



## Development NGOs: Working Together For Greater Impact

As Ireland's aid budget is shrinking fast, calls for greater NGO cooperation are increasing. Some have suggested that the vast number of not-for-profit organisations represent duplication of effort, and that there would be scope for better value for money.

The truth is that NGOs already are engaged in a vast array of coordination mechanisms, and that Irish NGOs adhere to a series of professional standards. Coordination, shared learning and information exchange are built into the Irish NGO sector.

### NGOs cooperate to enhance their long-term impact

The **diversity** of the NGO community is a key strength to the sector as a whole. A more diverse sector means that **issues and problems are tackled at many levels**. Some NGOs operate at the grassroots level, for example, others in policy formation, and others at the spectrum of area in between.



Ireland's NGOs represent diverse voices and communities. Their growing numbers are evidence of Irish people's increased interest in tackling global problems. It is also a hopeful indicator of the large numbers of people working to create a more prosperous future for all of us.

The corporate logic of mergers and acquisitions does not apply neatly to NGOs: for Irish NGOs, the key imperative is not growth, but **the improvement of services for beneficiaries**. For commercial companies, merging with other companies can be a sensible and effective way to add value or to increase a company's customer base, product ranges or market share. NGOs, in contrast, must seek greater **value for money** by coordinating and scaling up with other actors, either governments, international organisations or NGOs.



Irish Development NGOs understand that their programmes can alleviate poverty at a small scale, but that they can only secure lasting improvements for the world's poorest people if they can influence international political processes, by mobilising the skills, energies and power of others.

Through **networks and alliances**, Irish NGOs are seeking new and effective ways to **maximise their impact**, by making use of the power and ideas of all those who can make a difference: governments, companies, media and NGOs.

NGOs have found that there are many effective ways in which they can work with others:

- ★ By **partnering with community groups and NGOs in developing countries**, Irish NGOs assist isolated or oppressed communities to come together around shared goals and actions. They use their network of partnerships to encourage poor people to effect changes to their lives, and to end isolation.
- ★ Irish NGOs work through established **coordination mechanisms** such as UN bodies and host government structures, to ensure that their efforts build on national priorities and do not undermine local capacities.
- ★ Through **NGO networks and coalitions**, Irish NGOs meet their peers and challenge themselves to reflect on their weaknesses and alternatives to their approaches. Dóchas, for instance, is host to a large number of technical groups, where NGOs meet to learn from each other.
- ★ NGOs use networks and coalitions to advance the **core professional standards** they share, and to enhance their impact on policy processes. All Dóchas members have signed up to shared Codes of Conduct, and they use the network to hold each other to account.
- ★ By investing in their **Board and governance structures**, NGOs ensure that they are representative and accountable to all their stakeholders, and that their vision of long-term impact is communicated as widely as possible.

