



The Irish Association of Non Governmental
Development Organisations

Dochas 2006 Member Survey

Briefing Paper
Key Results & Trends

June 2007

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Dóchas, in its March 2006 paper on NGO Accountability¹, stated that “the environment in which Dóchas and its growing membership base is working is changing rapidly. A number of factors are influencing these changes including an expanding official aid budget, growing public and political interest in international development issues [...], greater strategic engagement with Irish Aid, changing concepts about the roles of Development NGOs and greater scrutiny and critiques of their operations”.

Find out who Dóchas members are

From this premise and to find out “who Dóchas members are” in this environment, Dóchas came to acknowledge the importance of capturing its members’ present situation (in terms of organisational structure, size and programmatic focus amongst other things), and of comparing it with their situation some time ago. This would offer a snapshot of the changes these NGOs underwent over a period of time. It could also contribute to improving learning and knowledge sharing within the membership. Finally, it could provide interesting pointers as to the changes the same organisations were likely to undergo or undertake in the near future.

For these reasons, Dóchas undertook a survey of its members in late 2006.

Improve learning and knowledge-sharing

1.2 Methodology

A questionnaire was sent to all 2006 members (38 in total). Quantitative and qualitative survey questions, based on the review of relevant literature and secondary research, were articulated around nine sections: Organisational information, values, governance, overall management, programming, finance, human resources, information and communication, and monitoring and evaluation.

¹ “NGO Accountability: Issues, Lessons and Challenges for Dóchas and its Members”, March 2006. Available from the Dóchas office.

26 members returned completed questionnaires, while an additional nine were obtained through bilateral interviews, giving a total of 35 completed questionnaires, or a 92% response rate. Input data was subsequently analysed, resulting in a set of statistics and indicators used to identify trends and main findings across the membership. This paper sets out to present the key findings and trends arising from the survey.

2. Facts, Figures & Trends²

2.1 Profile & Organisational Resources

The membership is relatively young, predominantly Dublin-based, development focused

Both the growth of Dóchas' membership and of the members themselves in terms of size, mission, and sectors of intervention, reflect the overall growth of the aid sector and the burgeoning of a diverse pool of development actors in Ireland.

- ❖ More than half of the 2006 membership³ (57%) was established in or after 1980. Among these organisations, five were set up in or after the year 2000. 51% of the members had joined the Dóchas network after 1999.

The increase in the number of players in the sector is an important push factor for NGOs to engage with like-minded actors or allies. In this regard, the Dóchas network provides member organisations with an opportunity to meet their peers and to jointly seek ways to develop professional skills and standards of practice.

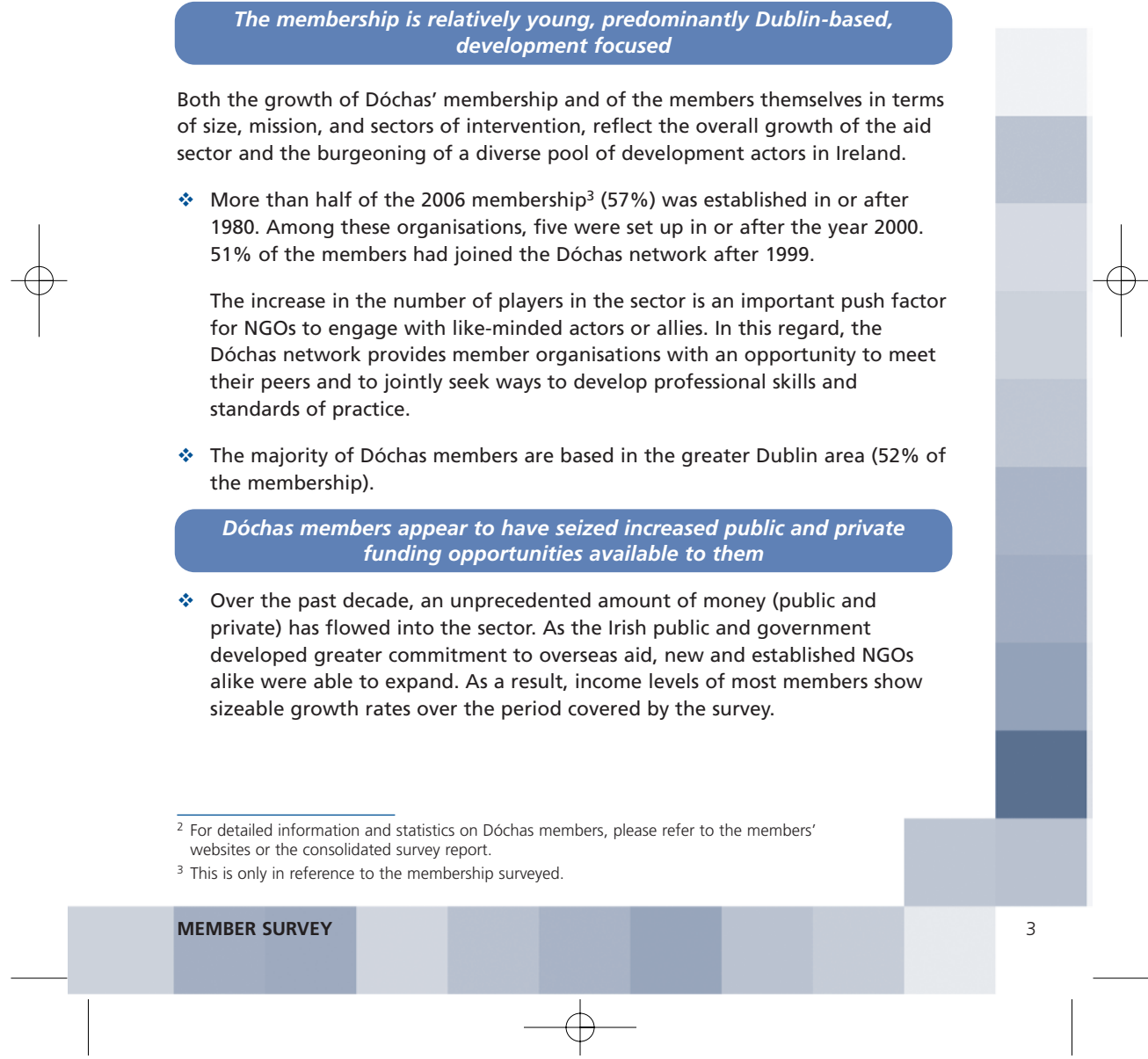
- ❖ The majority of Dóchas members are based in the greater Dublin area (52% of the membership).

