

# DÓCHAS STRATEGY

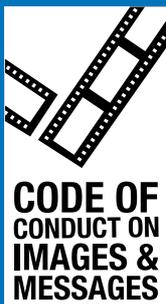
2015 - 2020



**Dochas**

The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

Dóchas is the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations. It is a meeting place and a leading voice for organisations that want Ireland to be a world leader in efforts to bring about global justice.



Dóchas has signed the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages

Please send your feedback to [media@dochas.ie](mailto:media@dochas.ie)



Dóchas adheres to the Irish Development NGOs Code of Corporate Governance

# VISION

Our vision is of a world where poverty and marginalisation are unacceptable, and where every person has the right to live a life in dignity.

# PURPOSE

The purpose of Dóchas is to be a meeting place and a leading voice for organisations that want Ireland to be a world leader in efforts to bring about global justice.

# MISSION

Dóchas is the national voice of the international development sector in Ireland, influencing policies and behaviours for a better world. Dóchas is a network to connect, inspire and represent people and organisations working for global justice.

# DÓCHAS STRATEGY 2015 - 2020

Dóchas is the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations, an umbrella group for a diverse range of organisations: large and small, young and old, secular or faith-based.

Each of our members have their own decision-making processes, culture, priorities and approaches. However, they share one vital characteristic: their unwavering commitment to tackling poverty and injustice in the world.

Our members have a vision of how society could be and they work to create a world where justice, equality, respect for human rights, solidarity and hope are the norm. Their work is driven by the belief that their support for people and organisations in developing countries – and for change makers at home - can bring about real and positive change for millions of poor and marginalised people around the world.

Dóchas was created in 1974, as a way to help strengthen Ireland's efforts to bring about that change. Through our network, Irish organisations come together to share and exchange their experiences, and to use those experiences to come up with more effective ways to end all forms of poverty and injustice.

## WHY DO WE EXIST?



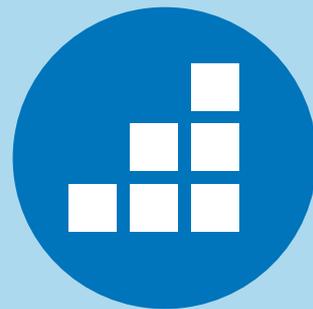
We work towards a world where poverty and marginalisation are unacceptable

## HOW WE DO IT?



Through Dóchas, we Connect, Collaborate, Challenge and Change

## WHAT WE WILL DO?



Build expertise,  
Build our voice,  
Build alliances,  
Build our network

## WHY A NEW STRATEGY?

2015 is the year in which the Millennium Development Goals are meant to have been achieved. The MDGs provided an overarching framework for global efforts to ensure that every human being can live a life in dignity and safety, and they provided a basis for collective action by governments, civil society, aid donors and private sector organisations.

Since their adoption a lot has been achieved and progress on many of the Goals has been remarkable. Yet many of the Goals remain unachieved. Furthermore, new actors have entered the international development space, and new concepts and policy priorities have emerged in the thinking about poverty and development, most notably the Universality principle contained in the draft Sustainable Development Goals, and the Development Effectiveness principles agreed internationally.

Ireland itself has also seen a rapid transformation from the time since our last Strategic Framework was developed (2009). The impact of years of austerity has meant that people in Ireland are more acutely aware of inequalities within Irish society and less trusting of all manners of 'establishment' institutions. In general, people want organisations to be clearer about their basic values and to demonstrate their relevance and impact.

The membership of Dóchas has changed too. On the one hand our membership has grown, but our network has also seen a number of mergers as well as the loss of some organisations who were badly affected by the economic downturn. At the same time, over the last few years, our member organisations have each become more focused and are working in fewer countries and thematic areas. Collaboration among NGOs is increasing steadily, as organisations seek to scale up their activities, both at home and abroad.

