

Evaluation of Irish Aid - Dóchas Partnership 2006-08

FINAL REPORT

Peter McEvoy
pjmcevoy@indigo.ie

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Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this evaluation is “to provide Irish Aid and Dóchas with an independent assessment of the work of Dóchas and its partnership with Irish Aid, 2006-2008, as structured by the most recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)”. The MoU, which ran from 1st January 2006 to 31st December 2008, was aimed at assisting and enabling Dóchas, its members and Irish Aid “to develop and mould a genuine partnership relationship”.

2. It is estimated that the 39 Irish Development NGOs that are members of Dóchas embrace between them some 850,000 supporters, 900+ employees and a combined turn-over of over €300 million¹. They are a diverse group of organisations, with different mandates, constituencies and ways of working. The membership has been growing at an incremental rate of approximately two new affiliates per year. The relatively gradual growth curve has given Dóchas a chance to consolidate itself over time, allowing it to focus on forging cohesion across the network, promoting quality standards in procedures and practice of the members, and nurturing a culture of shared learning.

3. This present evaluation was preceded in mid 2008 by a Dóchas *internal* evaluation. This earlier study revealed a sustained high level of satisfaction with Dóchas among its members, the wider NGO sector and government, and found a very high degree of identification with the network: a clear majority of members expressed strong commitment to the organisation and appreciation of its various areas of work, which were seen as meeting their needs to a high degree. The internal evaluation (2008) also cast a spotlight on the implications for the Dóchas membership of the emergence of new kinds of voluntary development organisations, which have begun to eclipse the more traditional Development NGOs in terms of ability to engage with, and to capture the imagination of, the Irish public. The existing membership of Dóchas recognizes the need to engage with the ‘newcomers’, in order to help improve their organisational capacity and accountability, and to reduce the reputational risks for the whole sector.

4. These findings are broadly corroborated in the present study, which points to Dóchas’ very substantial work output of consistently high quality, relative to the small size of its Secretariat. Stakeholders recognise that Dóchas constantly struggles with the dilemma of whether - or how - to narrow the breadth and scope of activities which it undertakes, and this dilemma underlay much of the consultative process towards a new Dóchas *Strategic Plan 2009-15*. The findings of this evaluation confirm that the change of emphasis of Dóchas, which was heralded in the previous Strategic Plan 2005-09, is in fact occurring, whereby ‘servicing’ and doing things on behalf of its members is becoming less pronounced, and correspondingly more attention is being devoted to Dóchas as providing a respected and enabling space within which the membership can pursue collective action and mutual learning.

5. Overall, what emerges from this assessment is a strong endorsement of the achievements and work rate of Dóchas over the past three years. Almost unanimously, stakeholders see the relationship between Dóchas and Irish Aid as broadly constructive, healthy and stronger now than ever before, involving a blend of formal and informal avenues of communication. Furthermore the quality of the relationship is acknowledged by most informants to have matured considerably during the lifetime of the recent MoU. Generally, the interaction has been articulate, perceptive and devoid of the partisan rhetoric which can sometimes characterise relationships between statutory bodies and

¹ Dóchas Budget Submission 2009.

NGOs. Dóchas' achievements over the past three years have been enabled to a significant extent by the substantial support received from Irish Aid under the terms of the agreed MoU.

6. The Dóchas Board and the staff team have earned respect from stakeholders for professionalism and diligence. The same is largely true of the Dóchas Working Groups which are acknowledged to be at the heart of Dóchas' work, providing a platform for members to come together and learn from each other. They illustrate the value of a mechanism for shared learning and concerted action within the network, whilst at the same time contributing to the dialogue between the Development NGO sector and Irish Aid.

7. Using the four key OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, our findings are as follows:

Relevance	Dóchas successfully attunes its activities to the needs and priorities of its members, especially those which are most active in the various Working Groups (the agendas of which are by definition needs-driven).
Efficiency	The work rate and output of the Dóchas Secretariat are widely acknowledged to be impressive relative to its modest size. Duplication with other entities engaged in building capacity of NGOs is negligible. From the Irish Aid perspective, the existence of Dóchas confers considerable efficiency gains in the conduct of its relationships with Irish-based civil society organisations; these efficiency gains arise from being able to channel much of the two-way communication and consultation processes with a plurality of client NGOs through a single contact point, in the knowledge that the messages will be disseminated accurately, promptly and reliably.
Effectiveness	Dóchas provides a respected and enabling space within which the membership can pursue collective action and mutual learning, thereby contributing to aid quality. Members (especially the smaller ones) look to Dóchas as a facilitator and interlocutor with Irish Aid. The present Evaluation concludes that Dóchas has become more professional in the way it does its business, and that its voice is regarded as authoritative (even though the general public's recognition of Dóchas as a brand may be low). It therefore has an important and valued role to play within Ireland's institutional framework in relation to international development.
Sustainability	Dóchas is not, and is unlikely ever to be, a self-financing organisation, but rather is reliant on key stakeholders, namely Dóchas members and the Government. However, the Board sees it as important for the organisation to have a more diverse funding base. The <i>benefits</i> conferred by the Irish Aid / Dóchas partnership (namely, efficiency gains both for IA and for NGOs, shared learning and structured dialogue on aid effectiveness, coherence, etc.) are sustainable into the future, in the context of a new 5-year Memorandum of Understanding between Irish Aid and Dóchas, as is here recommended.

8. Regarding the Irish Aid side of the partnership embodied in the MoU, there have been significant organisational and policy developments during the past three-year period which are relevant in the context of this review, and which are clearly identified in the detail of this Report. The extent to which Dóchas is perceived as a strategic partner

does not appear to be uniform across all the sections of Irish Aid which have reason to do business with the network; Civil Society Section being perceived as the anchor point.

9. Given the recent contraction in the ODA budget and the distinct possibility of slippage in the '0.7% by 2012' target, there was widespread support among interviewees for strategic cooperation between Dóchas and Irish Aid to nurture public awareness of aid and development. Many interviewees remarked on the general lack of understanding about development among the Irish public. The work done by Dóchas to date around the 'Aid Works' theme has been a very valuable element in its wider 'public messaging role'. This clearly merits even greater emphasis in the forthcoming period, even though views of stakeholders diverged as to the best strategy for Dóchas - whether to invest heavily in building a much stronger, conspicuous and more recognisable brand awareness as the basis for communicating directly with the public, or whether to work behind the scenes with and through the members of the network.

10. At another level, both sides of the partnership also share a common strategic interest in the **Aid Effectiveness and Policy Coherence** discourse (into which there is now scope to inject a potentially significant NGO perspective as a result of the 2008 High Level Forum in Accra).

11. Whilst the principle of Irish Aid funding support to Dóchas seems to have broad support across the entire stakeholder circle (no-one interviewed advocated discontinuation of the Dóchas grant), opinions diverge as to whether the existing two-thirds: one-third ratio between government subvention and other income is healthy.² Although there is a natural tension between financial dependence on government and maintaining one's integrity to advocate and critique, Dóchas is perceived to have rather skilfully struck a balance between the two. Overall, the rationale for channelling public funding to Dóchas can be articulated as follows:

- definite 'public good' benefits are conferred by the stronger networking and adherence to good practice which Dóchas promotes;
- the efficiency gains which accrue to both Irish Aid and to the Development NGOs by having an identifiable coordinating point;
- the fact of providing a vehicle for shared learning between statutory and voluntary sectors, e.g. in relation to HIV & AIDS interventions, thereby contributing to overall aid quality and effectiveness;
- potential for more successfully demonstrating to the general public positive impact and results of development aid spending, as a result of the partners focusing more intently on aid effectiveness and policy coherence.

For these reasons, the investment of public money in Dóchas, roughly on the scale that currently obtains, is considered to be justifiable on value for money grounds.

² This funding pattern is not unusual; it is commonplace for NGOs to be receiving a majority portion of funding from Government, and especially so in the case of NGO networks.

12. Key Recommendations.

(a) *Recommendations to both sides of the Irish Aid / Dóchas partnership:*

- i. A new Memorandum of Understanding should be concluded between Irish Aid and Dóchas, this time for a five-year duration (subject to a mid-term review).
- ii. The new MoU should, by mutual agreement, incorporate thematic pillars of strategic importance to both parties.
- iii. The new MoU should also provide for broadening the strategic relationship with Dóchas across all Irish Aid sections which have reason to do business with the network.
- iv. The role of Dóchas as a neutral and enabling space for reflection and shared learning across the NGDO sector has become more pronounced; this role should be further intensified and should be explicitly acknowledged in the new MoU.
- v. Dóchas and Irish Aid should intensify their dialogue in relation to Aid Effectiveness and Policy Coherence, to further the process of internalising the aid effectiveness agenda, and giving it concrete expression.

(b) *Recommendations to Dóchas:*

- i. The work done by Dóchas to date around the 'Aid Works' theme has been a very valuable element in its wider 'public messaging role', and merits continued emphasis.
- ii. In relation to the European dimension of its work, Dóchas should continue to build a fuller understanding and awareness among Irish development NGOs of
 - the funding opportunities available from European institutions;
 - the role played by European institutions in international development policy and action.
- iii. Dóchas should intensify its efforts to extend its membership base and to consolidate its position as a representative national platform.

(c) *Other recommendations:*

Irish Aid, Dóchas and the missionary organisations should engage collectively to agree a course of action in respect of the Development Forum.

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ACRONYMS

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSF	Civil Society Fund
ERF	Emergency and Relief Fund
HPP	Humanitarian Programme Policy
HR	Human Resource(s)
IA	Irish Aid
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
IDEA	Irish Development Education Association
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGDO	Non Government Development Organisation
NGO	Non Government Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Development & Cooperation – Development Assistance Committee.

1. Introduction and Context

1.1. The purpose of this evaluation is “to provide Irish Aid and Dóchas with an independent assessment of the work of Dóchas and its partnership with Irish Aid, 2006-2008, as structured by the most recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)”. This partnership relationship between Irish Aid and Dóchas is an important exemplar of the wider forms of collaboration which obtain between Irish Aid and the Irish Development NGO sector, all of which share in common “*the overarching goal of eradicating poverty and inequality throughout the developing world*”.³

1.2. Dóchas is an independent charitable organisation whose membership is open to Irish-based development organisations with charitable status. As a network, its membership comprises some 39 Irish based NGOs that are independent and diverse. Its founding in 1993 saw the bringing together of two organisations: CONGOOD (which represented the common interests of Irish NGDOs since 1974), and the Irish National Assembly which linked Irish NGDOs into a European Union NGO network. Dóchas’ purpose is to be “a vibrant, outward-looking network, with an active and informed membership representative of the Irish development sector, providing services and promoting effective action to bring about sustainable development”.⁴

1.3. Provision for an evaluation of this kind was incorporated in the MoU (clause 15), which envisaged the scope of the exercise as follows:

“The focus [of the evaluation] will be on strategic appraisal, policy development, results, outputs, outcomes, constraints, lessons learnt and how experience gained fits into future planning and design”.

As indicated by this last phrase, this assessment not only looks back at the partnership over the past three years and how it has progressed (or otherwise), but is also forward-looking, in an effort to help inform decisions about the future strategic partnership between Irish Aid and Dóchas.

