



The  
**Community Foundation**  
for Northern Ireland

# DEALING WITH THE PAST IN NORTHERN IRELAND 'FROM BELOW' AN EVALUATION

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## foreword

Issues around victimhood and how the past 40 years of conflict in Northern Ireland can be understood and adequately dealt with have been prevalent since the ceasefires of the mid-1990's.

Despite the best efforts of many organisations and institutions, the evidence of these unresolved dilemmas bequeathed by the causes and conduct of the conflict is palpable, although several initiatives have attempted to address these issues over many years.

In February 2007, the Community Foundation, under Measure 2.4 of the European Union's Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (Peace II Extension), awarded just under £1million to a range of projects working to tackle these issues at grassroots level.

This funding allowed the groups involved to engage in imaginative initiatives with a broad range of participants in order to explore their experiences and views.

In this report, Brian Gormally and Kieran McEvoy analyse the effectiveness of such approaches and assess what can be learned from those working 'from below' the political and/or governmental spheres.

Each project ran for a period of up to 18 months and the process involved intensive discussion with a cross section of groups from a range of communities.

I hope the ongoing process addressing the legacy of our past is aided by this report, which offers a direct contribution to the debate from people who lived through the anguish and contradictions of violence.

Together, good practice can be gathered in the hope that our society can contribute to other communities across the world, who are struggling with their own particular legacy issues.

Hopefully, as we move forward, we can learn together.

My thanks are also offered to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Foundation for their assistance in the production of this report.

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Director, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland  
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## executive summary

### Background

In February 2007, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) issued a limited call for applications to projects engaged in work which was designed to 'develop skills for addressing the past as a pathway to reconciliation' under Measure 2.4 of the European Union's Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE II Programme). The total amount awarded just under £1 million and each project ran for approximately 15 – 18 months. This funding allowed the groups involved to engage in a range of storytelling, group discussions and other past related work. This report analyses the effectiveness of these approaches and what others can learn from the Northern Ireland experience of grassroots work on dealing with the past.

### The Projects

**Womens Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)** is a regional women's organisation which organised a project called **Women and the Conflict**. The project was based upon the premise that women have had very distinctive and diverse experiences of conflict.

**Trademark** is a voluntary organisation supported by the trade union movement which delivers training and a range of interventions mainly concentrated around equality, good relations and human rights.

**Journeys Out** involved a collaboration between three organisations, INCORE, Intercomm and the Peace and Reconciliation Group. The Journeys Out project was designed in particular to engage a new generation of community leaders in debates about dealing with the past on inter-community basis.

**Healing Through Remembering (HTR)** is a cross-community project made up of a diverse individuals including former Loyalist and Republican combatants, members of the security forces, victims, individuals from different churches, human rights and community activists and others. HTR is a specialist organisation which exists solely and specifically to explore methods of dealing with the past.

**Towards Understanding and Healing (TUH)** is an organisation based in Derry\ Londonderry which focuses on individual stories as a route to exploring and understanding the impact of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

**The Ex-Prisoners of War (Ex-Pow) Consortium** involves ex-prisoners and former combatants from Republican and Loyalist traditions – three Republican and two Loyalist groupings – all of whom are involved in ‘dealing with the past’ style work.

### Key Findings

- There is a significant tradition amongst community projects in Northern Ireland directed towards dealing with the past. Such *grassroots skills, energy and expertise should be tapped into* by whatever emerges from the report of the Consultative Group on the Past.
- A central working assumption which informed the work of all of the groups evaluated was that “the past must be “faced up to.”
- The diversity of individuals’ experiences of conflict must directly inform the styles of engagement of past related work. Thus women, trade unionists, community leaders, ex-prisoners, marginalised or hitherto uninvolved groups and participants (actors and victims) all require bespoke styles of work rather than ‘off-the shelf’ or one size fits all models.
- Grass-roots leadership is central in efforts geared towards dealing with the past. Those with local credibility and organisational capacity are often best placed to lead the difficult conversations in past related work in diverse community and organisational settings.
- Past related work must include reaching out to those individuals and organisation which have not yet been fully engaged in these debates so that projects are not simply ‘preaching to the converted’.
- Dealing with the past should include both cross community and single identity work.
- Exploring a violent past conflict is difficult and requires real care and sensitivity to ensure the physical, psychological and emotional safety and security of all participants.
- The use of *personal stories* can be a key vehicle for past related work.
- Dealing with the past in an effective manner may require specific gender focused projects including the *development of women only projects*.

- Whilst acknowledging key differences, *the use of international examples* and experiences of other societies' efforts to deal with the past is often a key resource in management controversial and sensitive subjects. South Africa is not the only example of such efforts!
- A number of the groups evaluated developed a method of working which placed the personal stories of the participants explicitly within *the broader political and social context* within which they occurred. The transferability of different political approaches to different projects or contexts remains an open question.
- In addition to this external evaluation, many of the *groups developed their own ongoing evaluations* during the delivery of the project as part of their implementation and delivery strategy.
- The projects involved produced a *significant array of resources* which may be of use to other groups or individuals involved in dealing with the past.

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## introduction

In February 2007 the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) issued a limited call for applications to projects engaged in work which was designed to 'develop skills for addressing the past as a pathway to reconciliation'. The Community Foundation was responsible for the implementation of Measure 2.4 (original and extended Measures) of the European Union's Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE II Programme) on behalf of the Special EU Programmes Body. The extended Measure 2.4 PEACE II Programme (Pathways to Inclusion, Integration and Reconciliation of Victims) originally opened for applications in August 2005. For a variety of reasons, including significant under spend in Measures 2.4a and 2.4b of the original PEACE II Programme, significant resources remained available in the extended Measure 2.4 in 2007 and the limited call on dealing with the past was made. The projects discussed below were selected for funding, with the total amount awarded just under £1 million. Each project was to run for approximately 15 months ending in June 2008. In the event, some of the projects applied for and were granted an extension of a few months additional funding.

The projects were required to design and deliver training modules and offer workshops aimed at '...building capacity for engagement, sharing, debate and discussion on ways to deal with the past to ensure a better future'. The training was required to include 'key groups who feel excluded from the debate or those who feel insufficiently empowered to engage in the debate'. A range of themes for the curricula for the different training modules were also suggested in the specifications relating to the call for applications. These included truth recovery and transitional justice (including international models); commemoration and community memorialisation; education archiving and collection issues; community based story telling; and institutional\agency responses to reflection and acknowledgement.

It is important to acknowledge from the outset that while we believe that some of the lessons learned from this evaluation are highly relevant to other 'bottom up' efforts at dealing with the past in Northern Ireland, this report focuses largely on the work of those six projects funded under the CFNI limited call. That said, this evaluation report is designed not only to analyse and evaluate key themes in the work of these projects, it also seeks to locate that work within the broader context of similar style initiatives both in Northern Ireland and internationally. Towards that end, the report includes some discussion both of the local and international context of 'bottom up' efforts to deal with the past in the wake of conflict. In addition, the report is designed to be of relevance to the public discussions which are ongoing as a result of the report by the government appointed Consultative Group on the Past (CGP) which was launched in late January 2009.<sup>1</sup>

Amongst the recommendations of the CGP were that an independent Legacy Commission should be established to deal with the past by combining processes of reconciliation, justice and information to promote peace and stability in Northern Ireland. The CGP recommended that the Legacy Commission should be given a budget of £100 million to achieve these objectives. It also recommend that a Reconciliation Forum should be established through which the Legacy Commission and the Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland (CVSNI) would liaise to tackle certain society issues relating to the conflict. Many of themes discussed by the projects examined in this evaluation resonate strongly with key elements of the CGP report. For example, throughout the report there is considerable emphasis on the importance of truth recovery, individual and communal story-telling, agreed forms of remembrance and memorialisation and the need to tackle sectarianism and work with young people so that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. The CGP report recognised the huge amount of work and the significant expertise that already exists in civil society in Northern Ireland concerning these issues.<sup>2</sup> If its recommendations were implemented, this would require a significant programme of work across the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland. We believe that it is important that the valuable experiences of the projects discussed in this evaluation become part of the broader public conversation concerning how to take forward such recommendations.

## Footnotes

- 1 Consultative Group on the Past (2009) *Report of the Consultative Group on the Past* (CGP). Belfast: CGP.
- 2 *“From the outset it was obvious that much excellent work had already been done in the field of dealing with the past by a range of individuals, by voluntary and community groups, by non-Governmental organisations, by statutory bodies and by both Governments. In particular we recognise the significant contribution made by Healing Through Remembering.”* Consultative Group on the Past (2009:47)

## the projects involved

Six very diverse projects were ultimately funded under the CFNI initiative. The projects funded were as follows;

**Womens Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)** is a regional women's organisation whose vision is "of a society where women are confident, valued and respected and occupy visible positions of power and influence in all areas of life." It was established in 1983 and provides training, community development, policy work and service delivery to individual women and community based organisations across Northern Ireland. It sees its mission as: "to advance women's equality and participation in society by working to bring about social, political and economic change." WRDA takes an explicitly feminist perspective and critiques systematic and structural inequality. It also acknowledges that women face particular challenges as part of a society emerging from a conflict situation. The WRDA project was called **Women and the Conflict**. It was based upon the premise that women have had very distinctive and diverse experiences of conflict including those associated with organising and sustaining family and community life. The diversity of womens' experiences also included differences experienced between Catholic and Protestant women as well as between rural and urban dwellers. In addition, the project was also informed by a view that often those diverse experiences are often absent from grander narratives of the conflict and that they directly inform womens' views on contemporary issues. It is these perspectives that informed the WRDA project on dealing with the past.

**Trademark** is a voluntary organisation but has representation on its Board from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. It is an organisation which 'works towards social change' and in which the goals of 'social justice, equality and pluralism are actively pursued'. Trademark is supported by the trade union movement and views itself as an anti-sectarian and anti-racist organisation. It delivers training and a range of interventions mainly concentrated around equality, good relations and human rights. It sees itself as rooted in the socialist ideology of the labour movement and believes that this stance can bring a distinctive perspective to questions of dealing with the past.

**Journeys Out** involved a collaboration between three organisations, INCORE, Intercomm and the Peace and Reconciliation Group. INCORE (International Conflict Research) is a joint project of the United Nations University and the University of Ulster. Combining research, education and capacity-building, INCORE seeks to address the causes and consequences of conflict in Northern Ireland and in other global conflict zones and promotes conflict resolution strategies and peace-building processes. Intercomm is a Belfast community-based organisation and aims to help construct a concrete and viable peace. Through a diverse range of programmes

it has assisted in combating social, economic and political problems created by the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. The Peace and Reconciliation Group was established over 25 years ago in Derry/Londonderry to address practical ways to work towards understanding and reconciliation in the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland. It has used a variety of diverse programmes to allow people to build bridges between communities that have been polarised by the historical and political events that have occurred in Northern Ireland. The Journeys Out project was therefore a collaboration between an academic institute and two groups engaged in community-based work but all with a shared ethos of peace-building. It was designed in particular to engage a new generation of community leaders in debates about dealing with the past on inter-community basis.

**Healing Through Remembering (HTR)** is an extensive cross-community project made up of a very diverse range of individual members holding different political perspectives. The organisation includes former Loyalist and Republican combatants, serving and former members of the security forces, victims, individuals from different churches, human rights and community activists, academics and a broad range of other backgrounds. Since it was established in 2001 the organisation has been focused exclusively on issues related to dealing with the past relating to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. HTR is therefore a specialist organisation which exists solely and specifically to explore methods of dealing with the past. It consists of five sub groups established to concentrate on discreet aspects of the key past related themes. The five sub groups are a Storytelling Sub Group, a Day Of Reflection Sub Group, a Living Memorial Museum Sub Group, a Truth Recovery and Acknowledgement Sub Group and a Network of Commemoration Sub Group. Across all of its sub groups, HTR has drawn extensively upon the international experience of dealing with the past to inform its own deliberations and working practices. In so far as it has a common ethos amongst its membership it may be focused on the understanding that facing the past is a worthwhile and necessary aspect of future peace and reconciliation.

**Towards Understanding and Healing (TUH)** is an organisation that recognises individual experience in the context of the larger story of conflict in Northern Ireland. Its origins lay in efforts by a range of individuals and community organisations in the Derry\Londonderry area to bring together former soldiers and parents of soldiers killed in Northern Ireland to meet with various individuals interested in exploring and understanding the impact of the conflict and the consequences of the soldiers' presence in Northern Ireland in the year 2000. Towards Understanding and Healing was established in order to offer a safe space for people to begin to articulate personal stories and also to listen to other stories '...in a way that does not diminish their own experience'. It therefore has a focus on the individual – though seeing each person's role in the broader community context – and on facilitating narrative about the past. It is in essence an ad hoc

grouping of people, many of whom have been involved in a range of initiatives over the past years. TUH explicitly acknowledges the particular influence of work carried out by other groups and individuals in developing its ethos and methodologies including An Crann/The Tree (a group which gathered and shared narratives about the conflict through a range of media), an Israel-based academic Prof. Dan Bar-On (who was responsible for creating a dialogue group between descendents of victims of the Holocaust and descendents of Nazi perpetrators) and former British soldiers who contributed to a Derry based book compiled by John Lindsay entitled *Brits Speak Out* in which former soldiers reflected upon their personal experiences during the conflict.

