

# **We Don't Care Less**

Keep Ireland's aid promise - 2012

## Report and Evaluation of the 2009 Campaign

**This report outlines the activities, achievements and challenges associated with the **We Do Care** campaign.**

**It presents the key characteristics of the 2009 campaign, and invites participating organisations to reflect on their own participation in the campaign, and to suggest ways to ensure even greater impact in the coming years.**

In its response to a severe downturn in the economy, the Irish government cut the ODA budget by €224 million, or some 24% of the total for 2009. ODA expenditure in terms of GNI dropped from 0.58% in 2008 to an estimated 0.52% in 2009, and the Government reneged on its promise to achieve the 0.7% ODA/GNI target by 2012.

In reaction to the first round of cuts, Irish Development NGOs and their supporters developed a campaign to save the ODA budget from further cuts in the December 2009 budget and ensure that Ireland stayed on track to meet its commitment to 0.7% ODA/GNI by 2012.

Coordinated by Dóchas, the national umbrella of Development NGOs, the “**We Don't Care Less**” campaign aimed to highlight the importance of honouring commitments to aid promises, in bad times as well as in good.

### **1. Objectives of the campaign:**

To ensure that Ireland's development cooperation programme gets back on track, by

- Halting any further cuts to the ODA budget during 2009 (*short term*);
- Ensuring the government honours its commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on ODA by 2012 (*medium term*);
- Ensuring that a strong commitment to ODA is part of how Ireland sees itself in the world – as exemplified by a minimum 0.7% ODA/GNI spend, coming automatically each year from Central Funds, rather than relying on the annual Budget process (*long term*).

## 2. **Activities:**

- Political Lobby: Informed by a stakeholder mapping exercise done at a well-attended meeting of Dóchas members, the campaign sought to target the following key power holders: the Taoiseach; the Department of Finance; and key members of the Cabinet (Tánaiste, Finance, Foreign Affairs and Green Party Ministers).

It aimed to target these people directly and through their policy/personal advisers, as well as through the Oireachtas, influential enablers/celebrities, the media, members of the public and by mobilising the supporter bases of Dóchas member organisations. A key concern for the campaign was the need to influence Cabinet members at constituency level. (Responsibility for targeting the selected Cabinet members in their constituencies was coordinated by Dóchas and carried out by those members with contacts in those constituencies)

Also key to the success of the campaign was the need to mobilise speakers and representatives from other sectors, and from the wider public, to support our campaign in direct representations to the Taoiseach (prime minister), Cabinet members and Dept. of Finance. The campaign coordination team mapped which member organisations had the best contacts with these political targets/opinion leaders and allocated responsibilities accordingly.

In this context, during the campaign we:

- √ Met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs (x2), Minister of State for Overseas Development (x2) and other Ministers (a number of formal and informal meetings);
- √ Met with Leaders of the major opposition parties, Fine Gael (x1) and Labour (x2), and with senior politicians of all other parties in the Oireachtas;
- √ Addressed a meeting of Senators and TDs (members of the Dáil, or lower house of parliament) in March;
- √ Discussed with the Minister of State for Overseas Aid, when he addressed the Dóchas AGM in April;
- √ Made presentations to the Oireachtas Committee for Foreign Affairs and the Sub-Committee on Development; On 11 September, the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs wrote to each minister in the Cabinet, calling on them to ensure that no further cuts be made to ODA spending in the Budget in December, given the severity of cuts to ODA in 2009.
- √ Wrote to TDs and Senators in the context of the visit of UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon;
- √ Collected 6,500 postcards and e-cards, and presented those to the Taoiseach's office in November;
- √ Obtained 85 articles in Ireland's print media that related to the campaign (25 of these in the Irish Times);
- √ Engaged in 23 radio and TV interviews in relation to the campaign.
- √ Distributed 20,000 campaign leaflets to Dochas member organisation for dissemination to supports and public event and activities.

