



The Irish Association of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations

**Submission to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence
October 2017 – Review of Irish Aid programme**

Dóchas, on behalf of our members, welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence (JCFTD) as part of its review of Irish Aid's programme.

We very much welcome and support Minister Coveney's recent statement supporting the work of Irish Aid, and his ambition to continue to protect and build on it¹. He also pledged to see "a dramatic increase" in ODA from 2019, coupled with a realistic roadmap to enable Ireland to meet its commitment to the 0.7% GNI*² target. More funding, and providing it through a planned and realistic roadmap, will be essential if Irish Aid is to continue to deliver a quality aid programme.

Not only is the quality of Ireland's international aid programme respected globally, its principled leadership on the global stage has earned Ireland the reputation of a state that believes in the power of collective action to solve some of the world's toughest problems.

Going forward, Agenda 2030 – or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – is an essential framework to guide the future direction of Irish Aid. The SDGs set the context and offer a roadmap to meet many of the complex challenges that we will face in the future. It has, as an underlining principle, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which remain a critical starting point to tackle the root causes of poverty, hunger, inequality and climate change.

The SDGs also demand a re-framing of aid to focus on long-term change, not short-term results. It calls for aid to remain untied, but realizes the importance of policy coherence as

¹ Statement at Irish Aid's annual report launch, 26 September 2017

² The CSO published a measurement of national income in July 2017 called Modified GNI (GNI*) this is intended to be a more realistic measurement of size and growth within the Irish economy.

the only solution to meeting the inter-linked challenges of climate, hunger, inequality and injustice.

In addition, the Goals place the most vulnerable and marginalized at the centre of development. No one deserves to be left behind and we need to “endeavor to reach the furthest behind first.”³ This needs to remain the key measurement, and central outcome of Irish Aid’s programme, guiding what it does and where it works.

Finally, to achieve the SDGs, Irish Aid’s programme needs to continue to strengthen its relationship with, and support to, civil society, including Irish development NGOs, and to ensure an enabling environment to allow civil society to flourish. We know that civil society is under-attack in many of the countries that we are working in, and yet it has a vital role to play in ensuring good governance. Civil society also has an important advocacy role to hold duty bearers to account and to enable pro-poor sustainable policies that allow people and the planet to flourish.

In Ireland, we seek a commitment to building a stronger meaningful partnership with Irish NGOs where there is space for open dialogue, multi-annual funding, and a balanced and proportionate approach to results. We also urge more support for work on advocacy, development education and public engagement. At home, for example, we need to be able to tell the strong story of the importance of overseas aid. In addition, we need to invest in global citizenship education today in order to secure the importance and relevance of Irish Aid in the future.

In its review of the Irish Aid programme, we therefore ask that the Joint Committee to consider three recommendations:

- 1. Civil society needs to remain a valued and key partner of Irish Aid.**
- 2. The Government must publish a multi-annual roadmap to reach the target of 0.7% spend of GNI* on its overseas aid programme by 2025.**
- 3. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) need to re-frame Irish Aid’s strategy – putting the poorest first, but demanding policy coherence across Government departments in order to address long-term sustainable change.**

³ Political declaration of “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development”

Partnering with Civil Society

Empowering civil society needs to remain a vital pillar of Irish Aid's strategy

Overseas aid from Ireland channeled through civil society partners and missionaries has played a critical part in supporting millions of vulnerable people throughout the world. The effects have been long term and have ensured better lives for countless people. Civil society therefore needs to remain a vital pillar of Irish Aid's programme.

Dóchas' members provide relief and development to the poorest communities in 68 countries around the world, including Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. The reach, diversity and innovation of the sector is helping to tackle the root causes of poverty, inequality and climate change, through interventions on a full-range of issues from health, education, human rights, governance, women & girls empowerment, economic empowerment, technology, and much more.

Irish NGOs also work in partnership with other civil society actors, both locally and globally, to ensure long-term sustainable development outcomes. That includes holding governments to account to respect international human rights and humanitarian obligations.

We also take a global and a local approach to our work. We are international actors, but we are accountable also to the Irish public as supporters of our individual organisations and as taxpayers. We believe strongly in the valuable relationship of mutual support and accountability which we hold with Irish Aid. In order to continue to play this vital role, below there are a number of recommendations with respect to the Irish Aid programme:

FACT FILE: Irish NGOs work in 68 countries, reach over 20 million people, with over 15,000 skilled professionals. 23% of ODA spend went to NGOs in 2016, down from 26% in 2015, while 61% went to multi-laterals in 2016 a rise of 9% on the previous year. Humanitarian assistance accounted for 27% of total Irish Aid funding in 2016, 12% of which went to NGOs, down from 20% in 2015.

- Continue to support and strengthen **a diverse international development sector** by ensuring support for a range of big, medium and small organisations. Over 75% of Dóchas members operate on less than €3 million euro per year.
- Ensure **predictable funding to Irish NGOs** that accepts the importance of covering core costs, the need for flexible funding, and the measurement of results that is balanced and proportionate. Accountability and long-term change for the communities we work with needs to continue to be at the forefront of shaping results.

- Continue to support **a range of development, humanitarian and human rights interventions** in recognition of the complex nature of the development challenges. We cannot afford to cherry pick the 17 Global Goals. We also need to respect that the process by which we achieve these development outcomes, is as important as the targets themselves. Civil society is uniquely placed to work closely and patiently with and through communities for meaningful change.
- Maintain **an appropriate balance** of both time and resources in order to meet the unprecedented levels of humanitarian crisis, while continuing to focus on the root causes, by supporting strong long-term development programmes aimed at building resilience to crisis and promoting human rights and good governance.
- Continue to support strong **co-ordination** among development actors, for example, by supporting Dóchas' efforts to create spaces to learn from our peers and others. Having a vibrant, innovative sector will be vital to ensure the effective delivery of overseas aid.
- Do more to support efforts at **evidence-based policymaking** that ensures strong policy coherence for sustainable development. This will require regular dialogue and policy forums with Dóchas members, but also support for research and learning by our members.
- Strengthen support and funding for innovative ways of engaging with the public, particularly young people. Irish NGOs, Volunteering agencies and the diaspora have important contributions to make on **development education and public engagement**, but funding has been falling. It is vital that we invest in this area in order to build the Irish taxpayers understanding of, and support for Ireland's development policy agenda and allow much more ownership by the public of the agenda.