**The Ex-Prisoners of War (Ex-Pow) Consortium** emerged from a number of political ex-prisoner groups who desired to work together to skill up their members to consider the range of issues associated with 'dealing with the past'. This unique partnership included ex-prisoners and former combatants from Republican and Loyalist traditions – three Republican and two Loyalist Groupings. The ex-prisoner organisations involved were Coiste na n-Iarchimí, An Eochair, Teach na Fáilte, EPIC and Charter. Coiste na n-Iarchimí, the lead partner, is the support organisation for Provisional IRA ex-prisoners. An Eochair is the support organisation for Official IRA ex-prisoners. Teach na Fáilte is the support organisation for former INLA prisoners. EPIC is the support organisation for UVF and RHC ex-prisoners. CHARTER is the support organisation for UDA/UFF ex-prisoners. Those involved included members of organisations which had been previously involved in political violence against 'the other side' (eg. Republican\Loyalist or Republican\State) but also intra-factional violence within the Republican and Loyalist communities. A key premise of the project was of the central role of ex-prisoners in taking forward discussions on dealing with the past both within their own organisations and in broader society.

## the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation as laid out in the Terms of Reference was fourfold:

- To highlight how the projects had met the objectives of Measure 2.4 and the PEACE II Programme
- To highlight how the objectives of the projects had been met as detailed in their individual applications, and to highlight issues that facilitated or inhibited the projects achieving their aims and objectives
- To provide a learning opportunity for the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and other stakeholders by contributing to an assessment of the overall impact of the six funded projects in the context of the requirements established for the Measure 2.4 limited call
- To make recommendations that can contribute to policy development in this area of work in the context of sustaining it and developing it in the future

The key objective of the evaluation was through a formative evaluation process to produce an overall evaluation report with respect to all six projects. The evaluators understood a formative evaluation as one in which the key performance indicators are agreed with the project promoters and where the evaluators support and assist the promoters in achieving them. Ideally, the evaluation process is incorporated as an active and meaningful part of the project's activities.<sup>3</sup>

The demands of carrying out a meaningful collective evaluation of six very different and complex projects have also created a learning process for the evaluators and a continuing modification of the methods used. To put it simply, we started out with an evaluation structure based on a deductive form of reasoning and ended up with a process that was much more inductive in its approach. In practical terms, that meant that originally we proposed a quite detailed and schematic framework of analysis derived from the criteria of the Peace II Programme. In this final report however, given the diversity of the different projects and the contemporary political importance of their experiences in light of the Consultative Group on the Past report, we have opted to present the key lessons from the work of the projects in terms of broader themes of more general applicability rather than in the form of a detailed commentary on each project.

We believe it is useful to reflect on this basic paradigmatic shift in the evaluation method as it may be of interest for future evaluations. First, however, we should note a couple of practical constraints on the evaluation methods.

The complexity, intensity or particularity of the work that some of the projects were engaged in meant that, in consultation with the projects themselves, it was not practical or appropriate for the evaluators to be directly involved with participants at different stages of their work. Given that the funding was specifically designed to reach groups and individuals who had hitherto felt excluded from the debates concerning the past, the methodology required had to be particularly sensitive. For example, we were able to facilitate a focus group of organisers and participants in the TUH project but not to observe their work in progress. We directly observed a number of the Ex-POW workshops but only at a relatively advanced stage in their work when relations within and between the groups were already well established. The INCORE project was sensitive but also involved a number of international events which the external evaluators were unable to attend due to constraints on time and expense. The activities undertaken by the WRDA project were explicitly for females only. While attendance at the projects final conference was viable, we agreed with the project that our presence (as male evaluators) in the earlier and more sensitive aspects of the work of the project would have vitiated the female only ethos of the programme. In short, observation, participation and evaluation in the work of projects which are dealing with the past must be highly conscious of the sensitivities involved and premised upon sensible negotiations and discussions with the needs of the projects themselves.

Another factor is that, as we note later in the report, in addition to the element of their budget which the six projects agreed to devote towards this evaluation, all of the projects deployed their own evaluative strategies as part of their programme development, review and implementation. Quite apart from the more mechanistic requirements required as a matter of course by Peace funded projects, these were experienced projects that demonstrated an impressive commitment to a reflexive and self critical approach to their work – particularly given the relatively brief period when the projects were operational. Amongst all the projects, we saw evidence of genuine efforts to take on board the views of participants, staff and volunteers and other stakeholders as part of the broader learning process. This style of ongoing 'reflective practice', particularly in a field where the sensitivities of the work may mitigate against traditional participant observation style evaluation, is to be commended.

The end result of these various factors is that this collective evaluation is based both on the evaluative materials submitted by the projects themselves, our review and analysis of primary and secondary materials (including feedback from participants) and our own observations. Such a methodology is entirely appropriate for this style of thematic or collective evaluation where the key emphasis has been to identify learning for the future rather than a process of "checking up" on the minutia of programme implementation.

As was noted above, the activities of these six projects reflect a broader trend internationally of work generated ‘from below’. In many such societies, individuals and communities most directly affected by past conflict are challenging the assumption that ‘dealing with the past’ should be the exclusive preserve of ‘top down’ state or state-like institutions (such as trials of former human rights abusers or truth commissions).<sup>4</sup> By way of background, we have summarised some of the key themes emerging from those international developments which we believe are relevant to the contemporary debate in Northern Ireland. In addition, again as was mentioned previously, similar grass-roots initiatives have already been a feature of the Northern Ireland context and some of the most relevant are detailed below.

### Footnotes

- 3 See M. Quinn Patton (2008 4<sup>th</sup> ed) *Utilisation Focused Evaluation*. London: Sage; D. Taylor and S. Balloch (2004) *The Politics of Evaluation*. Winchester: Policy Press; P. Rossi, M. Lipsi and H. Freeman (2004, 7<sup>th</sup> ed) *Evaluation: A Systemic Approach*. London: Sage.
- 4 For a review of experiences in Brazil, East Timor, Colombia, Guatemala, the former Soviet Union and elsewhere see K. McEvoy and L. McGregor (eds) (2008) *Transitional Justice from Below: Grassroots Activism and the Struggle for Change*. Oxford: Hart.

## dealing with the past “from below”: the international context

The notion of ‘dealing with the past’ in societies which are struggling to come to terms with a violent past has increasingly become synonymous with the field of ‘transitional justice’. Since the early 1990s, the term has increasingly dominated debates on the intersection between democratisation, human rights protections and state-reconstruction after conflict.<sup>5</sup> As well as its historical associations with the post war tribunals in Nuremberg and Tokyo, and the move towards democracy in previously authoritarian regimes in Latin America and the former Soviet Union, the term is now regularly deployed in a wide range of contexts including Northern Ireland. It has recently been defined by the United Nations as : ‘compris[ing] the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation. These may include both judicial and non-judicial mechanisms, with differing levels of international involvement (or none at all) and individual prosecutions, reparations, truth-seeking, institutional reform, vetting and dismissals, or a combination thereof.’<sup>6</sup>

Dealing with the past in transitional justice contexts may involve prosecutions. Thus for example, international prosecutorial institutions such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) or the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), hybrid tribunals at the national level made up of both international and local legal actors (e.g. Sierra Leone or Cambodia) or local trials such as those in Argentina are all designed to come to terms with historical abuses through prosecuting former human rights abusers.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, or in some instances as an alternative to prosecutions, many societies emerging from conflict have established an additional range of different methods designed to ‘deal with the past’. Such methods have included:

- Institutions or processes (including truth commissions) which are designed to achieve truth recovery and to formally record past abuses.
- Reparations and programmes for victims [including compensation, restitution, rehabilitation and symbolic reparation].
- programmes designed to assist former combatants return to civilian life including numerous Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration initiatives (DDR – discussed further below).
- processes for releasing those imprisoned as a result of conflict.

- amnesties for offences committed during a previous conflict or in return for cooperation with bodies such as a truth commission.
- programmes of institutional reform which in some instances have included lustration initiatives (removing from office those tainted by abuses committed under the former regime) and ‘rule of law’ programmes which normally involve recruitment, professionalisation and human rights training programmes for judges, lawyers, police and other justice professionals.
- programmes designed to identify and meet the needs of particular groupings which have been affected by previous conflict on the basis of gender, age (e.g. ‘child soldiers’ or elderly veterans) or indigenous status.
- initiatives designed to promote reconciliation between former enemies, or indeed between former combatants and the civilian populations who they may have harmed.
- different forms of memorials, museums and other means of commemoration which are designed to acknowledge the hurts of the past and preserve the memory of those who may have been killed, injured or disappeared in the past conflict.

Given that the rule of law is often either absent or hugely distorted in many conflicts, the self evident need to create or reshape a justice system based on human rights principles has perhaps inevitably left the field of transitional justice with a fairly legalistic, state-centric and ‘top-down’ focus to much of its theory and practice. What were once a series of loose principles and ideals (e.g. ending impunity or recognising and acknowledging the victims of violence) have become concretised into a set of mechanisms and modes of intervention. Dealing with the Past in the guise of transitional justice is now normalised, mainstreamed and increasingly institutionalised.<sup>8</sup>

However, in partial reaction to this state-centric and top down emphasis in much transitional justice theory and practice, there has in recent years been increased attention paid to work going on ‘below’ the gaze of state or ‘state-like’ institutions. In part these developments are a reflection of a broader questioning of the willingness or capacity of such institutions to deliver justice, security and other basic human needs in normal ‘settled’ societies.<sup>9</sup> In transitional societies in particular, where the capacity or political will of such institutions to come to terms with uncomfortable truths about the past is itself often highly contested, such debates have been given a particularly sharp focus.<sup>10</sup> Indeed in places like Sri Lanka, Colombia and to an extent Northern Ireland, it is precisely the absence of viable state like institutions to deal effectively with the past which has arguably led

to much of the creative energy for transition actually coming 'from below'.<sup>11</sup> Often in these and other contexts national justice systems are themselves too aloof, corrupt, tainted, ineffective, overwhelmed or otherwise incapable of responding properly to the needs of transition. In such settings, it is frequently victims and survivor groups, community and civil society organisations, human rights non-governmental organisations, church bodies and others that have been the engines of change.

Transitional justice 'from below' does not simply mean locating transitional justice at community level. Rather, the term 'from below' is increasingly used to denote a 'resistant' or 'mobilising' character to the actions of community, civil society and other non-state actors in their opposition to powerful political, social or economic forces.<sup>12</sup> Developing effective methods of dealing with the past in transitional contexts, is marked not simply by the deliberation of major legal institutions or landmark cases but by the individuals and groups involved in social and political struggles which placed them on the political agenda in the first place.<sup>13</sup>

However, while the 'from below' perspective is generally interested in maximising community ownership and participation in processes of justice in transition, this is not at the expense of a suspension of critical faculties. The 'from below' perspective does not pre-suppose a naive or overly romanticised notion of community or civil society. Indeed, many of those who have written in the field of informalism, community justice, community mediation or restorative justice are keenly aware of the dangers of the community as a site of exclusionary practices or unequal power relationships.<sup>14</sup> Being alert to such dangers should not however result in automatic resort to 'defensive formalism', a default to the tried and failed methods of state led formal justice. Rather, it suggests that good transitional justice practice in community based settings can emerge through a pragmatic assessment of risks and capacities, the development of strategies which buttress against those risks and build upon existing skills and abilities and a willingness at times to complement rather than dismiss the work of top-down institutions.

In sum, the 'from below' perspective thus offers an informed critique of some of the limitations of transitional justice 'from above' and a willingness to accommodate or compensate for those weaknesses with concurrent 'bottom up' projects. While such projects are designed to maximise ownership and participation – what is referred to in the development literature as the 'actor orientated' perspective<sup>15</sup> - such an ethos requires a similarly cold-eyed assessment of risk and capacity of grass roots actors who take on transitional justice responsibilities themselves.

## Footnotes

- 5 See e.g. R Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000);
- 6 UNSC, Report of the Secretary General to the Security Council, 'The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post Conflict Societies', (23 August 2004) UN Doc S/2004/616, available online at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/395/29/PDF/N0439529.pdf>.
- 7 A Cassese, *International Criminal Law* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003); W Schabas, *An Introduction to the International Criminal Court* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004); R Kerr, *The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia: An Exercise in Law, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004); D McGoldrich, P Rowe, and E Donnelly (eds), *The Permanent International Criminal Court* (Oxford, Hart Publishing, 2004).
- 8 See K. McEvoy (2007) "Beyond Legalism: Towards a Thicker Understanding of Transitional Justice." *Journal of Law and Society*, 34,4, 411-440.
- 9 N. Rose, (2000) 'Government and Control' in D. Garland and R. Sparks (eds) *Criminology and Social Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 10 A. Betts, (2005) 'Should Approaches to Post-conflict Justice and Reconciliation be Determined Globally, Nationally or Locally?', 17(4) *European Journal of Development Research*, (2005) 735 P. Gready, 'Reconceptualising Transitional Justice: Embedded and Distanced Justice', 5 *Conflict, Security and Development*, (2005) 3
- 11 C Bell and J Keenan (2004) 'Human Rights Nongovernmental Organizations and the Problems of Transition' 26 *Human Rights Quarterly* 330; F Haniffa, 'In the Pursuit of Democracy in Post Colonial Sri Lanka: Local Human Rights Approaches to Transitional Justice' (New York, ICTJ Monograph, 2006); R Uprimny, C Botero, E Restrepo and MP Saffron, *Justicia Transicional Sin Transición? Verdad, Justicia y Reparación para Colombia* (Bogota, Centro de Estudios de Derecho y Sociedad, 2006).
- 12 For example, Brecher et al and Falk talk of 'globalisation from below' in their discussion of grassroots resistance to neo-liberal capitalist encroachments on environmental justice, labour, developing world debt and related issues. See e.g. J Brecher, T Costello, & B Smyth (2000) *Globalisation From Below: The Power of Solidarity* Cambridge MA, Southend Press; R Falk (2003) 'Globalization-from-Below: An Innovative Politics of Resistance,' in R. Sandbrook (ed) *Civilizing Globalization: A Survival Guide*, Albany NY: State University of New York Press.
- 13 U Baxi, (2002) *The Future of Human Rights*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- 14 See e.g. A Crawford (1999) *The Local Governance of Crime: Appeals to Community and Partnership* Oxford, Oxford University Press; A Etzioni (1994) *The Spirit of Community*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1994. G Pavlich (2005) *Governing Paradoxes of Restorative Justice* London: Glasshouse Press.
- 15 C Nyamu-Musembi (2002) *Towards and Actor Informed Perspective on Human Rights*. IDS Working Paper 169 Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

## dealing with the past “from below”: the northern ireland experience

Unlike in many other transitional settings, the 1998 Agreement in Northern Ireland did not include a formal mechanism such as a truth process designed to deal with the past. A number of those who negotiated the Agreement have suggest that the additional difficulties of establishing such a mechanism to deal with the past would have made the achievement of an agreement almost impossible.<sup>16</sup> That said, as Christine Bell has argued,<sup>17</sup> the Agreement did contain a number of mechanisms which might be described as ‘piecemeal’ elements of an approach to the past. These elements included provisions for the release and reintegration of paramilitary prisoners, the provision of services to victims, the establishment of the Patten Commission on Policing, the Human Rights Commission, and a range of other measures - all of which were broadly geared towards addressing past consequences of the conflict. However, in the absence of a formal institution tasked with a holistic examination of the past, many local community and civil society organisations have attempted different ways of ‘dealing with the past’ themselves. The initiatives discussed below are certainly not an exhaustive list of all such local processes, but rather a few illustrative examples which are of relevance to the projects discussed in this report.

