

Speech by Minister Peter Power T.D. at the Kenya Embassy hosted seminar for Irish NGOs working in Kenya.

17 June 2010 in Kenya Embassy

Check against Delivery

Your Excellency, Ambassador Catherine Muigai Mwangi, Ladies and Gentlemen, friends, it gives me great pleasure to be here with you today and to have the honour of addressing a few short words to you at this event which investigates the practice of development partnerships between Irish NGOs and Kenya civil society organisations.

Though Ireland does not have bilateral development cooperation programmes with Kenya, our two countries enjoy a strong relationship based on common interests and mutual respect.

Just last week, I had the pleasure of meeting with Minister Noah Wekesa, Kenya's Minister for Forestry and Wildlife who was visiting Ireland. He provided me with a very interesting overview of the real and immediate effects of climate change in Kenya. He explained the far reaching consequences of this process which include increased conflict over natural resources, as land and water diminish in quality and quantity.

The Kenya government are examining multiple strategies to deal with the consequences of climate change including working with school children on tree planting programmes and engaging with pastoralist communities who are on the frontline of climate change realities.

I know that many of you here today understand the development challenges that Kenya faces and that you are working closely with Kenyan civil society organisations and government to address the fundamental causes of poverty and hunger in Kenya and in the region as a whole.

Irish Aid, the government's aid programme, has since 2007, provided over €30 million to Kenya through NGOs and UN Agencies. I am particularly pleased that Irish NGOs remain active in the Kenya, working in health, education and livelihoods support. Your contribution to Kenya's development builds on the contribution of many Irish women and men who worked in Kenya prior to independence in 1963.

As many of you know, the first volunteer development workers from Ireland in Africa were Irish missionaries and many remain active there to this day. Other Irish people have followed in their wake such as professionals working for the UN, members of the Defence Forces as well as many NGO volunteers and professional aid workers from all walks of life.

As Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs with responsibility for overseas development, I have the privilege of travelling widely where I meet and witness the work of many Irish people in the developing world. The commitment demonstrated by all never fails but to impress me.

I have no doubt that those of you who have engaged directly with Kenyans, have given a lot and have achieved much in your work. But I venture to suggest that you have gained something very valuable from the experience of working with people from another culture and

sharing in the challenges of tackling the complex problems of poverty and hunger. I hope that this experience has helped you to understand the deepening interdependence between people globally and to attach value to development cooperation between nations such as Ireland and Kenya.

The Irish Government is deeply committed to maintaining its strong investment in development cooperation and despite extreme pressure on the public finances, Ireland remains the seventh most generous aid donor in the world, in per capita terms.

This year is the 10th anniversary of the Millennium Declaration and the member states of the United Nations will meet in New York in September to review progress in the achievement of the 8 Millennium Development Goals. At the summit, the challenges for the remaining five years will be clearly set out. While we have seen some real and tangible progress over the last decade, especially in the sphere of primary education, there are many areas where the lack of progress is of real concern and in some cases, the remaining challenges are extremely daunting.

In the government's Hunger Taskforce Report, published in 2008, we signalled our deep concern about one of the Millennium Goals upon which all the others depend; namely, the growing scandal of global hunger and the need for new initiatives and impetus at global level to bring hunger and food security to the centre of global development efforts.

During this year, the government continues to work towards co-ordinated global action on hunger, allied to sound national policies on food security across the developing world but especially in sub-Saharan Africa. I believe that agriculture is a critical engine of pro-poor growth and poverty reduction, and that the role of women as significant producers in this part of the economy must be recognised and explicitly supported.

It is a very sad fact that progress is slowest in the areas of development that are critical to women. The number of people living with hunger is at an all-time high - and women and children are the most affected groups. There is an urgent need to reduce the particular vulnerability of women and children to hunger and food insecurity. I believe that we need to stress the importance of guaranteeing adequate levels of maternal and infant nutrition to all. Lack of adequate nutrition is a driver of maternal mortality. Progress in reducing maternal mortality is possible, but the situation, especially in sub-Saharan Africa remains appalling and represents a failure to address a fundamental injustice.

