

Rural communities

... polite avoidance and denial
– rhetoric or reality?

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Rural Enabler Programme
Building Peace Locally

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Executive Summary	2
3	Background	5
4	Approach	7
5	Challenges	11
6	Peace building in a rural context	13
7	Successful Outcomes	15
7.1	Community Relations and Community Development	
7.2	Flags and Emblems	
7.3	Housing	
7.4	Rural Interfaces	
7.5	Race and Ethnicity	
7.6	Children and Young People	
8	Key Learning	20
9	Recommendations	22
	Appendix I: Interviewees	24
	Appendix II: Semi Structured Interview Questions	24

1

Introduction

This is one of a series of research/discussion papers which highlights the experience and learning from the activities of the Rural Enabler Programme 2010-2013.

This paper discusses progress around the themes highlighted in the 'Sharing over Separation – a rural perspective' baseline paper developed by Rural Community Network (RCN) with the Community Relations Council (CRC) in 2009.

The purpose of this research/discussion paper is to assist regional and local policy makers, statutory agencies and community/voluntary organisations in the further development and enhancement of work carried out through the Rural Enabler Programme.

To achieve this, the research examined:

- The approach that was used in undertaking the work.
- The appropriateness of the support and assistance given to rural communities in their peace building work within the Rural Enabler Programme.
- The learning that has been achieved to date including successful outcomes from interventions which were used, barriers to peace building and the complexities of working across jurisdictions.
- The need for specific rural peace building approaches.

The methodology used in researching this paper was a desk review of relevant papers, reports, evaluations, minutes of meetings etc and a series of semi structured interviews with representatives from participating organisations, Rural Enabler staff and members of Rural Community Network's Shared Future Sub Committee. (A list of the interviewees is in Appendix I and the interview questions are detailed in Appendix II).

The paper concludes with a series of recommendations for further work for statutory and voluntary agencies based on the experience, learning and achievements of the Rural Enabler Programme.

The Rural Enabler Programme has demonstrated that avoidance and denial of conflict and division are still part of the reality of rural communities in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. However, the Programme has also demonstrated very clearly that another part of this reality is the strong interest among individuals, groups and Institutions to move away from avoidance and denial towards encounter and acknowledgement. The Rural Enabler Programme demonstrated an effective approach to supporting cross community and cross border encounter and provided a good model for acknowledging and addressing challenging issues of conflict and division as an integral part of community development. By highlighting and supporting this commitment to move from avoidance and denial to encounter and acknowledgement, the Rural Enabler Programme has made a significant contribution to sustaining rural communities in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland.

2.1 Key Learning

The key learning gained from the achievements of the Rural Enabler Programme is as follows:

- 1) In the context of generations of separation, deep divisions and embedded segregation along political, religious and cultural lines, rural peace building is a challenging, ambitious and long-term process, dependent on communities' commitment and capacity to change destructive patterns of the past as an essential part of building sustainable rural communities.
- 2) Significant barriers to rural peace building are the ongoing policy gap on community relations and dealing with the past, avoidance and denial due to deeply embedded fear and suspicion, and practical issues such as limited resources, volunteer time and transport. In response to these significant barriers, the Rural Enabler Programme demonstrated an effective approach in supporting rural communities and Institutions to move from avoidance and denial of conflict and division into encounter and acknowledgment of the 'other'.
- 3) The Rural Enabler Programme highlighted the willingness of many individuals, groups and Institutions to take risks to engage in peace building in rural communities for the first time.
- 4) A flexible, needs led, people centred, community development approach is effective in stimulating, supporting and progressing peace building in rural communities and is an essential part of the community development process.
- 5) Rural peace building is long term work that requires attention and sensitivity to building trust and relationships. An open and listening approach is more likely to engage groups and Institutions that have not yet engaged in peace building work.
- 6) A key characteristic of the approach was the personality, commitment, motivation, skill and experience of a the local Rural Enabler.
- 7) Building capacity, confidence and an understanding of community development is the foundation for supporting groups and Institutions to engage in peace building in rural communities.

- 8) Distinctive features of peace building in rural communities are the investment of time to work with the pace and challenges of a traditional way of life, addressing invisible interfaces, providing personal support, working with Institutions, working in dispersed communities and addressing majority/minority dynamics (particularly in border areas).
- 9) Networking, collaboration and genuine partnership within and between organisations and different sectors are vital to support effective peace building in rural communities.
- 10) Critical reflection and sharing of skills, learning and resources (such as the Institutions course) from the Rural Enabler Programme will increase the impact of future rural peace building initiatives.
- 11) A relatively small amount of grant aid and support can be a catalyst for new peace building initiatives in rural communities.
- 12) The funding mechanism developed by RCN and agreed with SEUPB (involving direct procurement by the funder) is an effective way of providing access to small grants to small and unconstituted groups and churches without requiring them to set up a new constituted charitable association.
- 13) The Rural Enabler Programme demonstrated that the complexity of working across jurisdictions on a cross border initiative is not a major barrier. The involvement of the accountable government departments from both jurisdictions was an important strength of the Programme.
- 14) Cross border and cross community encounters were particularly effective across the border counties.
- 15) As the Programme developed, there was an acknowledgement the Programme may have been too ambitious given the timescale. This acknowledgement was addressed by developing a cross cutting process which allowed many themes to be addressed within a given project.
- 16) Although the Rural Enabler Programme demonstrates that significant impact can be achieved in a short time with a reflective, effective and strategic approach and a motivated staff team, there are inevitable limitations in delivering a short term (two year) project within a context that requires much longer term interventions.

2.2 Recommendations

Office of the First & deputy First Minister

- 1) To support grass roots peace building in rural communities, there is an urgent need for agreed government policy and long term strategies to address sectarianism and racism and to deal with the past.
- 2) The proposed Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy should recognise the particular needs of rural communities and the distinctive features of rural peace building identified through the Rural Enabler Programme.

Department of Agriculture & Rural Development and Department for Social Development

- 3) DSD, DARD, other government agencies and supporting community development and good relations in rural communities

should embed peace building as an essential part of rural community development plans and use the approach of the REP as a model of good practice. This should be embedded in the new Rural Development Programme.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and Department of Justice and Equality

- 4) The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Department of Justice and Equality, other government agencies and local authorities with a responsibility for supporting community development and equality in rural communities in the Border Counties of Ireland should embed peace building as an essential part of rural community development plans, using the approach of the REP as a model for building cross border relationships and sustaining religious diversity in rural communities. This should be embedded in the new Rural Development Programme.