- √ Printed an open letter advertisement in the Irish Times and Irish Independent in early April.
  - √ Sent suggestions for e-action and updates to supporters of the campaign.
  - √ Organised debate events with MEP Candidates in all four constituencies for the European Parliament elections. At the Dublin debate, six out of seven candidates for the Dublin constituency in the European elections said that they would favour legislating to ensure Ireland reaches its commitment of spending 0.7% of national income on ODA – a fact that was reported in the Irish Times the next day;
  - √ Ensured that all TDs received at least one, and in most cases dozens, of letters from constituents about the aid cuts;
  - √ Organised a mass photo of 222 people (1 for every €1 million cut from the aid budget) in “We Do Care” t-shirts, in front of the Department of Finance;
  - √ Organised local lobby events in Donegal and Cork;
  - √ Organised well-publicised candle vigils in Dublin and Cork;
  - √ Recorded a film with “I Care” statements (posted on the [www.wedocare.ie](http://www.wedocare.ie) website), and posted a specially designed DVD with the video to every TD and Senator in the country;
  - √ Wrote a formal Pre-Budget Submission, and sent it to Government, urging Ministers not to cut the ODA budget any further.
  - √ Responded to the budget announcement in December 2009, including a online communication to all supporters of the campaign.
- Coordination of Communications: A lot of effort went into developing and disseminating clear, shared messages that were repeated and advanced at many levels. The campaign used a combination of “moral” arguments and “self-interest” arguments that showed how and why ODA serves Ireland’s national interests.

The campaign message was essentially that Ireland needs to “Get back on track – and keep our promise to the world’s poor”.

We opted for a campaign slogan “**We Don’t Care Less / We Do Care**” to highlight that the values underpinning the Irish development cooperation efforts have not changed simply because Ireland is feeling the pinch of global recession.

**We Don’t Care Less**  
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The key argument we wanted to convey to politicians and media representatives was that people in Ireland are fundamentally committed to global solidarity, and that it was wrong to assume that, simply because there weren’t thousands of people marching in the streets, that there was no public support for development cooperation.

We built the campaign around this central theme, and included a number of sub-messages:

- **‘Aid works’.**  
It saves lives, it provides healthcare, it supports education, aid supports human rights and the fight against poverty.
- **‘Aid is affordable.’**  
Aid accounts for a very small share of our national income.
- **‘Aid helps salvage our international reputation’.**  
After the banking crisis, the end of the Celtic Tiger (and the Ryan Report about sexual abuse in the Church) aid is one of the things Irish people are good at and can be proud. It helps us stand out positively in the world. Aid has given us a greater voice e.g. UN vote.

While the policy messages focused on technical issues such as aid budgets, percentage targets and timeframes, the public and media part of the campaign focused on the human impact of the cuts.

In this context, during the campaign we:

- √ Developed a campaign proposal, that was presented and discussed at a special meeting of Dóchas member organisations;
- √ Created a special NGO Communicators group, to ensure individual NGOs were involved in the design and roll out of the communications strategy;
- √ Printed 18,000 leaflets with the core campaign issues and key demands. The leaflets were distributed through participating organisations, university colleges, and at summer festivals throughout the country;
- √ Designed a dedicated campaign website [www.WeDoCare.ie](http://www.WeDoCare.ie) with a lobby action, and a briefing document about development cooperation – the website resulted in some 650 emails being sent to the Minister for Finance;
- √ Received an overwhelming amount of media coverage: We have not been able to keep track of all the radio interviews involving member organisations over the period, but the statistics for coverage in the print media are impressive:
  - 85 newspapers articles and references  
(out of a total 106 during the year covering Dóchas’ work)
  - 23 radio and TV interviews involving Dóchas staff  
(many more involving member organisations’ staff, but we do not have a complete overview, as many concern local radio stations)
- Mobilising Others:

A key campaign strategy was to ensure that the public debate was informed not just by input from the Development NGOs, who could be construed to simply be defending their own funding. The campaign deliberately tried to get others, not linked to the Development sector, to speak out about the aid cuts – reaffirming the message that people across Irish society “do care”.