Dóchas members appear to have seized increased public and private funding opportunities available to them

- ❖ Over the past decade, an unprecedented amount of money (public and private) has flowed into the sector. As the Irish public and government developed greater commitment to overseas aid, new and established NGOs alike were able to expand. As a result, income levels of most members show sizeable growth rates over the period covered by the survey.

² For detailed information and statistics on Dóchas members, please refer to the members' websites or the consolidated survey report.

³ This is only in reference to the membership surveyed.



The total 2005 income of the members amounted to €281.78 million⁴. From this total income, 68% was voluntary (from the general public, private donations, private firms, foundations or other). This points to a healthy financial independence from the State.

In terms of income resource growth, four members enjoyed growth rates of more than 200% between 2001 and 2005, while another four saw their income increase by more than 100%. Finally, six members witnessed growth rates of more than 50%. It must be said, however, that these percentage growth rates are this spectacular as the initial income levels of many organisations were very low.

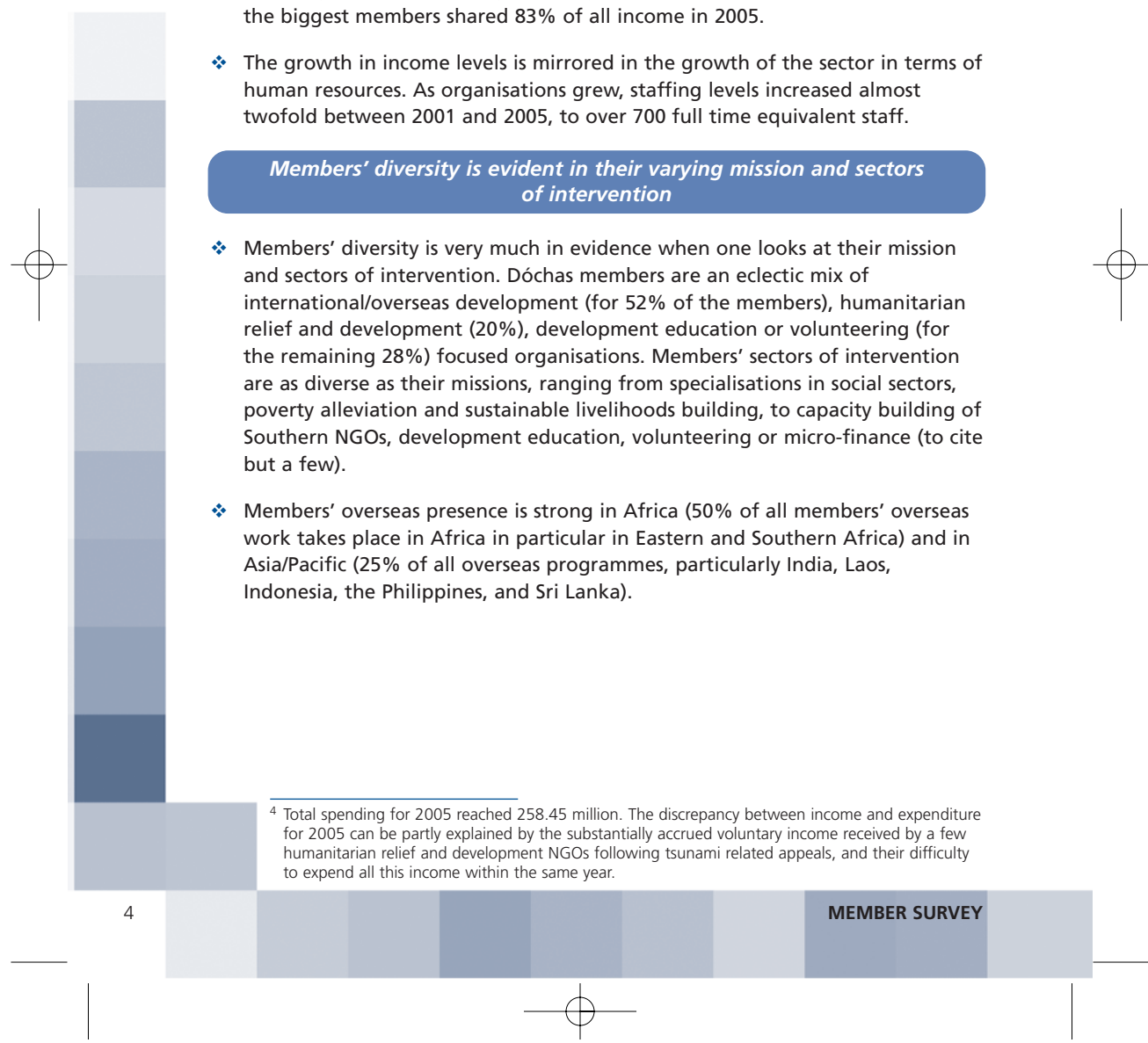
Currently, resources are very unevenly distributed within the membership: 5 of the biggest members shared 83% of all income in 2005.

- ❖ The growth in income levels is mirrored in the growth of the sector in terms of human resources. As organisations grew, staffing levels increased almost twofold between 2001 and 2005, to over 700 full time equivalent staff.

Members' diversity is evident in their varying mission and sectors of intervention

- ❖ Members' diversity is very much in evidence when one looks at their mission and sectors of intervention. Dóchas members are an eclectic mix of international/overseas development (for 52% of the members), humanitarian relief and development (20%), development education or volunteering (for the remaining 28%) focused organisations. Members' sectors of intervention are as diverse as their missions, ranging from specialisations in social sectors, poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods building, to capacity building of Southern NGOs, development education, volunteering or micro-finance (to cite but a few).
