



Meeting with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement

9 May 2019

The “Towards a New Common Chapter” project

Opening Statement

Dr Anthony Soares, Acting Director, Centre for Cross Border Studies: On behalf of the Centre for Cross Border Studies and the other organisations here present, I would like to thank the Chair, Vice-Chair and members of this Committee for the invitation to meet with you to discuss the “Towards a New Common Chapter” project, and the resulting New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands.

If the Chair is in agreement, I will begin by saying something about the Centre for Cross Border Studies and the “Towards a New Common Chapter” project before Tara Farrell, Deputy CEO of Longford Women’s Link, Louise Coyle, Director of Northern Ireland Rural Women’s Network, and Eilidh Dickson, Policy and Parliamentary Manager at Engender, tell you about their own organisations and their involvement in the project. But before doing so, I would like to draw your attention to the New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands, of which you should have a copy, as this will be the ultimate focus of our conversation here today.

Since its creation in 1999, the Centre for Cross Border Studies has sought to contribute to the increased social, economic and territorial cohesion of the island of Ireland by promoting and improving the quality of cross-border cooperation. The Centre’s pursuit of its mission has been framed by two primary public policy imperatives: the European Union’s Cohesion Policy with its focus on social, economic and territorial cohesion, and the commitment to cross-border and North-South cooperation integral to Strand 2 of the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

Throughout its existence, therefore, the Centre for Cross Border Studies has been deeply concerned with community, social and economic development and cooperation particularly on the island of Ireland, but also between the island of Ireland, Great Britain and beyond. This concern informed the Centre’s desire to initiate the “Towards a New Common Chapter” project.

The “Towards a New Common Chapter” project began in late 2014, and has been made possible with the generous support of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s Reconciliation Fund. The project has looked to support and inspire grass-roots community commitment to cross-border cooperation in all its dimensions: cooperation at the border, wider North-South cooperation, and East-West cooperation between the island of Ireland and Great Britain. It has worked towards a “bottom-up” vision of the importance and role of cross-border cooperation within and between these islands, whilst also noting the need for community groups to possess the necessary skills and capacity to not only engage in their own cross-border initiatives, but also to enter into more productive dialogues with relevant local, regional and central government policies and strategies.

The result of a series of intensive conversations between a range of community groups from Northern Ireland and Ireland, and more recently with groups from England, Scotland and Wales, is the New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands that you have before you. The New Common Charter represents a shared desire to maintain and strengthen relations between communities across these islands, to work together on issues of common concern, and to advocate for the provision of the requisite structures and means to cooperate within and between these islands in whatever circumstances may arise.

In light of this Committee’s specific role, and given that the sets of relations envisioned within the New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands reflect the core strands of the Good Friday Agreement, we would ask members to support it and work with us in ensuring all administrations across these islands put in place policies and funding structures to encourage cross-border and cross-jurisdictional cooperation at grassroots community level. We hope that today’s meeting will offer an opportunity to discuss in greater detail the work undertaken as part of the Towards a New Common Chapter project, and how members of this Committee and political representatives more generally can champion the objectives of the New Common Charter for Cooperation. These are outlined in more detail in the series of recommendations within the supporting information provided to the Committee. They include how capacity-building measures should be introduced to improve how all levels of government and public bodies across these islands engage with community organisations in the development of policies and strategies with a cross-border or cross-jurisdictional dimension, as well as the need for a comprehensive assessment of the current funding landscape for cross-border and cross-jurisdictional cooperation initiatives aimed at community organisations, and what that landscape should look like going forward. Crucially, we would also like to see concrete support in advancing the work undertaken in the “Towards a New Common Chapter” project, bringing it to a wider audience, and perhaps looking towards a platform for cross-border, cross-jurisdictional dialogue for community organisations that recalls the structure provided for governments and administrations across these islands through the British-Irish Council.

These are issues we may explore further during today’s meeting, but I will hand over now to Tara Farrell of Longford Women’s Link.