1.4. The MoU phase under review was the second 3-year agreement to have been enacted between the two parties, the first having been in force for the triennium ending 31st December 2005 (having been externally evaluated in April 2005). Although the aims of the successive MoUs were broadly similar, the emphasis in the latter one shifted more towards mutual cooperation between the partners, and less on the organisational strengthening of Dóchas.

1.5. The more recent MoU between Irish Aid and Dóchas states that “*Irish Aid provides support to Dóchas for the full implementation of Dóchas’ programme of action and the strategic plan that forms the basis for the programme*”. It would therefore seem to follow that where the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for this study refer to evaluating “Irish Aid supported activities of Dóchas”, this in fact means the totality of Dóchas’ range of activity⁵, namely

- *Maximising the Impact of Development NGOs*
- *Strengthening Ireland’s Commitment to Development*
- *Promoting Policies to End Poverty*
 - *Building a More Effective Network*

³ Memorandum of Understanding between Irish Aid and Dóchas 2006, section 1

⁴ Dóchas Mission Statement – see www.dochas.ie

⁵ As specified in Dóchas’ *Strategic Plan 2005-2009*

1.6. The Terms of Reference outlined two sets of questions and key issues to be explored respectively with Dóchas and with Irish Aid :

✚ *With respect to Dóchas*, the evaluation would “assess the implementation of the annual Dóchas Action Plans 2006-2008 framed in the context of the Dóchas **Strategic Plan 2005-2009**, and will provide an assessment of the four key activities to be developed in the context of the MoU between Dóchas and Irish Aid, namely:

- Maximising the impact of Development NGOs – Building members’ capacity for learning and reflection, and translating that into standards of good practice;
- Strengthening Ireland’s commitment to development – Promoting coherent public messaging by the Dóchas members and building public awareness of development challenges;
- Promoting policies to end poverty – Building Dóchas members’ capacity to engage with policy issues at Irish and EU level, and serving as an interlocutor for NGO interaction with Irish Aid;
- Building an effective network – Strengthening Dóchas’ capacity to respond to the needs of the membership and the wider Development sector.”

✚ *With respect to Irish Aid*, the evaluation would “assess the mechanisms and instruments in place through which Irish Aid can “assist and enable” the relationship, financially, organisationally or otherwise.”

1.7. As mentioned above, this evaluation was envisaged more than three years ago when the MoU between Dóchas and Irish Aid was signed, and therefore long before there was any hint of the economic recession and the attendant public spending reductions which have become all too evident in recent months. Inevitably, the overall outlook for ODA expenditure became a recurrent theme in the course of interviews for this study, and this is reflected in the Findings, but only to the extent that the issue impinges directly on one or other aspect of the Terms of Reference of this Study.

1.8. The Consultant would like to thank the various stakeholders who were approached for interview during the consultation phase of the exercise, for being so cooperative and generous with their time. Thanks are also due to the joint Irish Aid / Dóchas Steering Group for their guidance and help in this consultancy, and to Conall O Caoimh for his permission to draw upon the research findings collated for internally-commissioned *Evaluation of Dóchas Strategic Plan 2005-2009* (July 2009).

2. Methodology.

2.1. Most of the evidence-gathering and analysis for this Report was undertaken during the month of February 2009. The Consultant, with the prior agreement of the Steering Committee overseeing the study, implemented the assignment as follows:

- 1) Desk review of relevant documentation provided by Dóchas and by Irish Aid (the joint MoU 2006-8 and its antecedent, previous internal and external evaluation reports, Dóchas Annual Reports for the three years 2006, 2007 and 2008, Irish Aid Civil Society Policy, Dóchas Codes of Practice, Policy documents and Submissions, Working Group materials, etc).
- 2) Interviews with members of the Board of Dóchas (6 out of 8) and with the full staff team of Dóchas (4);
- 3) Interviews with Director General of Irish Aid, members of the Senior Management Group (5) and other officials (8) of various Sections within Irish Aid who have / had dealings with Dóchas;
- 4) Short focus-group style sessions with the Humanitarian Aid Working Group and the Disability & Development Working Group;
- 5) Two agency-based group sessions with staff of Trócaire and Concern Worldwide;
- 6) Individual interviews with representatives of 17 (44%) of Dóchas member organisations (at the level of CEO or Programme Manager);
- 7) Interviews with representatives of outside stakeholders (Kimmage Development Studies Centre, Dtalk, Connect-World, misean cara).

Interviewees were provided in advance with a one-page summary of key questions to be addressed in the Evaluation, derived from the Terms of Reference (copy appended). Views were elicited on the basis that they would not be attributed to named individuals in the Evaluation Report.

A list of all those consulted is appended.

2.2. Some minor logistical difficulties were experienced in scheduling focus groups and other meetings (arising partly from the sheer 'busyness' of those working in the Development NGO and Irish Aid sectors, and partly from the timing of the announcement of the €95m cutback in Irish Aid budget). In spite of these minor problems, input was obtained from a wide cross-section of the Dóchas membership - by size (large / medium / small), by sectoral focus (livelihood security, emergency and relief, development education, volunteering, etc), and by geographical location.

3. Situation Analysis

3.1. Overall

3.1.1. In the early years of the present decade, with the adoption of the MDGs and the growing international focus on poverty reduction, the agendas of Irish Aid and of the NGDO community moved into closer alignment. As part of the mutual engagement, a three year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in July 2002 between Irish Aid and Dóchas with the aim of “*developing a strategic partnership and dialogue through a strengthened Dóchas which can be a cohesive voice for its members*”.⁶ Through the MoU, both partners recognised the potential for strong collaboration on public policy issues and in relation to policy dialogue; core capacity building support was provided in order to boost the human resource capacity of the organisation. Following an independent evaluation in April 2005 and in parallel the publication of the White Paper on Irish Aid (2006) which endorsed partnership-building between Government and NGDOs, a second MoU was agreed between Irish Aid and Dóchas, whereby “*Irish Aid provides support to Dóchas for the full implementation of Dóchas’ programme of action and the strategic plan that forms the basis for the programme.*”

3.1.2. Dóchas’ Strategic Plan, which places global poverty reduction as the overarching aim of the organisation, grouped the totality of its activities into four key areas, namely

- *Maximising the Impact of Development NGOs*
- *Strengthening Ireland’s Commitment to Development*
- *Promoting Policies to End Poverty*
- *Building a More Effective Network*

Dóchas engages with a range of external stakeholders including Government, Irish and European civil society organisations, media, academics and the general public. It is estimated that the 39 Irish Development NGOs that are members of Dóchas embrace between them some 850,000 supporters, 900+ employees and a combined turn-over of over €300 million⁷. They are a diverse group of organisations, with different mandates, constituencies and ways of working. The Dóchas network has undergone incremental growth in its membership since the first Memorandum of Understanding was signed, with roughly two new organisations being admitted to membership at each AGM⁸ (out of five or so candidates annually). Thus between 2006 and 2009 the membership grew by some 15%, from 34 to 39, and in the course of the previous 3-year span of the first MoU 2002-05, the membership rose from 28 to 33 (18%). The relatively gradual growth curve has given Dóchas a chance to consolidate itself over time, allowing it to focus on forging cohesion across the network, promoting quality standards in procedures and practice of the members, and nurturing a culture of shared learning.

⁶ *First Memorandum of Understanding between Irish Aid and Dóchas 2002*

⁷ Dóchas Budget Submission 2009.

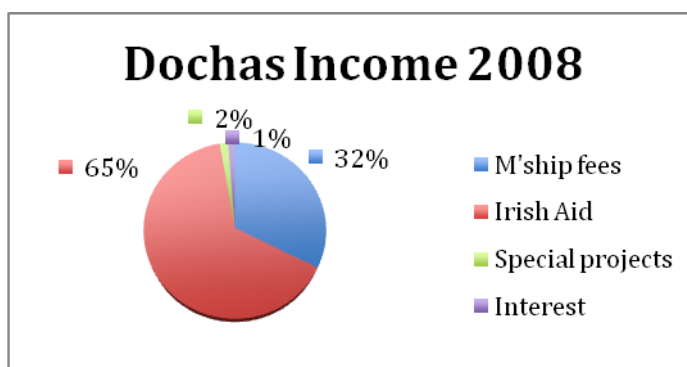
⁸ Admission to membership involves a 3-stage procedure: (i) a check by Dóchas Secretariat on the applicant’s technical compliance with the published membership criteria, (ii) substantive consideration by the Dóchas Board and (iii) a two-thirds majority vote at the AGM on foot of a positive recommendation from the Board.

3.1.3. Working Groups ⁹ are at the heart of Dóchas' work. These Working Groups provide a platform for members to come together and learn from each other. Through the Working Groups (and the less formal ad-hoc Learning Groups), members can come up with common solutions and recommendations for improvements to their own work and to the development cooperation programme of the Irish government and the EU.

3.1.4. The staff capacity of Dóchas was also expanded significantly during the period under review, although it still remains at a modest level in absolute terms, comprising a staff establishment of 3.5 full time equivalents. The creation in 2005 of a full-time post of Policy Officer and a part-time post of Information Officer has resulted in a palpable scaling-up of Dóchas output of work, as well as its ability to monitor and filter the voluminous information (domestic, European and global) which is of relevance to the development NGO community here.

3.1.5. In 2008 the breakdown of Dóchas' income ¹⁰ was as shown below.

	€	%
Membership Fees	124,977	32
Irish Aid Grant	250,000	65
Project Income	5,915	2
Bank Interest	4,759	1
TOTAL	385,651	100



3.2. Dóchas' outputs under its four strategic headings

3.2.1. Based on a desk review of Dóchas Annual Reports for the three years under review, together with observations from interviews with informed stakeholders, the Consultant used the four strategic headings quoted in paragraph 3.1 above to tabulate a selection of the tangible and factual outputs and track record of Dóchas. The list, which is not exhaustive, is testimony to the work rate of the organisation, work which has been

⁹ The Dóchas Working Groups currently comprise:

- Humanitarian Aid Working Group
- HIV & AIDS Working Group
- Development Education Working Group
- Food & Livelihood Security Working Group
- Disability and International Development Working Group

¹⁰ As per audited accounts for y/e 31.12.08 (signed off by the Board)

enabled to a significant extent by the Irish Aid – Dóchas cooperation and MoU which underpins it.