- ❖ Members' overseas presence is strong in Africa (50% of all members' overseas work takes place in Africa in particular in Eastern and Southern Africa) and in Asia/Pacific (25% of all overseas programmes, particularly India, Laos, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka).

⁴ Total spending for 2005 reached 258.45 million. The discrepancy between income and expenditure for 2005 can be partly explained by the substantially accrued voluntary income received by a few humanitarian relief and development NGOs following tsunami related appeals, and their difficulty to expend all this income within the same year.



2.2 Board, Management, and Operational Structures

An ethic of professionalism permeates governing, management and operational structures

Greater scrutiny from diverse stakeholders towards NGOs and their operations may have been a decisive push factor in ensuring professional and efficient governing bodies, management and operational structures.

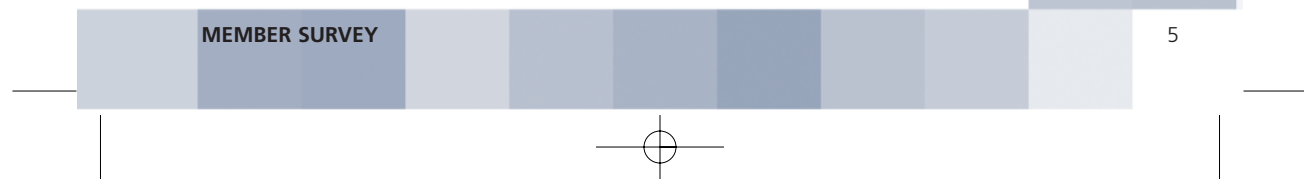
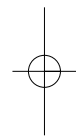
- ❖ For a large majority of members, Boards or other governing structures appear sound and well established, and have been generally so over the period covered by the survey. Board members seem competent (45% of members indicate looking for a specific set of skills when recruiting new members), their role clear and defined, and their election process clearly rolled out (89% of the membership point towards a formal election process, at the Annual General Meeting, through a majority voting system).
- ❖ Other members seem to have acted upon calls for improvement in their governance structures and are currently engaged in governance reviews. High levels of professionalism across the membership should entice the few remaining members with weaker governing bodies to take a similar review path.
- ❖ Management capacity within the membership appears to be strong and overall, members indicate their readiness to strengthen their accountability to all stakeholders.