Tara Farrell, Deputy CEO, Longford Women’s Link: Longford Women’s Link, a dynamic social enterprise founded in 1995, links women with the resources to make their community safe and equal. Longford Women’s Link identifies and addresses key inequalities that prevent women in Longford achieving their full social and economic potential and our work provides real and tangible

opportunities for women and their families. Services provided to approximately 900 women and 130 children in Longford and the Midlands have enabled women to access a wide range of programmes and supports yielding real benefits for their families and the wider community. We provide women-centred services (Education, Training, Group Support, Childcare, Domestic Violence, Counselling, Female Entrepreneurship, Community Employment, Local Democracy, capacity-building and local/national advocacy). Key to the delivery of our services is our unique model of Integrated Service Delivery.

Longford Women's Link have identified barriers to accessing both local and national decision-making structures which are critical factors in preventing full and equal participation of rural women in their communities. Our flagship programme, the Women's Manifesto Programme is a unique model of local democratic participation which aims to support women in Longford and other counties to play an active and meaningful role in their local decision-making structures. The Women's Manifesto Programme was supported by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust from 2012 until the cessation of the Trust's funding support in Ireland in 2016. Longford Women's Link and the Women's Manifesto Programme have been active members of the *Towards a New Common Chapter* initiative since 2015 and see it as a key all-island programme of sustained engagement as we move beyond the Brexit referendum. We believe that working at the grassroots level, as this programme most definitely does, is absolutely critical if we are to see meaningful cooperation and community development alongside an empowered civic society across these islands.

Louise Coyle, Director, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network: The Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network's overall mission is to influence key decision makers through providing a voice and representation for rural women, ensuring their equal and valued position in society. NIRWN seeks to:

- increase the voice of rural women at a policy level;
- advocate and lobby on behalf of rural women;
- provide information and networking opportunities for rural women;
- pilot innovative projects to further the vision of rural women; and
- hold statutory bodies to account to measure their impact on rural women.

NIRWN does this by, among other things, advocacy, organising local and regional networking events, providing an information service to all Northern Ireland government departments, and supporting other organisations to link with rural women.

NIRWN is also a partner in The Women's Regional Consortium which consists of seven women's sector organisations who have come together to provide a voice for women from disadvantaged and rural areas and support efforts to tackle disadvantage and social exclusion. We work in partnership with each other, statutory and governmental organisations, and local women's organisations, centres and groups.

NIRWN has been engaged in the 'Towards a New Common Chapter' initiative because it is a grass roots effort to build and develop co-operation across our islands, taking account of historic barriers. The development and emergence of community and civic leaders, taking collective action to break the silence, and to share space, for the greater good, requires leadership from within, as well as encouragement and support from external agencies. Community development offers active and

potentially active individuals a process and a route they can use to lead and facilitate collective visioning and action.¹ Building peace in rural areas and communities is all about supporting the processes that lead to an absence of violence and conflict; an absence of fear of violence, a flourishing of economic, social and political justice, peaceful co-existence and the shared ‘democratic’ use of power.

Eilidh Dickson, Policy and Parliamentary Manager, Engender: Engender is Scotland’s feminist policy organisation. We work to give effect to women’s equality and rights at local, national and international level, increase women’s access to power, safety, and resources, and to make visible the impact of sexism on women, men and society. With over 25 years’ experience in gendered policy and advocacy, we are ambitious in our desires to build a Scotland which secures equality for all women, and which works collaboratively with international and Scottish partners. We work across a wide range of national policy portfolios to advocate for women’s economic, social and political equality with men, including social security, justice, public space and political representation. Our Gender Matters Roadmap, published in 2017, sets out a series of measures that, with political will, can be taken by Scottish Government and other bodies in order to move towards women’s equality in Scotland by 2030.

We also represent Scotland on the UK Joint Committee on Women, through which we work closely as a member of the European Women’s Lobby (EWL), and in 2018 worked to consult with women on the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). To that end, we work with sister organisations both locally and across the UK and internationally as part of our ‘Gender Matters Internationally’ work to highlight women’s inequality as a global concern.

Engender became involved in the Towards a New Common Chapter initiative in 2018 through links with women’s sector organisations in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Engender was asked to host a Scottish event for the project on February 2019 as part of its fourth stage of the project, which focussed on building support for Chapter from community organisations in England, Wales and Scotland. At this session grassroots, women’s organisations based in Scotland were presented with the draft Charter and offered our thoughts on its scope and relevance to our experiences and priorities. Engender was then invited to the evaluation event in Belfast in March 2019.

