

Introduction

On the 30th of March 2012, it was announced in the Irish Independent newspaper that the government is going to create a review report of the White Paper on Irish Development Aid as it stands at the moment. This report is going to be published in September of 2012 and will be made using both submissions from experts in the fields of development aid and foreign as well as submissions from the public in general. I believe that this is an ideal time to address some of the issues that many people in this country have about the state of Irish aid to the developing world. Some of these problems will be addressed below. The end product will be a Review Report which will be published by the Government in autumn 2012, setting out the way ahead for the aid programme. Will its recommendations be included in the next budget?

Delivering €639 million euro worth of aid. Considering that the total haul from any household charge is likely to be between €160,000,000 and €180,000,000 could we not then make up this figure from that being spent by the Irish Aid in the developing world and thereby alleviate the tax burden of the already hard pressed Irish taxpayer, cancel a deeply unpopular near politically impossible tax and maintain our standing if need be in the developing world with half or even a third of the €639 million euro mentioned above. This would put the Irish Aid budget for overseas aid at between €319,000,000 and €213,000,000 of the original €639 million.

Ireland's first White Paper on Irish Aid was published by the Government in September 2006. Would it not be more prudent to tailor a paper written during the height of the economic boom to our considerably more difficult economic circumstances.

Progress Made

In the review paper it is stated on page 6 that the question facing the review board and those participating in the review in any capacity is "Has the government been successful in implementing the commitments in the White Paper on Irish Aid". Again, I believe that an important point is being overlooked. This White paper was published in 2006. Ireland in 2006 was a very different country to the one it is now in 2012. Our economy was booming, confidence in the government was never higher and the both the citizenry and the state were awash with money. But this is the Republic of Ireland, 2012. Our economy has stagnated, confidence in the government is almost imperceptibly low and the Fine Gael led government has had to repeatedly break election promises, raise taxes and impose other cost cutting measures. In an era of streamlining, cutting back and with the phrase "make do with what you have" having become the mantra of everyday life, the question facing the review board should be "Is it wise to continue spending over half a billion euro on the developing world" or more cynically "What are we getting we getting in return for our €690 million". While this

attitude is certainly cold and callous, isn't it true that this is what we need to be in our current economic situation.

A continued focus on Africa.

- ✓✓ A leadership role in the fight against global hunger and food and nutrition insecurity.
- ✓✓ Greater attention to fragility (due to conflict, climate change, and so on).
- ✓✓ Improved ways of preventing and responding to humanitarian emergencies.
- ✓✓ Continued attention to governance, gender, the environment and HIV and AIDS.
- ✓✓ Enhanced focus on climate change, in collaboration with other Government departments.
- ✓✓ Better focus on results.
- ✓✓ Stronger policy coherence across Government departments in Ireland.
- ✓✓ Streamlined and consistent support for the valuable work of civil society organisations.
- ✓ A renewed focus on trade and development – and the links between the two.
- ✓✓ A continued focus on programmes in health, HIV and AIDS, and education in particular.
- ✓✓ Strong oversight mechanisms, including through the Oireachtas and robust systems of accountability.
- ✓✓ Increased public engagement.

These are the aims as outlined in page 7 of the document. I believe that in order to make the Irish Aid programme more acceptable to an already financially hard pressed Irish public, we should seriously consider eliminating the first aims stated above in order to aid the cost cutting so necessary in government departments in our current economic situation.

Furthermore and also on page 7 of the document, in section 3.8, a number of further aims were put forward such as:

The number of partner countries was increased by one (Malawi) and not by two.

- The White Paper committed to an increasing engagement with and support for the African Union which was not as deep as anticipated.
- The idea of establishing an Irish Development Bank was not pursued.
- The development of a regional approach in Southern Africa and South East Asia was not as envisaged, although some sector-specific efforts were made in that regard.
- More recently the decision has been made by the Government to close the representative office in Timor Leste following a review of overseas missions. However, the aid programme there will continue, and the Irish Ambassador in Singapore will continue to be accredited to Timor Leste.
- The knowledge and understanding of development issues, and the Government's aid programme, amongst the Irish public is somewhat low - although there are high levels of goodwill and public support.

