

THE IMPACT OF BUREAUCRACY ON LOCAL OWNERSHIP OF PEACEBUILDING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Ireoluwatomi Oloke and Sean Byrne

This article explores how the bureaucratic nature of external actors' funding relationship with local organizations can impede local ownership of peacebuilding. The findings are drawn from 120 semi-structured interviews, carried out by the second author, which explore how civil society organization (CSO) leaders in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of the Republic of Ireland perceive the process of applying for and receiving economic assistance for peacebuilding from external actors. Study findings suggest that a focus on meeting funding requirements can overshadow the emphasis on peacebuilding and local inclusion, that smaller CSOs in particular are impacted by strenuous administrative requirements, and that such requirements can create significant financial constraints for CSOs. Ultimately, funding processes can be supportive and yet ensure CSOs are accountable for the assistance received.

INTRODUCTION

Externally supported peacebuilding interventions have the tendency to be bureaucratic in the way that they often seek to follow a set pattern to achieve a predetermined outcome. This is evident in the emphasis of neoliberal peacebuilding on a procedural, formulaic approach that is considered more effective than the seemingly outdated and messy locally

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developed approaches.¹ An example of how this plays out in practice is when local peacebuilders experience difficulty following the bureaucratic practices established by external funders as the basis for receiving economic assistance from these external actors.² This suggests that local ownership of peacebuilding is not limited to just program implementation and development, but that the facilitation or restriction of local ownership begins from even the preliminary stage of applying for external funding.

Against this background, this article considers how the bureaucratic nature of external actors' funding relationships with local civic organizations can impede the local ownership of peacebuilding projects. This is done by exploring how civil society organization (CSO) leaders in Northern Ireland and the Border counties of the Republic of Ireland perceive the process of applying for peacebuilding funding from external actors. In the following sections, we describe the study area and research methods and then present findings from interviews with the CSO leaders regarding their experiences with and perceptions of the requirements for receiving economic assistance. Finally, we discuss how overbearing technical and administrative requirements imposed on community service organizations can limit their capacity to function effectively as peacebuilders.

LOCAL OWNERSHIP OF PEACEBUILDING

The technocratization of peacebuilding has been exacerbated by the professionalization of the field, as exemplified in the increased emphasis on peace experts and the use of complicated technology.³ External actors typically prefer funding organizations that have the requisite administrative features needed to navigate the bureaucratic process—a selection criteria that has been described as a form of neocolonialism.⁴ Such external actors typically consider peacebuilding to be a medium for gaining social capital on the world stage as facilitators of peace, and typically seek out professional civil organizations that make it easy for them to gain the accolades they desire.⁵

Local CSOs often require the assistance of experts to successfully navigate the bureaucratic requirements for funding applications.⁶ CSOs with promising project ideas may be unable to complete applications for funding needed to implement these ideas because they lack the resources essential to the success of their application.⁷ The entire funding application and monitoring

process often requires significant institutional, financial, administrative, and technical resources that can be quite difficult for local organizations to acquire.⁸ Some local peacebuilders even give up on applying for funding because it requires so much more time and money than they can afford.⁹ Other local organizations have found the technical requirements (such as language and assessment methodology) imposed by funders to be restrictive, frustrating, and disconnected from the realities on the ground.¹⁰

The requirement to fulfill certain administrative requirements and possess specific capacity before accessing external support also engenders the exclusion of already marginalized local actors from the peacebuilding process. When only significantly educated and/or experienced individuals or organizations can perform the technical tasks required to receive funding from external actors, the bulk of the local actors become excluded.¹¹ Whether this is done intentionally or otherwise, it limits local agency and inclusion.¹² Funding application requirements that are expected to be fulfilled by disadvantaged groups (such as youth, women, ex-combatants, disabled citizens, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), ethnic/religious minorities, and war veterans) are often significant. It is hard to imagine how such individuals can be realistically expected to perform rigorous activities that require the use of significant technical skills such as risk assessment and mitigation strategy development.¹³