We welcome the potential the New Common Charter presents to further expand our networks and encourage grassroots collaboration on projects of shared importance, including women’s equality. Particularly in the context of Brexit and further devolution, partnership working enables us to learn from one another’s activities and successes. We already appreciate the opportunity to share space for discussions with community, grassroots and other civil society organisations with shared ambitions and from other sectors in a forum which promotes collaboration, sustained engagement and critical expertise.

¹ Ann Mc Geaney and Kathy Walsh, “The Role of Community Development in Rural Peace Building”, (February 2013), <http://www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org/publications/publicationdocument.aspx?doc=507>.

Background information

1. About the Centre for Cross Border Studies, Longford Women’s Link, Northern Ireland Rural Women’s Network, and Engender

1.1. Since its creation in 1999, the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS) has pursued its central mission of contributing to the increased social, economic and territorial cohesion of the island of Ireland. It achieves this by promoting and improving the quality of cross-border cooperation between (a) public bodies, and (b) between public bodies, business and civil society. Complementing this strategy, CCBS also works to improve the capacity of people involved in social and economic development to engage in mutually beneficial cross-border cooperation. Finally, it addresses information gaps and other barriers that constrain cross-border mobility and cross-border cooperation through research, provision of resources, tools and other support. Throughout its existence, therefore, CCBS has been deeply concerned with community, social and economic development and cooperation particularly on the island of Ireland, but also between the island of Ireland, Great Britain and beyond.² This concern informed CCBS’s desire to initiate the “Towards a New Common Chapter” project.

1.2. CCBS’s pursuit of its mission has been framed by two primary public policy imperatives: the commitment to cross-border and North-South cooperation integral to Strand II of the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and the European Union’s Cohesion Policy with its focus on social, economic and territorial cohesion, and supported by the EU’s Territorial Cooperation and Structural Funds programmes.

1.3. Longford Women’s Link (LWL),³ a dynamic social enterprise founded in 1995, links women with the resources to make their community safe and equal. LWL identifies and addresses key inequalities that prevent women in Longford achieving their full social/economic potential and its work provides real and tangible opportunities for women and their families. Services provided to approximately 900 women and 130 children in Longford/Midlands (2018) enabled women to access a wide range of programmes and supports yielding real benefits for their families and the wider community. LWL provides women-centred services (Education, Training, Group Support, Childcare, Domestic Violence, Counselling, Female Entrepreneurship, Community Employment, Local Democracy, capacity-building and local/national advocacy). Key to the delivery of LWL’s services is its unique model of Integrated Service Delivery (ISD).

1.4. LWL have identified barriers to accessing both local and national decision-making structures which are critical factors in preventing full and equal participation of rural women in their communities. LWL’s flagship programme, the Women’s Manifesto Programme is a unique model of local democratic participation which aims to support women in Longford and other counties to play an active and meaningful role in their local decision-making structures. The Women’s Manifesto Programme was supported by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (UK) from 2012 until the cessation of the JRCT funding support in ROI in 2016. LWL/Women’s Manifesto have been active members of the *Towards a New Common Chapter* initiative since 2015 and see it as a key all-island programme of sustained engagement as we move beyond the Brexit referendum. LWL believes that

² For more information on the Centre for Cross Border Studies, see <http://crossborder.ie/>.

³ For more information on Longford Women’s Link, see <http://www.lwl.ie/>.

working at the grassroots level, as this programme most definitely does, is absolutely critical if we are to see meaningful cooperation and community development alongside an empowered civic society across these islands. LWL engages at a national level in a number of areas - CEO Louise Lovett is on the board of NWCI and Deputy CEO Tara Farrell is the Chairperson of AONTAS as well as a member of the Steering Group of *The Next Chapter* (Irish Rural Link, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action and Politics Plus) through her board membership of Irish Rural Link.

1.5. Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network's (NIRWN) core mission is to influence key decision makers through providing a voice and representation for rural women, ensuring their equal and valued position in society.⁴

1.6. NIRWN's group objectives are:

- To increase the voice of rural women at a policy level;
- To advocate and lobby on behalf of rural women;
- To provide information and networking opportunities for rural women;
- To represent rural women on the Women's Regional Consortium;
- To pilot innovative projects to further the vision of rural women; and
- To hold statutory bodies to account to measure their impact on rural women.