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## CHANGES IN NGO WORKING ENVIRONMENT

### MACRO TRENDS

- ▶ Urbanisation
- ▶ Resource depletion and environmental damage
- ▶ Ageing populations
- ▶ Geo-political power shift
- ▶ Technological transformation
- ▶ Rising inequality
- ▶ Disasters and governance failures

### CHANGING CONCEPTS

- ▶ Poverty in Middle Income Countries
- ▶ MDGs change to SDGs
- ▶ Renewed focus on the Market
- ▶ Changing donor practices
- ▶ Changing expectations from public in Ireland

### CHANGING NGO ROLES

- ▶ Global federations
- ▶ Social enterprises
- ▶ Rise of social movements
- ▶ More focus on rights, less on services
- ▶ Rise of Southern NGOs
- ▶ Rise of for-profit actors and philanthropy

### CHANGES IN IRELAND

- ▶ More awareness of inequality
- ▶ Focus on domestic challenges
- ▶ Decreased confidence in institutions
- ▶ Greater literacy on global finance

## HOW WAS THE STRATEGY DEVELOPED?

This strategy was built over a 12-month period, based on consultations and discussions with Dóchas members about changing concepts of development, the changing role of international NGOs and changes in Irish society, in terms of public opinion, political support and changes in donor practice.

## WHAT IS OUR STARTING POINT?

Despite the challenging economic climate in Ireland, public support for overseas aid has remained high, and people in Ireland are also more likely than people in other European countries to see a personal responsibility to help fight global poverty. At the same time, the realisation that aid is not sufficient to “make poverty history” has grown, and a simplified “trade not aid” argument seems to be gaining ground. In reality, efforts to end extreme poverty and to find solutions to the enormous challenges relating to global public goods will require a combination of reforms at global level, obviously including the provision of international development assistance.

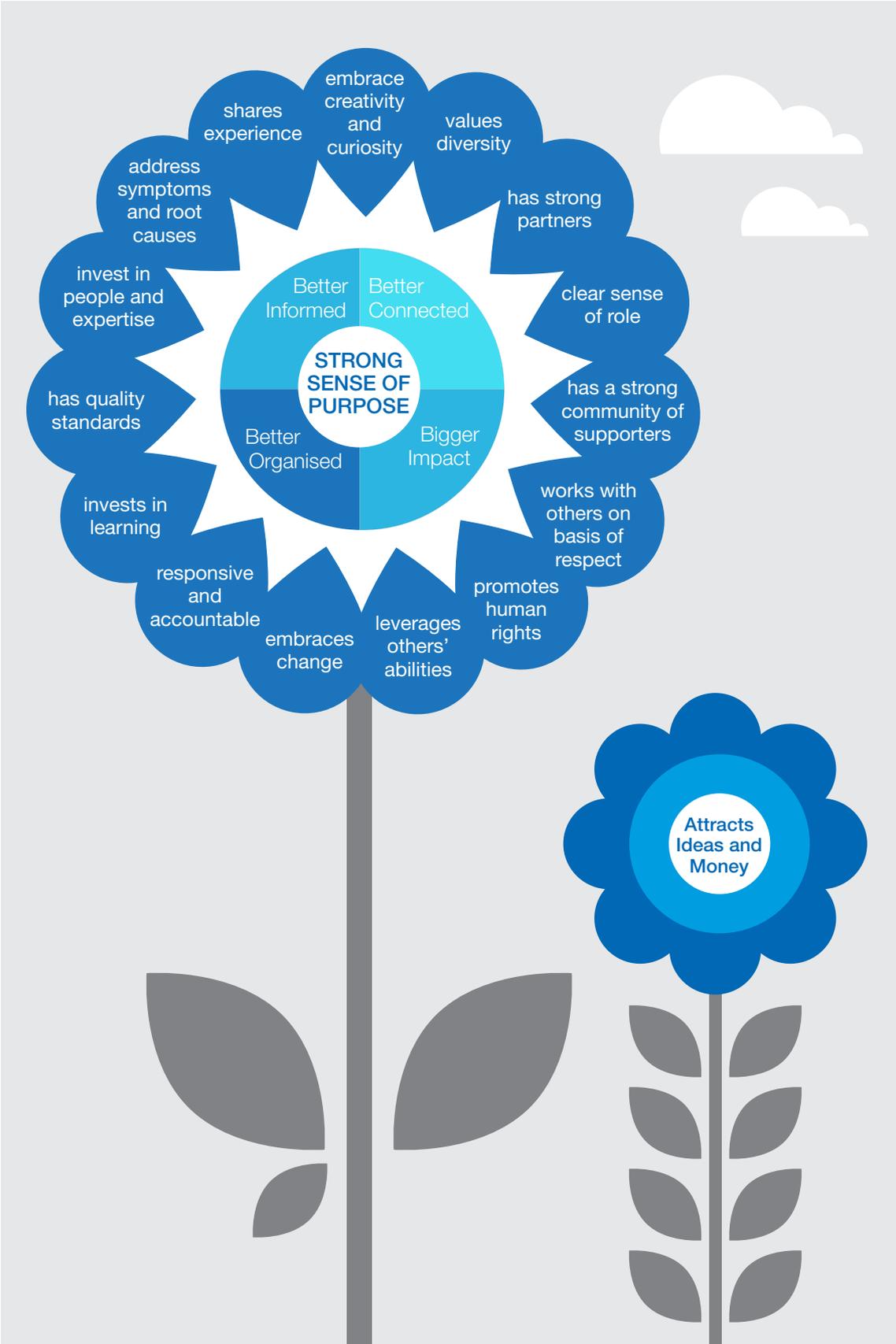
At the same time, however, trust in institutions is at a low, following the massive failure in political and financial leadership that triggered a widespread global crisis. NGOs, while still highly respected overall, have seen the public’s trust in them erode gradually and many people in Ireland and elsewhere have lost the belief that they can have a degree of influence on their own future.