Both Governments

- 5) Both governments should explore the integration of a long term rural peace building strategy within the context of any joint social and economic development approach across the whole Irish and Northern Irish cross border region.

Funders

- 6) Funders should consider using the funding mechanism developed by RCN and agreed by SEUPB (ie direct procurement by the funder) to enable unconstituted groups to access small grants for community work without the requirement of constituting a new charitable association.
- 7) PEACE IV should have a rural specific programme or programme element to address the particular needs and approaches of rural peace building.

Voluntary and Community Sector

- 8) Voluntary and community sector organisations should continue to develop strategic partnerships and build collaboration to widen and deepen their impact on community development and peace building in rural communities.
- 9) Rural Institutions such as the churches, the Loyal Orders, the GAA and Young Farmers' Clubs, should continue to develop their role in peace building in rural communities, supported by other appropriate community and voluntary sector organisations such as Rural Community Network.

Rural Community Network

- 10) RCN should attempt to maintain contact with groups that participated in the Rural Enabler Programme, to provide and/or signpost ongoing sources of support.
- 11) RCN should build on the achievements and learning from the Rural Enabler Programme and, in partnership with other organisations, attempt to secure commitment and resources for a further regional, cross border rural peace building support initiative using a community development and enabling approach.
- 12) In partnership with other organisations, RCN should explore the development of a new encounter, storytelling and dialogue programme on acknowledgement of the past, using the same approach as the Rural Enabler Programme.
- 13) In partnership with Irish Rural Link and other cross border partners, RCN should explore the development of a new 'across the border' initiative, focusing on supporting the building of relationships, trust understanding and co-operation between directly neighbouring communities separated by the border, using the successful approach of the Rural Enabler Programme.
- 14) RCN should continue to roll out the delivery of the Institutions course developed through the Rural Enabler Programme.

3

Background

Rural Community Network (RCN) is one of the leading organisations responsible for promoting community development and networking in rural communities throughout Northern Ireland. It was established by community organisations from rural areas in 1991. For many years, RCN has been active in policy, research, development and programmes addressing peace building and reconciliation in rural communities.

The foundations of the Rural Enabler Programme were laid out in the publication 'Sharing over Separation – a rural perspective' (2009), a publication developed by RCN with CRC. The publication included a series of research papers and recommendations on seven key and interrelated themes.

1) Community Relations and Community Development

Develop small grants, capacity building and training for single identity work that leads to increased intercommunity contact, engagement between rural Institutions and the community development/good relations support infrastructure, greater diversity on community group management structures, reflective practice and increase understanding of government departments.

2) Flags and Emblems

Research attitudes and opinions towards flags and emblems specific to rural areas develop opportunities for dialogue and multi-agency partnership approaches, raise awareness of relevant programmes and support community groups with their own programmes.

3) Housing

Research attachment to land/place in the context of community cohesion, explore assessment of housing need and potential for mixed tenure development, link to the 'Shared Neighbourhood Programme', encourage planners to consider good relations/community relations impact and explore how to encourage integration of migrant and indigenous communities in rural areas.

4) Rural Interfaces (now defined as Contested Spaces)

Identify key characteristics of rural interfaces, support those who own and manage buildings, centres and community halls in rural areas to sustain and develop these as shared/safe facilities, encourage community leaders to take further steps in engaging in cross community contact, challenge Planning Service on impact of planning decisions on shared space, explore further the impact of the border, and support local groups working across interfaces to co-operate on quality of life issues, before engaging in significant discussions on good relations.

5) Race and Ethnicity

Address personal and community capacity and community development needs for those from and working with BME communities in rural areas, explore the impact of the border for BME communities, support local government to develop action plans to promote good relations and address racism and incorporate images and activities that highlight diversity and support the development of an evidence base of skills and aspirations of BME communities in rural areas.

6) Children and Young People

Ensure young people are consulted and can participate in decision making that affects them, provide spaces for interaction and dialogue, research the roles of parents, guardians, teachers, community, church, political leaders and others in shaping how young people think and behave, work with Councils and others to develop and evidence processes of participation in local governance with young people, monitor shared spaces in single identity communities, and provide opportunities for young people to network, learn and share with each other.

7) Rural Institutions

Engage with the leaders of rural Institutions to foster new relationships, and cultivate 'change agents', adopt multiple approaches to engage rural Institutions in community development, create opportunities for community groups and rural Institutions to work together at a local level, develop a baseline on rural Institutions to assess progress, and ensure government departments and policy makers acknowledge the influence of rural Institutions.

Programme Rationale

To begin to carry forward these recommendations, RCN secured funding from the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) PEACE III Programme to deliver the Rural Enabler Programme (REP) between January 2010 and March 2013.

The Programme aimed 'to address issues of sectarianism, racism, social exclusion and all other form of rural inequality through challenging the status quo, assisting, supporting and creating the space for local communities and rural Institutions to identify the fears of reconciliation and anti-racism work'.

Twelve Rural Enablers were employed to work in each of the counties throughout Northern Ireland and the Border counties of the Republic of Ireland. Another Rural Enabler worked with Institutions which were identified as holding significant influence over rural dwellers.

The REP used a community development approach to tackle the impact of conflict and modern day racism within rural Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. The project adopted an integrated and interdependent thematic approach involving one regional and up to 72 local programmes of intervention to address sectarianism, racism, community polarisation, mistrust and hatred.

The REP was a partnership approach between the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG), the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), Irish Rural Link (IRL) and RCN (the Lead Partner). The partners formed a Regional Management Project Committee together with SEUPB and provided strategic direction for the Programme.

As the Programme came to a conclusion, a series of research and discussion papers were commissioned to identify the learning from the programme and to make recommendations for the future of peace building in rural communities in Northern Ireland. This paper is a part of this series.

4

Approach

Relationship Building

The approach taken through the Programme was to build relationships with individuals, local groups and Institutions so that the needs of each particular context could be explored and appropriate support offered. In many cases, this initial phase of listening and building trust took a period of months before any project was developed. However, this investment of time in building trust at an early stage proved to be an effective way of enabling groups to participate in peace building initiatives for the first time.

