Féin, outlined the party's vision for reconciliation (Kearney, 2012). It is a complicated statement containing many facets but key components include an analysis that the 'next phase' of the conflict is one of reconciliation and there is a need to *"addresses the trans-generational division and hurt created by the civil war and our political conflicts ever since".* The statement specifically notes the importance of *"being prepared to move outside our own comfort zones, and being prepared to embrace new thinking"* which he notes that republicanism is ready to do.

He observes that unionists appear to be less willing to reach out or address "acts of omission and commission" and that the British Government is unwilling to deal with the past. The statement calls for an independent, international truth commission to address 'unanswered questions'. Thereafter the statement includes what it calls 'an enabling programme', e.g. implementation of outstanding agreements; committing to various capital spend projects, withdrawal of the British Secretary of State, the transfer of reserved powers to the Executive, and the setting of a date for a Border Poll.

The statement notes that reconciliation is the responsibility of all and calls for a *"critical mass and momentum is needed to build grassroots community support for reconciliation otherwise it remains theoretical and abstract".* It ends with a call for friendship. *"Our ambition is to achieve reconciliation in our time and the beginning of an era in which we all as Republican, unionist, Irish and British citizens can become friends with one another: a time when our children learn to play and grow up together; and in which, to paraphrase Bobby Sands, the future can echo with their laughter"* (Kearney, 2012).

It is fairly clear that some of the high-profile reconciliation events subsequent to this document (such as meetings with the British Royal family) flowed from this policy shift in the position of Sinn Féin towards the British establishment. The policy was also tied to a programme called

'Uncomfortable Conversations' which encouraged republicans, through a range of structured events and think-pieces, to face some of their own fears and "*to address the genuine fears and concerns of Unionists in a meaningful way*".

This culminated in the launch of Towards an Agreed and Reconciled Future: Sinn Féin Policy on Reconciliation and Healing in March 2016 which was (seemingly) timed to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the Easter Rising (the failed armed insurrection by republicans to end British rule on the Island of Ireland in 1916). This marked a milestone in the next phase of the conflict for republicans, which viewed reconciliation as a step on the way towards their consistent commitment towards a united Ireland. The Sinn Féin document outlines a definition of reconciliation. '*Reconciliation is both a goal, something to achieve; and a process, a means to achieve that goal. It is the public space within which we can collectively engage with the key challenges of truth, justice, and acknowledgement within the context of building for the future. For the purposes of this policy we focus on the construction of reconciliation as a process: a process that is open and which seeks to position the possibility of reconciliation outside the thrust of daily politics'* (Sinn Féin, 2016).

The document talks of multiple ways of building reconciliation. The various programmes and actions are too many to replicate here but include, for example, acknowledging the grief and loss of all victims; continued engagements with families bereaved or seriously physically injured including those injured by or through republicans actions; comprehensively dealing with the issue of legacy through the full implementation of legacy mechanisms outlined in the Stormont House Agreement (noting a gender sensitive approach is important); and acknowledgement of the hurt and injustices caused by and to each other; promoting public policy to incentivise sharing, promote integration and deliver efficient public service; to equality and good relations proof all major policy decisions; and respond positively to shared commemoration invitations where 'our presence' will contribute to reconciliation and healing outcomes.

Overall, what is interesting about this document is that reconciliation as a strategy, is interwoven with various governmental commitments around the Stormont House and the Fresh Start Agreements, as well as the various structures and processes (e.g. Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition). In reviewing the various statements and approaches to reconciliation over the years from Sinn Féin, it is clear that reconciliation is at the heart of their political strategy and approach to the wider peace process. Conceptually this creates both opportunities and threats for any prospect for reconciliation as a term to be used at a broader political level, encompassing with nationalist and unionist perspectives.

Needless to say, the Sinn Féin approach to reconciliation has received much criticism from opposing political parties. Much of this has been targeted at whether the strategy is simply a cynical approach to achieving their political objectives, and devoid of any genuine attempts to acknowledge and address the hurt perpetrated by the IRA. Commentator Alex Kane, writing in the Newsletter (a more unionist orientated daily newspaper) acknowledges Sinn Féin's approach is "neither a ruse nor a trick" but: "*...it is a key element of Sinn Féin's ongoing journey towards a united Ireland. As the document says, 'Reconciliation is both a goal, something to achieve; and a process, a means to achieve that goal'. That goal is Irish unity and Sinn Féin's understanding of reconciliation is a process for preparing unionists for unity. In other words, unionists should embrace Sinn Féin's concept of reconciliation because it makes it easier to deliver a reconciled, united Ireland, 'which genuinely cherishes all her children equally'* " (Kane, 2016).