1.7. NIRWN's core business activities include:

- Policy Consultation (forum)
- Advocacy
- Representation
- Events/Networking local and regional
- Providing a voice
- Provide an information service to all government departments
- Support other organisations to link with rural women
- Form strategic alliances with relevant agencies in order to advocate and represent rural women

1.8. NIRWN is also a partner in The Women's Regional Consortium which consists of seven women's sector organisations who have come together to provide a voice for women from disadvantaged and rural areas and support efforts to tackle disadvantage and social exclusion. NIRWN works in partnership with each other, statutory and governmental organisations, and local women's organisations, centres and groups.

1.9. Women in Northern Ireland today are still economically, culturally and politically unequal. Women continue to struggle with dominant patriarchal values and structures in every sphere of private and public life and are underrepresented in public life and the political arena where change may be influenced and enacted. The process of social change in Northern Ireland has been impacted by the Northern Ireland Conflict⁵ and Post-Good Friday Agreement policy making has not improved

⁴ For more information on NIRWN, see <https://www.nirwn.org/>.

⁵ Helen Mc Laughlin, "Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation" (2009), http://review.table59.co.uk/wrda/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Barriers_to_Participation_-_Final_March_2009_version_2.pdf.

matters for women in Northern Ireland.⁶ The lack of gender parity that exists throughout Northern Irish society is, in NIRWN's view, a key factor hindering the development of a new shared future. Women in Northern Ireland have not been afforded the opportunity to participate equally in progressing the country from a post-conflict society to a peaceful society. This is having a negative impact on their social and economic development, particularly those already experiencing disadvantage; such as rural women. It is imperative that our region has 'visible' women at decision-making level if sustainable peace is to be achieved. *'There are also stark inequities between Government funding for service delivery to women's groups between rural and urban (1.3% v 98.7%)'*.⁷ It is imperative that women in rural areas are listened to and supported so that their historic invisibility is not mirrored in a post-conflict society.

1.10. Engender is Scotland's feminist policy organisation.⁸ Engender works to give effect to women's equality and rights at local, national and international level, increase women's access to power, safety, and resources, and to make visible the impact of sexism on women, men and society. With over 25 years' experience in gendered policy and advocacy, the organisation is ambitious in its desires to build a Scotland which secures equality for all women, and which works collaboratively with international and Scottish partners. Engender works across a wide range of national policy portfolios to advocate for women's economic, social and political equality with men, including social security, justice, public space and political representation. Its Gender Matters Roadmap, published in 2017, sets out a series of measures that, with political will, can be taken by Scottish Government and other bodies in order to move towards women's equality in Scotland by 2030. The Roadmap was developed through a process of collaboration with Engender's members, the women's sector and wider stakeholders.

1.11. Equal representation and participation in public affairs is a core element of Engender's work. In coalition with other equalities organisations in Scotland, Engender created the Equal Representation Campaign to improve diversity in Scotland's Political institutions including a self-assessment toolkit for political parties to analyse local, regional, or national party membership and the experiences of women, disabled people, ethnic minorities and the LGBTI community. The tool then provides tailored guidance to advance equality and diversity across a range of themes. The project has highlighted the particular barriers women face in becoming involved in politics and reaching senior decision-making roles within every level of governance.

1.12. Engender also represents Scotland on the UK Joint Committee on Women, through which it works closely as a member of the European Women's Lobby (EWL), and in 2018 worked to consult with women on the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). To that end, Engender works with sister organisations both locally and across the UK and internationally as part of its 'Gender Matters Internationally' work to highlight women's inequality as a global concern.

⁶ Michael Potter, "Review of Gender Issues in Northern Ireland", NIAR 510-13 (2014), <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2014/ofmdfm/1514.pdf>.

⁷ Evaluation of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (Final Report, June 2015), <https://www.nirwn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/RISP-Final-Evaluation-Report-Sect-1-WRC-and-Concluding-Remarks.pdf>.

⁸ For more information on Engender, see <https://www.engender.org.uk/>.