*Management capacity appears strong
Power sharing practices are growing*

- ❖ The Senior Manager is ultimately accountable to the governing structure for strategic implementation. But power sharing practices are growing. Indeed, a trend is developing towards handing over responsibilities for implementing Board strategies to senior management staff not at the top of the leadership hierarchy (for 31% of members), or to more junior management staff (for 29%).

Guiding values focus on rights-based approaches to development

- ❖ Guiding values focused on rights-based approaches to development embed the mandate of Dóchas members. Goals of a just, equitable, inclusive and sustainable world, without poverty, and where people can fulfil their basic needs and realise their full potential, permeate their long-term strategies.



These guiding values are being translated into programmable short and long-term strategies.

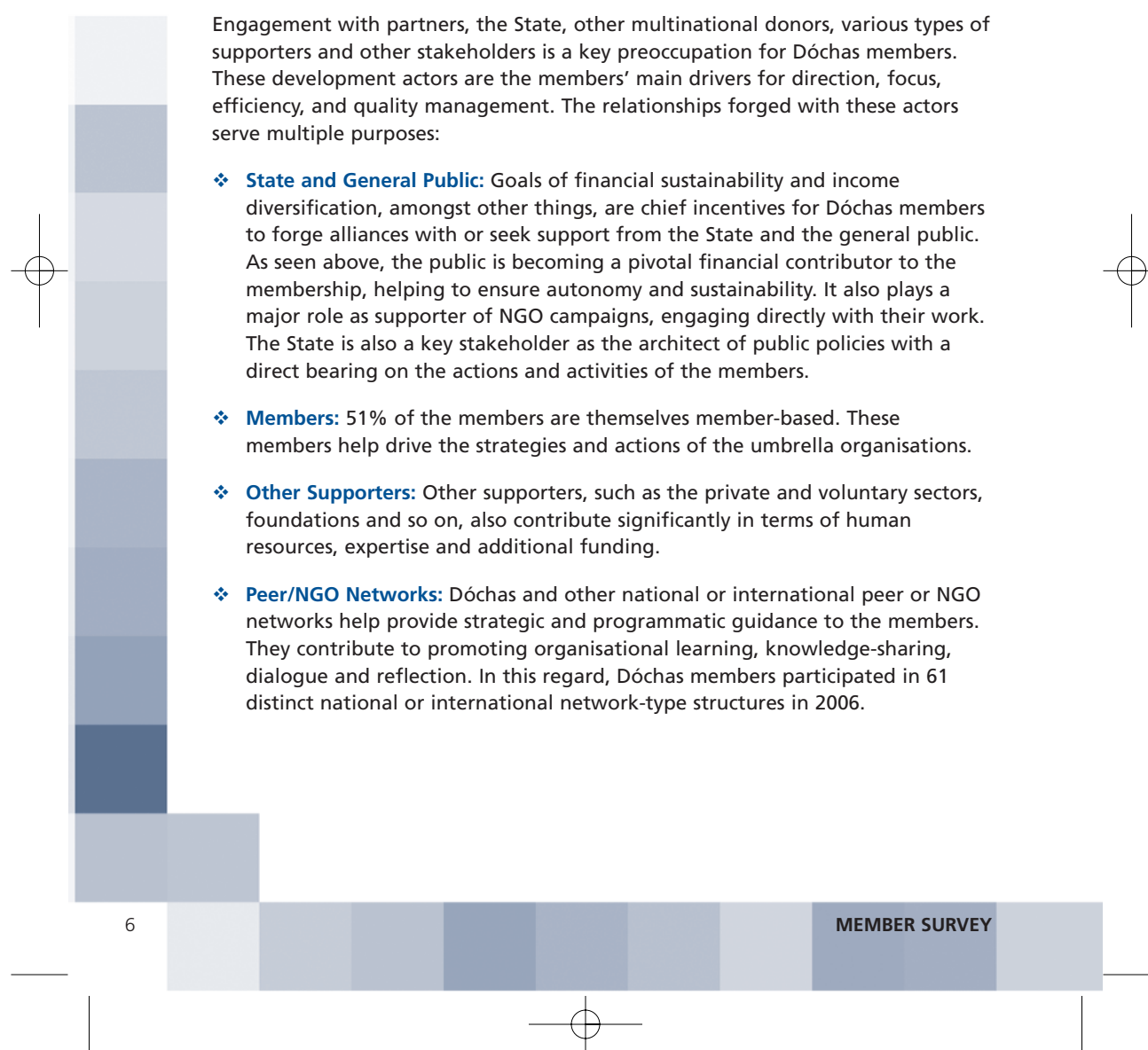
- ❖ These principles for action are being translated into programmable long-term strategic plans and short-term implementation strategies, although some members point to a relative lack of capacity in this area.