Community Development

The principles of community development underpinned the approach. The starting point was that effective community development must address the community divisions that hinder sustainable rural communities. This needs led, community development approach was effective in building trust and credibility, particularly with groups who were cautious and lacking in confidence and capacity to engage in peace building for the first time. There was an open agenda and a non-judgmental approach to involve people from any starting point and to work alongside them at their own pace. This allowed groups to see their own potential to address the issues that were most important to them. The approach enabled many groups to develop new work, to network and to access funding for the first time. This approach resulted in projects with realistic outcomes and did not create dependency.

Capacity Building

The Rural Enablers assisted with building capacity, clarifying goals and planning, acting as a support and catalyst to local groups. In some cases, the Enabler helped to build better relationships within a group or supported a group to become more inclusive. Many groups supported were not constituted and were given appropriate ongoing assistance to develop and deliver a peace building project for the first time. Groups with limited capacity were supported to take modest steps rather than attempt unrealistic major initiatives. The Enablers also built the capacity of individuals as key influencers for building peace in communities and Institutions. Some groups were supported to gain a better understanding of their own cultural traditions and heritage to build their capacity for cross community and/or cross border engagement. In some of the less successful initiatives, the learning was that more single identity capacity building had been required to prepare for a cross community/cross border encounter. For many of the groups, the assistance with planning, facilitation and evaluation was unique and the REP has left them with increased skills and confidence and new ways of working.

Rural Enablers

The presence and accessibility of a local Rural Enabler as a resource on the ground proved to be a good support to groups planning and implementing new initiatives. An important characteristic of the approach was the personality, personal enthusiasm, skill and experience of the local Rural Enabler. A key skill was to provide the right support at the right time and to act as a mentor or a 'critical friend' as

required. Every Enabler had their own style, local knowledge and experience of working with people to enable them to do something new. When the Rural Enabler demonstrated empathy and a genuine commitment to community development and peace building, this seemed to build a good working relationship with local groups. This approach involved being people centred and working in a respectful way in order to bring out the best in people. The Enabler's motivation, patience, skills and personal approach were key to building trust that enabled people to engage with new ideas and activities. Some of the Enablers have articulated their own profound learning and personal journey as a result of their work on the Programme.

Another strength of the county based team of Enablers was that they each had particular skills, experiences, strengths and backgrounds which brought an overall diversity to the team. This resulted in good cross fertilisation across the Programme as Enablers worked together on initiatives, particularly on a cross border basis. The Enablers were regarded as part of the RCN staff team and became the first peripatetic workforce on rural peace building. As the Programme finishes, although this is lost, the Rural Enabler staff may now bring their learning, experience and most effective approaches into other, different programmes.

Small Grants

The Programme helped to identify the different local support needs and offered to provide appropriate support, resources and small grants depending on the existing needs and capacities and what the group wanted to do. However this was not a traditional grants programme. Small grants were available to unconstituted groups (which may not even have their own bank account) through a new funding mechanism (agreed with SEUPB) whereby goods and services were procured directly by the funder (RCN) rather than by the group. The small grant element acted as a catalyst for groups who had

developed an idea but needed some additional input and money to turn their idea into action. The support and facilitation of the Enabler was always more important than the grant and the small grant level of funding did not distract from the process or attract applications from more well established groups seeking to top up funds for a major project. In some cases, the Enabler supported the group to access additional funding from sources they had not previously had the knowledge, confidence or capacity to submit an application to.

Partnership

Another important feature of the approach taken was to work within and alongside existing initiatives and organisations rather than duplicate, compete or attempt to 'reinvent the wheel'. The Programme began with a scoping study to identify existing work and gaps and to ensure the Programme complemented wider community development and peace building. Good working relationships and partnerships were built with many organisations at a regional and local level. Twelve Sub regional Advisory Groups (SAGs) were established, made up of representatives of a range of rural Institutions, community development and good relations support structures. The SAGs provided a space to discuss and locate REP interventions to complement and support other initiatives, rather than to compete or duplicate. However, in a context where there is ongoing tension between competition and collaboration between sectors and/or community groups, this approach of working alongside existing initiatives could be perceived as 'piggy backing' on the work of others. In this context, the commitment to collaboration and the value of genuine working partnership needs to be continuously articulated and modelled. In some situations, the Enabler played a vital role as an independent advisor, meeting chair or facilitator, where an independent voice or function was essential in building partnerships and collaboration.

Focus on Peace Building

The Programme had a clear focus on peace building and only supported projects that aimed to make a contribution to peace. As a result of this, groups that did not acknowledge a need to build bridges between communities or who did not want to focus on peace building did not engage in the Programme. Groups seeking support were encouraged and facilitated to develop the peace building element of their project. The Enablers supported groups and Institutions to address sectarianism, to work on improving relationships and to build greater integration, often around issues of common concern. At times, this approach required asking challenging questions and facilitating uncomfortable conversations to ensure the integrity of the peace building focus.

Encounter

The Enablers supported the development of opportunities for encounters where people could establish new relationships for cross community and cross border dialogue to increase their understanding of 'the other'. Enablers stimulated communities to find space to come together to work on practical local problems such as health. Forging new links between individuals, communities and Institutions was an important outcome of this approach. Informal and formal storytelling was supported to open up dialogue between people from different backgrounds and these encounters enabled new conversations in a safe environment. In some places, where groups had previously been cautious, they were supported to engage in more focused conversations. The Programme found that many rural groups and Institutions are willing to work with 'the other'.

Cross Border

The cross border nature of the Programme provided many more opportunities than challenges. The cross border events and exchanges, which included facilitated discussion and dialogue, provided opportunities for learning as people heard the stories of other border communities for the first time. Strong connections were established and good relationships were built on a cross border and cross community basis and some of these links have been sustained outside of and beyond the Programme.

At the outset of the Programme, the staff had to work through the different expectations and views of community development and community relations in the different contexts, North and South and also between different counties. For example, in the Border Counties of Ireland, with different experiences of the conflict of the past, local issues ranged from inclusion of the Protestant minority and BME communities to the impact of the border on social and economic development, through to the current activities of dissident republicans. While recognising the differences in context, North and South, the Programme was explicit in its attempts to address covert sectarianism and community divisions in the Southern border counties, as much as in Northern Ireland. The Programme helped to increase confidence among Southern border Protestant minorities through acknowledgment, support and awareness raising. The staff developed the confidence to deliver an overt peace building programme in the South, in spite of some opposition and the Enablers learned from each other across the border.