1.13. Engender became involved in the Towards a New Common Chapter initiative in 2018 through links with women's sector organisations in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Engender was asked to host a Scottish event for the project on February 2019 as part of its fourth stage of the project, which focussed on building support for Chapter from community organisations in England, Wales and Scotland. At this session grassroots, women's organisations based in Scotland were presented with the draft Chapter, and representatives from Engender offered their thoughts on its scope and relevance to their experiences and priorities. Engender was then invited to the evaluation event in Belfast in March 2019.

1.14. Engender welcomes the potential the New Common Chapter presents to further expand the organisation's networks and encourage grassroots collaboration on projects of shared importance, including women's equality. Particularly in the context of Brexit and further devolution, partnership working enables us to learn from one another's activities and successes. We already appreciate the opportunity to share space for discussions with community, grassroots and other civil society organisations with shared ambitions and from other sectors in a forum which promotes collaboration, sustained engagement and critical expertise.

2. Introduction to the "Towards a New Common Chapter" project – its origins and rationale

2.1. The "Towards a New Common Chapter" project began in late 2014. It was initially made possible by the generous support of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, with further subsequent funding gratefully received from the Community Relations Council and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Reconciliation Fund.

2.2. Part of the original rationale for undertaking the "Towards a New Common Chapter" project, which is ongoing,⁹ was to address the need for cross-border cooperation to be independently valued and enacted at the grass-roots level, with communities from both sides of the border on the island of Ireland jointly setting their own priorities and advocating for their inclusion in regional and local strategies. Without this engagement in cross-border cooperation, it was felt that it would continue to be hostage to what is at times an unstable political environment and the time-limited pursuit of European funding, and therefore hamper the ability of cross-border cooperation to properly contribute to peace and reconciliation and to wider socio-economic development.

2.3. Inspiration for the project came from the commitment to cooperation by the Governments in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland expressed in the chapter of agreed text that appeared in Northern Ireland's Structural Funds Plan and Ireland's National Development Plan for the period 2000-2006 – the Common Chapter.¹⁰

2.4. However, the 2000-2006 period also saw the collapse of the power-sharing institutions in Northern Ireland as well as the suspension of the North-South Ministerial Council, and their

⁹ The Towards a New Common Chapter project was originally expected to have a duration of three years, but in light of the uncertainties created by the UK's decision to leave the European Union, it was judged that an additional six to twelve months would be necessary.

¹⁰ *Northern Ireland Structural Funds Plan 2000-2006: 'Northern Ireland: - a Region achieving Transition'* (2000); Government of Ireland, *Ireland: National Development Plan 2000-2006* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1999). In the Northern Ireland document the agreed text appears under the section entitled "Co-operation with the Republic of Ireland" (pp.87-96), while in the Irish document it comes under the chapter "Co-operation with Northern Ireland" (pp.177-186).

restoration in 2007 following the 2006 St Andrew's Agreement did not result in the revival of the Common Chapter. The failure to reintroduce the Common Chapter has been interpreted by the Centre for Cross Border Studies as threatening the marginalisation of and political commitment to cross-border cooperation, particularly at times of political or economic crisis.¹¹

2.5. Therefore, whilst it has not sought to replicate or supplant the place of the "old" Common Chapter, the "Towards a New Common Chapter" project has looked to support and inspire grass-roots community commitment to cross-border cooperation in all its dimensions. It has worked towards a "bottom-up" vision of the importance and role of cross-border cooperation within and between these islands, whilst also noting the need for community groups to possess the necessary skills and capacity to not only engage in their own cross-border initiatives, but also to enter into more productive dialogues with relevant local, regional and central government policies and strategies.

2.6. However, involving local communities in the design of policies to ensure the inclusion of cooperation initiatives does not only assume a particular level of capacity, but also returns us to the fundamental question of whether there is genuine understanding or acceptance of the need for such cooperation. The underlying imperative for cross-border, North-South and East-West cooperation may be woven into the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, articulated by the Common Chapter while it existed, and enacted through cooperation initiatives at central and local government levels, as well as by a range of non-governmental institutions and organisations, but what is the level of wider support for cooperation? For those grass-roots community groups who have been involved in cross-border cooperation efforts, what has been their experience and what suggestions do they have for the future of cross-border cooperation? And what understanding do community groups based away from the border have of cross-border cooperation and do they value wider North-South and East-West cooperation?

