

Irish Aid
Riverstone House
23-27 Henry Street
Limerick
Ireland

April 30th, 2012

RE: Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid

I would like to acknowledge the international recognition of the work of Irish Aid as being at the forefront of overseas development particularly in the areas of education, gender, humanitarian crisis, civil society, and its focus on those in extreme poverty all the while maintaining its impartiality.

I respect Irish Aid's commitment to not tying development aid with trade although I recognise that increased trade relations between Ireland and African countries and adding Trade to Foreign Affairs Ministry has brought a new dimension but the focus must always remain on human rights. As private investment, foreign direct investment and job creation become increasingly relevant areas of discussion for country development, I hope that Irish Aid will maintain an ethical relationship when discussing the role of trade and the role of aid in overseas development.

I feel strongly about incorporating a disability strategy in Irish Aid policy and including those with mental health issues. I also wish to include a few points on Aid Effectiveness, climate change and natural resources, food security and malnutrition, Tax Justice, Youth Empowerment, human rights and civil society, and the role of the migrant diaspora in Ireland as a stakeholder and a possible resource for Irish Aid.

Irish Aid must continually emphasise more specificity and greater accountability with regards to how it will address the individual Millennium Development Goals.

I believe meaningful consultation with the communities in the development aid countries has to be at the core of Irish Aid.

Maureen O'Sullivan

Aid Effectiveness

Amidst austerity measures and budget cuts, public speculation on government accountability on spending is increasing, however I wish to state it is imperative that Irish Aid is committed to its promise to spend .7% of GDP by 2015. The year 2015 is approaching rapidly and there must be a coordinated effort to reach this goal.

On the issue of accountability, Irish Aid has on a number of occasions - in the OECD Peer Review of Irish Aid, as well as an EU-Commissioned study - been praised for showing by example, the ability of a Department to self-regulate. It has already become one of the most evaluated and assessed areas of Government expenditure as reported by Dochas.

As Chairperson of Irish section of AWEPA, I ask that our work with African Parliamentarians be taken on board. AWEPA has instilled the role of parliaments in the new international systems of aid effectiveness, and opened a place for AWEPA in the negotiating structures of the OECD and the UN.

It is important to make clear what exactly the 'aid effectiveness' issue means. The intention of AWEPA is that parliaments, in partnership with civil society organisations, will become the central institutions through which the Millennium Development Goals are overseen and validated in the years leading to 2015.

AWEPA's task in the coming years is to ensure that parliaments are allowed to play this historic oversight role within international aid effectiveness negotiations. Significantly, the outcome document of the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, South Korea, in late 2011, endorses the oversight role of parliaments. As a result, AWEPA has its own parliament-to-parliament based plan for monitoring overseas aid. Irish AWEPA Members have already volunteered for this project, and indicated their willingness to take part in joint monitoring teams with African MPs, to check that aid reaches its intended recipients, right down to constituency levels in Africa.

Disability

I understand that before a disability strategy can be implemented by Irish Aid, Ireland needs to pass the Mental Capacity Bill in order to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

I accept that Minister Joe Costello considers disability to be a priority however I ask that Irish Aid not wait until international agreements are ratified to begin developing a disability strategy. It would be useful to start the process now by engaging with the relevant stakeholders and consultation with those in programme countries and those potential beneficiaries.

When we speak of sustainable development, human rights and the MDG goals, disability and mental health issues need to be considered so this can be achieved. In order for countries to honour their MDG and UN commitments, disability will have to become a factor in development aid policies. This is an area which Ireland could show leadership as it has done in other areas of overseas development.

I urge Irish Aid to adopt the recommendations highlighted in the World Report on Disability 2011 which suggest that a 'twin-track' approach be adopted to ensure that no recipient of overseas aid will be excluded from the benefits due to their disability.

Inclusivity is vital and involves ensuring that the mainstream disability framework is implemented at all levels including local and national governments in developing countries.

An example of a successful approach to disability in overseas development is demonstrated by the Australian government which in 2008 implemented a Disability Strategy titled 'Development for all: towards a disability-inclusive Australian Aid program' as part of its overseas development aid policy. Programs are aimed at disability inclusive developments including improving the quality of life, reducing preventable disability and supporting leadership in the area of disability and development.