In New York in September, we will meet not only to review progress against the Millennium Development Goals but also to remind ourselves that the eradication of poverty is not an optional charitable extra but an integral necessity to safeguard our global future.

We must both protect and consolidate what we have achieved and accelerate progress in areas where obstacles persist. I am convinced that each and all of us have a role in contributing to this change.

Irish Aid works closely with the NGO sector in Ireland, both directly and through Dóchas to improve the quality and effectiveness of our interventions. Both Irish Aid and the Irish NGO sector are deeply committed to ensuring that the considerable level of taxpayers' money invested in development is used to best effect and can demonstrate clear and tangible results.

All of us recognise the importance of working with, and in support of, government systems and local institutions in countries of operation. In fact, the attendance levels at today's seminar

underscore the shared commitment we have to working with local systems to ensure sustainable outcomes in our development work.

It is broadly recognised by all that sound contextual analysis is imperative for effective development programming. I believe that development cooperation is one of those areas which benefits from an open and inquiring approach to the development of strategy. It is extremely important that those of us with resources invest the time and money to ensure that we have a sound understanding of the problem to be addressed.

NGOs, though traditionally involved only in service delivery, are now seen to have an important role in building country ownership of policies by engaging in discussions and dialogue about those policies. They also have an important role in holding governments to account by ensuring that policy commitments are met. A key role for Irish NGO is to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations in third countries which in turn engage with their own governments. We all recognise that citizens globally require accountability and responsiveness from their governments if sustainable development is to become a reality.

As I highlighted earlier, a key component of working with partner organisations in other countries is co-operation, collaboration and understanding. In this regard, I found the results of a 2008 Dóchas sponsored survey of Irish NGOs operating in Kenya, quite interesting and challenging.

Firstly I would like to commend Dóchas and its members for undertaking this survey. Critical reflection on quality of NGO intervention should come first and foremost from inside the NGO sector. Dóchas is playing a leading role in facilitating and catalysing improvements in programme quality among Irish NGOs.

The survey appears to raise a number of key challenges in the way in which Irish NGOs engage with partners. The first fact which demands attention is the sheer numbers of Irish based NGOs which are operating in Kenya. This raises questions around coordination, mechanisms to avoid duplication and the need to share knowledge and learning. The study pointed to real gaps in this regard and I hope that today's seminar will enable organisations to reflect on these challenges and attempt to identify possible solutions.

In essence, the findings of this survey appear to be a reflection, and I stress that this is not a donor-led reflection but rather from the target communities, of the principles of the aid effectiveness agenda. Irish Aid is fully committed to these principles, of ensuring maximum effectiveness, improving monitoring and reporting and promoting the establishment of results based focussed in the aid and development sector. I know this is a shared commitment. I understand that Irish Aid and Dóchas members meet regularly to progress the aid and development effectiveness agenda and to ensure that good practice is promoted.

The Irish Government is under increasing pressure to ensure greater value for public money and I cannot overemphasise that in the public eye, there are very few, if indeed any, "sacred cows" remaining. We must acknowledge therefore that we have a dual responsibility, to those whom we assist and to those whose money we spend in the developing world.

Irish Aid prioritises engagement with partners that have a clearly defined niche and comparative advantage, which apply the best practice and can measure and demonstrate results from their investment. These principles of effectiveness and accountability have been brought into renewed and sharpened focus as we find ourselves in these challenging and straitened times.

Irish people, I believe, can be proud of our international contribution to development, and of the difference it is making in their name internationally and especially in Kenya. I believe that Ireland's aid programme can make a real difference, based as it is on our commitment to untied aid, the importance of partnership, and the belief that those benefiting from development should drive the agenda.

I would like to finish by again thanking the Ambassador for taking the time to organise this seminar. It is evidence that the government of Kenya values and appreciates the commitment shown by Irish NGOs to working with Kenyans in solidarity and partnership. I know that as Irish NGOs you will continue to engage with the challenges presented and absorb the lessons to improve your practice of partnership and development.

If delivered in partnership, development assistance can and does make a real difference in the lives of the people you work with and I wish you every success in the future.

ENDS