Strand	Selected Outputs of Dóchas' work 2006-08 (collated from Annual Reports)
Maximising the Impact of Development NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Publication of the NGO Accountability paper / strategy, and of the Dóchas <i>Governance and Procedures Manual</i>. ○ <i>Irish Development NGO Code on Corporate Governance</i> adopted, and being applied by many NGOs (within and beyond the international development sector). ○ <i>Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages (2007)</i> adopted by members. ○ Publication of the first ever Dóchas membership survey, presenting baseline data on the sector's current size and capacity, and increasing the sector's transparency. ○ Publication of a discussion document, followed by a seminar series, about the <i>Future of Irish Development NGOs</i>. ○ Publication of an occasional web-bulletin <i>Dóchas NGO Impact News</i> ○ Publication of weekly web-bulletin <i>Wednesday News</i> ○ Initiating a study <i>Partnerships in Practice – a Survey of NGO relationships</i> and of <i>Kenya Partnership Survey</i>. ○ Produced a resource handbook <i>Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in Humanitarian Action</i> ○ Hosted a wide range of topical learning fora, e.g. on HIV & AIDS, the Green Revolution, Human Resources, Garda Vetting of Prospective Volunteers, the Role of the Private Sector, and others identified by the members. ○ Submission to the OECD DAC Peer Review of Ireland (2008) ○ Developed Strategic Plans for its Working Groups on HIV & AIDS, Development Education and Disability
Strengthening Ireland's Commitment to Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dóchas carried out a targeted lobby of the main political parties, with a view to obtaining explicit commitments on overseas aid in their 2007 election manifestos. ○ Presentation of two guides for members of the Oireachtas on the work and values of Irish Development NGOs. ○ Contributions from Dóchas informed a media debate about aid and corruption. ○ Dóchas coordinated NGO input into key fora, e.g. Oireachtas debates on Policy Coherence for Development, Lisbon Treaty referendum, and World Aids Day events. ○ Follow-up commentary on the White Paper on Irish Aid (2006) ○ Contributed to the <i>IA Development Education Strategy 2008-11</i> ○ Advised IA on the remit and focus of the Information & Volunteering Centre, Dublin
Promoting Policies to End Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased public profile of Dóchas as a network, and of its messages, through publications and information services such as the HowYouCanHelp.ie website. ○ Coordinated NGO lobby in the run-up to the White Paper on Irish Aid (2006). ○ Hosting of regular gatherings of the Development Forum (with ABIA and Mísean Cara) ○ Publication of Dóchas Resource Document on <i>Tackling Corruption (2007)</i> ○ Influenced various IA policy papers relating to Civil Society, Education, Health, Gender, Environment and the report of the Hunger Task Force. ○ Produced annual briefing paper on <i>The EU Agenda for Dóchas members</i>. ○ Developed a joint policy platform with ICTU on <i>Aid for Trade</i> ○ Mobilised key 'practitioner' perspectives to Ireland's policy engagement on HIV & AIDS (e.g. UN AIDS, Global Fund, UN General Assembly Special Session, EU Presidency).

<p>Building a More Effective Network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In 2008 (for example) Dóchas organised 84 NGO meetings, attended by 700 staff members of member organisations and 140 staff of other organisations ○ Lobby and briefings on the Charities Bill 2007 reflecting key proposals and comments put forward by Dóchas members. ○ Dóchas members initiated a sector-wide survey into partnership practices. ○ A series of debates about <i>NGO Communications</i> prompted members to work together to improve the coherence of the NGO sector's voice. ○ Produced a checklist for NGO Insurance Cover. ○ Facilitated a research study on <i>Career Development and HR Enhancement in the Irish Development Sector</i>. ○ Organised a briefing session for members on accessing EU funding mechanisms. ○ Initiation of an on-line Consultant Register to assist member organisations. ○ Preparation on Strategy Paper on the Sustainability of Dóchas
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3.2.2. Turning now to Dóchas' engagement at **European level**, the organisation continues to be one of the more active National Platforms within the pan-European NGO structure, **CONCORD**¹¹. Irish NGOs are represented in several CONCORD working groups, and Trócaire's Justin Kilcullen plays a widely praised role as President of the network. Some other activities by Dóchas in the EU context included:

- Hosting a CONCORD Board meeting in Dublin in 2008;
- Dóchas has been asked to join a CONCORD Task Group on building the capacity of National Platforms in new Member States, e.g. Czech Republic (which incidentally is currently holding the EU Presidency).
- In particular, Dóchas staff played a mentoring role to the Lithuanian NGDO network, under a pilot initiative by CONCORD whereby one National Platform actively mentors another.
- Dóchas has met a number of times with the Irish Aid EU section to brief them on NGO priorities and concerns ahead of key EU-level meetings.
- Dóchas hosted a delegation of the Czech NGO platform, FoRS, when they visited Ireland to learn about the work of Dóchas, Dóchas members and Irish Aid, as preparation for the Czech EU Presidency project.
- organised a training event for Dóchas members on accessing EU funding in 2008¹².

On this last point, more than one voice from within Irish Aid saw merit in Dóchas continuing to help to link Irish Development NGOs into EU funding (thereby potentially reducing the perceived over-reliance of Irish NGDOs on the Civil Society Fund). As one interviewee put: *"In terms of funding prospects for 2009, my advice to any Irish NGO would have to be: if you want project funding next year, better look to Europe"*.

3.2.3. In 2008 Dóchas commissioned an evaluation of its Strategic Plan 2005-09¹³. The evaluation showed a sustained high level of satisfaction among members, the wider

¹¹ CONCORD is the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development. Its 18 international networks and 22 national associations from the European Member States represent more than 1600 European NGOs vis-à-vis the European Institutions. www.concordeurope.org

¹² The task of accessing EU funding is not straightforward; for example, the EU Commission is merging last year's funding round (2008) with this year's (2009), with the result that (a) the 1 in 10 chance of success has been lowered further, and (b) NGOs which are unsuccessful in 2009 will not be able to tender for EU funding until 2011.

¹³ Conall O'Caomh *Evaluation of Dóchas Plan 2005-2009*. June 2008.

NGO sector and government. The evaluation also found a very high degree of identification with the network, with a clear majority of members expressing strong commitment to the organisation and appreciation of its various areas of work, which were seen as meeting their needs to a high degree. However, a small minority of the membership indicated low identification, seeing Dóchas activities as largely irrelevant to their day to day operations and concerns, although not to the extent that were likely to disaffiliate. Some members reported a feeling of overload of dual network responsibilities. In terms of future priorities for Dóchas, the survey revealed a preference for direct services such as 'off the shelf' policies or information on alternative funders. Interviewees identified a series of key changes in the external environment which call for adjustment in how they and the network operate, e.g.:

- the funding environment;
- the demand for public accountability;
- the 'de-professionalisation' of development work, in portrayed and perceived as something that anyone can do);
- the weakening of traditional NGO relations with the public;
- changes in Irish Aid, and
- the need to adapt private sector approaches in NGO work.

3.2.4. The Dóchas internal evaluation cast a spotlight on the implications of the phenomenal growth in recent years of emerging Irish organisations with an outreach to the developing world (some of which are offshoots of private philanthropy, others are small-scale localized civil society initiatives). To some extent these embryonic organisations have begun to eclipse the more traditional Development NGOs in terms of ability to engage with, and to capture the imagination of, the Irish public. Many have also taken advantage of the openness of Irish Aid's Civil Society funding mechanisms in recent years.¹⁴ The existing membership of Dóchas recognizes the need to engage with the newcomers, in order to help improve their organisational capacity and accountability, and to reduce the reputational risks for the whole sector.

3.3. Irish Aid.

3.3.1. Turning now to the Irish Aid side of the partnership embodied in the MoU, there have been a number of significant developments of an organisational and policy nature during the past three-year period which are relevant in the context of this review. Above all, the most striking feature – until July 2008 – was the buoyant level of Ireland's ODA budget, with an average spend of just under €850m in each of the 3 years 2006-8. This made Ireland "*the sixth biggest donor in the world, in terms of ODA per capita, and it has taken a leadership role in enhancing the impact of global aid efforts, in areas such as HIV & AIDS, civil society and emergency response*".¹⁵

3.3.2. A flavour of the sheer breadth and depth of policy development in Irish Aid in that relatively short time span can be discerned from the following selective list of policy-related Irish Aid publications in the recent past ¹⁶:

- Publication of the first-ever Government *White Paper on Irish Aid* (2006).
- Report of the Hunger Task Force (2008)
- *Guidelines on Children Living in the Context of HIV and AIDS* (2008)

¹⁴ The cumulative total of beneficiary organisations of Irish Aid's Civil Society Fund reached 206 in 2008, although that more than half of these would not be eligible for Dóchas membership, being non-Irish entities, academic institutions, or bodies for whom development work is not a core activity.

¹⁵ Quotation from Dóchas' Budget Submission for 2009 (September 2008).

¹⁶ At the time of writing, a Policy Paper on Humanitarian Relief was also in preparation

- Irish Aid *Civil Society Policy* (2008), which incidentally contains prominent references to the key role played by Dóchas;
- Irish Aid *Education Policy and Strategy Paper* (2008)
- Irish Aid *Health Policy paper - Improving Health to Reduce Poverty* (2008)
- Irish Aid *Environmental Policy Paper* (2008)
- Irish Aid *Evaluation Policy* (2008)
- *Programme of Strategic Cooperation between Irish Aid and Higher Education 2007-11*.
- *Development Education - an Introduction* (2007)
- *Linking Ireland and the South: Good Practice Guidelines for North-South Linking* (2006).

Almost all of this policy development was greeted with approval by Dóchas' constituency, and in many ways, Irish Aid was now doing precisely what the Development NGOs had long been urging it to do, in terms of embracing and codifying best international donor practice. In fact, it could be said that in contrast to a decade ago when the NGOs found themselves taking the lead on the development policy front, they have now been overtaken by Irish Aid in terms of policy capacity and praxis.

3.3.3. In parallel with developing new policies on many fronts, there has been significant structural reorganisation and (until recently) growth in volume of Irish Aid funding support to Irish Development NGOs under the three broad categories of Civil Society Development fund, Emergency and Recovery, and Development Education. Within the Civil Society fund category, the following qualitative improvements have been instituted:

- Twice-yearly Thematic Learning fora for MAPS partners (plus others by invitation), and selection of a thematic topic each year for in-depth research;
- Significant expansion of the number of agencies in receipt of multi-annual Block Grant funding from three to twenty;
- Re-formulation - in greater detail than previously - of the MAPS Guidelines (March 2006);
- Formulation and publication of the criteria governing Organisational Assessments of NGOs seeking to progress towards multi-annual, more programmatic funding.

Recent innovations to Irish Aid's Emergency and Recovery funding mechanisms have included:

- the advent of a more programmatic and predictable funding mechanism for 8 eligible NGOs under the Humanitarian Programme Policy (HPP) process,
- the provision of an additional flexible funding window to Trócaire, Concern Worldwide and GOAL, by way of a rolling Emergency and Relief Fund (ERF) mechanism¹⁷, and
- new application and report formats aimed at streamlining appraisal and monitoring processes.

3.3.4. Irish Aid has continued to recruit – and promote – Development Specialist staff, most of whom have prior experience as staff members of Development NGOs and who therefore can relate well to Dóchas and its members, as and when the circumstances arise. Even though the relationship between Dóchas and Irish Aid has tended not to be an adversarial one, the reality is that statutory bodies and NGO networks act out different roles in the public policy arena, and it can obviously help the functioning of the inter-relationship between the two if the staff of one have an insight and understanding

¹⁷ The ERF is a pilot initiative and will be reviewed during 2009.

of what makes the other tick, in terms of their organisational cultures, motivations, and constraints. The MoU clearly acknowledges the different and distinct roles played by the two agencies, stating that *“Irish Aid and Dóchas acknowledge the multifaceted nature of this relationship, which included elements of mutual learning, policy dialogue and practical interaction, as well as Irish Aid financial support for Dóchas activities”*.