Risk Taking

Another distinct feature of the approach taken was a willingness and flexibility to take risks and to try new things. The Enablers were allowed to take risks as they attempted to break new ground with communities and Institutions and it is important that this was supported by the Programme Co-ordinator and the RCN management. The risk was that, in some circumstances, an intervention might result in people becoming more entrenched rather than beginning to think and work in a different way and the Programme could be blamed for making things worse. However, this approach to risk taking resulted in effective work in some areas where there were high levels of community tension and with groups that had not engaged in peace building or community development before.

Critical Reflection and Sharing Learning

Another important characteristic of the overall approach was a commitment to continuously reflect critically on the work and this resulted in good learning and clear strategic thinking regarding the most effective approach in different contexts. These discussion papers and the Practice to Policy study demonstrate the commitment to critically reflect and share learning from the Programme.

5

Challenges

The main challenges for rural peace building experienced during the course of the Programme were as follows:

A Deeply Divided Society

The biggest challenge facing rural peace building is the overall context of working to build bridges and break down barriers in an historically deeply divided society. Rural communities have become increasingly segregated even if the manifestations of division are subtler than in urban communities. The divisions are particularly acute in rural border areas, where the conflict and the border have had a deep impact on social, cultural and economic connections between majority and minority communities. Community background influences business, educational and recreational behaviour and division is reinforced and passed down the generations. From a young age, people in rural communities in Northern Ireland especially live generally separate lives, segregated along the two larger religious/political/cultural traditions.

While there may now be new communities, some contact between the two main traditions and a level of interdependence in rural areas, there is generally a lack of meaningful interaction and, consequently, a limited or inaccurate understanding of 'the other'. One impact of the conflict has been a need to remain separate as a matter of safety and survival and in the past, coming together was regarded as suspect within separated communities. Where communities are in a minority, there can be a lack of support from the majority community to maintain the minority community's presence,

culture and Institutions. In this context of generations of separation, deep divisions and embedded segregation along political, religious and cultural lines, peace building is a challenging, ambitious and long term process, dependent on communities' commitment and capacity to change destructive patterns of the past as an essential part of building sustainable rural communities.

Avoidance and Denial

The denial of the existence of conflict and division and the avoidance of addressing contentious, painful and potentially threatening issues are human responses and coping mechanisms which are not unique to this country. Public and private avoidance and denial are common in divided and conflicted societies throughout the world. In the local context of a deeply divided post conflict society, avoidance and denial are behaviours evident in both urban and rural communities in the North and the South, across communities, social classes and Institutions. A polite avoidance of acknowledging or discussing conflict and division is a way of averting the discomfort of addressing the underlying pain and bitterness and the unresolved issues around the conflict. It is easier to say there isn't a problem, or that this is only an issue at physical interfaces or in the city or on the border, or in the North, or to say that there is no longer any need for peace building because there is a political agreement and the conflict was in the past. The phrases often used to describe this in rural communities is 'whatever you say, say nothing' or 'don't open that can of worms' or 'don't go dragging up the past again'. In small rural communities, there can be glossing over and a reluctance to

address such sensitive divisions because people may now be living side by side peacefully with a degree of tolerance for 'the other'. Such is the relief that the violent conflict is over that there is a fear that mentioning this or the ongoing divisions will only create new tensions. Many people are content with peaceful co-existence, leading peaceful and separate lives and with little interest in engaging with the 'other side' at a deeper level.

As a result, the deep and embedded divisions such as acknowledging the hurts of the past, attitudes to land, majority/minority relationships, sectarianism, paramilitarism, challenges for mixed relationships, flags, emblems and parades as well as the costs of having 'two of everything' are not addressed and misunderstanding, myth and suspicion of the 'other' is sustained. Entrenched views can be passed down from generation to generation and become an embedded part of the fabric of rural society. Ironically, in this context, those who do not wish to do it, such as 'gatekeepers' with the power and influence to prevent peace building initiatives, can misrepresent peace building as 'soft' or 'wishy-washy'. Even peace building initiatives can be superficial, tokenistic and can be more focused on public relations than on genuinely tackling contentious issues, building good relations and creating lasting change.

Fear

Fear remains a barrier to participating in peace building for many people in rural communities especially in areas where there are serious scars from the violence of the past (such as killings, intimidation and burning of halls). The close knit nature of rural communities means that individuals are afraid of how their participation might be perceived and spotlighted in the wider community. In some of the REP projects, groups were reluctant to publicise their achievements for fear of reprisals or fear of being portrayed in a negative light by the media.

Policy Gap

Fifteen years after The Agreement, there is still no agreed political strategy for reconciliation or dealing with the past and there is not yet an agreed government policy on Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. Most rural peace building initiatives are funded by European and American funders on a short term basis and are delivered in the absence of any overall shared goals, policy and strategy.

Practical Challenges

Practical challenges for rural peace building include limited time available in people's busy lives to commit to volunteering, transport and accessibility problems and practical challenges to cross border work due to the differences between jurisdictions.

6

Peace building in a rural context

The basic principles, processes and methods of peace building are the same in rural communities and urban communities. However, the Rural Enabler Programme has demonstrated that there are particular approaches to peace building that are essential in a rural context.

Working with a traditional way of life

In rural communities, traditional ways of life are deeply rooted and, as result of this, there can be a wariness of change, which means that the process of social change takes longer. This is why building relationships and trust is an essential and substantial phase for peace building in rural communities. Rural peace building needs to give particular attention to concerns and fears and ways of overcoming resistance to change.

Addressing invisible interfaces

In rural communities, segregation and interfaces are less visible and both poverty and sectarianism are more hidden. The result of this is that most of the resources for peace building are targeted at the most disadvantaged interface areas in urban environments. The hidden nature of rural division can also feed avoidance and denial within rural communities that suggests the 'real' problems are in urban areas where sectarian tensions are most visible. This can make it difficult for rural peace building to move from relationship building, tolerance and co-operation on issues of common concern to addressing more sensitive and contentious issues that challenge more entrenched views

and behaviours that are passed down the generations. This process requires time to build trust and partnerships and needs long term and sustained engagement.

Providing personal support

In rural communities where everyone knows each other, members of a family who become involved in peace building become very visible. As a result of this sense of being exposed or vulnerable, community leaders involved in rural peace building need a high level of capacity building and personal support of the kind provided by the Rural Enablers.