Routinely, the DUP have questioned how all-encompassing the Sinn Féin vision for reconciliation is. For example, Trevor Clarke, a DUP councilor in Coleraine, was quoted as saying: "*How about we stop discussing 'narratives' as suggested by Mr Kearney and deal with facts. Terrorists caused 90% of deaths during their campaign of sectarian slaughter here. That's not a narrative, that's a fact. And whilst Sinn Féin continue to eulogise and therefore legitimise terrorists and their actions, there cannot be reconciliation with the victims of their atrocities...give me democracy and the ballot box over the Armalite every day – it's just a shame others pursued both at the same time*" (Newsletter, 2017).

Mike Nesbitt former leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (the smaller of the two Unionist parties), also reflected:

"*The irony of Sinn Féin using the launch of a paper on reconciliation to give unionism a poke in the eye appears lost on them. We have consistently identified a need to reach a common understanding of what reconciliation means. Sinn Féin clearly see it as a journey. But in defining the journey's end as something unionism can never support – a united Ireland – their idea of reconciliation is fatally flawed*" (Newsletter, 2016).

The interesting issue is that when a concept such as reconciliation enters the political realm it cannot escape the debate as to how genuine the rhetoric is, irrespective of their wider political strategies and ambitions. One could argue that, irrespective of how the authenticity of the approach is understood, once the language achieves wider usage within the political landscape, it already has an effect on how people feel about one another and further opportunities to make an impact on strained or broken relationships open up.

Arguably, the relationship between Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley is one such example where their interactions, at least for a time, began to reshape the political landscape. The clear relationship breakdown between political parties in the current 2017 impasse, although fueled by real issues such as accusations of wrong doing in relation to Renewal Heat Incentive Scheme by the First Minister (for more details on this see The Guardian, 2016), and agreements about the status of the Irish language within public and political bodies, among others, also reflect a fundamental breakdown in trust between individuals.

The problem in deeply divided societies with ethno-national divisions is that politics often boil down to the zero sum, i.e. if Sinn Féin is advocating reconciliation then, if I am from a different party, is must be opposed. This limits the horizon on what is possible or what can be shared across parties. Routinely in our research work over the years, as well as the interviews carried out for this report, two factors emerge.

Firstly, many, including some of our interviewees and those at the T:BUC Forum remain wary of any one political party 'owning' the concept of reconciliation (albeit that Sinn Féin have indicated that "reconciliation is not the property or responsibility of any single political party or community") (Kearney, 2012).

Secondly, there is a constant accusation that there has been a lack of political leadership on reconciliation. Our research has indicated that this is less about the high-profile events which serve as 'acts of reconciliation', but that the partisan political goals of the two main communities (nationalist/republican and unionist/loyalist) routinely trump the wider social issues of creating a more shared, equitable and prosperous society.

At a political level there is tension between reconciliation as understood as a socially (and individually) transformative process or merely an unavoidable consequence of having to accept uncomfortable compromise with political opponents to ensure non-repetition of the violent phase of the conflict.

If there is one lesson to emerge from the contested notion of reconciliation at the political level in Northern Ireland it is that great strides have been made in many areas (such as the public displays of reconciliation) despite political differences. The term reconciliation has not gone away, despite its detractors. This might implicitly suggest that, even connecting with 'the other' with mutual respect cannot be ignored. The question remains as to how this can it be owned across the political landscape and driven forward at a cross-party leadership level. Our research has unequivocally found a desire for the political classes of all hues and traditions to jointly map out and commit to the road of travel.

The Way Forward

This report has covered a wide range of issues. In this final section of the report we will outline five key issues that have routinely come up in our work on reconciliation in Northern Ireland, and were reaffirmed in the primary research that informed this report. We think of these as areas for further reflection and for consideration in future work in progressing reconciliation in the region.

A WORKING DEFINITION OF RECONCILIATION

We have found that the working definition that we proposed over ten years ago still has traction within civil society, and some elements of government in Northern Ireland. As the T:BUC document has gained momentum we have found an ongoing interest to hear, once again, about our work in outlining the key strands necessary to address reconciliation following violent conflict. At The Northern Ireland Executive Offices' Together: Building a United Community Strategy (T:BUC) Forum held on 15 June 2017 with some 180 community delegates, the definition was presented and well-received by the overwhelming majority of participants. We have also found that using the definition as a diagnostic tool for reconciliation is equally well received.