3.3.5. The impact on the IA – Dóchas partnership of the move of IA Headquarters to Limerick under the Government’s Decentralisation Initiative is hard to gauge at this comparatively early stage. Already, it is clear that the frequency of informal contact is much reduced, and the ability of IA and NGO personnel to engage in joint reflection (through the kind of round-table lunchtime seminar which occasionally took place in Dublin) is now restricted. In these circumstances, looking ahead, the dynamics of the partnership may have to rely more heavily on whatever formal procedures and consultative machinery are to be built in to a new MoU between the parties.

3.3.6. Until recent months, the backdrop to the Irish Aid-Dóchas partnership was a generally favourable one. In particular, it was positively influenced by –

- a buoyant budgetary profile (such that NGDOs were generally pushing an open door in regard to the flow of IA co-funding, many of them on a multi-annual basis), and
- a dynamic policy climate, with very few issues arising on which the two sides of the partnership fundamentally diverged.

It is indeed the case that under the MoU, Dóchas and its members and Irish Aid sought to mould and develop a genuine partnership such as to facilitate a frank, appropriately balanced and mutually respectful relationship which would transcend funding issues and embrace issues of aid quality, effectiveness and sharing of learning. The sudden and severe reversal of budgetary fortunes since July 2008 present all concerned with a set of circumstances which were completely unforeseen a year ago, and which inevitably give rise to stresses and strains unknown in the Irish development sector for two decades past. Arguably, this reality makes it all the more important for the partnership ‘architecture’ to be maintained and enhanced, as a reflection of the underlying common interest which both sides of the partnership share in minimising the possible damage to Ireland’s credibility as a proponent of global justice and human rights.

4. Findings.

4.1. General

4.1.1. During the three-year period under review, Dóchas is perceived by those consulted for this evaluation as having become increasingly more professional in the way that it does its business, by

- ❖ promoting improved quality standards within the Development NGO sector (with particular reference to the Codes of Practice);
- ❖ facilitating concerted reflection and action among its members (among whom it enjoys an 'honest broker' role),
- ❖ contributing to building shared trust, confidence and respect *within* the sector (with agencies being decidedly more open to mutually sharing information and resources than was formerly the case);
- ❖ contributing to building shared trust, confidence and respect *between* the NGDO sector and Irish Aid (with the main focus here being on constructive engagement around policy development and, to a lesser extent, shared learning).

With regard to the perception of Dóchas by its members, the consultations undertaken during this Evaluation echoed the findings of the membership survey which Dóchas undertook in 2008 as a prelude to drawing up a new Strategic Plan 2009-12; summarised in the table below.

Members appreciated....	Members were worried about....
Dóchas' representative role	Lack of joint work between Dóchas and members
Dóchas' internal transparency	Lack of explicit commitment of some members
Dóchas' staff skills	Dóchas' ability to lead the sector
Dóchas' lobby efficacy	Lack of profile for joint work and for Dóchas itself
Dóchas' information services	Lack of funding for Dóchas
	Dóchas' efforts to successfully engage its members

Source: Strategic Planning page on Dóchas' website

4.1.2. Almost unanimously, stakeholders see the relationship between Dóchas and Irish Aid as broadly constructive, healthy and stronger now than ever before. Respondents described Dóchas' standing with Irish Aid as '*credible*' and '*growing in trust and confidence*'. Dóchas is perceived to '*have a Secretariat and Board of good calibre*' and to be '*good at back-channel diplomacy*' (which "*almost invariably makes it the first port of call*" for Irish Aid in relating to the Development NGO sector). It comes as no surprise therefore that the Irish Aid Civil Society Policy document (2008) acknowledged "*the relationship between Irish Aid and Dóchas [as] an important point of contact and cooperation between Irish Aid and the Irish non-government sector. Irish Aid and Dóchas will strengthen dialogue mechanisms on policy and practice issues within the framework of the White Paper and of the Millennium Development Goals.*"¹⁸

4.1.4. At the same time, there is an appreciation among some stakeholders of the complexity of this relationship and that it is further complicated by Dóchas being two-thirds dependent for its funding on Irish Aid. This is not unusual; it is commonplace for NGOs to be receiving core funding from Government, and especially so in the case of NGO networks which are analogous in structure to Dóchas (such as the National Youth

¹⁸ Irish Aid Civil Society Policy (2008). Page 14

Council or the Disability Federation of Ireland, whose dependency ratios are higher still¹⁹). Stakeholders from either side of the partnership considered

- that in an ideal world, Dóchas would have zero dependence on Irish Aid funding,
- that in the world of *realpolitik*, total self-funding by a body such as Dóchas is not a practical proposition,
- that definite 'public good' benefits are conferred by the stronger networking, shared learning and promotion of good practice which Dóchas promotes, and
- that the investment of public money in Dóchas is therefore justifiable on value for money grounds.

4.1.5. Here and there, Irish Aid officials considered Dóchas' tactics, representations or its public advocacy stances to have been mildly ill-judged, but ultimately the prerogative of NGOs to assert their independence and to voice evidence-based criticism at political level is acknowledged as healthy in the wider scheme of things. Conversely, there have been instances where Dóchas felt that its consultative role was unsatisfactory (e.g. in relation to the Irish Aid Humanitarian Relief policy currently in preparation), or appeared to be lacking in depth (e.g. the Governance Policy, before the 2009 round of consultations), but these instances appear to have been the exception rather than the rule. In the course of this evaluation, and as an illustration of one of several mechanisms of Dóchas-Irish Aid interaction, the Consultant was granted permission to sit in on a joint session between a Dóchas Working Group and Irish Aid officials, and was able to witness some of these dynamics being played out. The atmosphere was businesslike, and all present seemed to ultimately recognise that they were brought together by a fundamental common purpose of combating poverty and human suffering. However that being said, straight and candid talking was done, and there were several points of the discussion on which the parties had to agree either to 'park' their respective positions, or agree to disagree.

4.1.6. Contact between Dóchas and Irish Aid takes place at various levels and to reflect this there exists a variety of mechanisms for structured dialogue, some of which are more formal than others. Examples of the more formal ones are:

- (a) the Development Forum;²⁰
- (b) consultations between Dóchas Chair/CEO and the Director General (twice yearly);
- (c) consultations between Dóchas Chair / CEO and Civil Society Section (twice yearly, usually in March and September);
- (d) bilaterals between the Dóchas Humanitarian Aid Working Group and the Emergency and Recovery Section (thrice yearly).

All parties value the Development Forum as a formal mechanism for structured engagement between Irish Aid and the NGDO sector. The Forum operated under the aegis of the Advisory Board for Irish Aid until the latter's term of office expired last year (2008), but the future modalities for this Forum were unclear at time of writing.

4.1.7. An example of a rather *informal* relationship is that between Dóchas and the EU / Multilateral Section of Irish Aid, with Dóchas usually being afforded an opportunity to offer observations on relevant agenda items scheduled for discussion at meetings of the General Affairs Committee of the EU Council. It is important to mention that even where

¹⁹ In excess of 75% in both cases.

²⁰ The Development Forum (the blueprint for which emerged from the 2002 Irish Aid Review) was established under the aegis of the Advisory Board, and was intended to meet twice per year. It brought together c. 35 participants from Irish Aid, NGDO representatives (nominated by Dóchas) and missionary representatives (nominated by IMU and CMSI). Because the Advisory Board entity has lapsed at time of writing (the outgoing one have expired in October 2008), a degree of uncertainty surrounds the mechanics as to how the Development Forum is to be managed in future.

there is a formal mechanism in place for structured dialogue, personnel concerned on either side of the partnership can *usually* feel free to engage with each other informally as and when the need arises, and as a result, problems which might otherwise have the potential to fester can be sorted out at the lowest level possible. Compared to its sister networks in elsewhere in Europe, Dóchas would seem to be unique in having access to such a combination of formal and informal channels of communication; while there have a few instances where the balance may have tilted too far towards informality²¹, no-one really wants to see procedural rigidities becoming predominant in the relationship. That said, the re-location of Irish Aid to Limerick may induce rather more formality than previously obtained.

4.1.8. The extent to which Dóchas is perceived as a partner does not appear to be uniform across all the sections of Irish Aid which have reason to do business with the network. Understandably, Civil Society Section is seen as the anchor point of the relationship at the Irish Aid end, because the grant aid is paid from that source and an official of that Section has rights of attendance at the Dóchas Board. However, in order to avoid the relationship being too 'personality-dependent', clearer (though not necessarily formalised) mechanisms need to be established to facilitate coherent engagement of Dóchas with other sections of Irish Aid, such as Public Information & Development Education, EU / Multilateral, and the new Policy Programme and Effectiveness Section.

4.1.9. Particular appreciation was voiced by interviewees for the role of the Director and the staff team, who are said to be consistently courteous, open and responsive to enquiries, requests and suggestions. The role of Director is acknowledged by all to be potentially fraught with difficulty, having to carefully balance the need to take leadership and show initiative on the one hand, with the need to respect the autonomy and scope for independent action of each constituent member on the other. The Board has also earned the respect of both affiliates and other stakeholders for the diligent and committed manner in which the Directors have collectively discharged their duties. Broadly speaking, the relationship between executive staff and Board would appear to be healthy.

4.2. Relevance.

4.2.1. In spite of the acknowledged diversity in its membership, Dóchas has succeeded remarkably well in attuning its activities to the needs and priorities of its members, especially those which are most active in the various Working Groups (the agendas of which are by definition needs-driven). The following initiatives were the ones most frequently identified in the interviews as having been *highly relevant* in the eyes of the members:

- ⇒ Code of Practice on Governance
- ⇒ Code of Practice on Images
- ⇒ Garda vetting of Volunteers (both serving and prospective)
- ⇒ Careers and Development Initiative (involving a sub-group on HR which was precipitated by the difficulties experienced by agencies in efforts to recruit the 'right' people).
- ⇒ Articulating a coordinated Irish NGDO input to the Make Poverty History and Fairtrade movements.

²¹ For example, in the run-up to the OECD Peer Review in 2008

4.2.2. Dóchas actively seeks to help its membership to shape the future individually and collectively. For example, during the first half of 2008, Dóchas hosted a series of discussion events on the future of Irish Development NGOs, based on a discussion document.²² The series encouraged members to explore changes in the roles of Development NGOs, in the values of Irish society, expectations from donors, supporters and partners, and in the concepts of development cooperation. The themes and challenges were subsequently discussed in the process towards a Strategic Plan 2009-2015, and in special task groups on human resources and NGO communications. The Dóchas discussion document set out a series of potential challenges to Irish Development NGOs (depicted below). A subsequent on-line survey found that Dóchas members agreed with the challenges identified, and appreciated the priority Dóchas accorded to debating the long-term trends.



4.2.3. There is one further challenge not explicitly mentioned in the above graphic but which cropped up in a couple of the stakeholder interviews, namely the bewilderment of the Irish public at the multiplicity of Development NGOs within what is a small country, and the associated perception of duplication of overheads and dis-economies of scale. According to some informants, the Irish Development NGO landscape will look very different a decade from now, by which time 'niche' NGOs will have formed coalitions with like minded ones; a significant number will have undergone mergers and acquisitions, and larger NGOs, in the quest to be more cost-effective, will increasingly out-source significant chunks of their work to smaller ones. Perhaps Dóchas members need to begin to explore these 'what if' scenarios in a more explicit way, and in doing so to take full advantage of the 'safe' space for discussion and reflection which Dóchas offers.