While bureaucracy is frequently presented as a neutral though occasionally obstructive factor that is unaffected by politics, this is not always the case. The administrative and technocratic process can be used within the neoliberal sphere as a way of ensuring that peacebuilding projects that will be approved align with dominant mindsets.¹⁴ Hence the difficulty in getting through the granting process, which is often positioned as just a failure of bureaucracy, could have deeper objectives of limiting the pool of those who can access economic assistance. Bureaucracy can also become a tool to tame radical grassroots movements in the way that funding applicants are mandated to conform to certain technical processes and requirements if they are to be considered for the external support they need to advance their movement.¹⁵ Hence, donors do not necessarily have to intentionally constrain such activist organizations, whose focus begins to drift from their original social transformation objectives to providing service provision and fulfilling donor requirements. If the organizations cannot conform to the bureaucracy, they may become ultimately excluded from the peacebuilding process.¹⁶ In

this way, administrative requirements can intentionally or unintentionally become an avenue to gatekeep organizations seeking peacebuilding funding. Local organizations may even need to transform themselves in order to access external support. Yet while bodies like the European Union (EU) seem to want local organizations to bend to access their support, they can adapt to the specific local context on some levels.¹⁷

Further, funders' focus on ensuring that CSOs meet administrative and technical requirements may obscure more important questions around the nature of the organization and the programs they are proposing to implement. Some local organizations have reportedly gained external funding despite the xenophobic or racist beliefs they hold because they have mastered the technical language skills so desired by external actors.¹⁸ Despite the rhetoric of local ownership, organizations that can "deliver feasible and visible results along with a host of paperwork" are most likely to be supported by external actors.¹⁹ Some believe that for these local organizations to be genuinely in control of their peacebuilding, they must consider other sources of funding that would make them less dependent on external funding, and that foreign donors must seek for ways to accommodate local actors who do not fit into their bureaucratic mould.²⁰

Practitioner experience and research have found that when external peacebuilders support programs at the local level rather than at national or regional levels, the sustainability of peacebuilding is increased.²¹ For such local-level peacebuilding processes to be successfully implemented, the political structures of the state must provide for decentralization. Some foreign donor agencies tend to support policies developed by national governments, not minding that they can be considered "biased against minority groups when they lead to unequal outcomes or disrupt local political relationships."²² Top-down decentralization reform instituted by the Rwandan national government, for instance, was carried out with the objective of empowering citizens at the local level to fight poverty and participate in the process of planning and managing development projects.²³ The national government also launched development programs based on traditional practices, to be implemented at the local level. Important decisions like the selection of those who would benefit from public work was solely determined by local leaders with little or no input from residents. To create a truly emancipatory peace, peacebuilding and state-building activities must address the socio-economic inequality generated by neoliberalism.²⁴

The local is a complex system that can build resilience and sustainable peace with minimal external intervention.²⁵ The role of external peacebuilders is to stabilize the local community after violent conflict has ended and support it in gaining the ability to prevent future conflict rather than imposing projects or policies that will lead to the development of a liberal state.²⁶ Externally imposed intervention deprives the local system of the chance to learn how to manage challenges and build resilience.²⁷ The key then is for external actors to find the balance between providing material resources to address violence and allowing the local system its freedom to address challenges in such a way that it develops the ability to withstand future pressures without resorting to violent conflict.²⁸

Who and what is the authentic local becomes a political struggle, even within the peacebuilding process, and such representations are used by various parties to promote their own interests and prop up certain actors and practices at the expense of others.²⁹ However, actors are never simply victims of politically minded attempts to label them as local or international during peacebuilding efforts. They can take on different identities at various times, oscillating between a local and international identity, depending on which would benefit them at a given time.³⁰ Hence, the “local turn” conceives of the local as not just a homogeneous unit but a “multiple, messy assemblage of hybrid networks, where the identification of clear-cut identities and agendas is discouraged.”³¹ Rather than determining what is a good or bad local, attention must be paid to the practices and capacity that the community has to address and sustain in order to maintain peace.³² Positioning the local and the international as binary opposites must also be avoided to ensure that local practices are not demonized or romanticized, but used as a basis for building capacity and cultivating a context-specific approach to peace.³³ As emancipatory “local turn” approaches emphasize, it is essential to listen to grassroots voices and adopt the use of everyday practices as mediums for the expression of these voices.³⁴