3. Implementation of the "Towards a New Common Chapter" project

3.1. To begin answering these questions, the "Towards a New Common Chapter" project initially sought to engage with two constituencies in particular: women's groups and Protestant/Unionist community groups from both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. The inclusion of women's groups was in line with the argument put forward by the Centre for Cross Border Studies in its response to the consultation on *Ireland's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2015-2018*,¹² which concluded that "the under-representation of women [...] will continue to hamper

¹¹ In 2014, for example, before this very Committee, CCBS stated: "Since the demise of the Common Chapter, the limited but nevertheless important references to cross-border cooperation have dwindled and all but disappeared from major policy documents. Unless there is a clear policy imperative supported by resources – and it is made clear to civil servants and other public officials that it is part of their job – even the most motivated people will, with the increasing pressures of austerity, see cross-border cooperation as an unaffordable luxury". Centre for Cross Border Studies, "Submission to the Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement" (26 June 2014), p.3; <http://www.crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/CCBS-Presentation-to-GFA-Committee-26-06-2014.pdf>.

¹² Government of Ireland, *Ireland's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2015-2018* (2014), <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/ourrolesandpolicies/ourwork/empoweringwomen-peaceandsecurity/Irelands-second-National-Action-Plan-on-Women-Peace-and-Security.pdf> [last accessed 15/08/2017].

progress in relation to peacebuilding and reconciliation”.¹³ Therefore, in undertaking this project it was felt that it was essential that women’s groups should have equal representation in reflections on cross-border cooperation and on the development of a shared vision for its future. Involving Protestant/Unionist community groups, on the other hand, was seen as addressing the need to engage those who may have specific concerns around cross-border cooperation at the Northern Ireland-Ireland border, as well as a broader vision of cooperation encompassing the East-West dimension.

3.2. The project was structured into five core stages:

Stage	Goal
1. Critical engagement with “old” Common Chapter and identification of cross-border needs	A grassroots cross-community and cross-border agenda for CBC
2. Development of vision for future CBC (in its three dimensions)	Production of draft of New Common Chapter
3. Community-led consultation and advocacy with other CSOs	Production of New Common Chapter
4. Community-led East-West engagement	Support for New Common Chapter from community organisations in GB
5. Community-led advocacy with policy-makers	Support for New Common Charter from political actors and policy-makers

We are now in the project’s concluding stage, with the groups from the island of Ireland having agreed an initial draft of the New Common Chapter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands at the end of the second stage, which was then taken to groups in England, Scotland and Wales, before a final version was decided upon at a meeting in Belfast of representatives of community groups from all the jurisdictions which drew the fourth stage to a close. That final version is now entitled the New Common *Charter* for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands.

3.3. The first two stages involved a series of workshops, with an evaluation seminar at the conclusion of each. The opening stage consisted of four core workshops (the majority being of a cross-border nature), before an evaluation seminar bringing together all the participating groups to determine whether there was sufficient consensus to progress towards the drafting of a New Common Chapter in Stage 2. The programme of work developed for the first stage was as follows:

Workshop 1	Introducing the “old” Common Chapter
Workshop 2	Critique of “old” Common Chapter
Workshop 3	Analysis of principles of integrated cross-

¹³ Centre for Cross Border Studies, “Consultation Response: Ireland’s Second National Action Plan – Women, Peace and Security” (August 2014), <http://www.crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/WPS-Consultation-Response-by-CCBS.pdf>.

	border cooperation
Workshop 4	Identification of areas of need capable of being addressed on a cross-border basis (North-South <i>and</i> East-West)
Evaluation Seminar (December 2016)	Evaluation of progress and way forward

With the participating groups having agreed that sufficient progress had been made, the second stage was then devoted to the drafting of a New Common Chapter, with groups once again working on a cross-border basis. That draft was then presented to and discussed with other community groups in Northern Ireland and Ireland in the third stage.

3.4. What was made possible by the “Towards a New Common Chapter” project was the provision of a space where critical and at times difficult conversations could take place over the value and potential roles of cross-border cooperation. Crucially, those conversations were themselves cross-border in nature, bringing together community groups from both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland and, later, groups from Great Britain. These cross-border spaces for community dialogue are not always available, particularly where the focus is on cross-border cooperation itself and those taking part in the conversation represent smaller or grass-roots community organisations.

