

# ***ECTi - Ethics Consultancy & Training Ireland***

**Submission to Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid (21<sup>st</sup> April 2012)**

**Nature of Views: The Ethical Basis of the White Paper**

**Organisation: *ECTi - Ethics Consultancy & Training Ireland***

**Key Terms: Engaged Values, Care, Reciprocal Principle, Duty,  
Detached Values, Contract Theory, Respect, Partnership**

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## *Introduction and Core Message*

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission on the Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid. As an ethicist, Managing Director of the company *ECTi - Ethics Consultancy & Training Ireland*, and someone with direct experience of assisting State bodies implement key ethics training, I am deeply interested in this important topic. When examining the White Paper I shall use as a guiding concept what I have called the *Reciprocal Principle – Ethics in Action*. I believe this principle appreciably addresses the core ethical/moral issues which need to be stressed in the scripting of this White Paper.

My considerations will be based on the following understanding of what Irish Aid is: A programme of *assistance* to developing countries with a priority set on the reduction of poverty and inequality. It makes *cooperation* with governments, other donors, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and interested organisations a key component of a global attempt to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Irish Aid notes also that the principle of *partnership* forms the bedrock of its engagement with programme countries.

In what follows, I shall evaluate the White Paper on Irish Aid (WPIA) from a purely ethical perspective. Given that the over-arching object of the WPIA is to attain poverty reduction by reaching the MDGs, the moral profile of the delivery of this aid is paramount and highlighted under four headings: *Progress Made, Changing Context, Key Issues* and *Ways of Working*.

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## A) Progress Made

Much progress has undoubtedly been made in meeting the WIPA commitments (cf. Annex 1). The specific ethical terms which arise in the White Paper are centred on the principles of effectiveness, coherence and partnership, “Irish Aid . . . is widely seen as a champion in making aid more effective” (3.10).

The term *partnership* within the document should, I argue, be expanded upon, as its ethical power and relevance to the stated goals is profoundly important. Partnership implies agreement around a common aim through common purposes and is intimately linked to a congruence of specific and targeted actions. It is the highlighting of this active sense of engagement that should be made more prominent throughout this document. The use of the term *cooperation* also falls under this ethical rubric and should be emphasised in like manner while recording that its roots lie more directly within the confines of morality, rather than ethics. This note underlines the necessity for concrete definitions and a greater appreciation of the subtle shades of meaning that can arise when it comes to the discipline of ethics.

Other major ethical concepts such as *care* are also rather poorly (if at all) defined. As a consequence, their fundamental impact within the White Paper is neutralised. In an effort to move closer to the goals promoted in this document, a fuller articulation and demonstration of the values (e.g. detached and engaged) which underpin it should be formulated: “Ireland’s contribution to the fight against global poverty is a practical expression of its *values* as a nation” (1.1). This emphasis would create a material means of linking the Irish Government’s laudable aspirations with the practical realities of aid provision.

The guiding premise of my recommendations, and one that acts as the ethical and thematic thread of this submission, is something I have dubbed the *Reciprocal Principle – Ethics in Action*. This approach conjoins in an achievable way the donor-recipient dynamic by focusing on the terms care, respect and mutual benefit. Through action, ethics empowers people to make confident and morally sound decisions. It acknowledges points of tension between personal beliefs, professional practices and political policies and it offers methodologies for dispute resolution and techniques for evaluating behaviour, levels of engagement and policy.

This *Reciprocal Principle* recognises both the moral imperative of aid as central to Ireland’s foreign policy and the intersection of interests in a bilateral way that are active, tangible and ethical. This conception compels us to new insights into why and how aid is provided and creates a fresh understanding of reciprocity, one which encompasses self-interest through a vision of future trade as distinct from what had previously been a one-way donor-recipient equation. Such a principle, founded as it is on ethical and emotional engagement, helps greatly in reducing the fragmentation of Irish Aid (3.11), enhances the level of results monitoring, and builds overall coherence.