2.3 Key Relationships

Engagement with partners and other stakeholders is a key preoccupation for the membership

Engagement with partners, the State, other multinational donors, various types of supporters and other stakeholders is a key preoccupation for Dóchas members. These development actors are the members' main drivers for direction, focus, efficiency, and quality management. The relationships forged with these actors serve multiple purposes:

- ❖ **State and General Public:** Goals of financial sustainability and income diversification, amongst other things, are chief incentives for Dóchas members to forge alliances with or seek support from the State and the general public. As seen above, the public is becoming a pivotal financial contributor to the membership, helping to ensure autonomy and sustainability. It also plays a major role as supporter of NGO campaigns, engaging directly with their work. The State is also a key stakeholder as the architect of public policies with a direct bearing on the actions and activities of the members.
- ❖ **Members:** 51% of the members are themselves member-based. These members help drive the strategies and actions of the umbrella organisations.
- ❖ **Other Supporters:** Other supporters, such as the private and voluntary sectors, foundations and so on, also contribute significantly in terms of human resources, expertise and additional funding.
- ❖ **Peer/NGO Networks:** Dóchas and other national or international peer or NGO networks help provide strategic and programmatic guidance to the members. They contribute to promoting organisational learning, knowledge-sharing, dialogue and reflection. In this regard, Dóchas members participated in 61 distinct national or international network-type structures in 2006.



The strategic involvement of beneficiaries in the members' day-to-day running of programmes and projects needs to be strengthened

❖ **Partners and Beneficiaries:** "Downward" accountability, to beneficiaries or clients, is seen as essential to ensure that development goals are adequate for the development needs of targeted populations. The involvement of communities, notably in evaluating NGOs, is considered a key mechanism for raising their leverage.

Almost half (49%) of members implemented all of their programmes via local partners⁵. 64% of the members involved beneficiaries in programme/project monitoring and evaluation in 2006, as compared with only 20% in 2001.

While beneficiaries are closely involved in the development of overall strategies and programme approaches, a relatively marginal place is given by members to beneficiaries in the day-to-day running of programmes and projects. Members' strategic involvement of beneficiaries needs to be strengthened.

2.4 Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

"Upward" accountability to donors, governments etc. and "downward" accountability to communities and beneficiaries push NGOs to try and deliver more efficient and effective services. In addition, NGOs need effective monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that their programmes and systems are cost-effective and relevant.

Overall, Dóchas members report having put in place the necessary control systems at the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of their project cycle

❖ Overall, Dóchas members report having put in place the necessary control systems (some informal) to ensure that the planning, implementation, and evaluation phases of a programme/project cycle are coherent with the mandate and guiding principles of their organisation.

Financial control and human resources management are at the top of the members' organisational accountability and efficiency priorities. Financial accountability requirements in particular push the members to apply formal quality and accountability mechanisms, such as the Statement of Recommended Practice on accounting and reporting standards (SORP).

⁵ Note that 13 members did not answer this question, as they did not have programmes or activities abroad.



Planning, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting mechanisms could be strengthened

- ❖ The survey showed that members feel that their planning, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting mechanisms could be further strengthened, and informal methods and mechanisms for impact assessment systematised.

2.5 Transparency

Transparency in the survey was considered from the point of view of a clear information and communication strategy, to inform staff and other stakeholders and regulate information production and dissemination. It was also considered from an information content perspective.