Global crises that have highlighted the modern world’s inter-connectedness have further undermined this belief in democracy. The scale of problems such as the banking crash, Ebola and climate change is such that many people feel overwhelmed and robbed of any ability to influence the forces that impact on their lives. This in turn leads them to question the ability of small civil society organisations to affect meaningful change.

The perceived fragmentation of the NGO sector has the potential to further erode support for Development NGOs. The austerity period has forced many NGOs to cut costs, and their collective capacity to operate at scale, or to engage in topical research and policy analysis, has come under severe pressure. Yet, the opportunities to promote change and to work through broad civil society alliances and networks have increased, and the necessity to break out of existing silos is more and more evident to civil society organisations across different sectors.

Dóchas members are acutely aware of these opportunities and of the need to up-skill and up-scale their work. They work together through the Dóchas network to leverage expertise, experience and connections. Our members see the network as a meeting place to share ideas and as a place to challenge themselves and each other, inspired by a set of professional standards and shared values.

# KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY NGO SECTOR



## WHAT IS OUR AMBITION?

As a sector, we have managed to engage people and decision makers in Ireland with the moral case for overseas aid and support for aid is very high across all sectors of society. At the same time, aid is seen by many people as an 'add on', something external to their everyday lives and everyday decisions. In many parts of Irish society, global issues are seen as being about aid and charity, not as a fundamental aspect of our lives and choices as a 'globalised' country in an inter-dependent world.

Dóchas wants to emphasise that, in the words of the Government's new foreign policy statement, "the world is no longer foreign" and that "Ireland is connected to the global community in ways that would have seemed fanciful only a generation ago."

**We want to make global development not about 'what we give' but about 'how we live.'**

We want to build on the proud tradition of Ireland's 'soft power'. Ireland's reputation as a caring country can help us play a big role on the global stage - but only if the standards that apply to our development programme and foreign policy are also translated into high standards for Irish businesses abroad and for Governmental policies at home. Our foreign policy has long been based on a conviction that Ireland's interests are best served by the promotion of a global society that is rules based and where the rights of vulnerable states and people are respected, yet our domestic policies have lacked a similar explicit reference to rights, responsibilities and solidarity.