Generally, and simplistically, if we diagnose the process of rebuilding fractured relationships in Northern Ireland using our five strands, we observe that in terms of 'building a common vision for the future', Northern Ireland politicians have struggled to articulate this in a unified way; 'acknowledging and dealing with the past' has not been addressed in a structured or holistic manner; there has been significant investment in 'building relationships' and 'changing attitudes' with varying degrees of success; and finally levels of 'socio-economic inequalities' have narrowed in Northern Ireland and technically this should provide some bedrock to work from moving forward. This type of approach to understanding the dynamics of reconciliation, even if somewhat simplistic, was consistently welcomed in interviews and at the T:BUC Forum.

To this end, we have learned that if reconciliation is operationalised in practical ways it gains support. That said, we also need to guard against the concept becoming aspirational, as some interviewees noted. As noted previously, our research has routinely showed that, contrary to the

idea that reconciliation might be rejected as a 'soft' term, actually many intuitively understand the implicit 'hard' challenges it brings in a deeply divided society. We can choose to shy away from these challenges, or find new ways to work with the term and make it practical.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

A recurring theme of this report, and other research undertaken is the perceived lack of political vision and leadership around the issue of inter-communal division in Northern Ireland (Kelly, 2012b) and more importantly communal approaches to reconciliation. Although some new vision, in fact fairly far-reaching, is evident in the T:BUC Strategy, the actions outlined to achieve this vision are considered inadequate by many of those we spoke with. There is an ongoing concern that terms such as 'good relations' and 'shared' represent a minimalist approach to social change, and few of the strategies adopted by government to date seek to alter the underlying social division en masse.

A clear message from our qualitative interviews and the literature review is that more a more robust set of government policies is required to break down social, residential and educational segregation and actively promote integration. Zero-sum politics still dominate, making politicians unlikely to adopt policies as sensible as they might be, proposed by other parties. There are ongoing concerns for example that Sinn Féin now 'own' reconciliation and it is associated with their political agenda. But equally there are no attempts by others to try to redefine the term, or engage with 'the other' to see if new common approaches to reconciliation can be developed.

In short, and to quote Duncan Morrow, reconciliation involves, among other task "recalibrating ethno-national goals towards accommodation" (Morrow, 2016, p.43). To do this requires genuine and visionary leadership. Engaging with a concept such as reconciliation is also risky, as we noted, it often has unpredictable consequences both positive and negative, but (calculated) risk-taking is itself often the hallmark a true leader.

LINKING THE COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL

There is no doubt, as this report has shown, there is a massive store of knowledge, skills and practice at the community level when it comes to peacebuilding and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. As was noted earlier, despite decades of community-based reconciliation work, and the positive impact of this, it would be difficult to convincingly argue that reconciliation (or community relations more broadly) has been a joined up at the community and political level in Northern Ireland.

Of course, separating out reconciliation from "real-world decisions that respond to concrete challenges associated with addressing armed conflict, and which derive from fear, anger, resentment and discrimination" (Morrow, 2016, p.39) is impossible. But equally we cannot build positive reconciliation work on the ground if it is continually undermined by the lack of social policies to alter issues of segregation and the insidious nature of sectarianism, as well as embedding a rights culture. There is clear evidence that the political context in Northern Ireland has a knock-on effect on how different communities perceive one another.

To this end, policies for social change that challenge division, and leadership that crosses political boundaries or is aimed at the greater good, are an integral part of local and community-based reconciliation work having the potential for scalable impact. An enabling political environment needs to be created for the full impact of community-based work to have an effect. There is an urgent concern that funds to support community work are being limited, and that at a political level such work is not being prioritised. Equally, more focus needs to be given to articulating what works and why in terms of both attitudinal and behavioural change.

LINKING GOOD RELATIONS, RECONCILIATION AND DEALING WITH THE PAST

In this research and over the years we have routinely been told that dealing with the past remains an urgent priority on the reconciliation landscape. Although significant progress was made to propose a set of dealing with the past measures in relation to the Stormont House Agreement, the process now appears to be stalled. Three recommendations flow from this research.

Firstly, urgent attention needs to be given to the issue of dealing with the past, and society can no longer afford for the issue to continually be stalled. That unresolved issues from the past continue to hamper the building of the present is a message we have routinely heard. This is not, however, an easy component of the reconciliation agenda to deal with as it "requires a reckoning with power and violence in the past" (Morrow, 2016, p44).