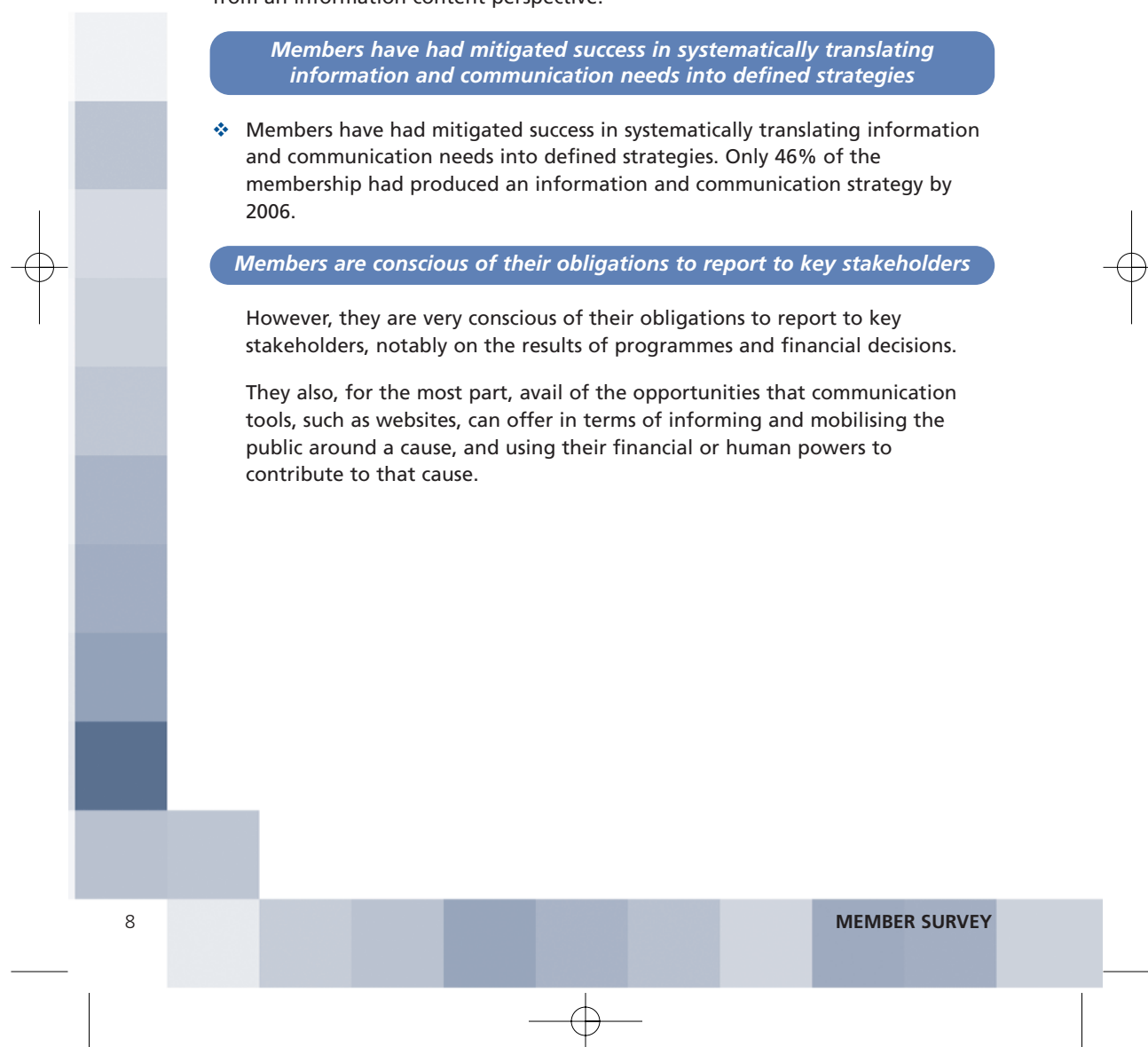
Members have had mitigated success in systematically translating information and communication needs into defined strategies

- ❖ Members have had mitigated success in systematically translating information and communication needs into defined strategies. Only 46% of the membership had produced an information and communication strategy by 2006.

Members are conscious of their obligations to report to key stakeholders

However, they are very conscious of their obligations to report to key stakeholders, notably on the results of programmes and financial decisions.

They also, for the most part, avail of the opportunities that communication tools, such as websites, can offer in terms of informing and mobilising the public around a cause, and using their financial or human powers to contribute to that cause.