Working in dispersed communities

The scattered population in rural areas creates a practical challenge for peace building. Travelling distances to meet, encounter and work together takes more time to plan and organise, costs more and takes longer to implement in a dispersed rural community than in an urban area. It is important to recognise that many people in rural communities will not want to be, or are not able to be, involved in organised groups and therefore working with individuals on peace building is also important.

Working with Institutions

The influence of churches, Loyal Orders, the GAA and other Institutions is greater in rural communities than in many urban contexts. Institutions are often spaces where people of the same culture can safely meet and discuss politics and religion. As a result of this, the importance of single identity religious and cultural Institutions engaging in and supporting peace building is more important in rural communities.

Working with the dynamics of majorities and minorities

The demographics of many rural areas, particularly border rural areas, results in large majorities with a tendency to overlook the local minority community. This can be evident in community groups, which may reflect the majority community and find it difficult to fully include the whole community. This is a particular challenge for community groups who may want to engage in peace building but who are perceived as partisan in relation to the conflict. Minority communities can withdraw from wider community development networks, structures and resources. Rural peace building needs to acknowledge and address these challenges at the outset, rather than the easier starting point of 'we're open to everyone, but they just don't come.'

Investment of time

The common feature of all these distinctive aspects of peace building in a rural context is that they take a longer time and work at a slower pace than in urban settings. This means that short term, stop/start peace building initiatives are not the most effective or efficient way of building peace in a rural context. This is the single greatest weakness of the Rural Enabler Programme. Although the Programme achieved substantial outcomes in a short space of time and embedded some sustainable work, it appears to have ended prematurely, several phases early.

7

Successful Outcomes

7.1 Community Relations and Community Development

The objective on Community Development and Community Relations was to embed the practice of excellence in community development work as a means of addressing issues of community/good relations within rural areas.

The desired outcome was that the practice of excellence in community development work as a means of addressing issues of community/good relations is embedded within work in rural areas and within Institutions.

The successful outcomes on this theme included:

Enhanced knowledge and skills in community development and good relations through the delivery of training

30 Facilitatory Development grants were issued for capacity and skills training, 89 training events were completed, more than 2,300 participants undertook training in community development principles, conflict mediation or peace building and 84 learning resources were produced.

Examples of this training include:

- Community development training for 12 Orange Lodge members in Co Down
- Intercultural awareness training with Cavan County Childcare Committee/Ballyconnell Community Playgroup and Crèche.
- Epilogues training for programme staff and community representatives to support peace building

- Local community development training in places such as Rasharkin, Maguiresbridge and King William III estate in Maghera
- Community development and good relations training delivered jointly to Inishowen Women's Information Network and Mid Ulster Women's Network

Increased capacity of groups to engage in community development and peace building

The Rural Enablers provided support that increased capacity and skills of groups and nearly 2,000 individuals to address sectarianism, racism and polarisation. Capacity was increased within many groups such as Annaclone Community Engagement Group, Fermanagh Ulster Scots Empowerment, Carrigallen Old Schoolhouse Group, Leitrim Community Networks, Ferdia Community Park House in Ardee, Portavogie Culture and Heritage Society and many church/faith based groups in border areas such as St John's Heritage Group, Co Leitrim.

Single identity work leading to increased cross community and cross border contact and co-operation

70 Facilitatory Development grants were issued to support dialogue between individuals, groups and organisations on a single identity, cross community and cross border basis. This included new cross community and cross border links and new conversations on sharing space to facilitate the delivery of better services within rural areas and to ensure that assets within the community are potentially more sustainable for future generations with usage by all members of the community. Examples of this support includes:

- The Ards Peninsula Shared History and Inishowen Friends of Messines projects and cross border exchange
- The development of the Long Kesh/Maze storytelling and dialogue project with Halftown Residents' Association
- The South Lough Neagh Historical Society "Flax to Linen" project
- The Circle of Friends group and networking with Bailieborough Women's Group
- The Cassandra Hand in Clones cross community/cross border women's project using lace and craft as a tool to engage
- The Calry Active Age Retirement Association and Maydown Shared History Project cross border exchange, learning and publication
- Local communities such as Cashel and Ederney regarding the development of shared space

Increased engagement between rural Institutions and community development/good relations support infrastructures

12 Sub Regional Advisory Groups (SAGs) were established, made up of representatives from a range of rural Institutions, community development and good relations support structures such as Local Council Good Relations Officers, PEACE III clusters and voluntary and community sector networks. 97 SAG meetings took place across the lifetime of the project. In addition to this, the project initiated and supported over 200 networking events, which also facilitated increased engagement.

Greater understanding of inclusion and increased diversity on community group management structures

The Enablers supported meetings, capacity building and training around increasing minority representation in participant groups. This work addressed the inclusion of both Catholic or Protestant minorities and ethnic and other minorities. Groups supported in this way included Down & Newry Women's Aid, Ballyconnell Town Development Association and Glens Vintage and Ballymoney Old Vehicle Clubs.

7.2 Flags and Emblems

The objective on Flags and Emblems was to establish a rural dialogue around all the flags and emblems displayed not only in local community areas but further afield.

The desired outcome was that rural communities and Institutions are empowered to work towards the full implementation of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Interventions on this theme resulted in a number of local flag protocols being developed and some reduction in territorial markings. Dialogue, multi-agency partnership and local community groups were supported. Significant work was facilitated in building a Code of Good practice with the Fermanagh Bands Forum and the development of a flags protocol in Stoneyford. A conference entitled 'Flagging it Up' facilitated conversations around the complexities and possible solutions around a flags/emblems protocol and a conference paper was produced. Other interventions on flags and emblems include:

- Providing support and advice around dialogue on flags issues to the Orange Order's STRIPE project
- A dialogue event on flags and emblems involving members of bands and historical/cultural groups in Kilkeel
- A banner project promoting dialogue, understanding and relationship building in Lifford & Strabane

- Supporting the Sligo St Patrick's Day Parade Committee to host cross cultural/community events around St Patrick's Day, leading to facilitated dialogue sessions with Fermanagh Bands
- Mediation in relation to a 12th July parade Co Antrim
- Facilitated workshops with youth groups such as Scotch Street Youth Club, Armagh and Kingscourt Youthreach, Cavan

7.3 Housing

The objective on housing was to support communities and Institutions in recognising the value of mixed housing encouraging social and residential integration and cultural awareness. The desired outcome was increased social and residential integration and cultural awareness around rural housing issues.