CONTEXT

The 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty divided Ireland into the twenty-six-county Irish Free State, and the six Northern Ireland counties that were placed under the control of the Ulster’s Unionist Party while Catholics boycotted the Northern Ireland statelet.³⁵ Attempts to include Catholic Nationalists

were resisted by radical Protestant Loyalists and ignored by the Nationalists, who considered it superficial politics.³⁶ In 1967, a Belfast-to-Derry nonviolent march by students was attacked by Loyalists and escalated into violence. The British government suspended the Belfast parliament in 1972 and introduced direct rule from London and internment without trial (1971–75).³⁷ On Bloody Friday (21 July 1972), the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) planted twenty-two bombs in Belfast that killed nine people and maimed many more.³⁸ The violence intensified when none of the British troops who killed fourteen nonviolent protestors in Derry in 1972 (Bloody Sunday) were ever found guilty of murder.³⁹ The 1973 Sunningdale Agreement created a short-lived power-sharing government that collapsed because of pressure from the Ulster Worker's Council's strike in 1974.⁴⁰

The 1981 Hunger Strikes resulted in the deaths of Bobby Sands and nine other Republican prisoners, which brought many new recruits into the PIRA and caused international embarrassment for Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government. This brought much-needed attention from the European Community and the United States, as well as military support for the PIRA in terms of seven shiploads of weapons from Colonel Gaddafi in Libya.⁴¹ British economic, political, social, and security policy toward Northern Ireland during the Troubles can be described as crisis management littered with a plethora of mistakes and oversights.⁴²

Sectarian attacks and murders escalated as retaliatory strikes were carried out by Loyalist paramilitaries who engaged with Republican paramilitaries in a series of tit-for-tat sectarian atrocities.⁴³ The IRA split into the militant Provisionals (PIRA) and a more Marxist Official IRA, which also split in two in 1985. During the thirty years' war (the Troubles), the PIRA fought with the state's security forces and the Loyalist paramilitaries, and over 3,000 people were killed. A massive bomb placed in Omagh, County Tyrone, by the Provisional IRA on 15 August 1998 killed twenty-nine civilians and put added pressure on the PIRA to cease all military activities. Ceasefires by the PIRA and the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) in 1996 had allowed for negotiations. The 1998 Good Friday or Belfast Agreement brought an end to the political strife in Northern Ireland. The agreement created a North-South Ministerial Council and a British and Irish Council, introduced devolved government in Stormont, and documented the consent principle with regards to Northern Ireland's position within the United

Kingdom.⁴⁴

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA) facilitated the creation of new democratic power-sharing institutions and legislation to safeguard individual rights and equal opportunities. It also led to the decommissioning of Loyalist and Republican paramilitary weapons, the re-formation of the police force into the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), and the normalization of security in Northern Ireland with the withdrawal of British troops.⁴⁵ However, the peace process has been challenged by ongoing issues such as the British government's 2008 austerity program; the 2017–20 collapse and restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly; the new culture war between young Loyalists and the state over flags, marches, and emblems; ongoing tensions over the recent Brexit fiasco and the resultant Northern Ireland protocol; economic concerns and the prospect of having a Border poll with regards to Northern Ireland's position within the UK, especially in the wake of Sinn Féin's victory in the 5 May 2022 local Assembly elections; the Covid-19 pandemic; and recent violence by the New Irish Republican Army (NIRA) and Protestant Action Force (PAF) that has threatened the fragile peace in Northern Ireland.⁴⁶

Over USD\$4 billion in peacebuilding funding has been allocated to Northern Ireland from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the EU Peace and Reconciliation Fund.⁴⁷ The IFI was established in 1986 because of the Anglo-Irish Agreement signed by the British and Irish governments. The IFI is administered by a secretariat led by joint heads based in Belfast and Dublin and has provided £728 million to support over 6,000 community-based projects.⁴⁸ The EU PEACE I Programme (1995–99) was managed by local district partnerships and intermediate funding bodies, with a broad mandate to include the grassroots in economic development and cross-Border cooperation.⁴⁹ The EU PEACE II Programme (2000–2006) was delivered by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and set up to promote economic and social development and address the legacy of the conflict.⁵⁰ The EU PEACE III Programme (2007–13) was also managed by SEUPB to nurture reconciliation and a shared society.⁵¹ The EU PEACE IV Programme (2014–2020) focused on cross community contact and reconciliation. While this aid has made some contributions, significant divisions persist within Northern Ireland, where both Protestant and Catholic communities have their own separate schools, churches, sports grounds, and living areas.⁵² The centre of the conflict, which has not

been addressed, remains the matter of two conflicting identities coexisting somewhat uneasily in the same territory with separate national allegiances.⁵³