In this context, during the campaign we:

- √ Published a briefing paper on the impact of the global economic crisis on developing countries (March). The briefing paper "[Now is not the time to turn our backs to the poor](#)" is available on the [Dóchas website](#)
- √ Recorded video and written statements of people who said "I Care" – the testimonies were posted on the WeDoCare website.
- √ Presented the campaign to the Global Solidarity Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, which signed up to the campaign;
- √ Presented the campaign to the Executive Committee of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, which signed up to the campaign;
- √ Organised a Comhlámh Public Debate on the question whether Ireland can still afford ODA (October);
- √ Presented the campaign at events at University of Limerick, University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin and NUI Maynooth;
- √ Commissioned an opinion poll showing that, while a majority believed Government spending on overseas aid was much higher than is the case (as much as 10% of national income, compared with the actual figure of 0.48%), most respondents supported an increase in the aid budget;
- √ Marked 17<sup>th</sup> October, UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty, with a host of organisations and a range of events across the country.

This led to the following successes: (see <http://wedocare.ie/wordpress/news/news/>)

- √ During the Summer, two teams of African footballers (male and female) participated in a SARI-hosted football tournament wearing We Do Care t-shirts;
- √ In September, five senior church leaders, Protestant and Catholic, published an open letter to the Government calling for a halt to the ODA cuts;
- √ In October, Cardinal Brady, on behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, called on the government to maintain aid levels;
- √ A number of local County Councils tabled and adopted motions, calling on the Government not to cut the ODA budget any further;
- √ The Mayor of Cork City, Dara Murphy, expressed support for the campaign;
- √ A leading economist, Bloxham's Chief Economist Alan McQuaid, supported the campaign;
- √ Kumi Naidoo, Co-Chair of GCAP, recorded a message of support for Ireland's ODA targets;
- √ In November, a group of 30 TDs and Senators (including from Government parties) published a statement calling on the government to halt the aid cuts);
- √ A group of African musicians living in Ireland added their voice to the chorus of people calling for the maintenance of Ireland's aid commitment;
- √ A group of Irish-African beauty queens did the same;
- √ In November, a group of academics protested against the aid cuts.

### **3. Budget**

The total budget for the campaign amounted to €37,828.

### **4. Evaluation of the Campaign**

An extensive evaluation of the campaign raised some key issues and challenges for the future (phase 2) of the campaign.

#### **Main Strengths**

- The **political lobbying** paid off. The campaign managed to raise the aid cuts as a political issue, at a time that there were countless competing political issues.
  - The campaign halted the decline of the aid budget. At a time that the Government made drastic reductions in all areas of public expenditure, the December 2009 Budget did not contain further excessive cuts.
  - Members and outside observers agreed that targeting politicians was clearly the right strategy, and that the main message (demanding that the Government not cut the ODA budget) was the right one.
  - The campaign developed allies and got the support of several Cabinet members and TD's, as evidenced by the fact that some politicians publicly signed-up to the campaign and the many positive replies participating NGO's received in response to their letters.
  
- The campaign managed to **unify and mobilise the development sector**.
  - The campaign achieved a good public profile and, according to most NGO's, this experience should pave the way for other collective actions in the future.
  - Dóchas' leadership in the campaign has been described as impressive and encouraging, and members found Dóchas acted as an essential facilitator from the start. All the participating organisations stated that it was easy to get involved as the successive steps were presented in an effective way.
  - Members unanimously praised Dóchas' professionalism regarding communication and the quality of the campaign materials. There were frequent updates and the information was comprehensive and diverse, although some NGOs complained that they at times felt flooded by e-mails. They asked for more comprehensive fact sheets and that e-mails be sent to the appropriate persons in large organisations.
  - The VSO volunteer, Diane Balding, played an important coordinating role and link between the campaign coordination group and individual Dóchas members (especially smaller organisations). Diane also coordinated the letter writing campaign, collating letters sent and responses received. This is supported mapping of the campaign's political reach at constituency level.

- The **campaign strategy and messages** were appreciated by most participants.
  - The evaluation found that the original message was the right one and has proven to be effective. NGO's particularly appreciate the diversity of supporting messages which enabled them to revitalise their lobbying efforts month after month.
  - Most participants in the evaluation considered that the campaign events were an essential part of the campaign. They attracted media attention, were well organised and delivered, and well-targeted.
  - The campaign succeeded in mobilising 'other voices', people not associated with the development sector, to speak out on behalf of ODA.