Although a series of interventions had outcomes in relation to this theme in places such as Lack, Tubercurry and Bailieboro, housing received less of a focus than the other themes, perhaps recognising that a more substantial and long-term multi agency approach would be necessary to achieve the desired outcomes.

7.4 Rural Interfaces/Contested Spaces

The objective was to map rural interfaces as defined by local rural people and assist communities to take actions which address tensions, develop better understanding and promote the building of positive relationships for the future.

The desired outcome was that the barriers which limit access to services and facilities by one community or the other have been broken down and a 'me toism' approach is a thing of the past.

The project contributed to the greater understanding of the nature of rural interfaces by feeding into CRC's 'Beyond Belfast' research paper. 35 Facilitatory Development grants were issued to support 'shared' activities and scores

of discussions were facilitated in interfaces and contested spaces in rural communities, contributing to a decrease in local tensions in some contested areas.

Interventions that encouraged community leaders to take further steps in engaging in cross community contact were facilitated across the interfaces in places such as Maghera, Newtownbutler, Rasharkin and Stoneyford. Many projects explored the impact of the border and Enablers supported local groups to work across border interfaces on quality of life issues and good relations. Examples include:

- A project drawing together church members from the border interface areas of Florencecourt and Boho (Fermanagh) and Ballinaglera/Glangevlin (Leitrim & Cavan)
- The 'Stepping Stones of Experience' arts and discussion project which brought together older people that had been separated for 20 years because of roads cratered between Rossinver and Garrison
- Contributing to the Riverine regeneration project across the interface between Lifford and Strabane
- Supporting the 3CAP Project (3 Communities Advancing Through Peace) a cross-border partnership between Ballinaglera, Boho and Killesher targeting young people, older people, women, farmers' groups, music groups and community development organisations

7.5 Race and Ethnicity

The objective on racism was to develop a "we" approach to race relations to assist people living in rural areas to acknowledge the diversity that exists and give them skills, confidence and capacity to work on a collective basis to maximise the potential contribution that all rural dwellers can make to a sustainable rural Northern Ireland.

The desired outcome was that rural communities have increased skills, confidence and capacity to deal with issues of race and ethnicity.

More than 600 minority ethnic people participated in the Programme and a series of capacity building, training and integration interventions were supported. This included:

- Working with Inishowen Community Radio to create a radio programme with 10 interviews developed and delivered during 'One Donegal Cultural Diversity Month'
- Supporting Truagh Development Association on the integration of migrants, mainly Lithuanian, who are living and working in the area
- Co-facilitating media focus groups with Donegal Travellers Project, Donegal CWC, Port na Failte and the Centre for Independent Living
- An anti racism project with South Lough Neagh Rural Women's Group.
- Supporting a 'Sharing our Cultures' event on cultural diversity, respect and integration in Kildrumferton
- Promoting integration of new parents in Ballyjamesduff Crèche
- Designing and delivering a four week course on the impacts of sectarianism and racism and sense of community and belonging to young people in the Dungannon district with the MADCAP (making a difference in the community and policing) Project

7.6 Children and Young People

The objective on young people was to address the current limitations of engagement for young people through the creation of new spaces for dialogue.

The desired outcome was that young people are actively engaged in shaping a new, shared future for themselves.

The Programme supported a considerable number of interventions on the theme of children and young people. Over 5,000 young people (10-21 years) actively engaged in projects involving youth agencies, educators and parents and 27 training events for youth workers were completed.

Learning opportunities for young people supported through workshops on diversity and good relations were facilitated with young people in places such as Bushmills, Derrygonnelly, Castlederg, Benbradagh, Kilnaleck, Killeshandra, Ballyalbany and Tubbercurry.

Schools based initiatives included an arts based project on respect and diversity with North Coast Integrated College and local rural primary schools, a community relations course to build relationships among primary school children in Drumquin, and the development of an Equality in Diversity Forum between Lough Allen College, Drumkeeran, Drumshambo Vocational College and St Clare's Comprehensive School, Manorhamilton.

A series of projects provided children and young people with space for interaction and dialogue and opportunities to network, learn and share with each other. Examples of projects supported were:

- A cross border project between Kilglass Enniscrone United Football Club and Bushmills 'The Den' Youth Group which included dialogue sessions, residentials and cross cultural site visits
- Working with Sligo Comhairle na Oig and Foroige Sligo to ensure that young people from minority groups are represented on Sligo Youth Council and to enable a visit to Belfast including meeting with an MLA and members of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum at Stormont and participating in a dialogue session with the Council
- A collaborative cross border project between Breffni Youth Café (Carrick-on-Shannon); Carrowsyl Youth Group (Lisnaskea); and Scotch Street Youth Club (Armagh) called the LAF project aimed to challenge stereotypes of different races, religious traditions or nationalities
- CLASP Youth Media Project involving a group of young people in developing a media resource for use by other young people interested in getting involved in cross border activities

- A cross border programme of contact, dialogue and joint activities between Tandragee Scouts and Kilkenny Brownies
- Bringing young people together for events such as 'Loughshore Rural Youth Together Extravaganza' and 'A Safe Shared Space for Rural Young People' in Co Tyrone
- Working with Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster and the GAA to bring young people together for activities and dialogue
- Supporting the 'Me, Them, Us' Project in Moville to give a 'cultural snapshot' of a place and community, created from the energy and commitment of young people and the experience of older inhabitants of the area
- Supporting a series of projects with Bunrana Youth Drop-In including engaging with disaffected young people to replace sectarian graffiti with a vibrant, positive message on the local Football Park wall
- The development and delivery of the first OCN Level 1 Community Development Accreditation for Orange Order participants
- The development of the first OCN level 2 'Getting to Know Your Institutions Course', a six week course that involves a 'mystery tour' to Institutions within a local area to include the Orange Order, GAA, the four main traditional Christian churches, Ancient Order of Hibernians and Band Forums to give participants the opportunity to gain awareness of the history and culture of each institution and its importance to their members
- A series of 'Blessed are the Peacemakers' events to provide an opportunity for sharing and learning in relation to faith based community development and peace building in rural communities
- Local Churches, Inter Church Fora, GAA, Young Farmers' Clubs and Loyal Orders contact, training, capacity building, activities and dialogues

7.7 Rural Institutions

The objective on rural Institutions was to explore what responsibility rural Institutions have to the local minority community and their role in developing a Shared Future.