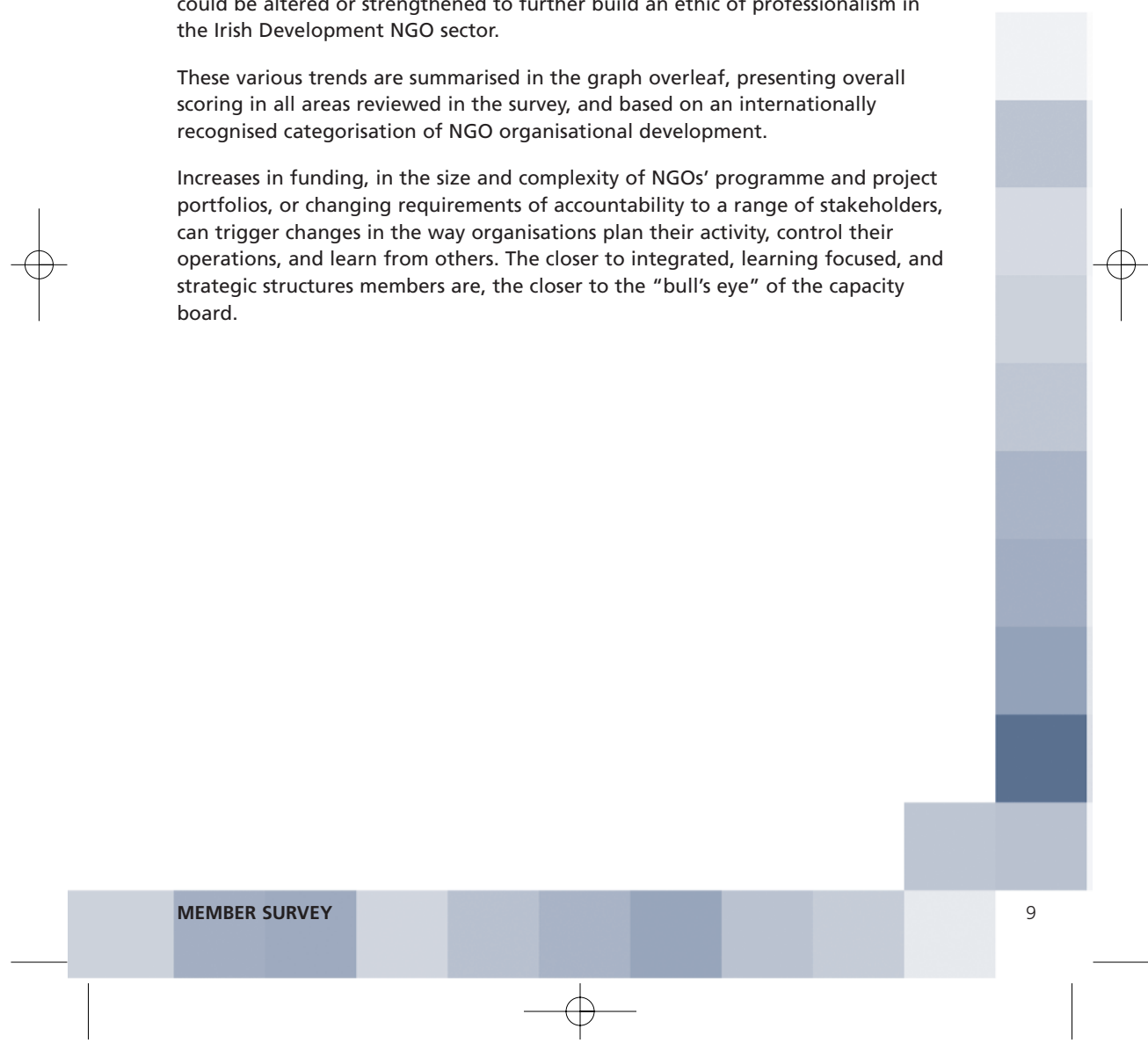
3. Conclusion and Way Forward

The diversity of Dóchas' membership, as revealed by the trends and findings arising from the survey, is striking. There is a great range in terms of organisational values and ways of working, while the survey also highlighted a substantial difference in size among the member organisations. However, as striking as this diversity might be, there is a clear common drive towards professionalism in the members' work, aimed at adding value to programmes and services, building sustainable organisations, and improving cost-effectiveness.

Trends and findings presented in this paper depict a healthy, semi-autonomous professional membership. They also highlight areas where actions and practices could be altered or strengthened to further build an ethic of professionalism in the Irish Development NGO sector.

These various trends are summarised in the graph overleaf, presenting overall scoring in all areas reviewed in the survey, and based on an internationally recognised categorisation of NGO organisational development.

Increases in funding, in the size and complexity of NGOs' programme and project portfolios, or changing requirements of accountability to a range of stakeholders, can trigger changes in the way organisations plan their activity, control their operations, and learn from others. The closer to integrated, learning focused, and strategic structures members are, the closer to the "bull's eye" of the capacity board.

