



Global Development: what can you do? starting points for members of the Oireachtas





Global Development: what can you do?

A Reference Guide for Members of the Oireachtas

As a TD or Senator, you have an opportunity to help shape Ireland's future. Similarly, you are in a unique position to support Irish efforts to improve the lives and opportunities of poor and marginalised communities overseas.

Ireland has a remarkable reputation as a country that has cared for the very poorest of our world through the work of our missionaries, our aid agencies and our government programme. Our aid programme has been rated as one of the most effective in the world, and it has enjoyed strong public and cross-party support.

As the umbrella organisation for Irish development NGOs, Dóchas is happy to support you as you engage with these important issues. This paper is intended as a user guide for members of the Dáil and Seanad, and suggests various ways in which you can use your role to bring about positive and lasting change in developing countries.



1.

In your Constituency

Highlight connections between your constituency and the wider world

- The lives of your constituents are connected to those of others throughout the globe, from the production of our food and clothing, to the ways in which our pension funds are invested.
- You are ideally placed to keep development and human rights issues on the agenda within your constituency and at national level.
- Politicians can help illustrate the links between global and local issues in ways that build understanding and solidarity. You can demonstrate how support for international development is related to issues affecting the lives of ordinary Irish people. Climate change, for example, means that we have a direct interest in tropical forest communities earning a sustainable living by maintaining ‘the lungs of our planet’.

Support citizens' initiatives in your area

Within your constituency there will be many groups actively engaged in development work. These include:

- Relief and development charities
- One World centres
- Development education organisations
- Solidarity groups
- Missionary orders
- Human rights organisations
- Global education projects in schools and youth clubs
- Immigrant support groups
- Fair Trade groups
- Twinning projects
- School linking projects
- Charity shops

Finding development groups in Ireland

A list of Irish development agencies and their areas of work is available at www.dochas.ie.

Contact details for 150 development organisations across the country are listed on the 'Index Contact List' at www.comhlamh.org/resources-index-contacts-list.

Over 200 local and national immigrant support groups are registered on www.integratingireland.ie.

Fair Trade-town groups appear on www.fairtrade.ie.

How can you support the overseas development groups in your constituency?

Any of these organisations would be delighted to brief you on their work and suggest ways in which you can help.

Get to know the work of development groups

- Arrange to meet with their staff or organisers.
- Attend their public events.
- Meet with expert visitors they bring from developing countries.
- Ask them to add you to their mailing lists.

Help them do their work

- Spread the word about the organisations you want to support, and about the professional codes of conduct that they adhere to.
- Help them gain access to decision makers who influence public policy.
- Advise on political, financial or other material assistance to support their development work overseas and at home.
- Direct potential volunteers to organisations committed to the Code of Good Practice for Sending Agencies.
- Introduce immigrants to Irish organisations working in their countries of origin.

Add your voice to theirs

- Contribute to Oireachtas debates.
- Ask Parliamentary Questions.
- Attend Oireachtas committee meetings relevant to overseas aid.
- Address their causes and concerns in public debates and in the media

Your support and engagement as a political representative and a supporter of Ireland's development cooperation programme will give encouragement and recognition to the work of development organisations.



Photo by Caroline Irby

Ansha Mohammed works as a tailor. She is pictured with one of her two sewing machines in her workshop in Geba, Ethiopia





2.

Voting in the Oireachtas

Legislation affecting development arises more frequently than ever. In our globalised world, many of Ireland's actions - in areas like agriculture, trade, climate change and international affairs - are felt throughout the world.

As a politician, you have important opportunities to influence legislation on a range of issues that impact on development.

Dóchas members are happy to offer their analysis and to discuss ways in which they feel you can help. We frequently produce policy papers on Ireland's development policies, which you can find at www.dochas.ie

The Oireachtas also controls the purse strings for Ireland's development cooperation programme. You will have a say in the Budget each year on whether Ireland fulfils its commitment, as set out in the Programme for Government, to reach the UN target of 0.7% of GNP by 2015 - and keeps overseas aid to at least that level afterwards.