The desired outcome was increased awareness and acceptance of the responsibility key Institutions have towards the inclusion of minority communities.

The project engaged with the leaders of rural Institutions such as the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, the GAA, Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster and the Churches to foster new relationships, cultivate 'change agents', engage rural Institutions in community development and create opportunities for community groups and rural Institutions to work together at a local level. Among the most significant outcomes on this theme were:

This theme is explored in detail in the associated discussion papers, 'Institutions - their role in peace building in rural communities' (Brid Ruddy and Padraic Murphy) and 'Churches and faith based organisations - their role in peace building in rural communities' (Tony Macaulay).

8

Key Learning

The key learning gained from the achievements of the Rural Enabler Programme is as follows:

- 1) In the context of generations of separation, deep divisions and embedded segregation along political, religious and cultural lines, rural peace building is a challenging, ambitious and long-term process, dependent on communities' commitment and capacity to change destructive patterns of the past as an essential part of building sustainable rural communities.
- 2) Significant barriers to rural peace building are the ongoing policy gap on community relations and dealing with the past, avoidance and denial due to deeply embedded fear and suspicion, and practical issues such as limited resources, volunteer time and transport. In response to these significant barriers, the Rural Enabler Programme demonstrated an effective approach in supporting rural communities and Institutions to move from avoidance and denial of conflict and division into encounter and acknowledgment of the 'other'.
- 3) The Rural Enabler Programme highlighted the willingness of many individuals, groups and Institutions to take risks to engage in peace building in rural communities for the first time.
- 4) A flexible, needs led, people centred, community development approach is effective in stimulating, supporting and progressing peace building in rural communities and is an essential part of the community development process.
- 5) Rural peace building is long term work that requires attention and sensitivity to building trust and relationships. An open and listening approach is more likely to engage groups and Institutions that have not yet engaged in peace building work.
- 6) A key characteristic of the approach was the personality, commitment, motivation, skill and experience of the local Rural Enabler.
- 7) Building capacity, confidence and an understanding of community development is the foundation for supporting groups and Institutions to engage in peace building in rural communities.
- 8) Distinctive features of peace building in rural communities are the investment of time to work with the pace and challenges of a traditional way of life, addressing invisible interfaces, providing personal support, working with Institutions, working in dispersed communities and addressing majority/minority dynamics (particularly in border areas).
- 9) Networking, collaboration and genuine partnership within and between organisations and different sectors are vital to support effective peace building in rural communities.
- 10) Critical reflection and sharing of skills, learning and resources (such as the Institutions course) from the Rural Enabler Programme will increase the impact of future rural peace building initiatives.

- 11) A relatively small amount of grant aid and support can be a catalyst for new peace building initiatives in rural communities.
- 12) The funding mechanism developed by RCN and agreed with SEUPB (involving direct procurement by the funder) is an effective way of providing access to small grants to small and unconstituted groups and churches without requiring them to set up a new constituted charitable association.
- 13) The Rural Enabler Programme demonstrated that the complexity of working across jurisdictions on a cross border initiative is not a major barrier. The involvement of the accountable government departments from both jurisdictions was an important strength of the Programme.
- 14) Cross border and cross community encounters were particularly effective across the border counties.
- 15) As the Programme developed, there was an acknowledgement the the Programme may have been too ambitious given the timescale. This acknowledgement was addressed by developing a cross cutting process which allowed many themes to be addressed within a given project.
- 16) Although the Rural Enabler Programme demonstrates that significant impact can be achieved in a short time with a reflective, effective and strategic approach and a motivated staff team, there are inevitable limitations in delivering a short term (two year) project within a context that requires much longer term interventions.

Conclusion

So, is polite avoidance and denial rhetoric or reality? The Rural Enabler Programme has demonstrated that avoidance and denial of conflict and division are still part of the reality of rural communities in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. However, the Programme has also demonstrated very clearly that another part of this reality is the strong interest among individuals, groups and Institutions to move away from avoidance and denial towards encounter and acknowledgement. The Rural Enabler Programme demonstrated an effective approach to supporting cross community and cross border encounter and provided a good model for acknowledging and addressing challenging issues of conflict and division as an integral part of community development. By highlighting and supporting this commitment to move from avoidance and denial to encounter and acknowledgement, the Rural Enabler Programme has made a significant contribution to sustaining rural communities in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland.

9

Recommendations

To build on the achievements and learning of the REP, the following recommendations are suggested.

Office of the First & deputy First Minister

- 1) To support grass roots peace building in rural communities, there is an urgent need for agreed government policy and long-term strategies to address sectarianism and racism and to deal with the past.
- 2) The proposed Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy should recognise the particular needs of rural communities and the distinctive features of rural peace building identified through the Rural Enabler Programme.

Department of Agriculture & Rural Development and Department for Social Development

- 3) DSD, DARD, other government agencies and local Councils with a responsibility for supporting community development and good relations in rural communities should embed peace building as an essential part of rural community development plans and use the approach of the REP as a model of good practice. This should be embedded in the new Rural Development Programme.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and Department of Justice and Equality

- 4) The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Department of Justice and Equality, other government agencies and local authorities with a responsibility for supporting community development and equality in rural communities in the Border Counties of Ireland should embed peace building as an essential part of rural community development plans, using the approach of the REP as a model for building cross border relationships and sustaining religious diversity in rural communities. This should be embedded in the new Rural Development Programme.

Both Governments

- 5) Both governments should explore the integration of a long term rural peace building strategy within the context of any joint social and economic development approach across the whole Irish and Northern Irish cross-border region.

Funders

- 6) Funders should consider using the funding mechanism developed by RCN and agreed by SEUPB (i.e. direct procurement by the funder) to enable unconstituted groups to access small grants for community work without the requirement of constituting a new charitable association.

7) PEACE IV should have a rural specific programme or programme element to address the particular needs and approaches of rural peace building.

Voluntary and Community Sector

8) and community sector organisations should continue to develop strategic partnerships and build collaboration to widen and deepen their impact on community development and peace building in rural communities.

9) Rural Institutions such as the churches, the Loyal Orders, the GAA and Young Farmers' Clubs, should continue to develop their role in peace building in rural communities, supported by other appropriate community and voluntary sector organisations such as Rural Community Network.