4.3. Efficiency.

4.3.1. From the Irish Aid point of view, the existence of Dóchas confers considerable efficiency gains in the conduct of its relationships with Irish-based civil society organisations (especially in the cases of Civil Society Section and the Emergency and Recovery Section). Efficiency gains arise from being able to channel much of the two-way communication and consultation processes which these Sections frequently have

²² A Wave of Change - How Irish NGOs will Sink or Swim March 2008.

with a multiplicity of client NGOs through a single contact point, in the knowledge that the messages will be disseminated accurately, promptly and reliably. Dóchas is also valued as a sounding board with which officials can dialogue to 'test the water' before formalising a contemplated course of action.

Examples of the kinds of information which Irish Aid finds it useful to disseminate via Dóchas are:

- overseas volunteering opportunities,
- upcoming deadlines for funding schemes,
- promoting events hosted by the IA Volunteering Centre,
- requests for case studies photographic material etc illustrating NGOs' work in the field, and the strategic alliance between these NGOs and Irish Aid.

Irish Aid also finds it useful to be able to tap into a single source for information / briefing about Development NGO events, publications, appointments, staff changes, etc. Thus the *Wednesday News* and other Dóchas material are read with keen interest not just in the NGO circles, but also in the corridors of Irish Aid.

4.3.2. Similar efficiency gains accrue to Dóchas members (and indeed to non-members), through access to one single portal for inter-agency communication and the single point of reference for information, statistics and documentation bank which Dóchas provides. Even a relatively simple service such as Dóchas *Wednesday News* (which is distributed by e-mail each week to some 1,200 subscribers, and which is also posted on the Dóchas website) is considered to be essential reading throughout the sector; after all, it constitutes the central, one-stop 'bulletin board' for up-to-date news and announcements from a sector which is always prone to information overload, and which what sometimes appear to be disparate and fragmented.

4.3.3. The internal efficiency of Dóchas was commented on favourably by almost all stakeholders interviewed. The work rate and output of the Secretariat are widely acknowledged to be impressive relative to its modest size, and budgets tend to be managed carefully (some would say, frugally). A significant factor in the organisation's efficient use of resources lies in the contributions-in-kind which are made by its members, in releasing their staff to attend the Dóchas Board, Working Groups and other meetings, and to engage in preparatory and follow-up activities, usually in the service of the network as a whole, with little tangible benefit to the individual agency concerned. The Dóchas Annual Report 2008 attempted to calculate a shadow price for this contribution in kind, and came up with a figure of €37,500. This is almost certainly an underestimate, because (a) it does not take account of time spent on work for Dóchas outside of actual meetings, (b) it assumed an average unit cost of staff time to be only €30 per hour, and (c) it excluded both the actual travel costs and the opportunity cost of time travelling to and from meetings for those based outside Dublin. A more realistic estimate of the value of in-kind contributions would probably be in excess of €50,000. (By comparison, the total cash contributions by way of affiliation fees amount to c. €125,000 annually).

4.3.4. The Terms of Reference of this evaluation invited comment on whether Dóchas' work in capacity building for learning and reflection is 'coherent with other capacity building providers and strategies'. The responses from stakeholders would suggest that the boundaries and respective roles are reasonably well defined and understood. Dóchas sees promotion of shared learning as very important for network-building and for NGO effectiveness, but in so far as training comes into this, it would see its role more in *identifying* unmet training needs rather than necessarily delivering

training itself. Other agencies have parallel roles in capacity building, but each in a differentiated way:

Agency	Relationship vis-à-vis Dóchas	Evaluator's comment
DTalk	Dóchas is represented on the Steering Committee of DTalk, and through this it can and does influence the content and methodology of DTalk's courses to reflect the collective learning of the membership network, e.g. in relation to HIV and AIDS, NGO governance, Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, etc. Dóchas disseminates information about DTalk courses via its Wednesday News.	Cooperation and complementarity between the two seems excellent
Misean Cara	Utilises DTalk to meet most of the training needs of its members within Ireland. Applied for membership of Dóchas in 2008 but in vain (party attributable to IMU / Misean Cara duality)	Irrespective of membership issue, scope exists for closer horizontal contact between Misean Cara and Dóchas in sharing of learning and dissemination of good development practice.
IDEA	Encompasses a larger circle of players than Dóchas Development Education Working Group (including for example, teacher education colleges). The two have begun to collaborate more closely, e.g. in organising a joint learning event on Technology and its application to Development Education.	Constituencies overlap but not co-extensive. Growing sense of cooperation.
Comhlámh	Itself an affiliate of Dóchas and a participant in the Dev Ed Working group, Comhlámh's involvement in organisational capacity building is confined to the niche area of the volunteer sending agencies	Mutual roles seem to be distinct, complementary and respected

4. 4. Effectiveness.

4.4.1. The effectiveness of Dóchas as a partner with Irish Aid can be considered under the sub-headings of (i) representative remit, (ii) networking, standard-setting and promoting accountability within the NGDO sector, (iii) public messaging, and (iv) the shared agenda which is emerging around 'aid effectiveness' and policy coherence.

4.4.2. Representative remit:

As the national platform of Irish Development NGOs, Dóchas represents its members to the European Union and the Irish Government, on issues of importance to the policy environment in which they work. By promoting cooperation among its members, Dóchas contributes to improving the quality and impact of their work. The report of the *Evaluation of the Dóchas Strategic Plan 2005-09* concluded that "the underlying 'glue' appears to be the [members'] shared interest (as distinct from a collective vision)"²³.

Given the nature of Irish political culture, no-one expects that Dóchas should be the sole communication channel between Irish Aid and the Development NGO family. Individual affiliates (especially the larger ones) have traditionally enjoyed direct access to senior officials of Irish Aid and to Ministers, and that reality is unlikely to change. Furthermore the composition of the membership is so diverse that the network cannot always speak with one voice, much as this prospect might sometimes appear attractive to Irish Aid from the point of view of administrative convenience. As one Dóchas publication put it, "Dóchas members are an eclectic mix of international / overseas development (52% of members), humanitarian relief and development (20%), development education or volunteering (28%) focused organisations."²⁴

Notwithstanding their diversity, the members (especially the small to medium sized organisations) attach importance to Dóchas as a facilitator and an interlocutor with Irish Aid on a collective basis, because:

- members see their own legitimacy as being affirmed through membership of the network²⁵;
- the Dóchas 'imprimatur' on submissions and representations is perceived as conferring on such documents a degree of authority and credibility that would be absent if agencies were attempting this individually;
- the Dóchas umbrella affords protective anonymity to members (especially the very small ones) which might otherwise feel a degree of vulnerability in raising potentially sensitive issues with Irish Aid, either of a policy or procedural nature.

While Dóchas' strength clearly resides in the collective nature of the network (which incidentally represents the greatest share of Irish Development NGOs by revenue volume), a recent membership survey revealed that its credibility as the voice of the sector is weakened by the combination of losing GOAL as a member and of not recruiting so many of the small recently-emerging organisations²⁶. The Director of Dóchas has compiled a database of some 67 such organisations, and over time has made contact with their spokespersons; the outcome of these contacts broke down fairly evenly between (a) non-respondents, (b) non-committal acknowledgments, and (c) positive interest / follow-up. In all of this, Dóchas finds itself confronted by two conflicting pressures: one is to safeguard minimum standards and credibility of Irish

²³ O'Coaimh. *Evaluation of Dóchas Strategic Plan 2005-2009*, page 2

²⁴ Dóchas 2006 Member Survey – Key Results and Trends. June 2007.

²⁵ *ibid*, page 2

²⁶ *ibid*, page 4

NGDOs (analogous to the role of a 'trade association'), and the other is to broaden its membership base (with the possibility that failure to do so could result in the emergence of a separate parallel network of new groups, such as business initiated charities). This dilemma is high on the list of those with which Dóchas is currently grappling as part of the deliberations on a new Strategic Plan 2009-2015.

4.4.3. Networking, standard-setting and promoting accountability.

The Dóchas Working Groups can be described as the 'engine room' where NGDOs (including aspirant members, and sometimes – by invitation - Irish Aid officials) come together to share learning, resources, intelligence on what constitutes good practice, and to agree on concerted action. The HIV & AIDS Working Group is often mentioned as an illustration of the benefits and the effectiveness which flow from this form of collaboration, given the requisite commitment and aptitudes of members – see Annex 3 for a short profile of this Working Group. It is also an illustration of how the statutory and voluntary sides of partnership can mutually reinforce each other's work where there is scope to do so, without compromising or diluting the role of either. In an unsolicited testimonial to the effectiveness of the Working Group, the former Irish Aid HIV & AIDS Advisor, Ms Nicola Brennan, wrote²⁷:

The Dóchas HIV and AIDS Working Group has been unique in its approach to HIV and AIDS, setting a clear strategic framework as a network body while each individual member having its own comparative strengths on addressing the HIV pandemic. The input and representation from the Working Group to Ireland's national statements presented to the United Nations General Assembly were a model of best practice within UN Member States and our events focused on 'learning and best practice' were instrumental in informing policy and programming in Irish Aid. ...

Looking ahead, the HIV and AIDS Working Group is keen to maintain focus on (a) 2010 as the year for delivery on HIV Universal Access / UNGASS targets, and beyond that (b) on 2015 as the year for fulfilling the MDG 6 Target 7.

Other working groups have focused on promoting good practice and quality standards in the Development NGO sector, for example the *Code of Conduct on Images and Messages*, which is now subscribed to by the entire membership, by Irish Aid and by several non-members, was devised and championed by the Development Education Working Group. Mention should also be made of the Disability and Development Working Group, which is striving in an innovative way to redress an area of relative neglect, by encouraging Development NGOs in Ireland to recognise the importance of including disability concerns in their work, and to encouraging Disability Organisations in Ireland to consider Development issues and ways of sharing their expertise / materials.

By way of observation, the Consultant was struck by the correlation between the work rate / output of a particular Working Group and the presence therein of a Convenor with suitable expertise, who is afforded sufficient working time by their employer NGO as a contribution-in-kind to Dóchas.

4.4.4. Public Messaging.

The work done by Dóchas to date around the 'Aid Works' theme, and the careful targeting of these efforts towards the Oireachtas, is recognised across the stakeholder spectrum as having been a very valuable element in its wider public 'messaging role'. In

²⁷ Extract from letter from N Brennan to Dóchas Director, 11th December 2008.

order to up-skill its constituency, Dóchas and Connect-World within the past year have hosted a series of workshopson **NGO Communications**, having teamed up with a number of communications professionals to analyse NGO public communications and to promote reflection among NGOs about the consistency and efficacy of their public communications. In so far as the frequency of media references to Dóchas can be taken as a proxy indicator of performance / impact in its public messaging role, an analysis of 2008 revealed that Dóchas featured in 26 print media items (up from 17 the year before), and 11 broadcast media items (the same as in 2007).²⁸ This of course is a rather crude yardstick, since (a) Dóchas on occasion finds itself in competition with its own members for 'column inches', and (b) the real intention is not to attract publicity for Dóchas *per se*, but rather for the substantive issues of fundamental concern to the network as a whole.