The fact that the government is still trying, at a time of constrained finances, to expand our charitable funding overseas with no clear returns in view seems to me at least to be entirely inconsistent with the prevailing economic conditions. Why are we talking about expanding

the number of countries in the Irish Aid programme? What is the point of trying to engage with an impotent organisation like the African Union which has proven itself unable to enforce peace and stability, the two keys ingredients for effective charity work, in various parts of that afflicted continent? Also the idea of establishing an “Irish Development Bank” at a time when the good name of Irish banks is no longer and the surviving banks are under investigation, downsizing and seem to be constantly posting losses is, frankly, laughable. Do we for one second imagine that they would perform any better in a poverty stricken, troubled region like Africa than they have in the stable, peaceful Republic of Ireland. However to give credit where it is due, the government of the time did try to adopt a more regional approach and focus on working in areas that actually stand a chance of success. I believe that this approach will reap the most realistic rewards in that it will draw wealth and stability into a region and by extension improve the lives of the people who live there. The decision to close the diplomatic office in Timor Leste must be commended as it will provide more in the way of savings for the government especially when those offices functions can be fulfilled by diplomatic stations in a more important centre of power like Singapore. This idea has already been heeded in the closure of the Irish embassy to the Vatican and the transfers of its diplomatic functions to our embassy to Rome.

On page 9 of the paper it states that:

Among the challenges are the needs to:

- Reduce fragmentation of aid (Irish Aid, whilst it prioritises nine Programme Countries, currently directs funds to more than 80 countries).
- Enhance efforts to measure and communicate the development results achieved.
- Build an overall coherent approach across Government.
- Take account of the human resources constraints faced.
- Increase internal public financial management expertise.
- Match country programme ambition with existing capacity and staffing.
- Ensure that the decentralisation of Irish Aid is well managed.

This in effect admits that a kind of “mission creep” has set in over the past few years with regard to our overseas aid. It admits that we are spending €639 million every year for the many years now supporting over 80 countries that are no closer to supporting themselves than they were when we started funding them. It admits that the government’s response to foreign aid and its failures has been haphazard and devoid of good leadership. The simple and callous fact of the matter is that we must drastically reduce the number of countries that are receiving our aid. We must adopt a more surgical approach to overseas development aid, namely the Triage method:

- Those countries that will continue in spite of aid
- Those that will fail in spite of aid
- Those for whom aid will make a real difference

If we focus the existing Irish Aid workforce on those countries for whom aid will make a vital difference, we can achieve better results with less and no change in the workforce so there will be no people earning more nor will there be more people on the unemployed register.

The Changing Context

Poverty may be shrinking but major troubles still lie ahead. In the economic and “sphere of influence” battle ground that is Africa will the rise of Chinese power, especially in overseas terms, match the power of the United States and other traditional powers in Africa. This is not a digression as you may think. In the book “Genocide and Cover Operations in Africa 1993-1999” the author, Wayne Madsen draws a direct link between competing economic and business concerns which led to the proliferation of conventional wars and terrorist campaigns across, destabilising large swathes of Africa and thereby exponentially increasing the workload of and resource drain on charities and organisations such as Irish Aid. With this link between business concerns, foreign relations strategy and the pressures on overseas aid, would it not better to place the “Development Co-Operation” section of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade within its “Political Division” (the section responsible for international political issues and which manages Ireland's participation in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy). This would allow for a more effective use of development aid in conjunction with our strong relations with the United States, European powers and our strong relationship with China. Also, and I do not say this lightly, could we not also make the aforementioned book by Wayne Madsen required reading for those seeking employment in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

“The situation in the Irish Aid Programme Countries (Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho, Mozambique, Vietnam and Timor Leste) is also constantly changing. Africa is experiencing an increased economic momentum, and economic growth rates in many Programme Countries are between 5% and 8% per annum. The telecommunications, banking and retail sectors in these countries are developing, construction is doing well, and inward investment is increasing.”