First, as is noted in the introduction, many grassroots projects including those examined in this evaluation have a significant organisational history in working on ‘dealing with the past’ related issues. For some, discussions on dealing with the past are an inevitable element of project service delivery. For example, by 2006 there were almost 150 different victims organisations in Northern Ireland. Many of these organisations have been involved in ‘dealing with the past’ style work, often as part of broader counselling efforts.<sup>18</sup> Amongst the ex-combatant community, part of the impetus for the development of the Ex-POW consortium discussed in this report was the fact that many involved in the five different ex-prisoner groups had already been engaged in work with their own constituencies on dealing with the past.<sup>19</sup>

More broadly, many other community or civil society projects have been involved in a broad range of story-telling style programmes of work and local historical and commemorative projects. For example, the Healing Through Remembering audit of storytelling style projects details 33 different styles of projects involved in story-telling style work concerning the conflict in and about Northern Ireland.<sup>20</sup> There has also been an increasingly lively public debate concerning forms of conflict related public commemoration in Northern Ireland with much of the most delicate work done on the ground (e.g. in negotiations concerning the replacement of paramilitary style murals) conducted by locally based community and civil society organisations.<sup>21</sup> A joint project between HTR and the Institute of Irish Studies at

Queens University Belfast has conducted an extensive audit of artefacts (e.g. objects, artworks, letters, audio and film recordings, ephemera) relating to the conflict. Interestingly, while as one would expect many of these were held in museums, galleries, libraries, others were the property of private individuals or community organisations – many of which have a very strong sense of the importance of local history and memories of the past.<sup>22</sup>

Local community and civil society organisations have also had a long history of 'bottom up' efforts at truth recovery.<sup>23</sup> Historically, there have been a number of prominent community led inquiries into controversial killings by the security forces or deaths where often families had little confidence in the police or judicial authorities. Often, these involved bringing in outside British or international legal experts to chair proceedings at which local people, witnesses and others gave evidence, which would then be written up into a report and then used as a basis for further campaigning concerning the case.<sup>24</sup> In addition, one local community based initiative (the Ardoyne Commemoration Project) established their own 'bottom up' truth recovery process, a project which has become internationally renowned in the transitional justice literature.<sup>25</sup> Specifically created as a direct challenge to what the organisers saw as a "hierarchy of victims" promulgated by the government sponsored Bloomfield report into victims, that project identified all the members of the Ardoyne community killed as a direct result of political violence between 1969 and 1998 (99 in all) and went directly to the closest next-of-kin of each victim to request both their testimony and the recommendation of another significant contact who would assist with the project. In this way, a picture was built of victims' lives through the testimony of those closest to them and was published in a 543-page book.<sup>26</sup> Considerable emphasis was placed throughout the process on victim and community ownership of the project. For example, all but one of the committee members were from Ardoyne; the interviewers, transcribers and other volunteers were from the local community; and participants were each given editorial control over their contribution. The centrality of this grassroots ownership and involvement was confirmed in a subsequent project evaluation.<sup>27</sup>

The broad point of relevance to this current report is that, in addition to the expertise amongst the projects reviewed herein, there is a significant tradition of 'bottom up' efforts in Northern Ireland directed towards dealing with the past. Such a reserve of skills, energy and expertise should be tapped into by whatever emerges from the report of the Consultative Group on the Past.

## Footnotes

- 16 See K. McEvoy (2009 in press) *Truth, Transition and Reconciliation: Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland*. Cullompton: Willan.
- 17 C. Bell (2003). Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland. *Fordham International Law Journal*, 26, 4, 1095-1147.
- 18 C. Gilligan (2006) "Traumatised By Peace? A Critique Of Five Assumptions In The Theory And Practice Of Conflict-Related Trauma Policy In Northern Ireland." *Policy And Politics* 34, 2, 325-346.
- 19 P. Shirlow and K. McEvoy (2008) *Beyond The Wire: Ex-prisoners and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland*. London: Pluto.
- 20 Healing Through Remembering (2005, updated 2007) '*Storytelling' Audit: An Audit Of Personal Story, Narrative And Testimony Initiatives Related To The Conflict In And About Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Healing Through Remembering. HTR define storytelling as "A project or process which allows reflection, expression, listening, and possible collection of personal, communal and institutional stories related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland." (HTR 2007: 10). For further discussion see L. O'Hagan (ed) (2008) *Stories in Conflict: Towards Understanding and Healing*. Derry: Yes Publications; M Jackson (2002) *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity*. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen Press; G. Rosenthal (2003) 'The Healing Effects of Storytelling: On the Conditions of Curative Storytelling in the Context of Research and Counselling' *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9 6, 915-933;
- 21 J. McCormick and N. Jarman (2005) "Death of a Mural." *Journal of Material Culture*, 10, 1, 49-71.
- 22 K. Brown (2008) *Artefacts Audit. A Report On The Material Culture Of The Conflict In And About Northern Ireland*" Belfast. Healing Through Remembering.
- 23 Rolston, B. (2000). *Unfinished Business: State Killings and the Quest for Truth*. Belfast: Beyond the Pale.
- 24 For example, local community activists were involved in 1971 in establishing an inquiry chaired by prominent British lawyer Lord Gifford and Albie Sachs (later to become a Supreme Court judge in South Africa) into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Seamus Cusack and George Desmond Beattie in Derry. Another prominent community-led inquiry was established to investigate the killing of Fergal Caraher, an unarmed member of the IRA who was shot dead at a check point by the British Army in South Armagh in 1990 – in that instance chaired by Michael Mansfield QC and included jurists from England, France and the US. A similar community inquiry was instigated by the Castlederg-Aghyaran Justice Group into the killing of Patrick Shanaghan, after his family withdrew from the state inquest five years after his death. In part, this inquiry influenced the selection of Shanaghan's case as one of the four joined Article 2 cases which the European Court of Human Rights gave judgement on in 2001. Indeed, the ECHR made specific mention of the inquiry in its judgment. More recently, in 2003, a community hearing was held into the deaths of six individuals shot dead by the British Army in 1973 in one night in the New Lodge area of North Belfast. For further discussion see Healing Through Remembering (2006) *Making Peace with the Past*. Belfast: Healing Through Remembering.

- 25 P. Lundy and M. McGovern (2008) "Whose Justice: Rethinking Transitional Justice from the Bottom Up." *Journal of Law and Society*, 35, 2, 265-292.
- 26 Ardoyne Commemoration Project (2002). *Ardoyne: The Untold Truth*. Belfast: Beyond the Pale.
- 27 Lundy, P., & McGovern, M. (2005b). *Community, "Truth-telling" and Conflict Resolution: A Critical Evaluation of the Role of Community-based "Truth-telling" Processes for Post-Conflict Transition. A Case Study of the Ardoyne Commemoration Project*.  
<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/victims/ardoyne/lundymcgovern05.pdf>

## why examine the past?: approaches and assumptions

In assessing the value and significance of any social intervention, the starting point must be its purpose – an exploration of why the intervention is taking place and what it is hoped to achieve. Unpicking the approaches and assumptions which underpin ‘dealing with the past’ projects is arguably of particular importance. Often justifications for engaging in projects which deal with the past are not fully developed. At times there appears to be an uncritical assumption that it is by definition a “good thing” for a society to examine its past, based on inadequately articulated linkages between truth recovery and reconciliation, over-blown legal rhetoric about ‘combating impunity’ or the transformative potential of human rights discourses and loose medical analogies to healing.<sup>28</sup> For these reasons, it is important to get a sense of what the projects examined for this report – individually and collectively – sought to achieve.

The projects involved in the Limited Call vary in the extent to which their purpose is stated explicitly. We have attempted to thematise these rationales in order to underline their broader applicability. As will be clear from the discussion below, there is significant overlap between them although we have separated them for greater clarity.

### **The Past Must Be “Faced Up To.”**

One clearly expressed rationale was a view that the uncomfortable truths of the past in Northern Ireland should be ‘faced up to’. For example, Trademark called its project, “Confronting the Legacy of the Past.” This encapsulated quite a combative and an explicitly political approach – a view that that the past must be dealt with by confronting the issues of the present. As one of the project workers articulated:

“The title ‘Confronting Legacy of the Past was deliberate – we wanted to say we were taking a different line to just ‘dealing with the past’ – we wanted to have the difficult conversations that we can’t have in everyday life.”

Trademark’s approach was informed by a view of contemporary society as divided by sectarianism and racism as well as by class and social discrimination. Starting from that perspective, its approach to the past was to examine the history and causes of these current political realities. In its final report, the organisation said:

“Our approach was to confront the legacy of the past by dealing with the social and political factors which led to the conflict and which to a degree are still prevalent. We promoted the idea of the need for a collective responsibility in dealing with issues including equality, human rights, history and identity, the

prevalence of sectarianism and also the emerging problems with racism and xenophobia.”

In some sense Trademarks approach to dealing with the past was an instrumental one - viewing history of a method transforming the present and future. Their perspective was one of facing up to the violence and division of the past as an object lesson in what divides people and what can bring them together.

### **The Past-Present Axis and Recognition of Diversity**

The relationship between contemporary society in Northern Ireland and our collective past was a constant refrain across all of the projects. However, as in any divided society, the ways in which that past was experienced and the particular lessons to be gleaned from that past are diverse and dependent upon a range of variables. The WRDA project in particular well illuminated this point. Their particular rationale was to explore the distinctive experience of women during the conflict and its impact upon their views on contemporary issues. As the project report articulates.

“Firstly, through the project WRDA wanted to give women an opportunity to reflect on and share their experiences of the ‘Troubles’ and secondly, to enable the women involved in the project to highlight the issues that affected them during the ‘Troubles’ and to compare and contrast these with current issues that have an impact on women’s lives.”<sup>29</sup>

Professor Mike Tomlinson makes a further point in the foreword to this report that: “while some women matched men in frontline roles, they also had distinctive experiences of the conflict, associated with their predominance in organising and sustaining family life and the roles they take within local communities.” WRDA made certain assumptions about the roles and experiences of women in particular that women had a distinctive role in and experience of the conflict which was often overlooked or indeed silenced in male-dominated discourse on the past. However, while wishing to capture those overlooked experiences, WRDA was also sensitive to the dangers of assuming unanimity of experiences on the basis of gender. Rather they made significant efforts to capture the diversity of womens’ experiences of the past by virtue of religion, class, urban rural divide and indeed age.<sup>30</sup>

Through video-interviews conducted with project participants to document their journeys from ‘conflict to participation’, INCORE also found that women experienced the past differently. In particular, women were found to face different challenges in seeking to engage in community activism. For example, once participant noted: “Especially being a mother I think as well, you know being a

women, working on an interface as opposed to a man, I mean I've to go home I've to do my smoothing and my housework" (Int10/07).

In different ways, each of the projects focused upon the diverse and distinct roles or experiences of people during the conflict and how they might contribute to dealing with the past. A quick glance at those involved underlines that diversity with women, trade unionists, community leaders, ex-prisoners, marginalised or hitherto uninvolved groups and participants (actors and victims) in the conflict all taking part in project related activities. The ways in which the projects interacted with these specific groups will be explored further in following sections. However, a few additional points are worthy of note at this stage.

First, the focus on specific groupings of people demonstrates again the importance of a complex and nuanced view of the forces at work in the past and therefore the elements that need to be engaged in building the future society. Second, a focus on distinct experiences and perhaps distinct roles for the future may be a more effective method of work than general, society-wide initiatives. Third, the diversity of the groups represented tends to indicate that social groupings far beyond those with a direct role in the conflict of whatever kind have a role to play both in dealing with the past and in building the future. Fourth, inter-generational relationships between groups must also be considered when 'dealing with the past'. The INCORE project, for example, was based on the premise that there is value in facilitating a smooth 'passing of the baton' between generations of community leaders as Northern Ireland emerges from violent conflict, and in sharing their experiences and perspectives on the past. As one participant questioned, "by being the youngest are my experiences relevant. Do I have anything to give?"