In response to the contraction in the ODA budget and the distinct possibility of slippage in the '0.7% by 2012' target, there was widespread support among interviewees for intensified cooperation between Dóchas and Irish Aid, to nurture public awareness. However views diverged as to the best strategy for Dóchas - whether to invest heavily in building a much stronger, conspicuous and more recognisable brand awareness as the basis for communicating directly with the public, or whether to work behind the scenes with and through the members of the network. The 2008 *Evaluation of Dóchas Strategic Plan 2005-09* is definitive on this issue, declaring that "Dóchas' role is not to run communication campaigns, but to facilitate coordination and complementarity among members"; it went on to recommend that "Dóchas needs to engage high level professional assistance in preparing a communications strategy, not for itself but for the sector".

Many interviewees remarked on the general lack of understanding about development among the Irish public; one of these felt that this was "reflective of a combined communications failure on the part of Irish Aid and of the NGOs to bring the Irish public with them over the past 10-15 years".

4.4.5. Aid Effectiveness / Coherence Agenda.

For Dóchas, accountability is the key to enhanced impact and effectiveness, which is why it has been consistently urging NGDOs 'to be clear about what it is they do, how they do it and why'. Reflecting on the "significant shift of emphasis in Dóchas' work", it recognised - in its *Strategy for Maximising NGO Impact* (October 2006) - "the inherent linkages between greater NGO quality, greater public commitment and better government policies". This echoed the Strategic Plan 2005-09, in which member organisations committed themselves to a coherent agenda aimed at optimising Ireland's contribution to the international community's efforts to eradicate global poverty, accepting the premise that making poverty history is about more than aid alone.

Thus the impetus provided by Dóchas has helped Irish development NGOs to begin the process of exploring the concepts of policy coherence and aid effectiveness which were highlighted by the Paris Declaration three years ago, and observers agree that there remains much scope for further work on this front by the NGO sector. As a result, all those involved in delivery of aid – official donors and non-state actors alike – are challenged:

- (a) to become more accountable by being able to demonstrate to the wider public that their money is being put to best possible use and that 'aid works', and

²⁸ Dóchas Annual Report 2008.

(b) to complement their aid efforts with concerted action to remove those obstacles and reform other policies that undermine development (protectionist subsidies, restrictive trade rules, migration policies and unequal access to energy supplies).

The High Level Forum in Accra in September 2008 (led by official donors, but with representation also from International Development NGOs) has given fresh impetus to finding ways in which donors and development NGOs *together* can work to help developing countries in the fight against poverty by making aid more accountable, transparent and results oriented.²⁹ This impetus is likely to become more pronounced in the years ahead, as we move into the 'home run' phase leading to 2015 (the target year for attainment of the MDGs). Irish Aid has responded to the recent developments by creating a new Policy Planning & Effectiveness Section, and by instituting a cross-departmental group on Coherence. For its part, Dóchas has been fully plugged into the debate and analysis around this major theme at the level of CONCORD. There would seem to be a timely convergence towards significant common ground around the drive for effectiveness and coherence, which points up an opportunity for Irish Aid and Dóchas to capitalise on to mutual advantage, under a new and revamped Memorandum of Understanding over the next five years (see Sections on Conclusions and Recommendations).

4.5. Sustainability

4.5.1. Two aspects of sustainability arise here – (i) the sustainability of Dóchas as an organisation, and (ii) the sustainability of benefits arising from its partnership relationship with Irish Aid.

4.5.2. With regard to its own organisational sustainability, Dóchas addresses this explicitly in a published paper *Dóchas Strategy for Sustainability* (November 2007). In the Dóchas Strategic Plan, the network had identified the need for Dóchas to ensure its long-term sustainability. The objective for Dóchas, in this context, is: "To support the achievement of other strategic objectives by maintaining a well governed and managed organisation based on active member participation." For Dóchas, sustainability means that

*"the organisation continues to function effectively until it achieves its goals, or until its members are no longer willing or able to continue, or until it becomes irrelevant. Our sustainability is thus linked intrinsically to the organisation being effective, and relevant to its stakeholders. Furthermore, Dóchas is sustainable if it continues to enable high-quality relationships."*³⁰

4.5.3. With regard to the financial aspect of sustainability, the Strategy Paper acknowledges that Dóchas is not and never will be a self-financing organisation, but rather is reliant on key stakeholders, namely Dóchas members and the Government:

Dóchas' main source of income is a multi-annual grant from the Irish government. This support is based on a shared understanding of Dóchas' role and relevance, and on a genuine commitment on the part of Irish Aid to efforts aimed at enhancing the capacity and impact of the Irish Development NGO sector. Crucially, the support consists not only of funding, but is based on a genuine

²⁹ It is relevant to mention here that the Accra Agenda for Action set out commitments on civil society, particularly points 13b, 20a, 20b and 20c of the Agenda.

³⁰ *Dóchas Strategy for Sustainability* (November 2007). Page 1

*partnership where government supports our work in many other ways as well.*³¹

The MoU contained a statement of intent “that as Dóchas develops as an organisation, its members should pay an increasing share the overall costs”. Our finding on this point is that if term ‘costs’ is interpreted in purely financial terms, the share of total income represented by the Irish Aid grant has remained fairly static, fluctuating between 63% and 66% during the period of the MoU; consequently, the stated intention has not been achieved and may in fact have been rather aspirational from the outset. If on the other hand ‘overall costs’ is interpreted more broadly to include staff time inputs and other contributions in kind from the members, a more balance picture emerges (see also 4.3.3 above).

4.5.4. In a prudent move, the Board of Dóchas in March 2008 adopted a Reserves Policy for the organisation, whereby a minimum liquidity level was set.³² Whilst the principle of Irish Aid funding support to Dóchas seems to have broad support across the entire stakeholder circle (no-one interviewed advocated discontinuation of the Dóchas grant), opinions diverge as to whether the existing balance between government subvention and other income is healthy. While there is a natural tension between financial dependence on government and maintaining one’s integrity to advocate and critique, Dóchas is perceived to have rather skilfully struck a balance between the two. Some (albeit a minority) are convinced that there is some scope for an increase in affiliation fees, and most feel that there is scope for expansion of the membership base (although the motivation for this is not primarily financial, but rather the strengthening of Dóchas mandate and credibility). Beyond this, the current deliberations of the Dóchas Board in the context of framing the new Strategic Plan would suggest that the Board sees it as important for the organisation to have a more diverse funding base, implying a quest for either some philanthropic funding and / or a grant from one of the EU funding windows (since public fundraising in the case of Dóchas is seen as impractical and inimical to the relationships with its own members).

4.5.5. Turning now to *the sustainability of benefits* of the partnership, these would seem to revolve mainly around:

- the efficiency gains accruing to both Irish Aid and to the Development NGOs (section 4.3 above),
- the fact of providing a vehicle for shared learning between statutory and voluntary sectors, e.g. in relation to HIV & AIDS interventions (section 4.4.3 above),
- potential for more successfully demonstrating impact and results to the general public, as a result of the partners focusing more intently on aid effectiveness and policy coherence.

Finally, the findings of this evaluation confirm that the change of emphasis of Dóchas which was heralded in the Strategic Plan 2005-09 is in fact occurring, whereby ‘servicing’ and doing things on behalf of its members is becoming less pronounced, and correspondingly more attention is being devoted to Dóchas as providing a respected and enabling space within which the membership can pursue collective action and

³¹ *ibid.* page 2

³² The level which was agreed and formalised in the organisation’s financial procedures was fixed at the higher of:

- subscriptions from the largest two members (currently €50,000)
- four months funding from Irish Aid (currently €85,000)

mutual learning. As was articulated in the *Dóchas Strategy for Maximising NGO Impact* (October 2006):

“by working together through Dóchas, member organisations can improve their own work, and strengthen government policy, if they are willing and able to learn from their experiences”.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Overall, what emerges from this assessment is a strong endorsement of the achievements and work rate of Dóchas over the past three years. Almost unanimously, stakeholders see the relationship between Dóchas and Irish Aid as broadly constructive, healthy and stronger now than ever before; furthermore the quality of the relationship is acknowledged by most informants to have matured considerably during the lifetime of the recent MoU. Generally, the interaction has been articulate, perceptive and devoid of the partisan rhetoric which can sometimes characterise relationships between statutory bodies and NGOs.

5.2. This constructive engagement has been greatly facilitated by three factors:

- i. the once-expanding funding climate in Irish Aid which prevailed for most of the period of the MoU;
- ii. a commitment to make the relationship work for the common good, both at the levels of Irish Aid's Director-General and of the Senior Management Group on the one hand, and of the Chair and Board of Dóchas on the other;
- iii. the identification of an Irish Aid official as the link person with Dóchas, to attend Board meetings for relevant agenda items and to facilitate two-way communication on an ongoing basis³³;

5.3. Now that the first of these factors – the expanding ODA budget - has gone dramatically into reverse, the partnership is mutually challenged by externalities which are of neither's making. Both parties to the partnership – Irish Aid and Dóchas - clearly have common cause in nurturing and enlarging the constituency of support in Ireland for international development engagement and for following through on human rights obligations. This is especially true at a time of stringency both in public expenditure and in voluntary donations. Unfortunately, this is also the very time when the partnership between the two (and indeed the cohesion of the Dóchas network itself) is likely to come under strain, as competition for scarce resources becomes more intense, and as hard decisions around resource allocation have to be made. In the new and adverse funding climate which now prevails, Dóchas faces the challenge of conducting its public advocacy about Government policy towards ODA in a way which does not put Irish Aid officials on the defensive, but rather accentuates the common interest shared by all who are striving – by different means – to uphold our obligations to the world's poor. As for Irish Aid, it may need to consciously remind itself of the subtleties of NGO-government relationships, such that NGOs – free of any sense of contradiction - can enjoy genuine and respectful dialogue on first name terms at official level, while on another plane altogether there may be forthright critique of 'macro level' government policy from the same source.

5.4. In the view of the stakeholders consulted during this study, the Dóchas – Irish Aid partnership will be subject to stresses and strains over the coming months – perhaps years –, but this reality makes it all the more important for the partnership 'architecture' to be maintained and enhanced, as a reflection of the underlying common interest which both sides of the partnership share. Accordingly, there is an appetite on all sides for a new Memorandum of Understanding between the two parties, primarily because the relationship is acknowledged to have worked well since 2002 when the first

³³ It was also advantageous that the individual selected for this portfolio had previously come from a Development NGO background, and knew the dynamics of the sector extremely well.

MoU was signed, but also because the relationship is seen as a key part of the infrastructure which facilitates mutual engagement between Irish Aid and the Development NGO community. If practicable, a five-year period 2009-2013 is being recommended this time around, subject to a mid-term review, and incorporating key thematic focal areas for joint action and shared learning, to be mutually agreed between the two parties. The potential key areas for such thematic focus which were identified by interviewees (without prompting by the Consultant, and in no particular order of importance) included: (i) Aid effectiveness and coherence; (ii) HIV & AIDS (an area in which Dóchas has already built up strong credentials), (iii) follow-up to the Hunger Task Force report (2008), (iv) Public communications strategy around 'Aid Works', and (v) Impact-reporting and outcomes evaluation.