METHODS

The qualitative data presented in this article is drawn from 120 semi-structured interviews carried out by the second author during the summer of 2010 with CSO leaders building cross-community relations in Derry and in the Border counties of Armagh, Cavan, Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, and Tyrone. The respondents comprised 102 local CSO leaders heading up diverse community development, peacebuilding, and reconciliation projects, five civil servants responsible for administering and auditing the funding, three IFI community development officers, and ten EU PEACE III development officers. These leaders' experiences and perceptions of the funding process, cross-community peacebuilding and reconciliation activities, and the peace process itself shed light on what is involved in receiving economic assistance from the EU Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE III) Fund and the IFI to build the peace dividend in post-peace accord Northern Ireland.

The recorded interviews took between 60 and 120 minutes to complete and were transcribed verbatim. The respondents were from both the Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) and the Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR) communities. The second author did not experience any challenges during the field research. Each respondent signed the ethics protocol form consenting to participate in the study. Pseudonyms are used to protect the respondents' anonymity. Respondents addressed ten open-ended questions related to community development, peacebuilding, and reconciliation. The second author inductively analyzed the transcribed data manually, using highlighters to create a coding framework to organize the data into significant themes.⁵⁴

RESULTS

Focus on Meeting funding Requirements Overshadows Emphasis on Peacebuilding and Community Inclusion

Respondents stated that the funding process, especially for the EU PEACE III Fund, was highly bureaucratic in terms of the nature of the application,

reporting process, and the overall experience with funders. As a CSO leader opined, the PEACE III funding required a lot of time and energy that could have been put to good use in the field executing the peacebuilding projects. It put a lot of stress on individual members of CSOs, and it impacted their capacity building. A PEACE III civil servant also noted that the bureaucratic requirements of the PEACE III Fund meant that civil servants were more focused on satisfying mundane funding requirements and deadlines than on the projects themselves and on encouraging more people to participate in project activities.

Deirdre: Because we are focusing on our funding and have deadlines to meet, we kind of work with the people who are coming to the door because it is easier to do. We do need to be kind of going out there and doing the neighbourhood work, and knocking on the doors, and give people the confidence to participate in events. Because it's the same people that are participating, there is a whole cohort of people who aren't. They are the people who are continuing to be isolated and to be marginalized, and we must look at ways of ensuring that they have opportunities to participate.

The focus on meeting bureaucratic requirements overshadowed the desire and need to stimulate the inclusion of local actors already on the margins.

A CSO leader articulated that compared to the IFI, the reporting and general administration requirements for PEACE III were so intense that some projects refused to accept the funding and waited to apply for the less demanding IFI funding.

Elsbeth: And even now we have a joke through our own project, it is so hard to spend the money because it is so much hassle, so much work involved, getting your quotes, going out to tender. It is just so time consuming. As well as that, you know, we can't employ individual facilitators. Everything must go through an organization, which means that you're still limited. You know people that you would have used previously that you knew were good at their job, you can't do that anymore.

Not only were the administration requirements intense, but the funders also mandated the specific individuals had to facilitate the programs organized by the CSOs. The CSOs did not have the opportunity to include those

community members they would have preferred to work with, and this undermined the goal of local ownership.

The inclusion of community members in the programs of CSOs was essential to the success of these programs. As a CSO leader contended, community development work should not depend solely on paid workers providing the much-needed services for their communities, as voluntary community involvement is essential to the sustainability of peacebuilding. He felt that the peace process would only survive after external funding ends, because people would then value peacebuilding activities for the impact they think such activities can make rather than considering these projects as simply a way to make money.

Tiernan: I don't believe that [peacebuilding] work should depend only on someone's salary being paid. I also believe that the concerns around the so-called community work now is how to make that sustainable. Unless people go on to get jobs, and we don't have jobs, it is not sustainable. If the Peace money was all taken away tomorrow, the peace will hold because people value it too much now. It is not just going to go because the Peace money goes.

The Loyalist community would say they never had a dividend anyway so they're not going to suddenly see something taken away from them. They certainly feel bad about the fact that they haven't got as much of the so-called Peace money as they would have liked. But the Peace money is, let's be honest, it's nothing. And it's on its way out and it is nothing in the final analysis. I believe the urge for peace is too strong now in both communities.

Peacebuilding must be entrenched in the grassroots for it to survive after external funding is finished and the voluntary sector must truly become that, rather than the full-time service-led industry it has become, for this to work.