3.

Oireachtas Oversight

TDs and senators can also help by ensuring that the government operates fairly, effectively and coherently in relation to overseas development.

Members of the Oireachtas will have very different ways of doing this, depending on whether you are in Cabinet, on the back benches or in the Opposition. Regardless of your political affiliation and whether you sit in the Dáil or the Seanad, you have an important role to play.

What you can do

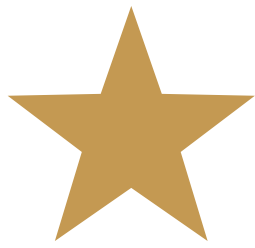
- Monitor progress towards our 0.7% promise for overseas aid.
- Monitor aid quality, ensuring that Ireland's aid stays focused on the poorest countries and remains 'untied' -- that is, not linked to the purchase of Irish goods and services.
- Advocate for an annual Dáil debate on Irish development cooperation and our role in making progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.
- Examine government policies and strive for coherence between Ireland's development and human rights objectives and other policy areas.
- Urge the government and the EU to honour commitments to a Development Round of trade talks at the WTO that place special emphasis on the needs of the least developed countries.
- Ensure that the positions taken by Ireland at global summit meetings have been adequately debated in the Oireachtas, and are a matter of public record.
- Ensure that all external evaluation and public expenditure reviews of the Irish Aid programme are published.



Photo by Noel Gavin / Alpix

Murekatete Pascasie, and her baby daughter Umutoni Geanette, taking part in a women's income generation project harvesting sorghum in Gikongoro, Southwest Rwanda





Two Key Decisions of the 31st Dáil

Ireland has made a commitment to reaching the EU and UN target of spending 0.7% of national income on overseas development assistance by 2015. Ireland's commitment to this promise has cross-party and public support, and the government has recommitted to it in the Programme for Government.

Our next job is to set out a clear and credible timetable for the growth of Ireland's ODA budget – in percentage terms - each year towards the 0.7% target.

Legislation to guarantee that commitment beyond 2015.

The only lasting way to ensure that Ireland does not go back on its promise to the poor is for legislation to reach at least the 0.7% commitment. We need your support in passing this legislation.



4.

Working on Committees

The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and its sub-committees, on Overseas Development and Human Rights, have traditionally provided an important forum through which to address development issues.

Given that so many areas of our economic life affect developing countries, and given the increasing emphasis on policy coherence for development, other Committees will play an increasingly important role.

In Ireland virtually all government departments undertake activities that affect developing countries in one way or other, and the growing number of Oireachtas Committees offer opportunities to promote an active, and ethical, role for Ireland in the global society of nations.

As the EU informs an increasing proportion of Irish policy-making, the Joint Committee on European Affairs has a vital role in ensuring that EU actions support the right of poor countries to fair and just development. The Committee can also play a pivotal parliamentary oversight role as the European Parliament has a limited say in - for instance - trade policy and the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

In Committee, you can engage in favour of the world's poor and marginalised on issues like EU affairs, justice and human rights, fair trading rules and systems, international agriculture and finance, health and education, climate change, energy policy, and many more.

As a TD or senator, we encourage you to propose motions for adoption or changes to draft legislation, organise debates and briefings, commission reports and ensure public debate on important issues.



Policy Coherence for Development

Striving to ensure Irish policies don't undermine developing countries

Aid alone cannot address the needs of the developing world: policies in areas like agriculture, trade, investment, energy, migration and security also can have a profound impact.

TDs and senators have an important role to play, through parliamentary debate and Committee processes, in assuring that Ireland's impact on developing countries is at least carefully considered in the cut and thrust of Irish politics.

Beyond that, and in line with the government position that development cooperation is of central importance to Irish foreign policy, the Oireachtas can strive to ensure that Ireland's actions genuinely contribute to poverty reduction, sustainable development, peace and justice.