Funding Overseas Development Assistance

The Government must commit to and publish a multi-annual roadmap to reach the target of 0.7% spend of its GNI* on its overseas aid programme by 2025.

We are living through a period of unprecedented political, economic and social upheaval driven by conflict, climate change and poverty, which demands that funding for the Irish Aid programme, through Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), is increased as a matter of urgency. Over 128 million people in 33 countries are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, and over 65 million people have been displaced from their homes by war and conflict.

Dóchas therefore continues to seek cross-party agreement for a realistic **published** roadmap on ODA that will show a genuine commitment towards reaching 0.7% of GNI*, by 2025 at the latest⁴. We must stem the negative trend which saw Ireland spend only 34 cents out of every €100 on helping the world's poorest in 2016.

Now that we have emerged from a lost decade and have a growing and prosperous economy, we should be willing to do more to help those that have the least.

Timely and predictable increases in aid towards that 0.7% target must also be aligned with an increase in capacity within Irish Aid to maintain the quality of the aid programme. This will only be achieved by ensuring there

are higher staff levels within Irish Aid and that overseas embassies, consulates and regional hubs are given more than just a trade and tourism function.

Increases in aid must also be matched by a strong commitment to a definition of ODA which ensures that it is targeted solely at poverty alleviation and underpinned by respect for good donorship, accountability, human rights and transparency. As such, Ireland will need to remain staunch in the defence of this definition as current debates at the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and among EU member states threaten to undermine it. In particular, it should not bow to pressure to allow extra costs, such as in-country refugee costs or peacekeeping to become part of its programme. In addition, it

FACT FILE: *The Government's commitment to ODA has fallen from 0.59% of GNI in 2008, to an estimated 0.34% of GNI* in 2017. As economic prosperity returns, we need to seek a race to the top, not the bottom.*

⁴ <http://www.dochas.ie/publications/d%C3%B3chas-pre-budget-submission-2018>

needs to continue to target its funding towards Least Development countries and fragile states.

Leaving no-one behind by 2030 through a quality aid programme

Ambitious leadership is needed by Irish Aid in order to fully realise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Ireland co-chaired the negotiations for the SDGs in 2015, delivering an ambitious and visionary framework which 193 states committed to, including Ireland. It was a huge achievement showing Ireland's commitment to multi-lateral action to eradicate poverty, address growing inequality, and meet climate targets, both in Ireland and globally, by 2030.

Irish Aid now needs to reframe its strategy to meet the SDGs by 2030. The Irish Aid programme needs to grow, but also maintain its quality and integrity, in line with respecting the process and targets set by all the Goals. We know that ODA in a vacuum will not solve the complex set of issues outlined in Agenda2030 - that it is just one tool of many - but it is one of the most vital levers to reaching the poorest of the poor.

We also need to recognise that if we are to deliver on the ambition of the SDGs, there needs to be much greater urgency and political leadership across all government departments, as well as greater public engagement. Key recommendations then to achieve Agenda2030 include:

FACT FILE: 22 Dochas members are active in Coalition2030 to drive forward Agenda2030. The coalition launched in March 2017, and includes up to 40 members drawn from the international, domestic, environmental, and trade union movements.

- Irish Aid needs to reframe its strategy in order to achieve the SDGs and champion these universal goals more strongly at home.
- Irish Aid needs to find new ways to strengthen a whole-of-Government approach to the SDGs to strengthen policy coherence across the Goals. We cannot continue to allow policies on climate, taxation, human rights and trade to undermine the delivery of the SDGs.
- Targets need to be established that monitor Irish Aid's efforts to influence and support UN member states, particularly its' key partner countries,⁵ to deliver on the Goals.
- Irish Aid needs to demand greater urgency from the European Commission to push the SDG agenda, and ensure it is at the centre of its strategy and budget processes.

⁵ In 2016 Irish Aid reported eight key partner countries: Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, Zambia <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaidpublications/Irish-Aid-Annual-Report-2016.pdf>

Conclusion

Ireland has a strong history of reaching beyond its borders to promote global solidarity, justice, and prosperity for all. We have a long and proud history of international development cooperation. Irish Aid, in partnership with Dóchas members, has been part of that story from the beginning. Its programme continues to show that aid does work. It is also globally recognized and is a source of national pride.

Irish people also continue to be enormously generous and supportive of Ireland's international development work. According to Dóchas' recent poll, 80% of people think that Ireland can, and should do more.⁶ Dóchas members, with the support of Irish Aid, remain committed to deepening the public's understanding of the importance, effectiveness and impact of overseas aid.

We strongly believe that Irish Aid's programme both in terms of funding, policy and public engagement needs to continue to be strengthened, in partnership with civil society.

Together, we need to be able to continue to tell those stories of impact and help raise public understanding of how Irish Aid is transforming lives and livelihoods around the globe. And we need to make sure that by 2030, we have each played our roles in transforming our world so that no-one is left behind.

⁶ Dóchas commissioned a MRBI poll in May 2017 to assess Irish support for overseas development assistance <http://www.dochas.ie/news/press-release-80-irish-people-think-ireland-should-spend-more-aid>.