In the past people living in rural areas along the Border were forced to emigrate to find work. Young people were opting to start their own local businesses, which provided them with a degree of dignity, choice, and freedom as they created employment opportunities for community members, which uplifted the local economy.

Lorcan: I mean in terms of peace and reconciliation you then get people who have something to get up for in the morning. They have a bit of dignity also in terms of the divide we have here in Northern Ireland, the Nationalist-Unionist divide. You're working with some guy who's on the other side. You have your lunch with him, and you begin to get to know him as a person, and you realize "well, actually he's just the same as I am."

It is important to create local CSOs and businesses so that local people have the dignity and freedom of holding jobs as well as freedom of choice to remain in their communities. The spillover effect of providing employment to local people was that it also promoted cross-community contact among workers, improving communication, trust, and reconciliation.

A CSO leader maintained that equity meant increasing the education and training base of the population through personal development, and the job of CSOs was to make it easy for citizens to access the work world. CSOs created a safe environment where people from diverse communities could come together and have the equality of opportunity and freedom to speak up. There is natural justice within that process.

Fionn: Justice is morphed into "just us" And there is a continuing injustice, and this may not be the most precise language, with the segregation there's a maybe a betrayal of all of us by this being there.

The equity and human rights agenda was embedded in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and Sinn Féin (SF) emphasized consolidating equity and justice for the Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR) community. This was an anathema to the British government's belief that human rights were deeply embedded in British political culture, and it did not have to concern itself with these European codified rights that were part of the architecture of the Good Friday Agreement; there was a sort of collusive silence around them.⁵⁵ It was important for people to listen to each other in conflict terms to be able to edge toward respecting human life.

Bureaucracy as a Hindrance to Smaller CSOs

Smaller CSOs seemed particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of burdensome administrative and technical requirements imposed by funders.

A CSO leader made it known that CSOs did not need the headache of working with PEACE III; its complicated and rather peculiar reporting structures created a bureaucratic overload for many smaller CSOs, who were forced to comply with strenuous requests under the threat of having their funding withheld. Another CSO leader highlighted how organizations on the southern side of the Border struggled with the red tape imposed by the EU PEACE III Fund. CSOs had to pay expenses up front and then submit the expenditures to the Peace Fund for reimbursement, which proved challenging for smaller CSOs which did not have access to funding options.

Ronan: This time around there is no float money being forwarded up front to projects. So, in our case we don't have a pot or a bank of money sitting that we can use. So, for the project we must spend the money first and then look for it back. We're not allowed to have overdraft fees; they're not eligible expenditure under the program.

So, it leaves you basically running after funding and the local authority having to process your applications under a lot of pressure, very, very, quickly. And for smaller community groups who may not have several bank accounts that they can offset against each other as we do, that's proving very, very difficult.

Further, a CSO leader reported that unlike the IFI, the PEACE III Fund involved a lot of monitoring and evaluation of project activity, with midterm reports and yearly evaluation reports. This was very cumbersome for smaller CSOs, which found it difficult to complete project activities while trying to satisfy administrative requirements.

Brendan: The EU fund was very, very time consuming in terms of paperwork and administration, a lot of bureaucracy involved in it. You were more of an administrator rather than trying to get out on the ground right from the application process to running the program, and then to evaluating it at the very end.

Technical requirements were often intimidating for small CSOs made up of volunteers and operating on small grants, and which often did not have the capacity to deal with such requirements.

Similarly, a CSO leader narrated that the PEACE III application forms were complex and stressful for small voluntary CSOs that did not have

significantly educated or qualified staff to assist in navigating the complex language of funding applications.

Ethan: The European Union stuff is so bureaucratic it would put you off. I remember we applied for money, and it was like a forty-page application form. And I am thinking at the time if you have got the brains in the world with all the resources to fill in this form you should be a millionaire. You don't need funding. You are smart enough to make it in Wall Street. You know if you had that kind of mind, you know that bureaucratic mind I see people tearing their hair out, very competent, capable intelligent people just really struggling to deal with bureaucracy, the EU needs to lighten up a bit.

He felt that PEACE III should re-evaluate the process and make it more user friendly for local community groups so that they could function properly and not be frustrated by the technocratic process.