Some important challenges around policy coherence for development include that:

Trade policies seeking advantage for Irish and EU producers can distort global trade and put unfair pressure on poor countries.

Subsidised European agriculture protects European farmers' livelihoods but has hindered agricultural exports from the developing world and introduced unfair competition in their domestic markets.

Our health service benefits from overseas professionals, but we need to be careful not to encourage brain drain from poor countries.



5.

Speaking Out For Justice

Irish parliamentarians have a proud tradition of bringing the actions of oppressive regimes and breaches of international law to the attention of the public.

By speaking out on important issues you can be a voice for fairness and solidarity with the world's poor and vulnerable.

Many members of the Oireachtas make a valuable contribution to international missions investigating alleged abuses of human rights and observing elections.

You can promote respect for International Law by:

- Ensuring that national legislation conforms with international best practice.
- Advocating that Ireland incorporates international commitments into national laws and policies.
- Highlighting violations of human rights and humanitarian law.
- Speaking out for protection of the victims of violent conflict and securing access for aid workers.
- Advocating that Ireland become a full party to international conventions and fulfil its obligations under these conventions.

Getting more involved

Finding a Niche

There are many simple ways in which you can lend your support to development and human rights causes. Dóchas member NGOs are happy to brief you on those issues or roles that inspire you to act.

Finding an Ally

Development has historically been an area where members of the Oireachtas cooperate well, regardless of party affiliation. Develop an interest in a particular issue or cause and you will often find cross-party support for positive, progressive positions.



Photo by Julie Harris



Richard Sembusi, vocational training graduate, Kampala, Uganda



Eugenie Munganyinka (7) 1st class,
Kirambi Catholic School, Rwanda





6.

Parliamentarians Networking Internationally

Parliamentarians have a key role to play in building international networks for human rights and promoting democracy.

AWEPA

Some members of the Oireachtas participate in the Association of European Parliamentarians for Africa, which seeks to support the functioning of parliaments in Africa and to keep Africa on the political agenda in Europe. There is an AWEPA policy officer based in Leinster House who will help with any enquiries.

www.awepa.org

Joint Parliamentary Assembly of the ACP

This is a twice-yearly meeting of parliamentarians from the African, Caribbean and Pacific states (who receive EU aid as a bloc) alongside MEPs and national parliamentarians. The assembly seeks to promote human rights and democracy, and monitors the implementation of the EU-ACP agreement.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/>

Inter-Parliamentary Union

This is the world organisation of national parliaments, which works for peace and cooperation among peoples with a view to strengthening representative institutions.

www.ipu.org



7.

NGOs are ready to work with you

Development organisations are eager to support your engagement on any of the areas highlighted in this paper.

Many NGOs and missionary groups have **expert staff** who can **guide** you on development programmes, humanitarian action, public policy issues relating to development, and international negotiations relating to human rights, trade, debt, etc.

NGOs can **brief** you in advance of important Oireachtas debates or Committee meetings. They can offer **advice and know-how** to support Parliamentary Questions or letters to a Minister.

Many of the aid agencies produce **policy documents** and will be happy to add you to their circulation lists.

Dóchas is the national platform of development organisations, comprising over 40 members with an estimated 850,000 supporters nationwide. Dóchas staff will be pleased to brief you on its **vision and approach** as well as key development issues, as they exist or emerge.

Feel free to contact Dóchas (www.dochas.ie), whose staff and members will support you in showing solidarity with the developing world. Subscribe to the Dóchas Wednesday News through our website to receive weekly updates on NGO events, meetings, seminars, conferences and workshops. Or follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

If Dóchas cannot help you on a particular issue you wish to champion, we will point you in the direction of those best placed to help you help the world's poor.



The Irish Association of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations

Dochas has signed the **Code of Conduct on Images & Messages**.
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