4. Main conclusions and recommendations

4.1. This project has revealed a sense amongst the participating groups of the lack of an appropriate platform (or platforms) for dialogue to take place between smaller or grass-roots community organisations in particular from across these islands. Whereas governments and devolved administrations may come together in structures such as the British-Irish Council, and larger institutions and organisations from across these islands may also exchange views and at times cooperate in line with their specific interests, the sentiment coming through in this project is that there is an absence of a sustained channel for grass-roots community organisations from across these islands to enter into dialogues that are cross-border and cross-sectoral. The result is a lack of knowledge of communities from other jurisdictions within these islands and the wider contexts they operate in, their hopes and the challenges they face, and which may in fact be ones that are shared across these islands. In turn, this lack of knowledge leads to missed opportunities to cooperate for mutual benefit.

Recommendation: Consideration should be given to providing the means to expand the reach of the New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands in order to test the degree of wider support for its objectives among community organisations across these islands.

Recommendation: A mechanism for dialogue and cooperation between grass-roots organisations across these islands should be developed, mirroring and perhaps interacting with the British-Irish Council.

4.2. The discussions that took place as part of the “Towards a New Common Chapter” project also noted a desire for grass-roots community organisations to participate more directly in the design of policies and strategies with a cross-border or cross-jurisdictional dimension (or which should have

such a dimension) undertaken by local, regional and central governments, and by other public bodies relevant to community organisations. The view was that policy-makers from local, regional and central governments may come together on a cross-border basis to develop strategies and policies, and may even consult with their respective communities, there are not always opportunities offered for communities to come together on a cross-border basis to engage in discussion. However, there was also recognition that grass-roots community organisations may not have the necessary capacity or skills to engage with policy-makers in relation to cross-border issues.

Recommendation: An assessment should be undertaken of the current levels and means of local, regional and central governments' engagement with community organisations in the development of policies and strategies with a cross-border or cross-jurisdictional dimension.

Recommendation: A capacity-building programme should be put in place to provide community organisations with the necessary skills to engage productively with local, regional and central governments on cross-border or cross-jurisdictional issues.

4.3. Prior to its final version, drafts of the New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands contained a section indicating the participating groups' views on what cross-border cooperation should *not* be about. Groups had stated that in order for cooperation within and between these islands to be successful, it should not:

- Be the unique preserve of any one government, agency, group or community;
- Be used for party-political purposes;
- Involve policies or projects imposed on communities and that are irrelevant to them;
- Operate on the basis of religious or cultural labelling, use assumptions about a community or group, or involve tokenism or quantitatively-driven targets;
- Be short-term, short-sighted or unsustainable;
- Be driven by the need to achieve large impacts in a way that privileges the involvement of larger institutions and organisations and dismisses the value of micro-community initiatives and their potential to contribute to significant positive change;
- Be overly theoretical, complicated or dismissive of community-led approaches;
- Be funding-led; and
- Deny equality of opportunities to people with different religious belief, political opinion, of different racial groups, ages, marital status, sexual orientation, gender, with or without a disability, with dependants or without.

These calls are in reality aimed at policy-makers and funders, but were ultimately not included in the final version of the New Common Charter, as the groups expressed the view that although they were of significant importance, they should be included in a separate document, such as guidance principles for policy-makers and funders in their engagement with community organisations.

Recommendation: Policy-makers at local, regional and local government levels and funders involved in the development of policies, strategies or funding programmes with a cross-border or cross-jurisdictional dimension should undertake specific skills development to maximise their engagement with community organisations.

4.4. Crucially, groups participating in the “Towards a New Common Chapter” project were clear on the lack of funding programmes supportive of cross-border or cross-jurisdictional cooperation between community organisations. It was generally recognised that the principle source of such cross-border cooperation initiatives was the European Union, with the Irish Government’s Reconciliation Fund, and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust being some of the other notable funders. Without the necessary funding support, any desire among community organisations to maintain and strengthen relations within and between these islands will remain generally unfulfilled, with the resulting consequences of growing divisions and misunderstandings.

Recommendation: A review of current funding sources for cross-border and cross-jurisdictional initiatives should be undertaken to properly understand the level of support offered outside EU programmes.

Recommendation: All administrations and funding bodies across these islands should ensure they provide adequate support to cross-border and cross-jurisdictional initiatives led by community organisations.