Participants noted a lack of accessibility for marginalized groups that cannot access funding because they did not know about it or lacked the skills needed to complete the complex and competitive application process. The rules and regulations guiding the application process were constantly changing, and CSOs had to pay expenses up front before they were reimbursed. They also needed invoices and quotations to satisfy the civil servants in charge of the funding process, as the administrators had to justify the expenditures and were not prepared to take any risks with projects. The auditing and reporting paperwork required was time consuming and overwhelmed the voluntary sector.

Financial Constraints of Bureaucracy

Administrative requirements also imposed financial costs on CSOs. A CSO leader divulged that the invoicing required for PEACE III was tedious and placed community organizations in precarious situations with their banks, requiring them to use overdrafts and spend their grant funds before the expenses were refunded to them. She concluded that the administration of PEACE III grant projects was time consuming and burdensome.

Paula: We also received money from Brussels several years ago, and this has been awful.... This is the grant we got for a couple

of years. The money was spent that they had allocated to us. We sent all the invoices, copies of checks, every reference, and paperwork that we could think about, and yet it had to go from one office to be verified and to another office that verified all the lot again.

So, we had been in the red in the bank all this time. So, it has been difficult. When something like that happens as you know, you must do the expenditure. You must spend the money before you get it refunded so there was no loophole, we had to pay. But because we were in the red there was no help with the bank fees, and everything that we had to pay for all those years.

One leader revealed that CSOs were sent threatening letters by PEACE III if they did not have their invoices in order. The administration of project funds was very rigorous and difficult from an operational point of view. He suggested that the development officers were not really interested in extending themselves to assist local community groups. Instead, they were more concerned with protecting themselves against approving any controversial projects with financial implications in what has become a peace industry in Northern Ireland and the Border counties. Another CSO leader reported that councils and government departments used PEACE III resources to cover a shortfall in the provision of public goods and services, thereby depriving voluntary community organizations of the needed resources.

A CSO leader argued that not all CSOs depended on external funding, as they had their own fundraising mechanisms and were also collaborating with statutory organizations on projects. He recognized that CSOs needed a dedicated, fully paid staff person as well as a plethora of fully trained volunteers who continued to work on community development and peacebuilding locally. He claimed that the funded projects were only just managing conflict, as the bitterness and animosity is deep and will take generations to cycle through. There was a lack of awareness of what peacebuilding was about, and not many people knew about PEACE III and what it really stood for. Many CSOs will fall by the wayside as the funding diminishes, while the steadfast volunteers with a deep commitment to their communities will continue to pour their hearts and souls into peacebuilding work. The bitterness is deep within both Unionist Loyalist and Nationalist

Republic community cultures, and it is going to take much time to break the transmission of intergroup prejudice and hatred. Families and schools have a responsibility to educate children about the conflict and model a response to it in a way that is congruent with democratic values and that explores the complexity of the conflict rather than highlights its narrow sectarian cultural and historical dimension.

A More Supportive Funding Process

As suggested in the foregoing sections, many participants considered the IFI funding process to be much more flexible and less bureaucratic than the PEACE III funding process. This less technocratic process was even considered helpful in building CSOs' capacity by allowing them to develop new administrative skills and in the process empower local communities. A CSO leader considered the IFI more flexible than the PEACE III Fund, since it had effective development officers on the ground who knew the needs of local communities intimately. In contrast to later funding processes, PEACE I's Local Strategy Partnerships that were not council controlled or led were made up of social partners from the community and voluntary sector, and they were able to take more risks with local projects.

A PEACE III development officer explained that the IFI process was more streamlined than the PEACE III Fund and that the PEACE III reporting process intimidated smaller CSOs with voluntary staff members, whereas the IFI process was less onerous on smaller CSOs.

Phoebe: And I suppose the problem is a lot of the community groups, particularly small grant recipients, don't have paid staff. They have volunteers, so they need somebody then to volunteer to do all this work.... I mean we've had some small grants recipients that were awarded the money coming back to us and saying, "we're actually not going to take it because we're actually a bit scared of the amount of work that's involved in it."

Similarly, a CSO leader reported that the IFI administration and auditing process was more doable compared to the PEACE III Fund, which placed an inordinate amount of work on voluntary organizations. A CSO leader commented that the IFI was flexible, responsive, and professional, and funded infrastructure and capital investment projects. The IFI moved into supporting better community relations, while PEACE III put an

administrative burden on local CSOs and the auditors who checked community projects. The goalposts kept shifting, and change was rather slow within the PEACE III bureaucracy in terms of policymaking and accessibility. While accountability was important, the process was often daunting for voluntary community groups who were not adept at keeping track of all the paperwork.