5.5. Overall, the rationale for channelling public funding to Dóchas can be articulated as follows:

- definite 'public good' benefits are conferred by the stronger networking and adherence to good practice which Dóchas promotes;
- the efficiency gains which accrue to both Irish Aid and to the Development NGOs (see section 4.2);
- the fact of providing a vehicle for shared learning between statutory and voluntary sectors, e.g. in relation to HIV & AIDS interventions (see section 4.3.3), thereby contributing to overall aid quality;
- potential for more successfully demonstrating to the general public positive impact and results of development aid spending, as a result of the partners focusing more intently on aid effectiveness and policy coherence.

For these reasons, the investment of public money in Dóchas, roughly on the scale that currently obtains, is considered to be justifiable on value for money grounds.

5.6. The work done by Dóchas to date around the 'Aid Works' theme has been a very valuable element in its wider public 'messaging role'. This merits even greater emphasis over the next year or two, at different levels – both at the popular level of basic understanding of the reality of global interdependence, and at the more sophisticated level of the **Aid Effectiveness and Policy Coherence** discourse (into which there is now scope to inject a potentially significant NGO perspective). In developing this latter profile, there seems to be fruitful scope for joint collaboration between Dóchas and Irish Aid. Germane to this is the recent creation of a Policy Planning and Effectiveness Section within Irish Aid (taking on board some essential features of the Accra Agenda). Dóchas and Irish Aid should intensify their dialogue on this crucial area, to further the process of internalising the aid effectiveness agenda, and adopt specific means of giving it concrete expression.

5.7. One of the striking features of Dóchas' work during the period under review has been the sheer breadth of issues to which the organisation has devoted its energies, relative to the resources and the staff complement which it has available. This breadth of scope is conveyed in the table in paragraph 3.2 above, under the four strategic headings of:

- Maximising the impact of Development NGOs – Building members' capacity for learning and reflection, and translating that into standards of good practice;
- Strengthening Ireland's commitment to development – Promoting coherent public messaging by the Dóchas members and building public awareness of development challenges;
- Promoting policies to end poverty – Building Dóchas members' capacity to engage with policy issues at Irish and EU level, and serving as an

- interlocutor for NGO interaction with Irish Aid;
- Building an effective network – Strengthening Dóchas’ capacity to respond to the needs of the membership and the wider Development sector.”

5.8. The findings of this evaluation confirm that a conscious change of emphasis by Dóchas: ‘servicing’ and doing things on behalf of its members is becoming less pronounced, and correspondingly more attention is being devoted by Dóchas to providing a respected and enabling space within which the membership can pursue collective action and mutual learning. Stakeholders recognise that Dóchas constantly struggles with the dilemma of whether - or how - to narrow the breadth and scope of activities which it undertakes. This dilemma surfaced again during the recent process of forging a new Dóchas Strategic Plan 2009-15 – a process which took place in parallel with the present evaluation. It is not the function of this report either to second-guess or to pre-empt the exhaustive process of internal analysis and reflection towards the new Strategic Plan in which the Dóchas staff team, Board and wider membership have been engaged between October 2008 and April 2009. Suffice it to say that

- it is an inherent feature of any NGO network that it should attempt to address the various needs of its membership, as these evolve over time;
- the membership is under no illusions³⁴ about the stark choices facing Dóchas, e.g. (i) whether *aid* issues or *development* issues should take precedence; (ii) whether efforts to significantly *broaden* the membership base carry the risk of diluting the existing quality criteria for membership.

With regard to the scope of the Irish Aid grant to Dóchas, the evaluator found no support for circumscribing specific activities of Dóchas which would be deemed eligible for IA funding support, as distinct from supporting the totality of Dóchas programme of work.

5.8. The table below summarises our conclusions under the four key OECD-DAC criteria:

Relevance	Dóchas successfully attunes its activities to the needs and priorities of its members, especially those which are most active in the various Working Groups (the agendas of which are by definition needs-driven).
Efficiency	The work rate and output of the Dóchas Secretariat are widely acknowledged to be impressive relative to its modest size. Duplication with other entities engaged in building capacity of NGDOs is negligible. From the Irish Aid perspective, the existence of Dóchas confers considerable efficiency gains in the conduct of its relationships with Irish-based civil society organisations; these efficiency gains arise from being able to channel much of the two-way communication and consultation processes with a plurality of client NGOs through a single contact point, in the knowledge that the messages will be disseminated accurately, promptly and reliably.

³⁴ As evidenced by the strategic planning documentation viewed by this Consultant

Effectiveness Dóchas provides a respected and enabling space within which the membership can pursue collective action and mutual learning, thereby contributing to aid quality. Members (especially the smaller ones) look to Dóchas as a facilitator and interlocutor with Irish Aid. The present Evaluation concludes that Dóchas has become more professional in the way it does its business, and that its voice is regarded as authoritative (even though the general public's recognition of Dóchas as a brand may be low). It therefore has an important and valued role to play within Ireland's institutional framework in relation to international development.

Sustainability Dóchas is not and never will be a self-financing organisation, but rather is reliant on key stakeholders, namely Dóchas members and the Government. However, the Board sees it as important for the organisation to have a more diverse funding base.

The *benefits* conferred by the Irish Aid / Dóchas partnership (namely, efficiency gains both for IA and for NGOs, shared learning and structured dialogue on aid effectiveness, coherence, etc.) are sustainable into the future, in the context of a new 5-year Memorandum of Understanding between Irish Aid and Dóchas, as is here recommended.

6. Recommendations.

The key recommendations of this Evaluation are categorised into three: (a) recommendations to Irish Aid and Dóchas jointly, (b) recommendations to Dóchas, and (iii) other.

a) Recommendations to Irish Aid and Dóchas jointly:

1. A new Memorandum of Understanding should be concluded between Irish Aid and Dóchas, this time for a five-year duration (subject to a mid-term review).

There is an appetite on all sides for a new Memorandum of Understanding between the two parties, primarily because the relationship is seen as a key part of the infrastructure which facilitates mutual engagement between Irish Aid and the Development NGOs.

2. The new MoU should, by mutual agreement, incorporate thematic pillars of strategic importance to both.

Suggestions emerging from the consultations regarding potential themes included:

- ❖ Aid Effectiveness and Policy Coherence
- ❖ HIV & AIDS
- ❖ Follow up to the Hunger Task Force report (2008)
- ❖ Public communications strategy around 'Aid Works'
- ❖ Impact-reporting and outcomes evaluation.

3. The new MoU should provide for broadening the strategic relationship with Dóchas across all relevant Irish Aid sections.

There should be greater recognition of Dóchas as a strategic partner across all sections of Irish Aid which have reason to do business with the network. Understandably, the Civil Society Section has been seen as the anchor point of the relationship at the Irish Aid end, but there are other sections of Irish Aid with which Dóchas engages, e.g. Emergency & Recovery, Public Information & Development Education, EU / Multilateral, and (prospectively) the prospectively the new Policy Programme and Effectiveness Section. Mechanisms to facilitate coherent engagement with Dóchas need to allow scope for a continued blend of formal and informal routes of access, while at the same time taking account of the fact of the re-location of Irish Aid to Limerick.

4. The role of Dóchas as a neutral and enabling space for reflection and shared learning across the NGDO sector has become more pronounced, and should be further intensified.

Examples of such activity include breakfast meetings of CEOs, Working Group events, specific Thematic Seminars.

5. Dóchas and Irish Aid should intensify their dialogue in relation to Aid Effectiveness and Policy Coherence, to further the process of internalising the aid effectiveness agenda, and giving it concrete expression.

As a result of the 2008 High Level Forum in Accra, the way is now open to inject a potentially significant NGO perspective into the Aid Effectiveness and Policy Coherence discourse.

b) Recommendations to Dóchas.

6. The work done by Dóchas to date around the ‘Aid Works’ theme has been a very valuable element in its wider ‘public messaging role’, and merits continued emphasis.

In the present difficult funding climate, it is all the more important for Irish Aid, Dóchas and Dóchas affiliates to intensify their public messaging, in order to nurture greater public awareness of global interdependence, and Ireland’s role in relation to this.

7. In relation to the European dimension of its work, Dóchas should continue to build a fuller understanding and awareness among Irish development NGOs of

- **the funding opportunities available from European institutions;**
- **the role played by European institutions in international development policy and action.**

8. Dóchas should intensify its efforts to extend its membership base and to consolidate its position as a representative national platform.

The possibility of a creating a new category of ‘interim’ or ‘associate’ membership would seem to be timely, and commands majority (though not unanimous) support among stakeholders.

c) Other recommendations:

9. Irish Aid, Dóchas and the missionary organisations should engage collectively to agree a course of action in respect of the Development Forum.

All parties value the Development Forum as a mechanism for structured engagement between Irish Aid and the NGDO sector. The Forum operated under the aegis of the Advisory Board for Irish Aid until the latter’s term of office expired last year (2008).

ANNEX 1

Draft Terms of Reference

Evaluation of the Irish Aid Supported Activities of Dóchas 2006-2008

1. Background

Dóchas is an independent charitable organisation whose membership is open to Irish-based development NGOs. As a network, its membership comprises currently 39 Irish development NGOs that are working together, based on a recognition of shared values and diverse motivations, work approaches and constituencies.

Dóchas' purpose is to be 'a vibrant, outward-looking network, with an active and informed membership representative of the Irish development sector, providing services and promoting effective action to bring about sustainable development.' It seeks to achieve this by harnessing the energies and experiences of its member organisations, to influence government and EU development policies, strengthen the constituency for development in Ireland, assist members in enhancing their efforts. In addition, it has set itself a target of building its own sustainability as a network.

In 2002, Irish Aid and Dóchas signed a Memorandum of Understanding, aimed at developing a strategic partnership and dialogue through a strengthened Dóchas as a cohesive voice for its members. After an evaluation of this first MOU, a follow up agreement was put in place in 2006, with similar goals, although the emphasis shifted slightly towards the mutual cooperation, and less on the organisational strengthening of Dóchas.

The current MOU will expire at the end of 2009. In the agreement, provision was made for a joint evaluation of the relationship and its achievements. It is envisaged that this evaluation will inform the future strategy for the Dóchas network, as well as any agreement between Dóchas and Irish Aid for continued partnership arrangements.

2. Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide Irish Aid and Dóchas with an independent assessment of the work of Dóchas and its partnership with Irish Aid, 2006-2008, as structured by the MOU. This assessment will help inform decisions about the future strategic partnership between Irish Aid and Dóchas.

3. Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation will focus on the implementation of the objective of the MOU, which is "to assist and enable Dóchas, its members and Irish Aid to develop and mould a genuine partnership relationship".

