

## **INTRODUCTION:**

ActionAid is an international organization with its headquarters in Johannesburg South Africa. ActionAid initially focused on fighting for the rights of people living in poverty and we have now moved on from fighting against poverty to working for long lasting solutions to poverty, advancing alternatives together with our partners and allies.

ActionAid Ireland was set up in 1983 by a group of Irish people as an independent Irish organisation and in 2003 ActionAid Ireland was a founding affiliate of ActionAid International. The new structure makes real our commitment to accountability to the people, communities and countries we work with, and makes us more effective in fighting and eradicating poverty

Our focus on **Women's Rights** has grown in recent years cutting across all of ActionAid's work. By seeking to reduce violence against women and girls, increase action on women's rights in relation to HIV/AIDS, recognize and protect women's rights to land, and enhance women's participation in local and national governance, ActionAid has enabled women and girls to realize lives of dignity and safety.

## **PROGRESS MADE**

The 2006 White Paper on Development commits the Government of Ireland to "mainstream gender considerations into all of our development cooperation activities." The White Paper Review Consultation Paper also recognises gender equality as a key issue to consider when implementing development programmes. Putting gender equality at the core of development policy is seen as important progress and the Government of Ireland is rightfully known to be a 'gender champion'.

The Government of Ireland has strengthened and deepened its understanding of gender-based violence in particular. Through its membership and support for the Consortium on Gender Based Violence it has provided opportunities to share learning between Irish Aid, the Defence Forces, humanitarian and development organisations based in Ireland. This has directly influenced the development of the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325.

In order to be an international 'gender champion' the Government of Ireland has built its capacity in this area and resources have been allocated to support gender equality initiatives.

The Government of Ireland has continuously received a high score from the OECD DAC for their development work and this has resulted in continuous adjustments to programming and civil society partnerships in order to maintain a high standard of work.

## **CHANGING CONTEXT**

- Dramatic shocks and crises will inevitably occur – whether related to economy, food, fuel, finances, climate or conflict – increasing human vulnerability and inequality, especially affecting women.

- Over half the population will be children or youth. Half will also be living in urban areas, shifting the location of poverty. Gender-based discrimination will persist as a cause of poverty and injustice, although women will be striving for increased leadership in all sectors
- The rise of consumption and growing middle classes around the world will increase the demands for food, and put significant pressures on natural resources, especially in low- and middle income countries
- As the world faces up to its natural resource limits (oil, water, land and forests), there will be a more compelling agenda for advancing ecological justice, sustainable agriculture and development models based on fair shares for all
- Political and economic power will continue to shift away from the United States of America and Europe towards a more multi-polar world. The BRIC countries will rise and re-emerge, expanding and transforming approaches to global governance and social and economic development.
- The capacity of states to take effective large-scale action against poverty will increase in many developing countries as they head towards middle income status; the temptation might grow to use enhanced state power to enforce repressive policies that favour political elites or private sector interest. Also, a growing share of those living in extreme poverty are likely to be concentrated in fragile states, where enforcing human rights obligations is extremely difficult.
- The rapid pace of technological development will accelerate further in many cases deepening divides but it will also create opportunities for democratising access to information and for people to be more involved in government and corporate processes.
- Civil society and people's movements will find new ways to connect, making their voices heard. However, reactionary and intolerant movements will also strengthen and threaten to undermine the rights of women and minorities.
- The global economic crisis and related continued budget pressure will affect prioritisation and strategic engagement for development in Ireland, and the need to better communicate results to the public

## **KEY ISSUES**

The Key Issues laid out in the White Paper Review Consultation Paper are; Hunger, Situations of Fragility, Climate Change, Responding to Basic Needs (HIV and AIDS, Health and Education), Governance and Human Rights, Gender Equality, and the Private Sector. ActionAid Ireland's focus is on women's rights and therefore this submission is mainly focusing on this area which is cross-cutting many of the key issues addressed in the White Paper Review Consultation Paper.

The underlying causes of poverty and injustice are gendered. Because of their socially ascribed role, women living in poverty have less access to land, education, networks, technology, transport, cash, decision-making or safety. Developing strategies to explicitly confront these different causes of poverty and injustice are essential in order to have a real impact on the lives of women and their communities.