A CSO leader recognized that IFI reporting structures were flexible and not as intensive as those of PEACE III. IFI development officers worked very closely with CSOs, allowing them to tweak the emphasis of their projects on the ground.

Alexander: Well, if I had to choose, I would go along with the IFI all the time mainly because I think they're not bound by the ridiculous European structures, and a lot of their funding mechanisms like the Community Bridges are flexible, you know, that's so vitally important to me.

They are more interested in good ideas and good programs than specific targets and outputs. You know their field [development] officers work very closely with potential projects in which you express an interest for a particular work, then you are coached into make a bid. There's no real structured application form.

In addition to having easy-to-navigate application and auditing processes, the IFI funding process also provided some support for administrative tasks to community organizations.

The IFI was detached from statutory responsibilities and was more flexible about how CSOs could spend project monies. Ultimately, the IFI's Community Bridges program funded many excellent anti-sectarian projects, especially in interface areas that witnessed an escalation in youth violence in urban areas. The IFI also provided significant training for project supervisors.

Bureaucracy as Way of Maintaining Accountability

Not all perceptions of the administrative and bureaucratic processes were negative, as some interviewees believed these procedures were essential to the peace process. A CSO leader disclosed that while CSOs should be held accountable to the funders for the resources they are entrusted with and for

the quality of the projects they deliver, this should be realistic and practical, based on the situation on the ground. The IFI had a more pragmatic approach to the stewardship of resources than did PEACE III.

Aidan: The IFI have a far more pragmatic realistic approach to paperwork and bureaucracy, progress reporting. I mean the work still must be done don't get me wrong. But they have a far more realistic and flexible approach to how it can be done and how it should be done, and what information is needed to be provided.

A CSO leader asserted that while having standards in place for CSOs was essential to stemming corruption and ensuring professionalism, this bureaucracy was overwhelming for development officers who needed to cope with shifting rules and regulations that seemed to undermine what they were tasked to do.

Padraig: I have heard the stories about the mismanagement of funding in the past but that seems to have led to a certain level of overkill in terms of how they now deal with the funding. There is an incredible layer of bureaucracy that surrounds it now. We are glad to get the funding and part of the funding is that we have a new administrator. That's good, but a lot of that administrator's tasks are taken up with fulfilling silly requirements on behalf of the PEACE III funders.

PEACE III provided meetings and seminars with CSOs to explain procedures on how to assess the impact of their projects, but these meetings were not very helpful because the technocratic language used by the fund instructors was too complicated for local community volunteers.

A CSO leader remarked that it was important for both the IFI and PEACE III to have monitoring and evaluation procedures. However, the IFI allowed CSOs to produce a business plan that was quite achievable, whereas the PEACE III process was more complex. The professional standards ensured that CSO personnel developed excellent capacity for future community development, even in a situation where there were few resources available.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research indicate that daunting technical and administrative requirements imposed on community service organizations can limit their capacity to function effectively as peacebuilders. These requirements can be considered as part of the neoliberal tendency, whether intentional or not, to carry out peacebuilding according to pre-set standards rather than suiting it to the needs of the local community. A focus on meeting funding requirements can cause CSOs to neglect the essential issue of ensuring that local actors participate in peacebuilding. Even when local organizations do attempt to include community members in their peacebuilding projects, administrative requirements can restrict their ability to include the most marginalized community members.

Funders may mandate CSOs to work with specific organizations or individuals with certain levels of experience who have the technical capacity to do such work, rather than those who would require significant support to build their capacity. However, when certain technical tasks can only be performed by a select few educated elite, the larger proportion of the local population who may be most significantly impacted by violent conflict is excluded. Hence, funders who seek to support genuinely locally owned peacebuilding may have to provide opportunities for participants to receive significant training while working with local civil society. This is not a novel or unrealistic ideal, as the interview participants noted how the IFI funding process was flexible and supportive of community realities that impacted how the local organizations receiving economic assistance operate.