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## *B) The Changing Context*

Note should immediately be taken of the important fact that at a global level the MDG of halving world poverty by 2015 is on track. Despite advances (4.4), however stubbornly persistent poverty rates in particular regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa remain high. Though indirect, over recent years, many of the poorest countries on that Continent have avoided the blunt force of the global recession, as they were simply at one remove from the financial system at large. This isolation, though fortuitous in this regard, underscores the need to ensure that these countries are not left alone or de-barred from gaining entry in an active and participatory to a system that is of capital importance to their development. On the whole, I am in agreement with the assessments outlined under the sub-heading *Private Sector* (5.31). I will comment on this topic at *D) Ways of Working*, suffice to say, under the guiding principle of reciprocity, an ethically grounded cross-fertilisation of trade and investment would, I believe, be highly progressive.

Engagement with a strict, profit-driven model of commercialism, from an aid perspective, would be short-sighted and detrimental to both Ireland and its programme countries. However, a more fulsome process of amalgamation, transparently built around the values of respect, rights and dignity would help to undermine the negative attitudes of gender inequality and lax enforcement of laws which are still prevalent in some jurisdictions. A variation of the classic ethical theory *Social Contract* can be applied to Irish Aid, one where the dynamism of reciprocity is elevated beyond rhetoric to become an accountable, honest and change-driven partnership. The evolving economic face of Africa (4.8) makes Ireland's aid programme opportune for a new and mature policy that lays aside sound-bite references to ethics and moves towards an *ethics of action*.

As many "programme countries are reducing their reliance on donors" (4.9), so the time is apposite for Irish Aid to create a more open and morally robust kinship. Note is made of programme countries "struggling to increase outward trade" (4.10), a point which again reinforces the relevance and importance of the *Reciprocal Principle*. By accentuating trade that is both ethical and long-term, we move from the increasingly redundant concept of aid as a manifestation of our sense of duty (i.e. a detached value) to aid as demonstrable of the active values we hold dear as a nation.

Through care as a key motivating force to aid donation, we develop not only a positive self-interested appetite that the receiver succeed but also encourage, on a long-term basis, the building of internal capacity and sustainability. Strengthening our engaged and active economic ties in a way that centres on reciprocity and respect, means we further assist in the promotion of solidarity at an intra-African level and lessen the one-way dependency structures of previous policies.

Given the economic downturn at home, an almost blinkered concentration on the vibrant and bilateral dynamic of care (and engaged values more generally) as the crux of Irish Aid is vital. The importance of the meticulous monitoring of aid funds, accountability and measurable results must continue to be a priority of probity. Isolating the dynamic power of care as the essential motivating factor to Irish people's support of aid provision and, given the "aid programme belongs to the Irish people" (1.2), means harnessing this drive becomes imperative if targeted and progressive aid planning is to reach its flowering.

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## *C) Key Issues*

Under the sub-heading *Hunger* (5.2) we encounter a core component of the moral dimension to Irish Aid. Historically, perhaps, little thought has been given to the act of giving. It was assumed that a donation of itself was *good* and so meta-ethical reflections were simply bracketed-off. Today, however, as Ireland's relationship with Africa matures, a more nuanced and in-depth appreciation of the ethical framework within which we relate needs to be expounded.

Despite progress, recalcitrant problems of overt and hidden hunger (5.2), weak governance and continued underdevelopment need to be tackled head-on. The Hunger Task Force Report (HTFR) highlights some key ethical issues, such as nutrition insecurity and need for tangible support and effective leadership programmes (5.4) as indispensable to advancement. This long-term vision underpins the relevance of an initial stronger weighting on the detached values of justice, rights and responsibility as a means of shoring-up situations of fragility. After this, a secondary move of concentrating on intersections of interest, linking relief with development (5.9) and enhancing partnerships will act as the foundation for future programmes, as the *Reciprocal Principle* becomes manifest.

I contend that our sense of duty (e.g. to respond to *Basic Needs* [5.15]) is in no way undermined by the *Reciprocal Principle* espoused in this submission. For it would be an error to view the concepts of duty and care as mutually exclusive. Though I argue it is vital to recognise the distinguishing features of both as motivational drives, they are best conceived as two sides of the same coin rather, than, two distinct denominations. Of course a human right, as a detached value, is so only because of its ethical etymology. Yet, the White Paper is replete with descriptions of rights as free-floating concepts with no attachment to their philosophical lineage. Ethics, as one of the four main branches of philosophy, carries with it an analytic rigour equal to metaphysics, epistemology or logic. It is for this reason that more exacting definitions of key terms such as *value* are required. This last comment is much less an expression of pedantry than a solid realisation that if the terms we apply to Irish aid planning are not precise, then misguided and unfocused policy formation will follow.