I believe that this statement from the report is effect an admission that many of the countries in the programme that continue to receive aid from Ireland do not need so much. Furthermore it can reasonably be expected that in the coming years with the recent energy finds in places in and around Ethiopia, that these countries will go from economic strength to strength and begin to financially power their own country.

“Many Programme Countries are reducing their reliance on donors, with greater resources being raised domestically, from remittances and from foreign direct investment. Uganda for example relied on donors for half of the national budget in 2003, and this has been reduced to a third. In many Programme Countries, however, the gap between the rich and the poor is stagnant, or growing.”

In my opinion this statement shows that in addition to the €639 million being given by the government to developing states, they are also gaining sufficient, that is to say large, amounts of money, enough to fund their country, through remittances. It is my belief that remittances should be measured and this alternative source of income taken into account when deciding how much aid to give to that country. Furthermore, this passage also shows that far from achieving equality for the peoples of the affected nation. It is interesting to note that the elimination of the wealth gap was not included in the list of goals for the Irish Aid programme as set out in the White paper. What is the meaning behind this omission? Add to all of this the following statements:

“Population dynamics (including growth rates, age structure, fertility and mortality, migration and so on) influence every aspect of human, social and economic development. The year 2011 will be remembered as the one in which the world’s population exceeded 7 billion, with a further increase of 2.3 billion projected by 2050. The projected doubling of the African population between 2005 and 2050 will pose huge developmental challenges. As the UNFPA State of Population 2011 Report explains, in the poorest countries, extreme poverty, food insecurity, inequality, high death rates and high birth rates are all linked in a vicious cycle. The challenge is to break this cycle.”

“Poverty and vulnerability will be further exacerbated by the ongoing impacts of climate change which will in turn worsen the growing problems of global hunger, and food, water and energy insecurity. Ethiopia for example is constantly ranked as one of the world’s most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. Climate change there is projected to reduce yields of the wheat staple crop by 33%. A global climate change response demands a move to low carbon and climate resilient development. The upcoming Rio + 20 conference for sustainable development will contribute further to the global momentum towards ‘green’ development pathways, ensuring a better balance between the economic, social and environmental pillars of development.”

These two statements seem, to me, to indicate that in spite of the massive amount of aid being given through the Irish Aid organisation we have only managed to stave off major problems for a few years and have not eradicated them. Just a thought for the present government: if it takes €639 million to, basically, plaster over the cracks, how much money from our already recession-hit economy will the aid programme take up in 5 years, 10 years or 20 years. I hope that the government will take this into account for the next budget.

Key Issues 800 words

Hunger

“The problem of chronic under-nutrition is prevalent across all of Ireland’s Programme Countries. In Tanzania, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Zambia and Uganda up to 50 % of all children under five are stunted. The current crisis in the Horn of Africa is affecting an estimated 13 million people with a death toll in excess of 80,000 to date. The immediate cause of this crisis is drought, but its severity is the result of a combination of

factors, including conflict, insecurity, disease, weak institutions and governance, and persistent underdevelopment.”

To be honest I believe that this just goes to show that in spite of the massive amount of aid being given to these countries, there serious problems with regard to hunger and population growth are only getting worse. This only strengthens the case for stricter control of our over seas aid.

Situations of fragility

“More than 1.5 billion people continue to live in countries affected by violent conflict.”

“No fragile or conflict-affected state is currently on track to meet any of the Millennium Development Goals.”

Both of these statements from the 2006 report admit what I have already said earlier: That aid is wasted on those Third World states that are convulsed in conflict. The fact that these lines were included in the Irish Aid white paper in 2006 shows that even back then, the agency considered this an incredibly important issue that needed to be addressed. As stated in this report, it is necessary to politically stabilise a country before sending in money.

Climate change

“In all countries, economic and social progress is dependent upon the health of the environment. Environmental assets (such as fertile soils, clean water, trees and bio-diversity) yield income, offer livelihoods and safety nets for the poor, maintain public health and drive economic growth.”

