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

The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations
Global Development: what can you do?

A Reference Guide for Members of the Oireachtas

As a TD or Senator, you have the 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.

This paper is intended as a “users guide” for members of the Dáil and Seanad, and suggests various ways in which you can use your role to effect positive and lasting change in developing countries.
In your Constituency

Highlight connections between your constituency and the wider world

- Our lives 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.

- 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 from maintaining ‘the lungs of our planet’.

- You can illustrate the links between global and local issues in ways that help to build understanding and solidarity.

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
- Immigrant support groups
- Fair Trade groups
- Twinning 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

- 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

- By contributing to Oireachtas debates, asking Parliamentary Questions and attending Oireachtas committee meetings relevant to their work
- By addressing their causes and concerns in public debates and within the media

Your engagement as a political representative will give encouragement and recognition to the work of development organisations.
Voting in the Oireachtas

Legislation affecting development arises more frequently than ever. In our globalised world, many of Ireland’s actions - on areas like agriculture, trade, climate change and international affairs (especially at EU and UN level) - are felt throughout the world.

As a politician, you have important opportunities to influence legislation at different stages.

Dóchas members are happy to offer their analysis and to discuss ways in which they feel you can help.

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 to reach the UN target of 0.7% of GNP by 2012 - and keeps overseas aid to at least that level afterwards.

What you can do

- Monitor progress towards the UN’s 0.7% target 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 debate on Irish development cooperation, progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and policy coherence for development - both across government departments and within the EU
- Examine government policies and strive for the coherence of other policy areas with Ireland’s development and human rights objectives
- Urge 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
- Scrutinise positions taken on behalf of Ireland at international meetings
- Monitor progress on the commitment in the White Paper on Irish Aid (2006) to publish all external evaluation and public expenditure reviews of the Irish Aid programme

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 they are in Cabinet, on the back benches or in the Opposition. Regardless of political affiliation and whether they sit in the Dáil or the Seanad, all have important roles to play.
Two Key Decisions of the 30th Dáil

Ireland has committed itself to reaching the UN target of spending 0.7% of national income on overseas development assistance by 2012, with an important interim target in 2010.

As a member of the Oireachtas you can use your influence to support:

The growth of Ireland’s ODA budget each year towards the 0.7% target;

- The current schedule commits Ireland to achieving:
  - 0.5% by 2007
  - 0.6% by 2010
  - 0.7% by 2012

Legislation to guarantee that commitment beyond 2012.

- 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.
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, migration and security 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 sometimes 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

Working on Committees

The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and its sub-committees, on 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 are set to play an increasing role.

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 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 or protect overseas development.

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, you can propose motions for adoption or changes to draft legislation, organise debates and briefings, commission reports and ensure public debate on important issues.
Speaking Out For Justice

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

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 secure access for aid workers
- Advocating that Ireland become a full party to international conventions and fulfil its obligations under these

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.
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.

**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.

**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](http://www.ipu.org)
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 37 members with over 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.

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.