### **Privileging Experience: Personal, Communal and 'the Other'**

In contrast to the anti-sectarian\anti-racist or gender-based approaches of Trademark and WRDA, the approach which underpinned TUH appeared in particular to privilege personal experience. In common with WRDA, the emphasis in much of TUH's materials is upon generating a better understanding of our diverse narratives in order to better understand the legacy of the past. However, TUH places a particular emphasis upon the importance of individual understanding and participation. As Maureen Hetherington, one of the key people behind the development of Towards Understanding and Healing has argued;

"Community healing starts with individual healing... Unless people are given the opportunity to deal firstly with their own hurts there can be no movement towards individual or community healing and the building of trust and good relations between communities."<sup>31</sup>

From such a perspective, listening to individual experiences is thus seen as key to understanding the memories and perspectives of “the other.” As the DVD commentary puts it: “We don’t know the half of it – or rather we only know the half of it.” The privileging of diverse personal experiences is a key component to a methodology of storytelling and positive encounter dialogue that encourages people to better understand each other’s history, culture, politics and humanity. Individual storytelling allows participants to tell and hear personal stories in a safe and supportive environment which is designed to humanise relations and to build trust. Positive encounter dialogue provides participants with the opportunity to have more challenging exchanges relating to critical conflict-based issues.

TUH made a number of additional arguments about the importance of interplay between individual and communal experiences. First, the ways in which particular communities remember or indeed reproduce their sense of communal victimhood may prevent individual victims from “moving on” as well as presenting significant obstacles to the building of trust and good relations between communities. Second, a process which they refer to as ‘silencing’ – not being willing or able to openly confront or talk about the past – at an individual level may have negative trans-generational impacts in a lack of trust between parents and children and present unresolved issues damaging children in the future. Finally, while they were explicit that their project was not specifically designed as counselling the individualistic nature of the process meant that in practice many of the responses from participants spoke directly of the personal benefits derived from the programme.

There was important cross-over between the TUH and Journeys Out projects in relation to promoting positive exchange of individual experience. Journeys Out explicitly sought to raise awareness and interest of individuals in debates around ‘dealing with the past’ with a view to their future possible involvement in projects such as TUH. TUH also offered important advice and support to the INCORE project as Journeys Out international residentials triggered the sharing of individuals’ stories and experiences to a far greater extent than had been anticipated during the initial planning stages of the project.

### **The Importance of Leadership**

A key feature which was discernable in both the Journeys Out programme and the EX-POW consortium was the centrality of leadership in efforts geared towards dealing with the past.

The Journeys Out project was premised upon a perspective that local communities needed to play a part in dealing with the past but then focused in particular on the specific role of community leaders. It sought to promote ‘dealing with the

past' as a positive tool for transformation and community development, rather than a backward looking exercise and rut in which individuals and communities can get stuck. Community leaders were therefore defined both as those who had come through the conflict and the "new generation" coming up. The Journeys Out project was also based upon the need for greater cross community contact and participation in order to deal with the past most effectively. In order for such exchange and dialogue to take place however, it was considered necessary to engage with community leaders whose leadership skills had previously been deployed primarily within a single identity environment and to reach those who had not necessarily been previously engaged in dealing with the past debate. As one of the project co-ordinators told the evaluators;

"Effective cross-community exchanges on dealing with the past in communities which have been directly affected by violence can only happen with the support and indeed leadership of those who live and work in such communities."

In what was described as 'a journey from conflict to participation', the Journeys Out programme was also premised on an assumption that the skills developed by those who had been previously involved in community leadership roles could and should be passed on to a new generation of community leaders to deal with the past in a structured and organised fashion. The specific assumption of the project was that leadership skills could be deployed in ways which would enable community leaders to mentor and train their peers in relation to local and international approaches to dealing with the past.

Journeys Out also operated on the basis that the community leaders it targeted (a significant number of whom identified themselves as 'ex-combatants' or 'ex-prisoners') had important stories to tell about dealing with the past – both in terms of their personal lives and their professional work. The project sought to document these journeys from conflict to participation, and to conduct research more generally into the role of community leadership in 'dealing with the past'.

Amongst the ex-POW Consortium, there was a similar working assumption about the importance of leadership in dealing with the sensitive issues which would inevitably arise on discussions concerning the past. In particular, the ex-POW Consortium was premised upon the idea that different former prisoner groups had developed significant leadership skills in terms of managing the sensitive issues regarding dealing with the past within their respective constituencies. In keeping with the general 'self-help' ethos which has permeated the reintegration efforts of ex-prisoner projects in the jurisdiction, this project viewed ex-prisoners and ex-combatants as key players for taking forward such discussions. The project was premised upon the need to further develop leadership and capacity skills amongst the different groupings to create a broader pool of members who were knowledgeable and articulate on the issues.

The ex-POW consortium was also highly self-conscious of the importance of a group of former combatants from diverse paramilitary and political backgrounds engaging in a concerted effort to explore their respective perspective on the past. (As noted this was also a key dimension of the Journeys Out project as many of the participants drawn from interface areas were former combatants.) At a symbolic level, the message that such work was possible even amongst former sworn enemies was self-evidently powerful. On a practical level, the fact the formal and informal means of communication were being enhanced and that existing relationships were being further developed was also highly significant. Quite apart from their capacity to exercise 'leadership by example' functions within their own constituencies about the possibilities of exploring their very diverse views on the past, many of those who took part in the Ex-POW programme also seemed very aware of their potential to exercise significant influence in the broader communities in which they lived.<sup>32</sup>

### **Broadening the Debate to 'Hard to Reach' and 'Uninvolved' Constituencies**

The HTR project was designed to build on its past experience in encouraging debate on the past in its various forms. Over a period the organisation had also come to the conclusion that the community needed to be deeply involved in dealing with the past. It had felt, however, that there were certain "hard to reach" groups which were less involved. The project, called "Expanding the Debate," was therefore designed to bring the various possible forms of engaging with the past to new groups of participants.

All of the organisations reviewed for this evaluation enjoy significant reputations in their respective fields. However, Healing Through Remembering (HTR) is widely regarded locally and internationally as amongst the best known and most influential local specialist organisation working on dealing with the past issues.<sup>33</sup> As an organisation which has worked closely with a very diverse range of protagonists interested in these issues in Northern Ireland, the work of HTR which was funded under the special call was geared in particular towards ; (a) reaching those organisations and individuals who were adjudged as not currently involved in the dealing with the past debate<sup>34</sup> and ; (b) enhancing the skills of those who were engaging in past related debates to enable them to reach further and deeper into excluded communities. In short, the working assumption of the HTR project was that groups which had not been fully engaged in the public debate on the past continued to exist and that methods, techniques and resources could be developed which could assist in reaching such groups.

HTR's work was based in particular on the view that by virtue of its uniquely diverse membership (including Loyalist, Republican, British Army and police backgrounds, as well as individuals from different faith backgrounds, victims groups, academics and community activists) and significant level of technical expertise in the field,

HTR was well placed as an organisation to lead efforts to reach significant individuals and organisations who had not previously been significantly engaged in the debate on dealing with the past. It was also envisaged that the existing sub group structure of HTR (which involved subgroups active on a range of topics including commemoration; truth-recovery; museums and memorialisation; storytelling and a day of reflection) could be used also be used to create a 'ripple effect' in terms of ongoing conversations and dialogues in the communities and organisations in which these different individuals were active. The intent was not to reach agreement or consensus amongst or even within these groupings. Rather, the emphasis was upon facilitating a process of dialogue and discussion concerning matters which were often, by definition, controversial.

The rationale for such outreach appeared to emanate from a perspective that, in order for society to best consider the question of how to deal with the past, such discussions should be as broad as possible. HTR's own experience since its inception of encouraging informed discussions amongst such a diverse membership has encouraged the organisation to wish to share that experience with other groups – an opportunity which many groups had availed of. For example, we noted that the INCORE project was able to draw on some of the resources produced by HTR to stimulate debate and discussion around 'dealing with the past' during its programme of community workshops and international residential.

### **Single Identity and Cross-Community Work**

Another important theme that arise out of this discussion of the purpose of the projects is the extent to which they see an objective of dealing with the past as being cross-community reconciliation. Of course, all the sponsoring organisations are themselves cross-community and all the projects, though to differing extents, have involved cross-community contact and dialogue. The nature of the Peace II funding also encourages this aspect, though it is not an absolute requirement. However, the explicit aim of cross-community reconciliation, as a principal reason for carrying out the work, was not shared to the same extent or in the same way by all the projects. Given the importance of this theme, it is worth exploring in some detail.

The TUH project was very explicit with regard to its views as to the importance of the cross-community dimension to dealing with the past. As noted above, its assumptions include the continuing existence of segregation and polarisation between the two main communities in Northern Ireland and that this division might lead to future conflict. Although its actual practice is based on individual development the work of TUH was infused with a belief that their project would impact on wider communities and contribute to the process of peace building. The following were remarks made at a focus group held with some of the participants:

“If we do nothing we will repeat what has happened. We are also good at myth making – one way of helping to prevent that is hearing different ‘truths.’ You go back into your own grouping and can challenge misconceptions, break down the myths.”

“People have said we can never go back to the old absolutes. We also need to build relationships in the new society, this is one way of doing it.”

A contributor to the project DVD comments:

“I think it’s so important that we stop the mythology of threat about the other and we can only do that through dialogue – to try and get a shared identity – instead of a them and us to become just an us.”

However, their perspective was more sophisticated than simply reducing the conflict to a dispute between the “the two communities” involved. TUH’s work sought to involve as wide a range of participants as possible of the groupings, factions and organisations (state and non-state) that were actors in the conflict as well those who were impacted by such armed actions. So, while the cross-community reconciliation aspect is clearly important to TUH, it also recognised that the conflict involved actors from outside the two communities, such as British soldiers, and that they must be part of the process of reconciliation.

Journeys Out project activities often involved cross-community participation, and this was particularly intensive during international residential. One of the explicit aims of the international residential was: “To develop cross/inter-community relationships between residential participants and across a range of diverse communities in Northern Ireland.” The desire for cross-community reconciliation was clearly expressed during the project. For example, in an evaluation of one of the residential it is noted that: “Many of our participants argued that communication was often disconnected in interface areas and that ‘getting to know the other’ was absolutely crucial.”

However, space was also provided in recognition of the fact that cross-community work is often most effective after some initial ‘single-identity’ work has been undertaken. This was the intention behind the community audits and workshops undertaken during the first few months of the project.

The project also emphasised engagement beyond and within the two main communities in Northern Ireland. Project records show that there was as much concentration on building or re-building relationships within the nationalist and unionists communities as between them. In particular, the project sought to support broader efforts to transform loyalist communities that were being led by

civil society and government at the time. The challenges being faced by these communities and their changing leadership had, at times, knock-on impacts for the project which required sensitive management. The INCORE project also sought to develop relationships between different groups and communities in Belfast and L/Derry. In doing so, it found there to be distinctive approaches and cultures around 'dealing with the past' in both cities that were not necessarily polarised along PUL/RNC lines.

The Ex-prisoner consortium obviously brought together former members of armed groups from the two main communities. This project was also premised upon a balancing act between on the one hand 'skilling up' those who were doing single identity work amongst the ex-combatant communities from which each of the groups came and, on the other, recognising the power and importance of cross-community dialogue between former enemies. This was certainly a 'first' in terms of a project which brought together former combatants from five different factions, all of which had been involved in violent actions against the other, as well as (in the case of the Republican groupings), against state forces. Obviously given the nature of the group the meetings, seminars and residential all included discussion on their respective perspective on the history of inter-communal violence – dating from 1690, 1798, through partition, the Civil Rights era and the conflict itself. The project also included discussions on the respective cultural traditions of the two principal communities, including a unique encounter where a member of the Orange Order presented his perspective on the history and values of that organisation and was questioned by the members of the consortium, including those from the different Republican organisations. Many of those involved in the consortium were also involved in interface and inter-community dialogue and the participants viewed their involvement in this organised discussion on the past as having direct practical consequences for the continuance of this vital dialogue between estranged communities. Finally, as with the TUH project, all those involved in the Ex-POW consortium were acutely aware of the role and responsibilities of the state as a protagonist in the conflict and as having played a key role in creating the socio-economic conditions which contributed to conflict amongst working class Protestant and Catholic communities.

The WRDA project again involved women from the two main communities. However, their initial engagement was on a single identity basis with sharing experiences coming later. As noted above, the project assumed that there would be differences in the experience of the "Troubles" between Catholics and Protestants, but also between rural and urban women and so engaged groups of each character. However, it also felt that there would be a level of shared experience and part of the project process was to explore the extent of that commonality encounter between the various groups. At an early stage of the project, it was proposed that there would be some level of formal input on Good Relations. After considerable discussion it was concluded that the promotion of

good relations was implicit in the project, and that a specific workshop on Good Relations would not coalesce with the intentions of the workshops, i.e. to enable women to talk about the “Troubles” and formalising input might be considered to imply some level of sectarianism amongst the participants. The project therefore acknowledged the significance of bringing women from the two main communities together but stepped back from making this the dominant purpose.

As was noted above, the general work of Healing Through Remembering is by definition cross-community as it includes a very diverse cross section of ex-combatants, victims, former and serving members of the security forces, victims and others. The elements of this project which were geared towards the development of further resources by HTR members included cross-community residentials. The element of the work that was targeted at those who had not hitherto been involved in the debates about the past was, by necessity, single identity. These were a preponderance of groups from the Protestant Unionist Loyalist community although some marginal republican elements were also involved. This approach is in line with HTR’s facilitative ethos – since it exists to encourage debate on dealing with the past rather than working for a pre-determined outcome. Having said that, the cross-community and diverse character of the organisation itself and the fact that it is encouraging new, marginalised groups to get involved in the debate, will, no doubt, have an indirect impact on cross-community reconciliation.