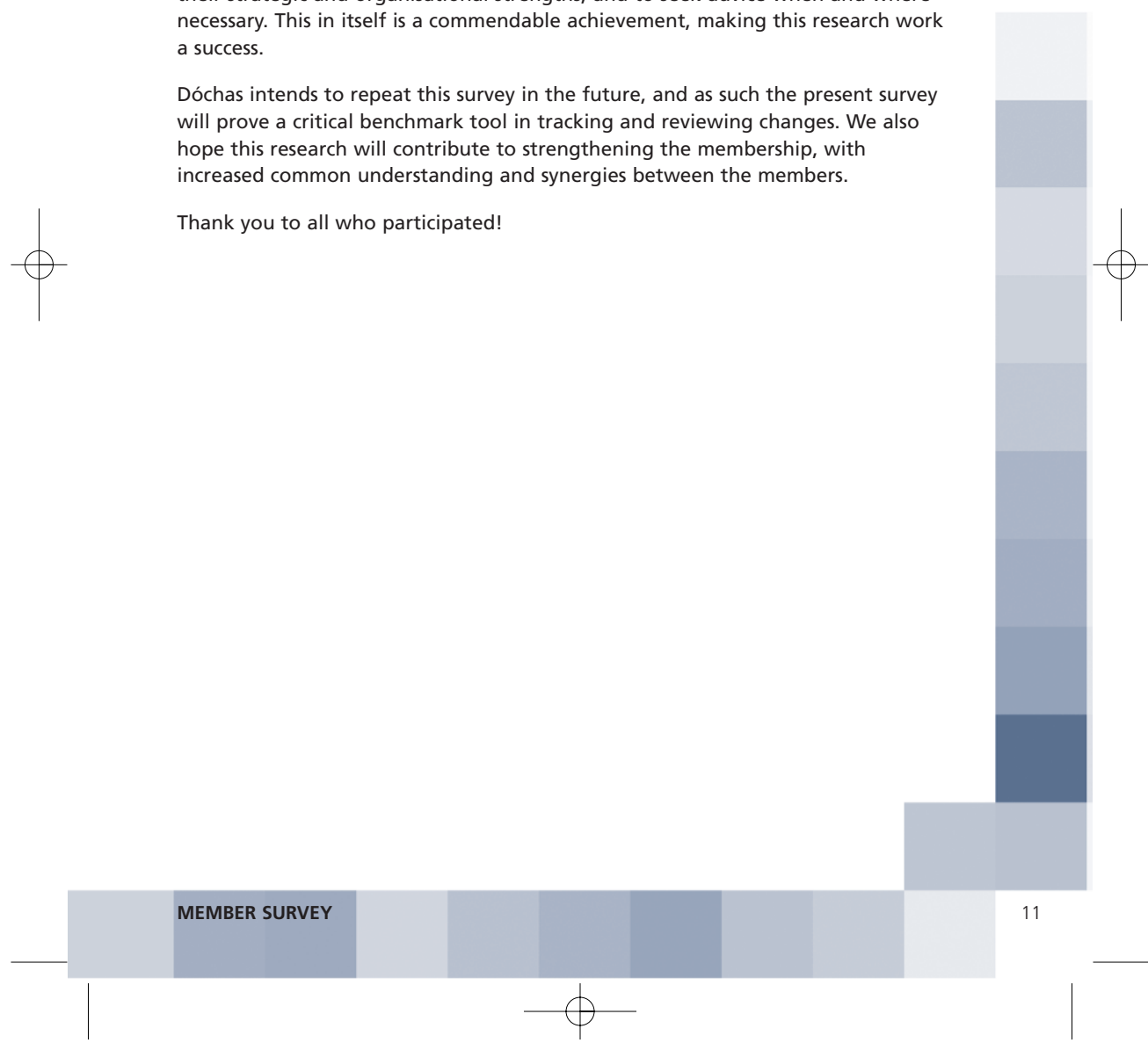


As the capacity board shows, members' strengths reside in their capacity to define a clear mandate, build a strategy around this mandate, and ensure that operational structures are sufficiently sound to implement effective programmes and actions based on these orientations. Improvements in monitoring and evaluation processes and transparency levels vis-à-vis key stakeholders, as well as increased participation of and accountability to beneficiaries should become strategic imperatives for Dóchas members. These improvements should guarantee the optimal combination of the quality, cost-effectiveness, results-managing, and learning factors, which make NGOs efficient, innovative and reliable development actors.

As Dóchas is already observing, this survey has encouraged members to reflect on their strategic and organisational strengths, and to seek advice when and where necessary. This in itself is a commendable achievement, making this research work a success.

Dóchas intends to repeat this survey in the future, and as such the present survey will prove a critical benchmark tool in tracking and reviewing changes. We also hope this research will contribute to strengthening the membership, with increased common understanding and synergies between the members.

Thank you to all who participated!



4. Key Resources

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More Information on Dóchas members can be found in the Survey Consolidated Report at www.dochas.ie or on members' websites.

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