The empowerment of women and, more broadly, the balancing of the gender equality scales is essentially a moral question. The application of the nine grounds of discrimination or the embrace of equivalent statutes such as the Equal Status Acts by programme countries would be one means of re-profiling the more mature cooperation that, I suggest, should be the cornerstone of the *Reciprocal Principle* of Irish Aid into the future. The closing of the gender gap through a two-way trade and investment formulation that is firmly founded on an *ethics in action* template, is critical for the likes of small-holder farmers, many of whom are women. Further, promotion of this type through events such as the UN-Women in 2010, would greatly assist in dismantling this debilitating bias.

(The role of private sector involvement under the umbrella of Irish Aid will be discussed in D) following).

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## *D) Ways of Working*

Within the overall endeavour to deliver an effective aid programme the pragmatic application of an ethical approach is paramount, though this is not made explicit in the White Paper. Ensuring a coherent and balanced form of cooperation in a maturing landscape of relationships can only be reached if the dynamic of reciprocity is at play. This elemental concept finds its apex in the bilateral engagement of ethical Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), private sector involvement, tourism and entrepreneurship. Only when this point of maturation is attained can notions of *value chain* and *Aid for Trade* become genuinely viable.

Utilitarian and deontological ethics will not suffice as stand-alone agencies for progressive change in the 21st century. It is crucial that aid acts not as an end in itself but as a conduit for on-going improvements at levels beyond the immediate requirements of fire-fighting. For this to occur, policy coherence as an ethical principle and a results orientated focus for Irish Aid needs to be moulded around the *Reciprocal Principle*. Phrases such as ‘Aid for Africa’ must be passed over in favour of ‘partnership with,’ and must be expanded to encompass an unambiguous two-way highway of contact between Ireland and Africa.

Obligations founded on respect, trust and honesty are created through reciprocity and synergies of ethical cohesion are formed as a consequence. By developing policies under this principle a closer marriage of NGOs, parliamentarians, private sector actors and others can emerge. A vital document within which the core dynamic of *ethics in action* can be brought to the fore is the Government’s African Strategy. By placing the ethical thread of reciprocity at the heart of this document, sincere and energetic engagement from all of the key stakeholders can be encouraged.

The significance of the *Reciprocal Principle* to this approach is to broaden the multilateral dimension of aid. The Government’s involvement in a well structured and morally thematized vision of aid delivery is intimately linked to the contributions of the EU, UN, World Bank and OECD (6.9). Though arduous economic conditions exist in Ireland today, public *good will* (a critical moral term) to aid programmes remains high. Nevertheless, there is something of a lacuna (6.43) between the Government’s aid programmes and a sound appreciation of them by the general public. By returning to the question, What is the motivation behind aid donation? and by recognising its foundation as being embedded in engaged values, the Government can more directly and substantially articulate its aid policies. Of course, this message, as I have stressed throughout, must also be enunciated in the developing countries with whom Ireland is linked. In this regard, NGOs and private sector actors can play a leading role by helping to distinguish the notion of ‘aid for’ from ‘working with,’ and firmly reiterating the values of cooperation, partnership and care.

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## ***Recommendations***

It is clear that Ireland has always played a leading role not only in aid support generally but, more specifically, in making aid both effective and coherent. Ireland's platform in Africa has been developed by Missionaries, NGOs, businesses, advocates and diplomats and it is on this foundation that my chief recommendation has been made. Ireland is now well positioned to advance a modern and mature ethical partnership with African countries, based on what I have called the *Reciprocal Principle – Ethics in Action*. Offering a more prominent ethical dimension to Irish Aid necessitates an active campaign of awareness of the *good will* that exists towards aid from Irish people by emphasising the dynamism of *care*.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the up-scaling of “economic dialogue” with countries such as South Africa. Dialogue, which means ‘a welcoming of difference,’ is precisely the ethical starting point from which mutually beneficial trade and investment can take place. By so doing and in conjunction with practical support for such things as the African Taxation Administrators Forum (ATAF), bilateral collaboration can be seen to be positive for Ireland and for Africa. Shaping future aid direction necessitates a return to the bedrock of aid itself, ethics. A dynamic ethics that embraces the interests of Ireland and of Africa in a way that is respectful, just and reciprocal.

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