- With respect to Dóchas, the evaluation will assess the implementation of the annual Dóchas Action Plans 2006-2008 framed in the context of the Dóchas Strategic Plan

2005-2009, and will provide an assessment of the four key activities to be developed in the context of the MoU between Dóchas and Irish Aid, namely:

- Maximising the impact of Development NGOs – Building members’ capacity for learning and reflection, and translating that into standards of good practice;
 - Strengthening Ireland’s commitment to development – Promoting coherent public messaging by the Dóchas members and building public awareness of development challenges;
 - Promoting policies to end poverty – Building Dóchas members’ capacity to engage with policy issues at Irish and EU level, and serving as an interlocutor for NGO interaction with Irish Aid;
 - Building an effective network – Strengthening Dóchas’ capacity to respond to the needs of the membership and the wider Development sector.
- With respect to Irish Aid, the evaluation will assess the mechanisms and instruments in place through which Irish Aid can “assist and enable” the relationship, financially, organisationally or otherwise.

The assessment will use the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability.

In terms of **Relevance**, key questions for consideration:

- To what extent does the work of Dóchas conform to the developmental objectives and strategic needs of its members and of the Irish Development NGO sector in Ireland?
- Has the work of Dóchas been designed in a collaborative manner with its members and other stakeholders?
- Have the annual Action Plans of Dóchas clearly identified issues relevant to the four strategic objectives of the organisation? Are there any key gaps and has the relationship between Dóchas and Irish Aid facilitated exchange and discussion on issues?
- What is Dóchas’ role in promoting public messaging by its members and in building public awareness of development challenges? How is this role coherent with the role of other Irish Aid funded actors, including CONNECT and various development education initiatives? How have Dóchas and Irish Aid engaged on this issue?

In terms of **Effectiveness**, key questions for consideration:

- What have been the key achievements of Dóchas?
- How effective has the work of Dóchas been in terms of achieving its stated objectives?
- Has policy engagement with relevant stakeholders been sufficiently and effectively strategic and at the appropriate levels?

- Has the Dóchas/Irish Aid MOU effectively facilitated engagement between Irish Aid and Dóchas members on policy development? As envisaged in the MoU between Dóchas and Irish Aid, was the desired relationship achieved?
- Has Dóchas been an effective interlocutor on policy development between Irish Aid and the NGO sector?

In terms of **Efficiency**, key questions for consideration:

- Were the activities of Dóchas implemented in a cost effective way?
- Has the work of Dóchas been efficiently managed given existing staffing and resources?
- How is Dóchas' work in capacity building for learning and reflection coherent with other capacity building providers and strategies (e.g. D-Talk, Misean Cara, IDEA, Comlámh) and did Dóchas efficiently resource its learning and reflection related activities?
- What mechanisms could have enhanced the relationship between Irish Aid and Dóchas?

In terms of **Sustainability**, key questions for consideration:

- Are the achievements of Dóchas likely to have continuing benefit?
- What initiatives could be envisaged to enhance the sustainable benefits of the relationship?

While the primary focus of the evaluation is not on the impact of the work of Dóchas, where evidence of programme impact is available (positive or negative) this should be documented.

4. Methodology

It is envisaged that the evaluation will essentially involve a review of documentation and interviews with key stakeholders. However, intending consultants should propose a detailed methodology as part of their tender proposal, setting out:

- (a) Their understanding of the ToRs
- (b) A short methodology showing how they plan to approach the assignment
- (c) Allocation of consultant days across team members (if applicable – see section 6)
- (d) Indicative timetable for the conduct and completion of the assignment.

5. Outputs

The consultant(s) will produce a final report (20-30 pages maximum) that will include findings, analyses, key lessons and recommendations. The report should demonstrate cognisance of the OECD-DAC *Evaluation Quality Standards*.

6. Evaluation Team and Selection Criteria

Expertise required: A single consultant or a small balanced team is envisaged that will have relevant and demonstrable experience in the following areas:

- Programme/project evaluation
- Working with the Irish NGO sector

It is desirable that the consultant would have a good understanding of:

- Capacity Building and training
- Promoting public awareness of development issues

If a tender proposes a small team, the Team Leader should have demonstrable experience of leading evaluations. The Team Leader will be responsible for the overall management of the assignment and the production of the final report.

Consultant(s) will be selected according to the following criteria:

- Understanding of the Terms of Reference
- Proposed methodology and planning of the assignment
- Experience in the evaluation of such programmes/projects
- Overall balance of skills being brought to the assignment
- Overall quality of the proposal
- Cost

7. Timeframe

The evaluation will ideally commence in early November 2008 with the final report available by mid-December 2008. There will be a maximum of 20 days available for this assignment. (Attention is drawn to the fact that Irish Aid has transferred to Limerick and some of the work will need to be carried out there).

8. Management Arrangements

The Evaluation will be managed by the Evaluation and Audit Unit of Irish Aid. A small steering committee will advise the evaluation process and review reports.

ANNEX 2: KEY ISSUES –

Evaluation of the Irish Aid supported activities of Dóchas 2006-8.

The exercise currently under way is a *joint* evaluation of the Dóchas – Irish Aid relationship and its achievements during the period 2006-8, using the four evaluation criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability.

It is envisaged also that this evaluation will inform the *future strategy* for the Dóchas network, as well as any agreement between Dóchas and Irish Aid for continued partnership arrangements.

Some of the key questions *with respect to Dóchas* (and its respective Working Groups) are:

- What have been the key achievements of Dóchas (or the respective Working Group)? Are these achievements likely to have continuing benefit?
- How effective has the work of Dóchas (or the respective working group) been in terms of achieving its stated objectives, especially
 - a. Maximising the impact of the development NGO sector?
 - b. Building an effective network?
 - c. Public messaging / promoting awareness of development challenges?
- Has policy engagement with relevant stakeholders been sufficiently strategic, and pitched at the appropriate levels?
- Has the Dóchas/Irish Aid MOU effectively facilitated engagement between Irish Aid and Dóchas members on policy development?
- How is Dóchas' work in capacity building for learning and reflection coherent with other capacity building providers and strategies (e.g. D-Talk, Misean Cara, IDEA, Comlámh)?

With respect to Irish Aid, some of the additional questions are:

- ❖ *Does the MoU provide adequate mechanisms and instruments through which Irish Aid can “assist and enable” the relationship with the development NGO community in general and Dóchas in particular?*
- ❖ *Has Dóchas been an effective interlocutor on policy development between Irish Aid and the NGO sector?*

ANNEX 3.

Short profile of Dóchas HIV & AIDS Working Group

Members (13): Concern Worldwide (convenor); Action Aid Ireland; Aidlink; Christian Aid; Irish Missionary Union; misean cara; Oxfam Ireland; Irish Family Planning Association; Trócaire; VSO; World Vision Ireland; Tear Fund Ireland; Skillshare International Ireland.

The WG has developed its own *Strategic Plan 2007-10*, reflecting dual aims:

1. To develop and share knowledge, expertise and best practice to encourage ongoing learning and effectiveness within the Dóchas HIV & AIDS Working Group, the member organisations and beyond.
2. To develop agreed advocacy positions and lobbying strategies to promote an effective Irish response to HIV/AIDS of (a) shared learning and (b) policy action.

The WG has its own web-page incorporated in the Dóchas website
<http://www.Dóchas.ie/activities03b.htm>

Sample activities in 2008

- Planned and facilitated the Irish Aid and Dóchas Learning Day Seminar on Orphans and Vulnerable Children, Elderly Carers and Psycho-social Support in May.
- Was represented on the official Irish delegation to the Special Session on AIDS of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGASS) in New York in June.
- Met with officials from the Health Service Executive (HSE) to explore ways in which its staff could get more involved in development issues.
- Met with the Executive Director of the Global Fund, visiting Irish Aid in Dublin in April.
- Participated at the 17th International AIDS Conference in Mexico (3-8 August), and supported the *Stamp out Stigma and Discrimination* campaign.
- Provided support to the Irish Aid Technical Advisory Group TAG) on HIV and AIDS.
- Supported the 4th Global Partners Forum on Children affected by HIV and AIDS (held in Dublin 6th / 7th October) and contributed to the Final Communiqué.
- Gave significant feedback on the Irish Aid HIV Policy and Strategy draft.
- Worked with Irish Aid to mark World Aids Day; on a series of events around themes of 'HIV, Food Security and Nutrition' and on the NGO-focused round-table discussion on the challenges involved in rolling out HIV programmes

ANNEX 4: LIST OF PERSONS CONSULTED

Irish Aid

Brendan Rogers	Director General, Irish Aid	Dublin
Fionnuala Gilsean	Head of Civil Society Section	Limerick
Brendan McMahon	Head, Emergency & Recovery	Limerick
Tom Sneyd	Head, EU Multilateral	Limerick
Austin Gormley	Hd Section, Public Information & DevEd	Limerick
Liz Higgins	Head, Policy ,Planning & Effectiveness	Limerick
Maire Mathews	Public Information & Dev Ed	Dublin
Emer O'Brien	Civil Society	Dublin
	Interim Mgt Review Imp Unit/Advisory	
Nicole McHugh	Board	Dublin
Aine Doody	Policy ,Planning & Effectiveness	Limerick
Adrian Fitzgerald	Civil Society	Limerick
Frank Flood	Volunteer Centre	Dublin
Anne Holmes	Emergency & Recovery	Limerick
Nicola Brennan	UN, World Bank, IFIs	Limerick

Dóchas Member Organisations

- denotes Dóchas Board member
- italics denote phone interview*

Bóthar	David Maloney	Limerick
ChildFund Ireland	Michael Kiely	Dublin
	Pam McHugh (WG on HIV / AIDS)	
	Jean McGrath (GBV Consortium)	
Christian Aid Irl	John Moffett	Dublin
Comhlámh	Deirdre Murray	Dublin
Concern Worldwide	Connell Foley *	Dublin
	Breda Gahan (WG on HIV / AIDS)	
	Darren Evans (WG on Food Security)	
	Lizzy Noone (WG on Dev Ed)	
Galway One World	Heike Vornhagen *	Galway
ICOS	<i>Sheila Power</i>	<i>Dublin</i>
ILCU Foundation	Alan Moore	Dublin
International		
Service	Orla Kilcullen	Dublin
Irish Red Cross	John Roycroft	Dublin
	Noel Wardick (Humanitarian WG)	
Nat Youth Council	Johnny Sheehan	Dublin
Oxfam Ireland	Jim Clerken *	Dublin
Plan Ireland	David Dalton	Dublin
Trócaire	Mike Williams *	Maynooth
	Eamonn Meehan	
	Sorcha Fennell (WG Food Security)	
	John Smith (WG Dev Education)	
	Tara Bedi (Advocacy)	
VITA	John Weakliam	Dublin
VSO Ireland	<i>Malcolm Quigley *</i>	<i>Dublin</i>
World Vision		
Ireland	Helen Keogh * (Chair of Dóchas)	

Dochas Staff
Dochas
Consultant

Hans Zomer, Eamon Casey, Anna Farrell,
 Holy Ramanankasina

Conall O Caoimh

Aspirant Members and Non Members

Sightsavers Irl	Ruth Coleman	Dun Laoghaire
CBM Ireland	Ben Gobin	Monaghan
Livability Ireland Partnership	Maggie Muldoon	Sligo
America Latina	Fergus Roche	Dublin

Other Agencies

Connect World	Katherine Meenan	Dublin
Misean Cara	Mike Greally	Dublin
<i>Kimmage DSC</i>	<i>Paddy Reilly</i>	<i>Dublin</i>
<i>DTalk</i>	<i>Aine Costigan</i>	<i>Dublin</i>