Trademark has a distinctive view on the issue of cross-community dialogue and relationships. As we have noted above, the organisation clearly recognised the existence of sectarianism and its impact throughout society. In no sense did it claim that its core constituency, the labour movement, was or is immune from what it sees as a divisive and negative ideology. However, it did not see the process of overcoming sectarianism as one of reconciliation, rather one of confronting divisive stereotypes. In its project, some of the engagements were cross-community, others single identity. Trademark says that:

“We have developed a methodology of critical engagement based on breaking through the denial, avoidance and politeness that often characterises this type of cross community engagement. We have also developed a way of challenging the myths, stereotypes and ‘cultural blindness’ that often characterises ethnically exclusive peace and reconciliation activities.”

Specifically, Trademark has a view of single identity work which “allows for a time bound ethno-nationalist exclusivity to engagement, but always and crucially through a process of critical engagement and critical pedagogy in which teaching and learning practices are designed to raise learners’ critical consciousness regarding discrimination, exclusion and oppressive social conditions.” The approach, therefore, is to challenge what are seen as narrow, exclusive and divisive

ideas both about one's "own" community and the other and whether in single identity or cross-community contexts.

Taken as a whole, these projects demonstrate a complex and nuanced approach to cross-community reconciliation. The individual approaches show marked differences but in none of the projects did we see a simplistic bi-polar view either of the past or the project of reconciliation. A clear lesson from this experience is the need to grasp the complex currents and forces that were involved in the past conflict and therefore the multi-faceted character of peace-building for the future.

### Footnotes

- 28 See generally M. Jackson (2002) *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity*. Tusculanum Press: Copenhagen; C. Moon (2008) *Narrating Political Reconciliation: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. New York: Lexington Books; L. Payne (2008) *Unsettling Accounts: Neither Truth Nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence*. London: Duke University Press; E Staub et al (2005) "Healing, Reconciliation, Forgiving and the Prevention of Violence after Genocide or Mass Killing: An Intervention and Its Experimental Evaluation in Rwanda." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24,3 297-334.
- 29 WRDA (2008) *Women and the Conflict: Talking about the 'Troubles' and Planning for the Future*. Belfast: WRDA.
- 30 Evaluators' notes from Projects seminar meeting held Healing Through Remembering Offices, June 2008.
- 31 M. Heatherington (2008) "The Role of Towards Understanding and Healing." In L. O'Hagan (ed) *Stories in Conflict: Towards Understanding and Healing*.
- 32 For example at one session at the Ulster Peoples College attended by the Evaluators, one former Loyalist combatant spoke persuasively about what he regarded as his personal responsibility to tell a younger generation of loyalist activists who had comparatively little direct experience of political violence about his 'warts and all experiences' of imprisonment and conflict.
- 33 One of the evaluators has recently completed comparative work in over a dozen different jurisdictions in transition and that fieldwork confirmed that Healing Through Remembering is indeed one of the best known local specialist organisations working in the field of transitional justice. See K. McEvoy, H. Mika and K. McConnachie (2009) *Transitional Justice From Below: Transforming Cultures of Violence*. Belfast: Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice.
- 34 One interesting feature of the HTR project was a decision early in the project life to revise the original term 'hard to reach'. As the Director of HTR indicated in a subsequent interview with the evaluators "...such a term was thought to suggest something of a value judgement. Perhaps it wasn't that such groups were hard to reach but rather that our arms were too short!"

## methods of work and forms of engagement

The broad approaches and the general nature of the participants in the various projects have been discussed above. In this section we offer a little more detail on the specific methodologies employed by the projects and the ways in which these were tailored to the targeted participants.

The **Towards Understanding and Healing** project had no formal or declared criteria for participation in the process and it appears that people were contacted through the networks that TUH and its members had developed over the years. However, the project specifically sought to include ex-members of non-state armed groups, Republican and Loyalist, ex-members of the state security forces – RUC, UDR/RIR, regular British Army regiments – and those who have suffered from violence from any of these sources from the two main communities here and in Britain and the Republic. The project therefore was aimed at those who had actively participated in or been severely impacted upon by the conflict, not the generality of the population. That said, we are persuaded that the methodology deployed is of use to a broader range of audiences.

The TUH programme involved two forms of engagement with participants – storytelling and dialogue. Some participants have been involved in both forms of activity but one did not necessarily have to lead to the other. Both programmes were based around a three day residential experience.

The story telling process worked as follows. A TUH staff member met with the participants before each residential in order to prepare them for the experience and to listen to any of their concerns. The residentials were facilitated by a number of people who work with TUH, either as staff members, sessional workers or volunteers. On the first day a number of preparatory exercises took place. On the second day participants broke up into small groups of 4-6 people in which the storytelling took place. Each group was designed to give people exposure to the widest possible experiences – “from combatants of every stripe to those whom they have impacted upon.” Day three was based on the concept of “finding the way home.” In previous work, the project had found that some participants experienced difficulties re-entering family and community life after a transformative storytelling encounter and this session was designed to help people to come to terms with that process.

The dialogue process shared many characteristics with storytelling and, as was noted above, was based on a three day residential. Dialogue encounters did differ from storytelling in that they were designed to allow participants to explore the issues that underlie their stories of conflict and that underlie the conflict itself.

As the commentary on the DVD articulates it :

“...It is in dialogue that diverse stories, having been told, can get to grips with each other.”

The **Journeys Out** project was designed to recruit 16-20 community leaders drawn from selected interface areas in North Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Participants were recruited through an open application process which ran over the summer of 2007 and 20 participants were selected to take part in the project over the period September 2007 to June 2008. As part of the selection process applicants were required to show how they could meet a range of criteria including significant experience of community leadership, the fact that they lived, worked or had significant experience of community leadership in the areas targeted by the project, that they were willing to share their experiences of community leadership to be researched, be able to commit to up to 14 days of their time over the life of the project, and be willing to travel locally and internationally and finally to be interested in and willing to work in cross/intercommunity frameworks.

The 20 participants and 8 mentors were drawn roughly 50-50 from the Protestant\Unionist\Loyalist and Catholic\Republican\Nationalist communities and were selected to include both those with a long history of living and working through the conflict, and younger emerging leaders.

The participants supported by mentors were involved in a range of activities over the life of the project including

- leading a workshop in relation to what has happened in terms of dealing with the past in their local area;
- intensive training in peer mediation, peer education, and facilitation skills;
- an international residential at the International Leadership Institute in Jordan to share and discuss different local and international approaches to dealing with the past;
- leading a workshop to share learning from this residential with local communities;
- a seminar with policymakers to share learning from the project;
- designing a Journeys Out Training Module and contributing to the piloting of this module at Incore's International Summer School (also in Jordan);

- and being video interviewed for inclusion in a protected, web-based archive of community leaders' journeys from conflict to participation.

The project therefore deployed a wide range of methods of work and engagement. These included action research whereby INCORE researchers conducted brief 'audits' of how local communities had 'dealt with the past'. Findings from audits then provided the basis for discussions at community workshops. International residentials were used to provide the 'safe space' and stimulus for dialogue and story-telling. Video-interviews were used to generate data for INCORE research on the role of community leadership in dealing with the past, but more importantly also constituted an entry point for developing relationships between researchers and individual participants, and helped build individuals' confidence to engage with difficult issues in group settings.

International structured learning was used to motivate and stimulate reflection on dealing with the past by Northern Ireland participants, for example, through a visit to the Holocaust Museum in Israel and the involvement of international participants from South Africa, Sri Lanka and the Middle East in the residentials. As participants noted "the input from the international members of the group enriched the overall residential and provided a measuring stick by which to examine progress in NI's own process of dealing with the past" (R01/08), "I'm left with the re-enforced realization of the misconception that one successful healing model, e.g. South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, can be applied to another situation" (R01/08).

The project also provided practical skills training in mentoring and facilitation, and built participants' capacity to lead training around 'dealing with the past' by assisting them to lead community workshops and deliver components of the INCORE Journeys Out Summer School module. The project also promoted peer-to-peer learning by ensuring each participant was supported by a mentor on an ongoing basis.

The participants on the **Healing Through Remembering** project included a range of people already associated with HTR such as former Loyalist and Republican combatants, former British Army and police officers, as well as individuals from different faith backgrounds, victims groups, academics and community activists. In addition, as was noted above, an overlapping range of groups originally identified as 'hard to reach', 'marginalised' and 'uninvolved' (in terms of ongoing debates on dealing with the past) were targeted by the programme. These included elements of the Unionist\Loyalist community including the Loyal Orders and related Orange traditions, ex-members of the security forces, disparate elements of the republican/nationalist community not currently involved in debates on the issue in

those communities. In addition, other 'marginalised voices' which were targeted by the project including those with less obvious access to the political system such as those living in interface and deprived areas, women, youth, older people, people with disabilities and ethnic minority groupings.<sup>35</sup> Finally those defined as 'uninvolved' in ongoing debates on the past were targeted including those who lived in middle class areas, elements of the business sector, as well as, institutions, and church based organisations.

The major activities associated with the HTR project were the practical outreach to participants through a series of 'conversation workshops' and a major conference as well as the simultaneous development and production of related resource materials.

Direct engagement with participants included:

- the organisation of six residential (attended by 84 people) by six different sub groups associated with HTR.
- The organisation of 33 workshops which were attended by 406 participants which focused upon a range of personal, communal and societal issues relating to dealing with the past.
- A further 20 discussions held with 17 different groups.
- A conference (80 attendees approximately) "Whatever You Say, Say Something" at which the conversational resource (discussed below) was launched.
- Partnership links were also developed with academic institutions involved in dealing with the past including the Institute of Irish Studies at Queens University Belfast (which co-hosted a seminar series) and an LLM Conference which was co-organised with the University of Ulster.

The development of relevant resources included the augmentation and 'road-testing' of those already associated with HTR as well the writing and production of new materials. This process involved existing staff, an outreach and training officer, existing members of different HTR sub groups and 'key fieldworkers' both in the production of resources and in the process of outreach to the identified target groups. The materials developed are outlined in the resources section below.

In principle, the **Trademark project** "was directed at those who have been negatively affected by the conflict but who have thus far been on the fringes of the peace process generally and in particular targeted peace and reconciliation initiatives." The project had a wide range of engagement with groups and a number

of one-off discussions. However, the main work of the project was with trade union activists and two major engagements with community activists in Craigavon and South Belfast.

In working with groups, the distinctive approach of the Trademark project was 'structured learning' with considerable input from tutors rather than a more passive or exploratory approach. Trademark has developed OCN accredited courses on community leadership and political leadership and modules from these were delivered as part of the project. This approach was not necessarily didactic but rather it involved using these resources as a prompt to get people engaged in learning, as opposed to a simple passing on of "knowledge." Trademark describes their approach as follows:

"The method of our engagement is that of a 'critical dialogue' which allows individuals to question accepted and even cherished beliefs in a secure environment so that a genuine learning process is given room to sustain itself beyond the length of programme itself."

After discussing various forms of teaching, the Trademark report goes on to say:

"These methodological approaches are underpinned by an approach known as **critical pedagogy** and it is particularly relevant to the themes of equality and good relations as it refers to teaching and learning practices that are designed to raise learners' critical consciousness regarding discrimination, exclusion and oppressive social conditions."

The modules covered in different encounters included :

1. Understanding history and the construction of identity
2. Dealing with the past – truth and perception
3. The absence of an agreed historical narrative
  - What is right not who is right
4. The challenges of transitional justice
  - Peace agreements
  - Amnesties or justice?
  - Truth and reconciliation or peace and reconciliation?
  - Equality and human rights

## 5. Anti-sectarianism

The **Womens Resource and Development Agency** project engaged with ten mainly community-based groups of women from across Northern Ireland. The project noted that it was broadly useful to designate groups as Protestant or Catholic but the reality was more complex than those designations suggest, with some groups having a small proportion of members from “the other community”. One group was entirely mixed. Similarly, while it had been useful to designate groups rural and urban, there were also complexities within this designation with some “rural” women living in housing estates that were not that different from urban equivalents.

The project encompassed 116 women of all ages, from teens to eighties, with a large proportion of participants having experienced the recent Troubles from its beginnings. Participants comprised women who might be described as being from “working class” communities, as well as women from “middle class” communities.

The groups were identified through the Women’s Centres Regional Partnership and then contacted by WRDA staff and the project was explained. The WRDA used their team of trained Community Facilitators to engage in the practical exercise with the groups. These are women who have experience and qualifications in community-based training and facilitation. They facilitated three structured workshops for each group.

The workshops used a form of experiential learning. Exercises included a Group Timeline and a Personal Timeline. The former identified the key events in the course of the Troubles and the latter encouraged participants to remember and record their own experiences at those times. As the project report notes:

“Whilst specific events were happening in the community, bombings, shootings, husbands and fathers being arrested, ‘normal life’ was carrying on. Women were attending school, finding work, getting married, starting and raising families.”

The workshops also involved exercises exploring specific gender roles and designed to examine contemporary issues facing women. After the workshops group were combined (usually bringing together Protestant and Catholic, urban and rural) in a residential. These gave an opportunity to compare and contrast the issues that they had identified to be relevant for women today. Complementary therapy was also available to provide a relaxing atmosphere and to acknowledge the contribution of the women participating.

The project culminated in a conference of all the participants in the project at which the draft final report was presented and a keynote speech given by Cynthia Cockburn on the Transition to Peace and the Transformation of Gender Relations. An external consultant evaluated the project process and wrote up the final report.

As was noted above, the participants on the **EX-Pow Consortium** project were all former prisoners or ex-combatants previously affiliated to five different Republican and Loyalist factions – the Provisional IRA, the Official IRA, the UVF, the UDA and the INLA. Their involvement in this process was through different ex-prisoner support organisations which work with former prisoners from each of these organisations.