“On the other hand, environmental hazards (e.g. pollution, environmental damage, and climate change) all threaten livelihoods and development. Poor countries and people tend to be most dependent on, and vulnerable to environmental hazards. The World Bank estimates that environmental assets provide 26% of the national wealth in Least Developed Countries, in comparison to around 2% in OECD countries.”

Does this basically mean that even with all of our aid, coordination of foreign policy and aid and politically stabilising a developing country that it could all be for nought if the climate does not allow? If we cannot stop deforestation and desertification, two key problems afflicting the Third World, then how do we justify the continued donation of money from our own cash strapped state to other states that will not stop their self-destructive practices.

Responding to basic needs

“Since its first description in 1981, HIV and AIDS has spread around the world, with its epicentre in Sub Saharan Africa. HIV and AIDS, malaria and TB are the main threats to socio-economic growth in many countries in this region. AIDS is now the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age globally. Girls and women are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection due to a combination of biological factors and gender-based inequalities, in particular gender-based violence.”

As outlined in this report, two of the major problems facing the developing world are AIDS and HIV epidemics. As admirable as it undoubtedly is that our overseas agency is trying to do something about this terrible scourge, I believe that we should not underestimate some of the causes of the spread of these diseases. Many religious groups, who have some of their strongest and most conservative support in Africa, oppose the use of artificial contraception for spiritual reasons and I believe that as long as this is the case then HIV and AIDS will continue cause major problems for poorer nations. Another major contributing factor, as has been endlessly repeated by various charities, medical groups and activists, is the unwillingness of those carrying these infections to acknowledge the problem. This can be due to any number of social and/or religious reasons or taboos. For as long as this state of affairs persists, they will continue infecting their partners. This is why we need a stronger, more diplomacy based approach to tackling poverty and social problems. To co-ordinate our actions with the religious organisations in the area and have them be on the frontline of combating sexually transmitted diseases.

Governance and human rights

“The 2010 Mo Ibrahim Index shows recent gains in many African countries in human and economic development but declines in political rights, personal safety and the rule of law. While many African citizens are becoming healthier and have greater access to economic opportunities than five years ago, many of them are less physically secure and less politically enfranchised – democracy is still at the stage of taking hold, and in many cases remains very fragile.”

“Good governance is about helping to create the conditions in which women and men are empowered to participate freely in their political, social and economic development and, in so doing, to achieve their potential.”

“Fighting corruption is an essential element of the pursuit of good governance – and efforts are continuing to ensure that national budgets and aid funds are spent effectively and benefit the most vulnerable people. The OECD concluded in their recent review that Irish Aid follows a rigorous process of internal checks and controls. This has helped to ensure that the resources channelled through the aid programme have been protected, and targeted where they are needed.”

Is this not proof of what I said earlier about the need to place the overseas development branch under the political division of the Department of Foreign Affairs. This would allow

those who are experienced in negotiating with governments to help make our foreign aid more effective in achieving its goals. In this case it would them to improve the state of human rights in certain areas and thereby improve the quality of life for many in that area.

Gender equality

“Gender inequality continues however to be a key dimension of poverty and vulnerability and a major violation of human rights. Climate change, the HIV and AIDS pandemic, conflict and natural disasters and food insecurity all affect men and women differently. For example, in the developing world, women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change. This is because they are the main managers of household resources, such as water, food and fuel; they are the majority of smallholder farmers; when disaster strikes, they have fewer resources to cope; and more women and girls die in natural disasters such as floods and hurricanes.”

“Gender-based violence in all its forms, during conflict, post-conflict and in more stable developing countries is a violation of human rights, an impediment to sustainable economic growth and limits progress across all of the Millennium Development Goals.”

“There is a growing recognition and understanding of the critical role of women small-holder farmers in efforts to combat food and nutrition insecurity and sustainably boost agricultural productivity. For example, closing the gender gap in access to agricultural inputs alone could lift an estimated 100-150 million people out of hunger. This issue is central to Ireland’s work on combating hunger.”

Gender equality is an essential part of the struggle for human rights so much so that I sometimes do not see why it is treated as being a separate issue. All of these paragraphs tie in to what has already been said in this submission about the need to improve medical care with respect

Private sector

Ways of working 800 words