Secondly, and drawing on previous research, the link between good relations, reconciliation and dealing with the past needs to be more clearly articulated (Kelly, 2012b). To quote the report "*For*

too long 'dealing with the past' has been treated as a separate, often mechanistic, process involving special structures, actions, objectives and constituencies, disengaged from the wider good relations and reconciliation objectives in Northern Ireland. What is required is a clear articulation of the connections, commonalities and intersections between dealing with the past and broader reconciliation processes at individual, community, political and societal levels" (Kelly, 2012b, pp.9-10). In other words, just as political processes cannot be hived off from relationship-building and reconciliation work, nor can dealing with the past.

Finally, we need to ask the question: why deal with the past? In the Consultative Group of the Past report reviewed earlier they proposed a series of reasons why for example truth was key to reconciliation. This approach did not receive much traction, perhaps because it is difficult to prove some of the statement made by the group – however, the anodyne use of the term in subsequent documents (such as the Stormont House Agreement) is also not helpful. In short, a clearer sense of what reconciliation means when used in political and policy documents needs to be more consistently articulated. The dealing with the past debate will only move forward when the argument as to why it is useful is won.

ARTICULATING COMPLEXITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

In reviewing what has been produced for this report, it is startling to see how most of the work today, and discourses around discussions on the topic of reconciliation, continually revert back to main social fault-lines (that is between the Catholic and Protestant communities). This is of course a hallmark of ethno-national conflicts but if reconciliation as a concept is to make any headway some of the narrowing that flows from ethno-national conflict needs to be challenged. A more nuanced analysis of the conflict, its impact and what needs to be done has to be developed.

We discussed in this report the issue of how the lack of a gendered analysis of the conflict narrows how we see harm, who partakes in reconciliation and peacebuilding work and why, and how different issues such as class intersect with peacebuilding practice. Equally, when one reads policy documents in Northern Ireland focusing on 'good relations' an enormous amount of confusion is apparent about how this relates to new migrant communities, or other sectors in society such as the LGBT community.

At the T:BUC Forum participants reminded us, for example, that reconciliation and community relations are words seldom applied to thinking about an ageing population. One of the interviewees stressed the importance of thinking about middle class communities and how they fit into any reconciliation agenda. Ongoing issue such as poor mental health, drug-dependency, suicide, youth violence and other concerns in deprived areas also mentioned to us when we talk about the past and reconciliation. Fresh thinking is needed to address these core societal issues, and more work needs to be done on concepts such as reconciliation and peacebuilding that moves beyond the narrow confines of politically constrained understanding of the impact of conflict.

Conclusion

Although the range of innovative practice at a community level has been explored in this paper, the paper has focused substantially on policy approaches to reconciliation in Northern Ireland. This of course risks being overly state-centric and raises comparative questions as to the relevancy of this focus for fragile states with limited capacities. That said, the Northern Ireland case provides a sobering reminder that even in societies with (relatively speaking) significant financial and human resources, policy vision can outstrip practical implementation. In addition, policies that address the past and relationships between groups, as well as seeking to re-establish trust in the state, in deeply divided themselves are continually subject to the same fault lines that drive political and social division in that society.

To this end, political leadership in Northern Ireland has failed to fully champion a cross-community vision for a reconciled society (notwithstanding the slippery nature of such a notion in itself) opting for a more constrained vision, perhaps best captured by the term co-existence. Given the continual faltering of the peace process itself, and the new stressors such as Brexit and the questions it raises for the Irish Border and the peace process more broadly, it appears that this limited approach is inadequate. The inability to transform the underlying social and political divisions in society (whether in terms of education, social segregation or cultural manifestations of identity) and the ongoing reluctance to address the past in a holistic way, continually undermine progress.

In addition, although there has been significant work done at a community level (although often not directly referred to as reconciliation work but 'community relations' or 'peacebuilding'), and a number of reconciliation-orientated policies have been put in place at the political level, these have often operated on different tracks. Government approaches have also been shown to be

piecemeal, not always supported across the political spectrum and disconnected, as well as not being fully embedded and mainstreamed across all government departments.

Clearly, as this paper has shown, coherence and intersection at the practice and policy levels in terms of reconciliation is needed in Northern Ireland. This is essential to capitalise on the massive investment in terms of community resource and direct financial investment in people-to-people peace and reconciliation work that has taken place in Northern Ireland.

As Northern Ireland faces continuing political crises and a seeming inability to reach a political agreement to re-establish the Northern Ireland Assembly not to mention new challenges for the island of Ireland associated with Brexit, we conclude that the establishment of a political vision for the future that transcends political differences and aspirations remains the biggest stumbling block to reconciliation in Northern Ireland, however we define it.