The project was co-ordinated by Coiste na N-Iarchimí, the umbrella organisation for former Provisional IRA prisoners, and included a project worker from each of the other organisations. Organisations were represented by two individuals at each Consortium meeting. The project was shaped by a detailed agreement negotiated by the different ex-prisoner organisations. The different organisations chose appropriate individuals from their respective ex-prisoner and ex-combatant communities to attend the broader meetings, seminars, training events and conferences. While the groups brought in different organisations and individuals to provide discussions on discreet topics (including, as discussed above, representatives from the Orange Order), much of the discussions on dealing with the past were facilitated by the Ulster People's College. The topics considered were agreed between the different groups.

One of the most interesting aspects of the work engaged in by the groups was where individuals from different backgrounds led discussions on the different past related events from their own perspective. Thus for example, different members of the various Republican organisations facilitated discussions on the history of Republicanism, the reasons behind various Republican splits and feuds. Similarly Loyalist members provided personal accounts of the historical origins of the different Loyalist organisations. Other themed discussions included personal storytelling and structured seminars led by the participants on 'origins and motivation for involvement in political struggle', 'exploring personal and communal identities', 'the changing role of ex-prisoner groupings', 'is the conflict over?', 'truth recovery' and a more general residential on 'dealing with the past'. The Consortium also made a significant impact at a number of events and conferences where the practical and symbolic contribution of former enemies engaged in collective efforts to deal with the past was widely viewed as extremely powerful. As one international

delegate who attended the “Whither Now After the War” Conference at Queens (at which a number of the Consortium spoke) told the evaluators:

“It really is quite remarkable to see these guys who were once deadly enemies making real efforts to deal with the past in a constructive way. They weren’t pretending to be the best of buddies. But nonetheless there was obviously a real effort to accommodate their different perspectives. It really was quite impressive.”

### Footnotes

- 35 For example, one group which works with people with disabilities completely unrelated to the conflict began the process somewhat dubious as to the relevance of the topic to the group members. However, once discussions were commenced, the group leaders were surprised as to the hidden relevance of ‘past related issues’ to the members and the interest which the topic engendered.

## thematic lessons concerning dealing with the past methodologies

The discussions above demonstrate the diversity of methods of work engaged in by the six projects. Each entails some positive methodologies that might be emulated by other initiatives attempting to deal with the past. A strength of this Limited Call is also that each project was committed to creating practical materials that would allow replication or adaptation of their model of work. These materials are discussed below. In this section, however, we examine some key themes that arise from our analysis of the method of work of the six different projects.

### Creating A 'Safe' Environment

No-one can doubt that exploring a violent past conflict, especially with those who had direct experience of that conflict, is a difficult and potentially risky enterprise. Given such sensitivities, real care must be taken to ensure the physical, psychological and emotional safety and security of all participants. It is only when participants feel properly secure in such settings that a substantial and meaningful discussion on dealing with the past can ensue. All the projects engaged directly with this issue.

As was noted above, **Healing Through Remembering** specifically reached out to marginalised or hitherto uninvolved sectors. In some of the “hard to reach” groupings HTR encountered an initial suspiciousness and reluctance to engage – in particular concerning ‘ownership’ of the topic. The credentials of HTR as an organisation were questioned and some participants required clarification of HTR’s position on various issues and also wished to clarify the religious and political make-up of the organisation. From our perspective, these suspicions reflected that the project was indeed seeking to engage with those who had not yet played a significant role in discussions on dealing with the past rather than ‘preaching to the converted’. In most cases, however, this initial suspicion gave way to an overriding interest in the subject, once its nature and relevance were explained.

One key strategy used by HTR to encourage a sense of safety and security amongst participants was to use facilitators that were generally known to and/or acceptable to the groups being engaged. In addition, HTR had quite a structured approach to the different topics explored, spelling out very clearly the nature and scope of the of the discussion to ensue. In the Conversation Guide developed by the project there is particular emphasis on a clear laying out the nature of the subject, the themes to be discussed and the parameters of those discussions from the beginning so as to avoid any “surprises” and to reassure people that they will not be “ambushed” during discussion.

As discussed, the **Towards Understanding and Healing** process was directed towards individual experience and encounters between disparate individuals, all of whom have some direct experience of the conflict. It was also open-ended, being prepared to follow stories and dialogue where they might lead. TUH also placed great emphasis upon creating safe conditions for the work. At a focus group of organisers and participants attended by the evaluators they were asked what they felt was the key lesson in dealing with difficult issues. The response was:

“Creating an environment of trust and safety – people need to understand the parameters of the discussion. Dealing with fears and expectations and signing up to guiding principles – all this stuff is crucial.”

As noted above, participants were visited by staff before a residential. They were made aware of the general background of other participants in the storytelling – again so they could make informed decisions and avoid being made to feel awkward or wrong-footed. In addition, as noted above, all participants were required to sign up to an agreed set of guiding principles. In addition, and importantly, the opportunity for follow-up visits and aftercare for those who needed it was also available. Again, in a similar fashion to HTR, setting the parameters on the discussion was viewed as an important part of feeling safe for TUH. As one participant put it to the evaluators ;

“You need also to trust the wisdom of the group – a group that has bonded has greater wisdom than the individuals. You must suspend your own views and opinions.”

Similarly the project DVD states:

“People think that bringing together people with different experiences of the troubles would be dangerous in that they might seek revenge or take out their anger on each other. In fact the opposite is the case – it is those experiences of the troubles that bond people together.”

At a residential event attended by the evaluators, some participants gave their views on the success of the project in managing this aspect of safety and managing difficult conversations:

“We knew we would be safe – we would be treated with respect and not judged.

“Because of the preparation we knew we would be safe – we had confidence in the people managing the process.”

“There is learning here – the dignified way it was done. Small groups are the best way to do this – you can’t do it in big groups. The fact that the facilitators were highly experienced and trained was also important.”

As part of the creation of a safe space and indeed more broadly in terms of the development of meaningful discussions, TUH organisers and participants stressed in particular the central importance of using residential. As one participant argued;

“It takes a while to get over shyness and so on – another reason for residential. The preparation is very important – a lot of personal, one to one contact is involved.”

A TUH organiser added:

“We must also challenge this notion of junkets – this cannot be done without a residential situation. Trust is built up at residential on the basis of shared experiences. Deep contact would not be possible without a process like this. In a classroom situation it is difficult to deal with controversial issues – a residential is necessary.”

That said, TUH organisers also stressed that however good the preparation, however clear the guidelines and professional the management of the event and follow-up, there was inevitably some risk involved. As one organiser put it “The first residential there was huge risk taking and people had to be carefully chosen.” The TUH view was that:

“there is a shortage of spaces where these issues can be unpicked safely. There is also an assumption that anyone can do this and that is dangerous, that is one reason why the resource is being developed.”

The general view was: “The risk taking paid off again and again.” As evaluators we were impressed by the clarity of TUH and the other organisations thinking on the risks involved and the related need for carefully planning the process from inception to delivery and follow through.

As was discussed previously **Trademark** was focused more upon an explicitly political and structural approach to dealing with the past including challenging sectarian and racist ideas – even amongst the participants and linking the past to current political developments. Trademark’s perspective was that such an approach was actually part of the process of creating a safe and secure space for participants, trying to focus on the links between politics and memory rather than individual feelings and mediating emotions through the structure of a politics-based

dialogue. One focus group of trade unionists who had been through the process agreed with such an approach:

“A major benefit was the fact that the issues were up-fronted – even if you felt uncomfortable at the outset it wasn’t too long before you were in the middle of it. If you avoid offending people you can’t get to the real issues. It was actually easier to get involved once the hard issues were on the table.”

One community activist commented:

“The sort of guys I know are pretty open minded but have never had the chance to discuss things and this course would encourage that.”

The **Womens Resource and Development Agency** project used a number of different methods to ensure that their groups of women felt safe in discussing personal experiences. The all-woman nature of the meetings was one obviously important factor. Another was the fact that project used experienced ‘community facilitators’ to help create a safe environment in which women could remember their past and share it with others. These facilitators brought their skills to bear in dealing with potentially controversial issues such as terminology (e.g. whether a group preferred to use the term “Troubles” or “Conflict” - groups were able to use their own terminology) or the recording of the women’s input.

The reporting aspect was also important. There was a need to record the women’s memories and opinions to provide the basic data of the project but in an accurate and appropriate way. The facilitators took notes of sessions, typed them up and then shared them with participants in the groups at their next session. In this way, the record of the process was accountable to the participants. Again, this was a particular method that might have wider application.

The **Journeys Out** project also used a number of mechanisms to create a safe environment. Like HTR, some suspicions about the intentions behind the project had to be overcome. Particularly important was the project’s emphasis on ‘dealing with the past’ as a tool for positive transformation community development - rather than as an end itself. The selection procedure for participants involving one-to-one interviews and agreement of Memorandums of Understanding also ensured participants understood exactly what they were getting involved in and committing to. Many of the participants – especially the Journeys Out mentors – were experienced community leaders and therefore had some prior experience of facilitating cross-community engagement and difficult conversations which the project was able to draw upon. The international residentials were also particularly valuable in providing safe space and enabling participants to explore local issues from new perspectives and in new frameworks. Finally, the project management

structure was important. INCORE's partners Intercomm and PRG acted as community interlocutors – engaging with participants on an ongoing (sometimes daily) basis, defusing tensions, continually assessing participants' progress and ensuring any issues or problems arising were addressed. The project's Steering Group involving all of the Journeys Out mentors and representatives from all of the communities and constituencies targeted by the project also proved to be an important mechanism.

Finally with regard to the **EX-POW consortium**, again significant attention was paid to ensure that participants felt comfortable and secure. Obviously given the background of the participants, their personal security was a significant factor. Many of the set piece seminars and discussion groups were held in comparatively 'neutral' South Belfast. However, other meetings and discussions did take place in predominantly Republican and Loyalist areas but there appeared significant awareness of the need for participants to feel comfortable about their personal security in such circumstances. The work of consortium was underpinned by quite a detailed written agreement between the groups including some basic ground rules on how the discussion sessions, meetings etc should be structured and conducted and what to do in the event of any disputes. During the sessions facilitated by the Ulster Peoples College these ground rules (concerning respect for the speaker, letting people finish their contributions uninterrupted etc) were restated. In addition, part of the efforts to get people to feel safe in their discussion was a ground rule that individuals would not discuss 'operational details' of previous events in which they had been involved. This was designed to allay concerns that participants might compromise themselves, former colleagues or their respective organisations or indeed unnecessarily inflame members of oppositional groups.<sup>36</sup>

### The Use Of Personal Stories

Four of the projects used the telling of personal stories as one of their main methods of work.

As we have noted the **Towards Understanding and Healing** project focused on storytelling as a form of encounter between diverse individuals who had been involved in the conflict. They distinguish between "storytelling" and "dialogue," with the latter being characterised as a more issue-based reprise of individual experiences. We have noted above the theoretical perspective that has led TUH to adopt this method but some of the participants in the project at least seem to feel that storytelling fulfilled some therapeutic needs amongst those who have been marked by the conflict. For example, a contributor on the TUH DVD posed the question: "what would encourage people to break their silence of 30 years?" The answer was:

“it is actually quite simple – if you can provide the safe space people will talk because they need to get rid of that silence. People describe it as this awful pressure in your gut – that you do want to tell people what you have experienced.”

This idea that the experience of conflict creates a pressure that can only be released by telling a personal story is a striking insight. For some people at least, it is clear that the experience is personally beneficial. One participant said: “I found it all very humbling, emotional and very helpful.” Another called it “a life-enriching experience.” A participant on the DVD said: “Once I realised I had something to say, it opened up a whole new life for me.”

The **Towards Understanding and Healing** project used a number of particular techniques to ensure that people were willing and able to bring their emotional experiences to the surface. Facilitators began the residential sessions by telling about themselves personally as well as professionally – to convince participants that they will be in good hands. In the opening session, people were encouraged to write down their hopes and fears for the residential and then these were shared. The DVD commentary notes that apprehension about the residential could be seen as the first shared experience. Then participants engaged in a “Bead Exercise” – where they would be required to string together differently coloured and shaped beads to represent elements of their story. This appeared to be a surprisingly effective non-verbal, visual and symbolic way for people to express themselves. The project literature also refers to the notion of “breaking the silence” or in other instances to accessing experiences of the conflict that may be “parcelled up” or contained in blackly humoured anecdotes.

The **Journeys Out** project used storytelling in two ways. First, during the project residencies, participants gave accounts of their personal experiences of the conflict. Second, some participants also gave video accounts which were then archived. The entire project was predicated on the concept of community leaders having experienced a “journey” out of conflict and into positive participation in the development of a new society. As was noted above, the purpose of the storytelling was not only for the benefit of the individual telling of experiences but also to pass on the learning out of those experiences to a new generation of community leaders and more generally for those accessing the video archive in the future. These lessons have been compiled in a full research report (see Resources section for further details) which explores themes such as why individuals moved into community leadership roles and the costs such moves often entail, and the need to acknowledge the specific experience of women.

The **Women and the Conflict** project could be seen as a group or collective form of storytelling. The basic process was one of collective remembering and of individuals contributing stories of their personal experiences in the group discussions. However, the process did not simply concern the involvement of individuals in constructing a narrative. It was structured by the concepts of the Group Timeline and the Personal Timeline, designed to relate individual experiences to the “historical” events of the time. The individual participants clearly felt the experience was positive with evaluation returns showing that they relished the opportunity to tell their stories. The project Final Report also noted that while it was certainly not the case for all participants, for some women the emotions aroused may have created subsequent difficulties:

“Many women were satisfied to participate and tell their stories, and indeed some reported finding the sessions therapeutic. However, some participants felt that revisiting experiences of loss and hurt was at times difficult and painful. While groups were supplied with a list of potential support and counselling services, some women felt that some form of more direct access to counselling support would have been of great benefit to them following the sessions.”

It should be noted, however, that only one group made this comment and the reality is that, given the dearth of available counselling, sign-posting to relevant agencies is the most that could be expected from the project.