**We believe it is time for Ireland to aspire to be a world leader in global justice.**

This means building on our world class development cooperation programme and making sure that as a country we pursue the type of policies that reinforce the human rights of all people. And it means that, as consumers and citizens, we take account of our impact on others and on the planet, and that the companies we work for or buy from recognise their duty to respect and protect the rights of people everywhere.

**And we believe this can only come about if we nurture a national and international movement of people and organisations committed to tackling poverty and inequality around the world.**

As a network, we must not merely focus on enhancing the technical abilities of our member organisations; we must help them connect, inspire, mobilise and encourage everyone and anyone that can help build the movement for change and that can help make a difference in the way we think and act on global issues. We must turn our members' donors into active supporters, and our funders into advocates for change.

## **VISION:**

Our vision is of a world where poverty and marginalisation are unacceptable, and where every person has the right to live a life in dignity.

## **MISSION:**

Dóchas is the national voice of the international development sector in Ireland, influencing policies and behaviours for a better world. Dóchas is a network to connect, inspire and represent people and organisations working for global justice.

## **WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?**

Dóchas was created by our member organisations as a place for them to come together, learn from each other and further improve their long term impact.

Our members are autonomous organisations who have chosen to work together and who provide the knowledge, staff and finances needed to deliver their common plans. Through Dóchas, our members work on issues that are better dealt with together and they turn to Dóchas to provide strength and coherence to the sector and to provide thought leadership. Dóchas helps organisations identify gaps in their work as well as opportunities to innovate and improve our collective impact on global poverty and inequality.

**The purpose of Dóchas is to be a meeting place and a leading voice for organisations that want Ireland to be a world leader in efforts to bring about global justice.**

As a network, our primary role is to Connect our members and to help them Collaborate with each other. But we also see ourselves as a standard bearer for high quality work, working with our members and others to Challenge existing policies and practices and to help Change unjust situations, policies and institutions.

The work of Dóchas is based on the values and experiences of our member organisations, and that of their colleagues and partners overseas. Our decisions are taken in ways that allow for maximum efficiency and involvement by all stakeholders. Dóchas reflects the diversity of views and approaches of our members, and communicates those views effectively.

Over the next few years, we will be guided by the following four strategic priorities:

### 1. Build expertise

Connecting organisations and people and stimulate the exchange of experience to build a bigger shared knowledge base and to prompt the practical application of lessons learnt and insights gained. Ensure the relevance and impact of those working for global justice, by articulating and disseminating core professional standards and ethical guidelines.

### 2. Build our voice

Equipping our members to strengthen their ability to advocate on behalf of marginalised communities of people and build our capacity to coordinate, represent, educate and mobilise people and organisations working towards global justice.

### 3. Build alliances

Providing inspiring thought leadership and forge alliances and partnerships with organisations and people that can help bring new solutions and increased scale to approaches to building global solidarity and global justice.

### 4. Build our network

Strengthening our accountable and effective network, so that the organisation can achieve its mission and vision and support a movement for global justice in the long term.

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## CONNECT, INSPIRE AND REPRESENT PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS WORKING FOR A BETTER WORLD



## HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

### Build expertise

Dóchas will need to broaden the skills base of its membership, to ensure greater diversity of experience and views. Dóchas will continue to seek to attract more members and also look for new ways to engage its existing member organisations. We will invest in smarter technology and other tools to help increase our convening power as well as our ability to ensure that our decisions are based on the meaningful participation of all those who should have a say.

We will promote methods to ensure that our work is evidence based and we will actively increase the use of techniques to collect and analyse relevant data that can prove and improve the effectiveness of our work.

### Build our voice

We will invest in our ability to analyse and influence policy trends, and we will strengthen our ability to develop coordinated shared messaging on the key topics that are relevant to our member organisations.