Rural Community Network

10) RCN should attempt to maintain contact with groups that participated in the Rural Enabler Programme, to provide and/or signpost ongoing sources of support.

11) RCN should build on the achievements and learning from the Rural Enabler Programme and, in partnership with other organisations, attempt to secure commitment and resources for a further regional, cross border rural peace building support initiative using a community development and enabling approach.

12) In partnership with other organisations, RCN should explore the development of a new encounter, storytelling and dialogue programme on acknowledgement of the past, using the same approach as the Rural Enabler Programme.

13) In partnership with Irish Rural Link and other cross border partners, RCN should explore the development of a new 'across the border' initiative, focussing on supporting the building of relationships, trust understanding and co-operation between directly neighbouring communities separated by the border, using the successful approach of the Rural Enabler Programme.

14) RCN should continue to roll out the delivery of the Institutions course developed through the Rural Enabler Programme.

Appendix I Interviewees

Neville Armstrong, Rural Enabler,
Co Fermanagh

Seamus Boland, Chief Executive Officer, Irish
Rural Link

Kate Clifford, Rural Enabler, Institutions

Jude Cumiskey, Rural Enabler, Co Down

Michael Hughes, Chief Executive Officer, RCN

Libby Keys, Rural Enabler Mentor/RCN Shared
Future Sub Committee

Lesley Macaulay, Rural Enabler,
Co Derry/Londonderry

Fintan McCabe, Rural Enabler Programme -
Assistant Programme Co-ordinator

Tommy McLaughlin, Good Relations Officer,
Fermanagh District Council

Aedin McLoughlin, Rural Enabler, Co Leitrim

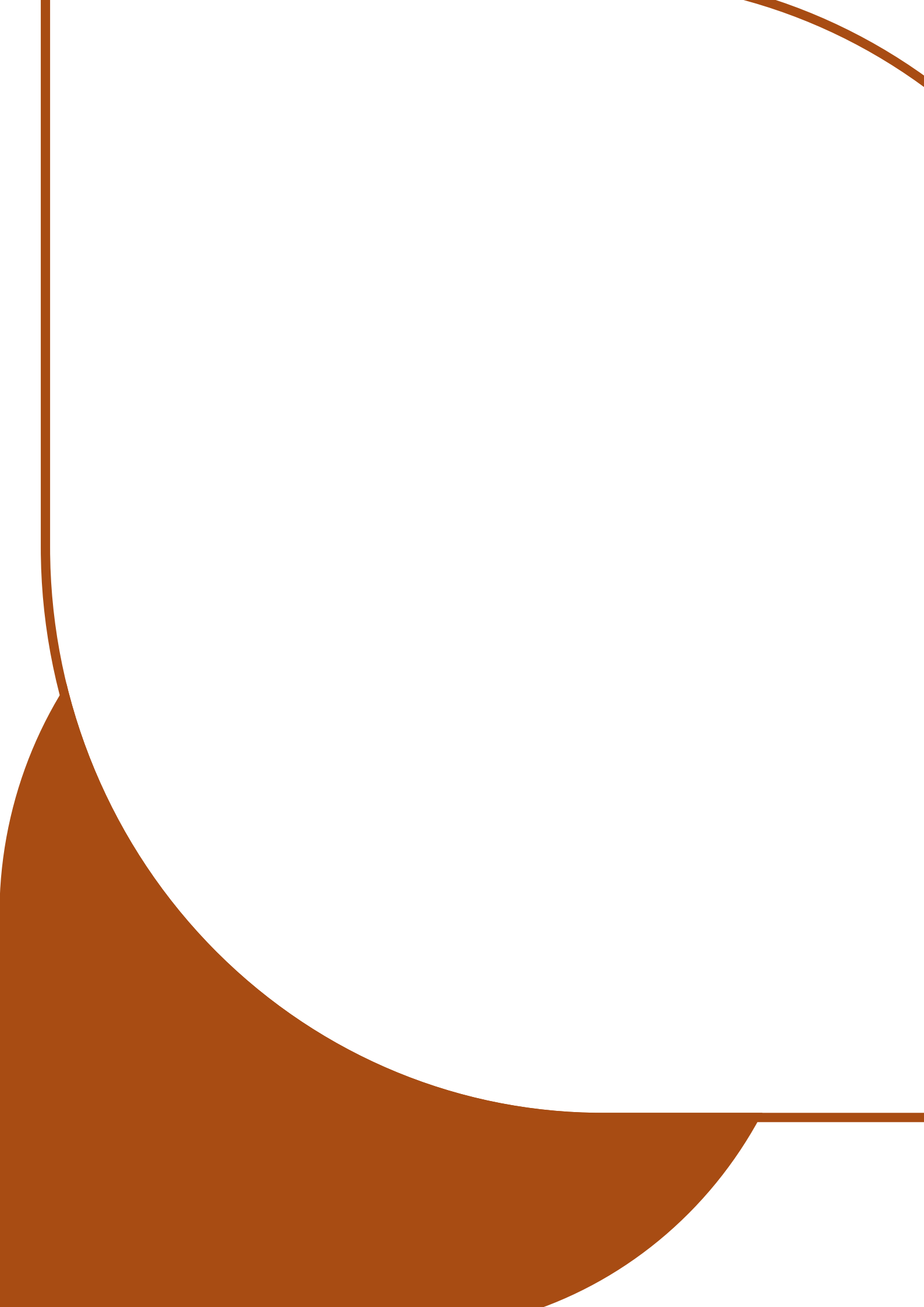
Maurice McNicholl, Rural Enabler Mentor

David Mitchell, Good Relations Officer, Lisburn
City Council

Marie O'Reilly, Rural Enabler, Co Cavan

Appendix II Semi Structured Interview Questions

- 1) How would you describe the approach which was used in the Rural Enabler Programme?
- 2) How appropriate was the support and assistance given to rural communities in their peace building work?
- 3) What have been the successful outcomes of the interventions used in the Rural Enabler Programme?
- 4) What, if any, were the issues in working across two jurisdictions on this type of work?
- 5) What are the barriers to peace building in rural communities?
- 6) What are the approaches to peace building that are specific to rural communities?
- 7) What would you say has been the key learning from this Programme?
- 8) What needs to happen next and in the future to build on what has been achieved through the Rural Enabler Programme?



This is the fourth of a series of four research reports. The others are:

Churches and faith based organisations

Institutions - their role in peace building in rural communities

The role of community development in rural peace building

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