### **Main Shortcomings**

- The campaign **failed on two of its three core objectives**.
  - Objective one, halting any further cuts to the ODA budget during 2009, was not achieved, as the December Budget contained a further cut of €25 million, plus the potential of climate-related expenditure to be taken from the ODA budget;
  - Objective two, ensuring the government honours its commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on ODA by 2012), was not achieved, as the Government dropped the 2012 time-frame.
- **Participation by NGOs** was varied and inconsistent.
  - All organisations based in the Republic of Ireland indicated that they had sent letters to local TDs, but only one-third of all participating NGOs indicated that they had taken part in other campaign events.
  - Only half of the participating NGOs put information about the campaign on their websites.
  - Less than half of the participating NGOs provided examples of how the aid cuts impacted on their work, or on the beneficiaries of their programmes.
  - Only about one-third of participating members did media work about the aid cuts.
  - Many NGOs did not report their activities to the campaign coordination team, making it difficult for the overall campaign to assess its traction and effectiveness.
- **Ownership of the campaign was insufficient** – Some participants in the evaluation found that there seems to have been a sense among Dóchas members that the campaign was run *on their behalf*, not *by them*.
  - Many NGOs did not understand that the campaign was based on the assumption that individual NGOs would undertake activities. They complained that the campaign's main activities and events were held in Dublin, whereas

the coordination team was frustrated by the lack of evidence that participating NGOs were developing campaign-based initiatives.

- Some NGOs indicated that they did not like, or understand, the campaign slogan, and that this presented an obstacle to greater participation.
- Small NGOs complained that participation in the campaign would be too time-consuming.

## 5. The Way Forward

In early 2010, Dóchas undertook an internal and external evaluation of its work during 2009, to inform its plans for a second phase of the campaign.

The key issues that the campaign raised are listed in section 4. In addition, comments from the evaluation provided the following suggestions for the future (Phase 2 of the campaign):

- The 2009 campaign took place in an incredibly **difficult context**, and was based on a very difficult premise – that amongst the panic and turmoil of an economic recession and severe political tensions, it is important to continue to invest in overseas aid.
- The campaign succeeded in raising **awareness of the importance of the aid budget**, and of the potential impact of the cuts to Ireland’s ODA budget. It did so, through positive messages and clear analysis, and avoided coming across as a campaign of yet another interest group seeking to protect its own patch.
- The campaign needs to **find ways to stay positive**. Political and public campaigns that are focused on solutions tend to be more successful. The sector must showcase its strengths and achievements, and demonstrate its impact, as well as the positive reasons why politicians should engage with overseas aid.
- The campaign must challenge the perception that there is a tension between “charity at home” and ODA. It must demonstrate the **importance of overseas aid for Ireland**, and what incentives there are for Ireland to invest in development cooperation.
- The campaign must be based on **human stories**: the best way to attract the attention of the general public and media is to explain the issue through concrete examples and show where the money goes.
- The campaign messages must remain **clear and simple**: the message must be understood by the different targeted audiences, and the campaign must emphasise that aid works, and that aid contributes to a broader agenda. It’s not just about percentages of GNI.
- The campaign must **acknowledge that the country is in trouble**. One of the main achievements of the campaign is that it has halted the decline in aid spending – it now needs to communicate that it appreciates the difficulties the Government is in, and the impact the recession has had on all areas of Government decision-making. Focusing on broken promises risks making us look out of step with public opinion, and does not provide solutions.
- The **European dimension** of Irish policy making seems to have been key in determining the 2010 ODA levels - Ireland did not want to fall behind on its EU commitments. This is a key starting point for future campaigning.

In addition, Dóchas stresses that the campaign will be, and must be, seen in the context of the “Aid Effectiveness” discussions. The ODA budget is not an end in itself, but a means to an end – making poverty history.

**The campaign must now base its message on field examples.** NGOs must be able to demonstrate that their work has real and lasting benefits for the world’s poorest people. Therefore, all the NGOs participating in the campaign must supply information about their work to Dóchas.

The campaign coordination team is currently working on a proposal to the Dóchas Board, for a second phase of the campaign.

This proposal will be discussed in March 2010 with the wider campaign membership, so that the second phase can be launched at the occasion of the Dóchas AGM in April 2010.