Peacebuilding must fundamentally involve a process of building the capacity of local actors to ensure that the peace is sustainable and lasts after external actors have departed. Genuinely locally owned peacebuilding must address economic inequality (which is essentially exclusion from the mainstream economy) to facilitate meaningful participation by the vulnerable population of a conflict-affected area. When inequality is ignored, the opportunity for effective local participation is limited to a select few. Hence, it is counterintuitive to exclude local actors on the premise that they do not have the requisite technical capacities, as this is paternalistic and unsustainable. Excluded actors have no incentive to maintain the peace developed and implemented by experts and external actors. Capacity building through active participation in the activities of CSOs could be considered an

opportunity to develop the community's ability to address future conflict long after economic assistance has ceased.

Study findings indicate that smaller CSOs were particularly vulnerable to the technical and administrative requirements of PEACE III funding at all stages. This was because the application, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation processes often required significant expertise to manoeuvre—expertise that smaller organizations couldn't access or afford. Sometimes it was not only about the technical nature of these processes but also their sheer volume that could be so overwhelming that smaller CSOs, which were largely made up of volunteers, simply refused to accept the funding. For these organizations, the stress associated with the application process was not worth the funds they stood to receive, and the community missed an opportunity for growth because of inflexible bureaucratic requirements.

This highlights how peacebuilding can become the almost-exclusive field of more professionalized organizations and individuals that have the resources to fulfill bureaucratic requirements and may be more focused on these technicalities than on the project itself. More sincere individuals and groups that do not have the requisite resources can be easily frustrated by the technical requirements. This is problematic in that when peacebuilding is driven solely by external actors or only a few local elites, it will not effectively address the systemic issues propagating the conflict. Such peacebuilding disproportionately benefits only a few.

Study findings also suggest that there were financial constraints associated with meeting the administrative requirements set up by external funders. One practice that was especially constraining was the requirement that organizations first spend funds they were requesting for projects before they could reclaim the money from funders. There was also a significant amount of paperwork CSOs needed to prepare to reclaim funds they had expended. Smaller organizations often did not have enough resources to spend first and be reimbursed later.

It is instructive that while identifying numerous challenges associated with PEACE III funding, participants highlighted ways in which IFI funding was comparatively more supportive. This indicates that it is possible for external actors to develop more manageable approaches to assisting local actors that take into considerations the issues on ground. Participants noted how the technical and administrative requirements of the IFI were much easier to

navigate, more flexible, and more accommodating than those of PEACE III. The process was supportive because the IFI had development officers who were aware of the needs of the local communities and created administrative procedures that allowed locals to develop administrative skills in the process of implementing peacebuilding projects. The IFI was ultimately able to fund useful and productive projects. Peacebuilding is sustainable when it allows community members to be involved in authentic ways, making them invested in seeing the success of such peace processes while also developing the skills needed to manage or prevent future conflict.

The discussion about the potentially crushing effects of bureaucratic requirements imposed on local organizations by funders is not to say that external actors should not demand accountability from the local organizations that they support for peacebuilding. Rather, such attempts to maintain accountability should be done in a way that is practical, taking into consideration local realities while also supporting the development of local capacity.

CONCLUSION

Local ownership of peacebuilding can be delicate and easily subverted through the most unassuming of practices. External actors must exercise caution to ensure that technical requirements set out to guarantee that peacebuilding addresses structural problems makes sufficient room for authentic local ownership. This is essential to ensure that peacebuilding is not just something imposed by external peacebuilders and solely executed by local elites but implemented in a way that addresses inequalities. External actors must find the balance between providing material resources to address violence and allowing the local system to address challenges in a way that nurtures the ability to withstand future pressures without resorting to violent conflict. Despite the challenges associated with maintaining local ownership, it is essential to the sustainability of peacebuilding because while devolved self-rule in Northern Ireland may be postponed for a while, it is unavoidable. No matter how long the peace process may take, external actors must ultimately leave the running of the society to local actors at some point.

Hence, creating funding and administrative processes that support the involvement of local actors in the peace process will increase the chances that

the transition to local ownership succeeds. While the CSOs to be funded by external actors must be well assessed to determine whether they have some potential to carry out peacebuilding, such organizations must not be treated as a blank slate for external actors to project their objectives onto by virtue of their influence as funders. Local wisdom around communication and accommodation that can facilitate intercultural tolerance and peace in divided societies must be incorporated into bureaucratic requirements if peacebuilding will be successful in the given context. While we are not romanticizing the local—if it did not have challenges there will be no need for peacebuilding in the first place—peacebuilding must be amenable to incorporating the perspective of the local to be sustainable.

ENDNOTES

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