Interestingly, the further the society has moved from the Belfast Agreement of 1998 the more apparent the divergences in future aspirations have become and have led, at least in part, to the current political impasse. Moving society beyond this is not simply the work of peacebuilding practitioners, or skilled negotiators, nor can it be delivered by successful economic development in itself, it requires political leadership that will set the course for the next phase of the peace process that contains a compelling vision of better future.

To conclude, the words of Dr Raymond McClean writing about the impact of Bloody Sunday in 1972 10 years after the event, are worth quoting:

"*...the massive problem of reconciliation between these people was yet to be tackled. It seemed to me that any attempt at progress would have to be directed in some way through the political process...I felt an accommodation could be reached at a local level. However, the role to be played by 'the man in London', by 'the man in Belfast', and by 'the man in Dublin', would be crucial to our future development and existence*" (McClean, 1983, p.162).

Forgiving Dr McClean for his male-based language (although at the time female politicians would have been few and far between), it is sobering that in 2017 our assessment would lead us to the same conclusion. Despite all the positive community work and generosity seen at a local level to reach out and breakdown division, it is our contention, that at this point in time reconciliation can only be forwarded through the political process.

In the final instance, our case study suggests that although significant progress has been made in terms of the Northern Ireland peace process more broadly, when it comes to transforming the underlying division in society much of the policy to date is tinkering around the edges of social change. This continues to undermine the peace process and community relations, as well as undermining the rebuilding of trust by some communities in the state. The disconnect between innovative community practice and the political process, and the failure to find agreement on how to collectively and constructively address the past, further stymies progress.

An all-inclusive approach to reconciliation driven by concerted politically-driven leadership and shared and mainstreamed governmental strategy (built on recognising the breadth and complexity of relationships) that ties directly into wide-ranging community intervention and dealing with the past processes is critical to further progress in Northern Ireland.

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Appendix A: Working Definition of Reconciliation

A WORKING DEFINITION OF RECONCILIATION

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Our working hypothesis is that reconciliation is a necessary process following conflict. However, we believe it is a voluntary act and cannot be imposed (IDEA, 2003). It involves five interwoven and related strands:

Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society

The articulation of a common vision of an interdependent, just equitable, open and diverse society. The development of a vision of a shared future requiring the involvement of the whole society, at all levels.

Acknowledging and dealing with the past

Acknowledging the hurt, losses, truths, and suffering of the past. Providing the mechanisms for justice, healing, restitution or reparation, and restoration (including apologies if necessary and steps aimed at redress.) Individuals and institutions acknowledge their own role in the conflicts of the past, accepting and learning from it in a constructive way so as to guarantee non-repetition.

Building positive relationships

Relationship building or renewal following violent conflict addressing issues of trust, prejudice, intolerance in this process resulting in accepting commonalities and differences, and embracing and engaging with those who are different to us.

Significant cultural and attitudinal change

Changes in how people relate to, and their attitudes towards, on another. The culture of suspicion, fear, mistrust and violence is broken down and opportunities and space opened up in which people can hear and be heard. A culture of respect for human rights and human difference is developed creating a context where each citizen becomes an active participant in society and feels a sense of belonging.

Substantial social, economic and political change

The social, economic and political structures which gave rise to the conflict and estrangement are identified, reconstructed are addressed, and transformed.

TWO OTHER FACTORS ARE CRITICALLY IMPORTANT, NAMELY:

Reconciliation involves a PARADOX, e.g. reconciliation promotes an encounter between the open expression of the painful past but at the same time seeks a long-term, interdependent future (see Lederach, 1997). Reconciliation as a concept is always influenced by an individual's underlying assumptions. There are different IDEOLOGIES of reconciliation, e.g. a religious ideology often emphasizes the re-discovering of a new conscience of individuals and society through moral reflection, repentance, confession and rebirth, but a human rights approach might see it as a process only achieved by regulating social interaction through the rule of law and preventing certain forms of violations of rights from happening again (see Hamber and van der Merwe, 1998; van der Merwe, 1999; Hamber, 2002).

Working definition by Brandon Hamber (✉ b.hamber@ulster.ac.uk) and Gráinne Kelly (✉ g.kelly@ulster.ac.uk).
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Working definition developed and adapted from: IDEA, 2003; Lederach, 1997; Porter, 2003; ADM/CPA, 2000; Rigby, 2001; Hamber, 2002; Hamber and van der Merwe, 1998; van der Merwe, 1999; Assefa 2001

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