CONCLUSIONS

Workshop participants were invited to consider a number of specific themes and issues (see Introduction). In the event, while these were indeed discussed, the consultation exercise was broad and open, an occasion to express depth of feeling, hopes and anxieties about the future, views on the workings of society and the specific challenges and opportunities offered by peace.

Consensus was almost complete on the issue of Social Inclusion. This was recognised by all workshops as the pathway to peace and reconciliation, the condition for a new beginning, the prerequisite for success in all the other priorities. More than a priority, it was seen as a value - the fundamental value which must underpin the entire Programme and for many, against which other actions should be audited. But it was also a task to be accomplished, an operational priority which all participants saw as fundamental. In its own right it demanded actions.

The draft Guidelines had set down an impressive list of possible actions under Social Inclusion. But many of the workshops suggested that the Social Inclusion priority should also incorporate actions contained under other headings. Almost none chose to prioritise within Social Inclusion, almost for fear of excluding the views of those not present at the conference.

One of the Social Inclusion workshops did however suggest as priority measures:

- capacity building

- development of self-confidence

- employment of socially excluded people and groups

- development of strategic models of community investment

- pilot action programmes

Moreover, early years provision and actions targeted on youth were frequently cited in discussion as key issues.

Almost all workshops preferred to defer prioritisation to the stage of implementation and to leave it to the local level, to grass-roots communities to make the choice about how their development was to be pursued in an inclusive way.

There was an implicit link between Social Inclusion and a decentralised, localised, in many cases explicitly community based form of delivery. This Initiative was seen as the chance for communities to write their own future, to escape from their history, to define their own identity and hence to determine the priorities for their development. These views were expressed with conviction, experience and clarity about the ultimate objective.

But on the immediate operational tasks to be undertaken, participants were less clear. There was a sense in which this consultation conference preferred to write its own agenda, to discuss the process of working together at grass-roots level rather than fix on the tangible outcomes, other than peace and reconciliation, of such a process.

Participants felt easier moving between past experience and the more distant future. The challenge to reflect on the near ground, the next few months and the operational details was recognised, but not taken up as fully as will be required for drafting a Programme.

And yet a Programme must be elaborated: there must be, as speakers suggested, priorities and a programme structure. There must be clarity on delivery mechanisms, on partnerships and global grants, monitoring and implementation. The Programme must be effective and efficient and it must achieve measurable results in terms of real change.

In this sense the conference of 29 March 1995 marks a milestone. Reflection has begun on these issues but it is not yet complete. Several particular issues are posed at this juncture:

i   If there is virtually total consensus on the five main priority themes, and wide agreement on the comparative weight of Social Inclusion relative to these, then in general there remains insufficient clarity on prioritisation of measures to be pursued under each theme and on the linkages between the themes.

ii   Many preferred to defer prioritisation of measures to the local level at the stage of implementation. Some suggested a compromise, preferring some form of classical sub-programme, (particularly for larger actions, including infrastructure). Others, while preferring to defer prioritisation of measures to implementation stage, felt the local level alone could not decide everything.

There was significant support for a parallel regional approach whereby regional partnerships would manage forms of funding and certain participants felt more traditional sub-programming mechanisms could, for some issues, be envisaged.

iii   The majority preference for the local was not without ambiguity. Many participants, representing non-Governmental agencies, preferred a community based approach. But some workshops, notably Cross-Border and Productive Investment/Industrial Development, also pointed out the importance of existing structures, particularly existing local development structures involving District Councils. And the Rural Development Group saw a role for the emerging Local Action Groups (LAG's) throughout the region and for District Councils.

Several important practical issues require clarity in this debate.

a)   Assuming for the sake of argument the existence of regional (Northern Ireland wide), local and community based partnerships, under what criteria are they to be differentiated?

