The Challenges of Community Foundations in Supporting Third Sector Activity in Post-Conflict Societies: Lessons from Northern Ireland
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Abstract
Gráinne Kelly explores the role that community foundations can play in supporting peacebuilding initiatives in regions emerging from violent conflict. Her discussion focuses on the example of Northern Ireland, a society struggling to come to terms with a thirty-year conflict that has caused underdevelopment, political instability, and social division. She draws on lessons from other post-conflict regions, including South Africa and Israel, and considers the work of community foundations in the United States that address racial tensions.

Ms. Kelly identifies several key questions:
- What challenges do community foundations face when working within divided societies?
- How do community foundations ensure adequate accountability and transparency in post-conflict societies?
- How do community foundations achieve adequate representation from all constituencies, many of whom have had antagonistic relationships?
- How do community foundations balance long-term needs, while addressing the immediate, often urgent, situations that are likely to erupt as a region moves from conflict to peace?

Employing the characteristics developed by the Worldwide Initiative of Grantmakers (WINGS) to identify community foundations, Ms. Kelly concludes that the value of a community foundation lies in its ability to bring people together. Having identified the challenges that community-based foundations may face, Ms. Kelly moves on to consider the many benefits that such a structure can bring to a community emerging from conflicts.

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