### **The Gender Specific Approach**

Whilst a number of the projects explored gender issues and ‘dealing with the past’ from a gender perspective, the Women and the Conflict project was the only project to adopt a gender specific approach. As we have noted, an assumption was that women’s experience of the conflict had distinctive aspects and required particular approaches to facilitate its expression. Some of the more general findings of the project relating to the role of women during the conflict will be noted later. As regards the process, however, the evaluation section of the Project Final Report noted:

“The evaluation materials revealed that the majority of women participating in the programme valued it immensely, and comments were overwhelmingly positive. The aspects of the project which women valued most were the opportunity to tell their story, or even a part of it; the opportunity to listen to other women; satisfaction that attention was being given to women’s role over the last four decades, and that a report was to be produced; the hope that the report would be noted and women’s concerns taken seriously by politicians and policy-makers ; increased knowledge about the extent to which women were impacted by the conflict ; appreciation of the strength and resilience

of themselves, their mothers, sisters, daughters, friends and neighbours ; welcoming the recognition that this kind of work is needed.”

There can be little doubt that there are strengths in an all-woman approach to dealing with the past both in the process and in the conclusions reached. It remains an open question whether a male specific project would also be useful.

### Using International Experiences.

As noted above a number of the projects including **Healing Through Remembering** and **Towards Understanding and Healing** incorporated relevant international examples into their project materials. However The **Journeys Out** project was the only one to not only explicitly use input from international sources but to locate a major part of the project's activity in another conflict zone. The opportunity for “a two way process of sharing learning from Northern Ireland and gaining knowledge in particular from international participants” motivated many participants to take part in the programme – as the illustrative quote below suggests.

Well I hope to learn how other people dealt with their conflicts you know. Going over to Jordan and learning how they are dealing with it because its still going on over there and how they are dealing with young people. I hope to get something out of it that I can use in my own work you know and I maybe hope that I can bring something over to them as well you know.

The international dimension of the pilot project proved critical in terms of developing relationships between the NI group; broadening participants perspectives on ‘dealing with the past’; and facilitating peer-to-peer exchange/ learning: “The input from the international members of the group enriched the overall residential and provided a measuring stick by which to examine progress in NI’s own process of dealing with the past” (R01/08). The unanticipated intensive story telling that took place between participants also owed much to the ‘safe space’ offered by the international environment, as well as the impact of participants having previously listened to some of the experiences of their international peers. Facilitators and participants could also ask “awkward questions” about aspects of their own past once introduced to a theme through an international example.

### A “Political Approach” to Dealing with the Past

All of the groups inevitably discussed politics in considering the past conflict in Northern Ireland. For example, amongst the **EX-Pow Consortium**, the political context which led to the outbreak of violence in the late 1960s, and indeed in earlier periods of conflict, was a key theme for all of the participants. In addition,

the ex-prisoners and former combatants held substantial discussions on the particular political circumstances that sustained the conflict for so long and indeed whether the 'war' could be truly understood as being 'over'.

Similarly, as was discussed above, Trademark's distinctive take on dealing with the past (in particular given their explicit trade union and socialist perspective) privileged politics rather than the feelings of the participants in their discussions. Trade union activists felt that this political approach was useful as the following comments made at a focus group demonstrate:

"Coming out of the discussions was the way in which sectarianism conflates political positions – the politics within each may have been very diverse but they were overridden by sectarian hegemony."

"Politics can be seen as a dirty word and because of the sensitivities people here avoid it. To look at the issues of the past honestly and to get them to question events, you have to come up with real politics – the common politics that people all over the world use. Once you're in a tribe you have a false identity and a false culture. This process got you to question that identity. It is a massively important and genuine and honest approach to it. When you take a political view it helps and continues a process rather than just giving an emotional catharsis."

Community activists from a Loyalist background also appreciated the explicitly political approach adopted by the organisation:

"This programme is coming from Trademark – a socialist entity – we call ourselves socialists and unionists in the pub! It's like a history class but from no one angle – basically we are being asked to think – which is a problem in unionism because we were always browbeaten."

"I never knew anything about left and right except which foot you kicked with! I think it was interesting to look at UK politics and then at here and how they all link. We also looked at the parties 30 years ago and now and the swing in some of them."

The idea of learning political lessons from the past was also appreciated by trade unionists, as some of the further comments from a focus group demonstrate:

"One of the things an exercise like this does is show up what are stereotypical views of the other community – yet historically it may have been different. How did positions change over history? What can you do to move that position on – to develop a process to bring communities together. At least to have an understanding of each other's position is a major gain."

The positive responses of participants to this approach underline that there is undoubtedly a place for such an explicitly political approach to engaging in discussions on the past. However, the extent to which this approach is transferable to other organisations or projects and the possible impact of different political approaches are questions that remain open.

### Diversity in Participation

All the projects involved a wide range of participants and we have explored the cross-community elements in an earlier section. As discussed above, the work of Healing Through Remembering has always been characterised by an extremely diverse range of participants – underlining that such engagement is both possible and highly productive. In a similar vein, Towards Understanding and Healing also explicitly brought together ex-combatants from a range of “sides” as well as victims of violence in this programme. Of course many ex-combatants and former members of the security forces have themselves experienced violence, loss and victimisation and the inadequacy of simplistic monochromatic notions of perpetrators and victims rarely stands up to close analysis in any conflicted society. However, some of the feelings of participants about this deliberate strategy were explored in a focus group and their comments may have wider resonance when this kind of diverse participation is initiated in projects designed to deal with past.

One ex-combatant participant at a TUH focus group addressed directly the issue of the perpetrator/victim axis :

“I found it difficult because I would have been perceived as the enemy – but my circumstances were that I had a brother killed by the army so walking into their presence and hearing their story was difficult – would I be able to control my anger? But I have stayed with it because through the exchange of stories you realise that their hurt is as deep as mine.”

However, in spite of trepidation, participants generally found the process positive:

“When I touched the water it felt right to be there. People weren’t making judgements on you.”

“I felt challenged by the diversity of people involved – I was anxious but the experience was positive.”

Another participant explained:

“What was really important for me was that it was not just cross-community – it involved ex-British soldiers, relatives of victims, ex-paramilitary members and so on. It was an extraordinary blend – it wasn’t simply prod and taig. I found it

amazing to meet the mother and father of a British soldier and being able to have a conversation with them – I wouldn't have thought that was possible but we made a connection at the human level. We are seeking an assurance that people are not demons that there was some rationality behind what was done.”

Again these experiences would suggest that this style of engagement is both possible and valuable but that great care needs to be taken in the preparation and execution of projects designed to bring together such diverse participants.

Interestingly, Journeys Out found that few project participants initially self-identified themselves as ‘displaced persons’, ‘victims’ or ‘survivors’, yet during video-interviews nearly every participant documented stories in this regard. This suggests the current terms of the dealing with the past are excluding a significant number of people who are ready to engage in these issues but perhaps in a different way – the project sought to fill this gap through its focus on ‘dealing with the past’ for positive transformation and community development rather than looking back.

## Evaluation

As was noted above, in addition to this current evaluation, several of the projects used evaluative techniques as part of their own programme development, implementation and review. Of course, in one sense, since all were mandated to produce transferable, useful resources at the end, the process of the projects was about evaluating and testing a model of work. Some of the evaluative methods used by the projects may have wider applicability.

The **Trademark** project included an innovative pilot of an impact assessment research tool called IPSEUS. Trademark acquired a licence for the software that allows attitude change analysis. The aim was to design and implement an IPSEUS identity instrument to enable assessment of the impact of the programme on a few participants. In depth case studies on a very small sample of three project participants were carried out utilising the theory of Identity Structure Analysis to assess identity parameters such as positive and negative role models, empathetic and conflicted identification with salient figures and groups within the context under which the project operated. The research process began with workshop sessions with project staff to inform the design of the IPSEUS identity instruments. Following training project staff administered the instruments to participants. The lead researcher then conducted follow-up interviews with these participants to document their personal histories, assess the impact of external events and to provide feedback on outcomes of the identity instrument. The results from the IPSEUS research are provided in a separate report entitled ‘Identity and Dealing with the Past’. The premise was that changes in identity are likely to occur as a

result of participation in a reconciliation project, and that these changes, whether positive or negative, can be determined through the application of Identity Structure Analysis.

While we would be extremely hesitant to overstate the significance of these findings given the very small size of the sample, the project evaluation claims that “On a number of specific occasions clear evidence of programme impact was identified in relation to a re-appraisal of views and values particularly in relation to the ‘other’ community with an increase in empathy and solidarity with working class Protestant communities.” We did find the juxtaposition of this personal of this personal identity evaluative methodology with the projects “political approach” to dealing with the past interesting. No doubt any interested parties who wished to explore the utility of this methodology further would almost certainly want to use a much larger sample size with attitudinal follow-up studies over longer periods of time. In fact, Trademark is now embarking on a longitudinal comparative survey.

The **Women in Conflict** project utilised a consultant evaluator, Helen McLaughlin, as a constituent part of the project design and as the author of the Final Report. The Report commented: “In a project of this nature, it was considered important to evaluate throughout. Evaluation occurred at three points in the programme:

- The Interaction Institute for Social Change (Boston) Plus / Delta evaluation model was employed at the end of each session. This meant that each group was asked what they felt had worked well in the current session (plus) and what they would like to be done differently (delta) in the next session. This feedback was recorded by facilitators each week.
- Each individual participant completed a confidential three-page evaluation form at the final workshop session.
- A focus-group type interview, based on structured questions, was held with each participating group in a residential setting after completing the programme.

The project incorporated the report on the findings of the Plus/Delta evaluation process into its overall final report. The project also made a DVD, in which some participants, some facilitators, the WRDA operational manager and Cynthia Cockburn, their expert on international conflict resolution, spoke. This was shown at the launch of the report and provided a very vivid flavour of the project.

**Journeys Out** project was grounded in an action evaluation framework – focusing on ‘dealing with the past’ in order to promote community development and transformation. This involved academics working with participants to identify issues

and obstacles in relation to 'dealing with the past' in the local areas targeted by the project – using tools such as community audits - and supporting participants as they led workshops to begin to address these. The whole project could therefore be described as evaluative. Various assessments and reports were produced throughout the project including community audits, summaries of survey results, workshop reports and a major research report compiling 'lessons' from the video-archive. These outputs were continually fed into project discussions and debates, and used to further tailor project activities. It is also envisaged that a number of academic articles will be produced in the project's aftermath.

Again the **Healing Through Remembering** project utilised evaluative techniques throughout its process. In particular the project held "conversational workshops" with the various groups participating in the outreach process and the consultants and the outreach worker extracted and wrote up a number of themes as a result. In addition, the workshops were used to pilot and develop a Conversational Guide for Dealing with the Past.

Finally given the collective nature of the **Ex-Pow Consortium**, project constantly sought the views of the participants from the different ex-prisoner organisations to ensure that all were happy with the choice of themes address, the delivery of the discussions and the continued development of the programme of work.

### Footnotes

- 36 For example, one group which works with people with disabilities completed unrelated to the conflict began the process somewhat dubious as to the relevance of the topic to the group members. However, once discussions were commenced, the group leaders were surprised as to the hidden relevance of 'past related issues' to the members and the interest which the topic engendered.

## resources for the future

The Limited Call asked projects to develop resources for the future which would assist in transferring the learning to future initiatives designed to deal with the past. All the projects fulfilled this objective, though in different ways. It is not part of the purpose of this evaluation to make a judgement on each of these products, though, for what it is worth, the evaluators consider all the outputs to be of a high standard and useful for the future. Below, we give a short account of the nature of the resources for reference. In discussions with one of the projects – Towards Understanding and Healing – it became apparent that a number of important issues had arisen and we asked the project to write up some of them. We include an edited version of these comments as they raise matters of general concern for future projects which develop or utilise resources for dealing with the past.

As noted above, the Healing Through Remembering project produced a comprehensive Conversation Guide on Dealing with the Past. This is both a practical tool for dialogue and a useful information resource for the whole subject of dealing with the past.

The experience and conclusions of the WRDA project were recorded in a final report: *Women and the Conflict: Talking about the "Troubles" and Planning For The Future*. This was prepared by a consultant by attending the residential, talking to participants, obtaining feedback from facilitators, using flipchart notes from workshop sessions, participant timelines and evaluations. The Report was designed as a basic record of the issues that this group of women had identified in the course of an extensive process including the impact on family life, the impact on communities and issues today. It is an attractive and well-designed publication and was widely disseminated amongst women's groups, organisations dealing with the past and those promoting human rights. It was launched by Jeffery Donaldson in his capacity as junior minister and was highly praised. In a thoughtful gesture, all the groups who came to the conference had group photos taken by a professional photographer. These were framed and sent to the groups by WRDA, and were very much appreciated by the groups. One group member died suddenly shortly afterwards and the group told WRDA how much they valued the fact that they had a photo to remember her with the group.

The main resource developed by Trademark was a project report. This detailed the project activity, listing the groups worked with and the main conclusions of the participants. Although it is not a resource for future trainers, it does explain the distinctive approach adopted by the Trademark programme. The IPSEUS report, noted above, was also published.

INCORE has developed a web-based archive of 30 video-interviews conducted with the participants in the project. A major research report has been published identifying key lessons and findings from the archive. Audits of how local communities have begun to 'deal with the past' and some of the outstanding issues and obstacles they face were also conducted and compiled in a report. Brief reports of the series of workshops led by community leaders as part of the project have also been produced. Reports of both international residentials are available. A Journeys Out training module involving contributions from many project participants was also piloted at the Incore Summer School in August 2008. The evaluations of the module were positive. All of these resources are available to interested parties.