Certain difficulties could be posed were local and community-based partnerships refer to or overlap on the same "area". In short, how large is the "local" market for area partnerships? Would more than one dissipate local efforts? A commitment to a single area partnership, embracing all relevant interests and with a special inclusion of community-based interests might prove useful. The issue then becomes the choice of reference area and how to balance all interests while

prioritising a bottom-up, community approach in the spirit of Social Inclusion. Whether district council areas are the suitable reference area remains, on the basis of the conference, open for discussion: at any rate, some flexibility seemed to be preferred, and there was a clear feeling that areas must be sufficiently small to engage grass-roots participation.

b)   If a plurality of partnerships pertaining to the same area is to be considered, then some kind of functional differentiation between them might be desirable. But this poses disadvantages as well: a holistic and integrated approach might be lost and quasi specialised local agencies may take the place of genuine bottom up development.

iv   Despite the practical issues to be resolved, the idea of partnership commanded widespread consensus at the conference. Almost a value of solidarity, it was considered by most participants as the logical articulation not merely of the Social Inclusion priority but indeed of other priorities too. The Productive Investment/Industrial Development workshop also thought in terms of partnerships, albeit in the industrial context of linkages of collaboration and cooperation between enterprises large and small and research establishments.

v   The issue of monitoring was linked closely to the structure of the programme itself. Most agreed on the need for quantifiable and qualitative benchmarks. Visibility, additionality, measurability, accountability emphasised by speakers from Government and the European Commission alike provoked no protests but in general this was not the language of the conference. And yet it was recognised that these must all be part of the Programme and that monitoring must pay heed to them.

The question of who should monitor, like the question of who should implement, was inevitably bound up with the issue of Inclusion. The preferred option seemed to be to involve all significant groups, Governments, non-Governmental

ganisations and social partners and the European Commission in monitoring and managing the Programme. Articulated in its most systematic form this would involve a single merged monitoring and consultative committee made up of both Governments, the European Commission and all significant actors on a representative basis. But for many participants variations of this were acceptable. The details mattered less and the promise of transparency, fairness, and effectiveness sufficed.

vi   No significant issues beyond the parameters set by the draft Guidelines themselves emerged in discussion. But there was one very significant divergence within the consultation exercise on the nature of actions meriting most expenditure.   This was between the Productive Investment/Industrial Development workshop and the others. And lesser expressions of the same tension were also evident to some extent in the Cross-Border and Rural Development workshops.

The divergence here was between those for whom the immediate priority was to regenerate the economy so providing the conditions of growth necessary to underpin peace, reconciliation and inclusiveness and those for whom this particular Community Initiative should pursue Social Inclusion directly. Both groups felt their priority should take the lion's share of resources. This division emerged as the most significant, substantive issue which still requires resolution through further consultation and reflection.

This was not an argument about ends however. Even though the language of each discourse was profoundly different, this was essentially about means: how best to pursue peace and reconciliation. While supporting Social Inclusion as both a priority and a horizontal theme, the Productive Investment/Industrial Development workshop saw their own priority as the most effective means to attain these goals.

They argued that this Initiative must address economic issues as well. They would not appear content to look to other Initiatives for assistance. They were clear that peace gave new opportunities for investment and hence for peace, reconciliation and inclusion.

vii   Cross-Border development and Employment were seen, like Social Inclusion, as both priorities in their own right and as horizontal themes.

Employment was seen mainly as "creating jobs" - not as training. It was crucial that the Employment Priority should be pursued with vigour in its own right, and should involve radical, proactive measures that result in more jobs, particularly for those most excluded from society. It was seen as very important in rural areas and radical local employment initiatives were favoured in this regard.

Cross-Border development, it was felt, should not be confined to border areas, even if it should be concentrated there. But the theme did not emerge as strongly as might have been anticipated.

viii   No clear indication on the issue of the balance of funding was given beyond a call that Social Inclusion and Productive Investment take the bigger share. The discussion, in truth, did not in general reach this level of detail.

ix   A final, major issue relates to participants' desire for speedy actions capable of giving rise to long-term positive effects. Speed and sustainability as major determinants of the choice of actions (and groups) to be supported will have implications for prioritisation of expenditure. The conference did not get to grips with this issue.

Further consultation will be required. If it is to go further than the stage at which we now are, it must test, at least in discussion, the implications of different approaches, prioritisations and delivery mechanisms for existing measures and models of development. It must also get to grips with the interaction between the new models currently being discussed and must clarify priority actions further.