We would encourage the Irish Government to focus on developing long lasting strategies and solutions together with Civil Society Organisations and other partners to improve the lives of women and consider the following areas in particular:

**GBV:** The focus of gender equality and gender-based violence issues in the White Paper is a positive development. However it should be strongly acknowledged that the root cause of gender-based violence is the fundamental inequality between men and women. Resources need to be focused on the prevention of gender-based violence, as well as treatment and support for survivors.

We welcome the recent focus on gender-based violence in fragile states but also acknowledge that endemic gender-based violence can have a serious affect on the lives of women in a wide variety of environments. With increasing recognition that prevention of gender-based violence is possible we encourage the Government of Ireland to ensure both prevention of and response to gender-based violence are included in the overall programme. We also note the need for a multi-sector response to gender-based violence encompassing health, psycho-social, security, legal and judicial.

**Safe cities:** More than half the world's population lives in cities. This will grow to almost 60% in just two decades. 90% of urban growth will be in the developing world, where cities are sites of growing inequality, echoing the inequality women are already facing on a daily basis, within their homes, communities and in relation to political and economic participation. Women living in poverty are most marginalised in enjoying the right to the city. Yet cities can offer solutions to poverty – they are engines of growth, economic and political power, places where women have greater freedom to recreate their roles away from traditional rural societies. However, confronted by violence or fear of violence, women living in poverty are unable to enjoy the benefits cities and urbanisation can offer. This impact is grave and widespread. Often such violence has become normalised for the victims as well as the duty bearers who are responsible for protecting women's rights.

*Women are not going out, they are stopping their children from spending time outside, in the streets they live a sort of enclosed, limiting existence. Add to that domestic violence, which makes them more fearful, we felt the need to make women take back their cities*  
(Olga Segovia, UNIFEM (Now UN Women), Brazil, 2009)

In order to have equal opportunities for men and women in urban settings we would welcome a stronger focus by the Government of Ireland on creating safe urban spaces in which improved public services and reduction in levels of violence and fear are central. It would be of key importance to have a women's rights approach that would allow for female participation in order for women to identify the types of changes necessary to increase safety while minimising the harmful impacts of growing urbanisation on urban poor women.

**Unpaid Care:** As economies grow and urbanise, women need more power to shape how markets are organised. Traditionally women have been seen only as docile, cheap labour for fields and factories or as wives and mothers whose unpaid hours of toil at home make it possible for poor households to survive on the lowest of wages. Increasingly however, women are organising to claim more power over productive resources. And they are building economic and ecological alternatives, from new forms of cooperatives, to demand recognition and reduction of unpaid care, to campaign for social protection and pro-poor macro-economic policies. Based on the principle that the poorest and most excluded groups in society must benefit from economic practices and policies and that gender

equitable approaches have proven to be more effective when women get organised, we would like to urge the Government of Ireland to support women and their organisations to progress innovative thinking, research and pilot work.

## **WAYS OF WORKING**

The chairmanship of the OSCE and the upcoming EU Presidency provide opportunities for the Government of Ireland to continue to promote the cause of gender equality and to be a leader in this area. It is vital for the Government of Ireland to continue to push for gender equality and women's rights to be at the heart of any new development framework after the Millennium Development Goals come to an end in 2015.

In order to abide by the OECD DAC criteria of effectiveness and transparency and to build on the existing gender equality and women's rights work we would welcome initiatives at the government level that would track the allocation of budgets and resources for gender initiatives and programmes. Mutual accountability mechanisms for Civil Society and Government can provide opportunities for shared learning and improved international accountability.

We welcome the increased focus on results-based management but would appreciate the inclusion of innovative ways for measuring the qualitative and longer terms aspects of change and support the principles that underpin Ireland's development programme, most notably human rights. This is particularly relevant in the area of women's rights and gender equality as changing attitudes and beliefs can take place over a long period of time.

The shift from a donor to a partnership model is very welcome. It has allowed for better communications and transparency and is in line with the international development community approach to development cooperation. Since developing a partnership model involves ongoing learning for both Government and Civil Society further development of this model of working would be very welcome. In particular the development of a partnership policy exploring different ways of working together and promoting stronger joint initiatives would be appreciated. This could result in Partnership policies for the various partners of the Irish Government - Civil Society, Partner Countries and Multi-laterals.