Like TUH, INCORE has faced a number of challenges in ensuring the research involved in the Journeys Out project was conducted sensitively and met participants' requirements in terms of confidentiality. Participants were fully briefed about the research process and what would and would not be disclosed, they also signed release forms. The web-based archive is password protected and anonymity in other materials and publications has been ensured whenever it has been requested. Such care has been key to the project's success in beginning to bridge the historical gap between academia and practitioners in Northern Ireland.

Towards Understanding and Healing has developed three interlinked forms of resources for the future – a training manual and resource pack on Story Telling and Dialogue, a DVD explaining the process and an edited collection Stories in Conflict: Towards Understanding and Healing with chapters on different issues involved in dealing with the past – some specific to the TUH experience and some more general. This collection of articles is designed to explore some of the issues raised by the project in more depth than is possible in training materials. The training manual and DVD are designed to enable the specific approach of storytelling and dialogue to be carried out safely and effectively in the future. As noted above, there were a range of specific difficulties and particular issues raised in the development of these resources and we believe these are of more general applicability for the development of such resources. The following is an edited account of some of them.

### **Responsible editing**

Many mechanisms regarding safety were put into place when preparing to film the DVD and in helping those involved debrief following the DVD filming experience. However, one of the more unexpected elements of safety in relation to the DVD was in editing the footage captured during filming. There were four inherent challenges in the process:

- To protect the truth and integrity of each individual's story, while simultaneously ensuring that overly sensitive or revealing footage be edited out.
- To protect the "realism" of the DVD, given that all those participating had previously participated in TUH storytelling and dialogue events and were relating to each other in a more familiar way than participants new to the process generally would.
- To create a sense of balance in the perspectives and backgrounds represented by participants, when participants themselves often told their stories in such a way that did not reveal the fullness of their background/story.
- To protect the viewer from unexpected and potentially traumatising material.

TUH hopes that these challenges were fully met by the editing process. It is important to note that the editing took months longer than anticipated and that the production company, Morrow Communications, showed unusual commitment to the project through their patience with the editing process. After extensive consultation and discussion, the TUH management committee made the decision to destroy the footage that was not used in the final version of the DVD. It was acknowledged that, while hours of footage made valuable by people's time and effort and willingness to share their stories would be "wasted," it was more important to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Each potential mechanism for safely storing the footage for future use was determined to be safe only in the hands of people committed to doing the right thing in protecting the confidentiality of the stories and of the participants. The potential for someone, perhaps years from now, to get a hold of the footage, to edit it in an exploitative manner, and release it for public consumption was determined to be too great a risk.

### **Responsible Post-Project Management Of Resources**

A debate took place during the year regarding how to appropriately manage the resources once they were produced and ready for public consumption. It was decided that the booklet/information folder and DVD be released to individuals and groups interested in using storytelling and dialogue to help in dealing with the past. However, the TUH management committee decided that the training manual will be tied to actual training provided by the organisation. The pairing of the manual and training was one of the few ways in which the organisation felt that it could ensure that individuals and organisations wanting to facilitate storytelling and dialogue encounters would have the full training necessary to do so. While there is no guarantee that storytelling and dialogue will be done safely and well in every situation, TUH felt that it was important that the information contained in the training manuals would not be put out into the ether where it would not be backed

up by training. The organisation hopes that the training manual will be a tool that will allow storytelling and dialogue to be used safely, sensitively, and well both locally and internationally.

## conclusions

In the body of this report, we have outlined a range of key themes which have informed and underpinned the work of these projects including their rationales for engagement in this style of work, the methodologies deployed and some of the key lessons learned. These are summarised below together with some additional recommendations which we believe can be reasonably drawn from our review of the work of these projects.

### **Utilising International and Local Experience of Transitional Justice From Below**

In many transitional societies local community and civil society organisations which have been directly affected by conflict are increasingly challenging the assumed monopoly of the state or state like 'top down' institutions (such as trials of former human rights abusers or truth commissions) on dealing with the past. This 'from below perspective' in the international arena seeks to maximise community ownership and participation in processes of justice in transition. It does not however equate to an overly romanticised notion of community or civil society. Rather, it suggests that good transitional justice practice in community based settings can emerge through a pragmatic assessment of risks and capacities, and a willingness to complement rather than dismiss the work of top-down institutions.

Although the INCORE project was the only one of these six to actively involve participants and contributors from other countries, other projects included international perspectives. We think it appropriate to draw attention to the importance of such a broader point of view. It is not that it is suitable for international perspectives to be involved in every initiative or circumstance but that the possibility of learning from others' experience is appreciated and understood in all situations. Like every other region in the world, the problems of Northern Ireland require bespoke solutions. It is particularly important however, to avoid exceptionalism and parochialism in a region with a strong sense of local history and, perhaps, a sometimes exaggerated sense of its own significance. More important is the reality that seeing problems and issues in the light of varied international experience, and therefore appreciating that conflict and division are features of many societies, will help demonstrate the possibility of solutions. Obstacles and difficulties which seem absolute when seen only from a local perspective can be understood as contingent and soluble when seen in the context of the broader sweep of human history and experience.

With regard to the local context, in part because an overarching top down institution such as a truth commission was not part of the Agreement, and because of longstanding distrust of state institutions in some communities most affected by violence, Northern Ireland has a long history of precisely such 'bottom

up' activism in dealing with the past. In the areas of grass-roots truth recovery, story telling, forms and content of commemoration and acknowledgement and other key aspects of dealing with the past, considerable indigenous knowledge and experience already exists in Northern Ireland.

In light of the recommendations from the Consultative Group on the Past, and the public consultation which is to follow, these relevant international and local experiences of transitional justice 'from below' (including those of the projects detailed in this evaluation) must be a key element of the overall process designed to deal with the past in and about Northern Ireland.

### **Clarity of Purpose**

In the text we made clear the importance of having clarity about purpose when dealing with the past. Given the sensitivities around the subject – and the importance that the projects being evaluated have given to creating safety – being clear about why an initiative is being undertaken is vital. It is our view that such initiatives should not be commenced out of a vague idea that it is a “good thing” or in pursuit of a generalised metaphor of healing. Projects should be specific about the problem they want to address and its implications for the future.

All the projects studied here were clear about their different rationales for dealing with the past. In particular, all were clear that their underlying aim was to use the past to build the future. Whether the objective was to deal with personal trauma or to explore factors leading to past divisions, the past was approached in order to learn lessons for the future. In that sense, we believe that any future initiatives should be asked to make explicit the link between dealing with the past and peace building for the future.

### **A Nuanced Approach to Cross-Community Work**

We drew attention in the text to the nuanced way in which projects had approached the cross-community aspects of their work. First, there was no simplistic concept of society being divided into two monolithic and competitive blocs. All the projects, to one extent or another, accepted that Northern Ireland society and the elements involved in the conflict were more complicated than that. In particular, some of the projects attempted explicitly to involve the various factions and interests that had been involved in the conflict, including British-based security forces – thus avoid a simplistic bifurcation of the conflict into 'two tribes' or related assumptions concerning the 'neutrality' of the state. In addition, Healing Through Remembering in particular continuously emphasised that the conflict also affected individuals, families and communities in the Republic of Ireland and in Britain and that dealing with the past should include those affected outside the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland.

Second, a perspective which pervaded the projects was not to ignore different identities or to assume that, in some deeper, more worthy sense, they were not important. We found no hint in the work of the projects of an attempt to corral people into a bland, unified identity. On the contrary, there was great emphasis on mutual understanding and encounter on the basis of respect for “where people were coming from”.

Third and related, whilst all of the projects were involved in a cross-community approach to dealing with the past, in some instances there was an associated acknowledgement that some sectors and constituencies were at different levels in terms of their readiness and capacity to engage in these debates. Thus, for example, some projects saw the utility in single identity work before entering more challenging cross-community debates and discussions on these very sensitive topics. We think it important, in the future, that any initiatives dealing with the past make explicit their theory and practice of cross-community encounter and demonstrate a similarly nuanced approach to those demonstrated by the projects reviewed in this report.

### **An Audit Of Current And Past Projects**

As is discussed above, there have been some partial accounts and reviews of the Northern Ireland experience of dealing with the past and Healing Through Remembering is an organisation devoted to bringing together and sharing that experience. INCORE has begun to compile an archive of materials in relation to victims available via the CAIN website and has developed an archive of community leaders' journeys, but as far as we are aware, there is no single central archive of materials produced or an accessible overview of all of the themes involved. This evaluation has attempted to provide a thematic overview for six projects but we think there is value in considering a meta-review of work that would record the experience gained and distil the learning achieved over the past decade and more.

### **The Role of Victims**

None of these projects were specifically focused on victims of the conflict, though several involved such people. This is not therefore the place to expand on the general role of victims in dealing with the past. However, some points are worth making. First, many victims organisations would argue that the voice of victims should be heard in conflict resolution initiatives in general and those dealing with the past in particular. This is indisputable. However, few would contend that victims should be the sole driving force behind such initiatives or that they can have a veto on the nature and objective of particular initiatives. Dealing with the past is a societal responsibility and it is unfair and illogical that those who have been most affected by the conflict should also be expected to shoulder a disproportionate

responsibility for resolving these issues. These projects demonstrate that victims can be a valued and important part of broader social initiatives in dealing with the past.

Second, there are different models of victim participation and it is possible to engage with different “kinds” of victims in the same project. The TUH experience in particular demonstrates that. As has been noted elsewhere, it is important that there is a “mixed economy” of victim engagement.

Third, victims should not be involved as living examples of the evils of conflict – objects of voyeuristic pity – but as active participants in a common exploration of the past. Having said that, victims may well need extra support and projects should ensure that happens.

### **The Role of Ex-combatants and Former Security Force Members**

As was discussed above, a number of the projects included ex-prisoners, former combatants and serving and former members of the security forces as part of the efforts to deal with the past. In the case of the Ex-Pow Consortium, their participants were exclusively made up of former prisoners and ex-combatants. A number of key lessons emerge from the involvement of such individuals in the work of these projects.

First, such individuals and organisations can become an enormously important resource in dealing with the past. It is often precisely because of their past experience of violence that ex-combatants, ex-prisoners and indeed former members of the security forces can engage with their own constituencies on what are often highly difficult and sensitive issues. They can become agents of transition. No-one can doubt that if we are to successfully deal with the past, this will require engagement with those organisations which were involved in violence. It is difficult to see how such discussions can ever take place without the involvement of trusted interlocutors, and it is obvious that ex-combatants or former members of the security forces are those with the most credibility to commence and sustain such conversations.

Second, and more broadly, the willingness of such individuals to engage in public and private dialogue concerning the violence of the past is of huge practical and symbolic importance. If those who have been directly involved in violence can take part in such a process or processes, this represents a significant act of social, moral and political leadership. It may encourage others, not only within their own constituencies but more broadly within our society, of the benefits of engagement in a ‘warts and all’ approach to our past.

Third, the work of ex-combatants in the different projects reviewed in this report speaks to themes which have been much discussed elsewhere – the fact that many ex-combatants, ex-prisoners and members of the security forces have themselves been victims of violence or have experienced violence visited upon their family, friends or community. Real engagement in dealing with the past underlines that simplistic divisions into ‘perpetrator’ and ‘victim’ simply do not capture the realities of past violence in a transitional society.

### **Sensitivity and Safety**

We have drawn particular attention to these aspects in the text of this evaluation. We do not need to rehearse here the importance of these aspects nor the particular ways in which projects have attempted to ensure them. However, we do want to highlight two aspects. First, the credibility of the practitioners or the interlocutors with participants is particularly important. This may be achieved by experience or by training, but trust in facilitators is vital. Second, several of the projects made use of residential experiences. Given the inevitable expense, sometimes one detects a certain cynicism concerning the justifiability of residential as a method of work. However in an area as sensitive as ‘dealing with the past’ we were entirely persuaded by the well made arguments by a number of the projects that such residential were absolutely essential to build trust and make participants feel safe and secure in discussing such issues.

### **The Importance Of Long Term Investment**

These projects were necessarily short term, given the nature of the Limited Call, which was designed to put to productive use an under-spend in the programme funding. We believe that they have achieved a great deal in a short time frame. However, we also believe that a long term investment is necessary in such projects – to unravel the complexities of the past cannot be a short term effort.

### **A Broad Interpretation Of Dealing With The Past**

The diversity of these projects demonstrates that there should be a broad interpretation of what dealing with the past means. It does not just involve victims, it is not solely the business of those who were directly involved in conflict and it is not just about individual experiences or memory. It is not just that there is room for a wide range of projects but that only significant diversity in purpose, method and approach can hope to “deal with” the past in any meaningful way. Victims and perpetrators, combatants and non-combatants, individuals and organisations, the involved and the “uninvolved” must all be engaged if the exercise is to have any meaning.

## A Checklist Of Good Practice?

We cannot distil the learning from these six projects into a simple list, nor would we purport to be able to identify every aspect of good practice for projects dealing with the past. However, given that society in Northern Ireland is considering how to move forward in this area, we think it is worthwhile to try to begin a checklist of good practice for future projects to which others may add. Our preliminary list would include:

- The need to be clear about purpose and to avoid emotional metaphor
- The importance of recognising and stating that experience is often affected by gender, class and other characteristics
- The need to recognise the particular roles and needs of victims
- The need to recognise the particular roles and needs of ex-combatants and former members of the security forces
- The importance of safety and sensitivity and explicit methods to ensure both in planning, implementing and review of any past related programme.
- An explicit theory and practice of cross-community contact that is nuanced and inclusive.
- An awareness and willingness to recognise the value of single identity work when necessary.
- An ongoing commitment to evaluation from the outset and throughout the design, delivery and review process of any project.
- An acknowledgement of the key role of community based engagement in dealing with the past as central to maximising participation and ownership of the debate.

notes

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