We will challenge ourselves to be innovative and effective in public communications and to ensure that we engage rather than preach. We will work with members to ensure that their engagement with the hundreds of thousands of people that support their work offers new opportunities for people to become truly involved in the complexities of global issues.

And we will develop a programme of work aimed at strengthening the voice and influence of the people and communities our members aim to serve.

### Build alliances

We will use the shared experience of our member organisations to get involved in discussions and processes outside the Development sector.

We will take an active role in discussions about the Government's and the private sector's role in addressing global challenges and we will seek the support and involvement of organisations and institutions with expertise to complement our own.

We will network with Irish civil society organisations, diaspora groups and business representatives in an effort to promote joint activities and strategic dialogue.

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## Build our network

We will continue to diversify the funding base of our organisation, as well as strengthen our standard setting governance and accountability mechanisms to ensure that we remain relevant and responsive to all those who are interested in or affected by our work.

We will continue to reinforce the capacity of our staff and our sector's leaders to ensure we deliver a programme of activities of the highest standards.

## HOW WILL WE KNOW WE ARE SUCCEEDING?

Dóchas will develop a detailed Results Framework, to measure and report on the progress being made under each of the proposed strategic goals. That Framework will evolve over time, to take account of new initiatives and new areas of work. However, it is clear that it will include targets and indicators for some of the key areas of work under this Strategic Framework.

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## Build expertise

We will have ensured that we provide an effective and trusted platform and meeting place for organisations wishing to exchange experiences and share learning and we will have increased the level of interaction among NGOs and other institutions working to address global issues.

We will have prompted strategic alliances and collaborative ventures in Ireland and abroad, and ensured that the lessons learned in these initiatives are shared widely within the sector and more widely. We will have used these lessons and the professional standards developed by our members to set clear benchmarks for high-impact work on global challenges.

We will have ensured that our members are acknowledged as being among the most accountable, most effective and most innovative organisations in Ireland, constantly improving their approaches to sustainable human development and increasing the scale and impact of their work.

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## Build our voice

We will have supported our members in their efforts to give voice to the voiceless. We will have trained members in public communications and assisted them in their education, engagement and mobilisation of people in Ireland on issues relating to global justice and international cooperation.

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## Build our voice

We will have showcased the expertise of our membership, and developed high quality and topical position papers and briefing documents that impact meaningfully on public discourse. We will have contributed to a meaningful shift in attitudes in Ireland, prompted by a change in the way NGOs and mass media communicate about global challenges and about our roles and responsibilities as global citizens.

We will have nurtured a movement of people and organisations that are determined to take action - and empowered to challenge perceived wisdom – to bring about a fair and sustainable global society.

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## Build alliances

We will have used the experience and expertise of our member organisations to leverage the skills and influence of others. Supported by our in-depth analysis and our timely information, we will have prompted action by Government and for-profit companies in Ireland and abroad.

We will have mobilised Irish civil society organisations, diaspora groups and business representatives in favour of changes in attitudes and policies that improve the lives of marginalised communities around the world.

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## Build our network

We will have secured a sustainable basis for our network, based on the active engagement of our members and of other organisations that support our mission, and driven by a membership strategy that leverages their strengths, insights, influence and expertise.

We will have developed a public profile that matches the strength of our collective, which is supported by hundreds of thousands of people across Ireland.

We will be widely respected as a thought leader, an agent of change and an example of good practice and good governance.

Dóchas will regularly commission external assessments of its work, to ensure that all our stakeholders have access to relevant and up to date information about our work and our impact. And we will continuously seek input and feedback from a wide variety of sources, to help us learn from our activities and to drive us to ever higher standards of performance.



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The ideas, opinions and comments in this publication are entirely the responsibility of Dóchas and do not necessarily represent or reflect the policies of Irish Aid or of the European Union.



**Irish Aid**

An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



**Dóchas**

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