Climate Change and Natural Resources

It has been well documented that climate change affects the poorest communities in the world most severely because they have little control over how their environment is managed. However since the financial crisis has dominated international discourse, climate change is not receiving its deserved attention.

Climate change cannot be discussed without mentioning unequal access to resources. Resources are becoming scarcer which in turn increases instability in regions and increasing chances of humanitarian crises from drought to civil conflict.

Irish Aid needs to keep climate change on the international agenda and focus on empowering those whose land and environment are being affected.

We are already aware that while Ireland and other countries are maintaining their overseas aid budgets, soaring oil prices are costing countries who import oil or fossil fuel in the developing world. The IEA recently reported that Sub-Saharan countries were spending \$18 billion on oil imports, outstripping the \$15 billion in overseas aid received from developed countries. This is not sustainable and threatens to unravel the progress already made in development so far.

The focus needs to shift in terms of assisting African countries to invest in green energy and renewable sources of energy as they cannot take the harsh effects of rising oil prices. The report from the International Energy Agency suggests that a donor government needs to prioritise clean energy and the diversification of energy which 'will bring down import bills'. It also identifies this as being a 'drain on the Treasuries of poor countries' and suggests that local governments 'better spend the money on social projects such as in education or health.'

Food Security and Malnutrition

Hunger is the number one cause of death in the world. It kills more people than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. Even when people have enough food to survive, its nutritional value varies

widely and often lacks key nutrients. This is called the hidden hunger; malnutrition resulting from vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

Irish Aid should continue to invest in solutions for food security including building resilience to volatile food prices and changes in financial markets, improving emergency responses, strengthening intervention systems to assist farming and pastoral communities, investing in small scale agriculture, including land and labour rights for women, and strengthening the provision of basic services such as education, healthcare and sanitation. Food should not be seen as a commodity to be traded.

Tax Justice

I hope that Irish Aid will support country by country financial accounting in order that companies pay their lawful taxes in their home countries and the countries of the developing world are not denied their just taxes from those companies doing business in the developing countries.

I believe that tax evasion is a vast factor in reducing aid effectiveness and we all hope to work towards a day when African revenue collection can end dependency on Aid.

Youth Empowerment

Youth employment and youth engagement are crucial and I would like to see Irish Aid taking an active role in this area with a particular emphasis on the girl child and youth in rural areas. This can be tackled through equal access to education, inclusion of meaningful curricula in terms of business plans, writing c.v.'s, career guidance, mini-companies, entrepreneurship, support for youth involvement in youth councils, youth parliaments etc., out of school activities; otherwise there will be further disengagement of youth and a movement towards crime, addiction, joining conflict situations.

Human Rights and Civil Society

The advent of the deadline for the 2015 Millennium Development Goals is fast approaching and although much work has been carried out by Irish Aid, further work is needed to reach the potential of the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs seek to imbed basic human rights into the lives of the poorest in the world, mainly in Sub-Sahara Africa. It aims to protect universal access to all basic services such as health and education.

With protests emerging from all over the world, we are entering a new phase of public awareness and resistance to unpopular government policies. Civil society, and an independent free media, are essential in keeping governments accountable in issues such as human rights, corruption and democratic processes, as is the principle of parliamentary oversight.

It is essential that Irish Aid works in coordination with grassroots civil society to bring awareness of human rights issues such as sexuality and population. Irish Aid should not shy away from difficult

topics while weak governments adopt populous agendas contrary to human rights. If we do not address fundamental human rights issues from the beginning through strengthening civil society, this vital channel will be weakened leaving space for further human rights abuses.

I accept that defending human rights is consistently addressed by Irish Aid on all levels of negotiation and assistance. However I believe Irish Aid could increase its advocacy and its presence especially in trials of human rights defenders in civil society, in cases where there are poignant breaches of human rights within a country. Support of fair judicial processes in programme countries would send out the right message in terms of dealing with human rights.

Migrant Diaspora

As highlighted by the 2011 Census, there is an increase in the number of foreign nationals residing in Ireland and an ever increasing amount of new community groups, NGOs and organisations representing the diaspora of citizens from around the world. Ultimately, the migrant diaspora have first-hand knowledge and experience of their country of origin. This specialist knowledge should be seen as a resource and one which could contribute to Irish Aid policy. This is particularly relevant in the area of developing civil society organisations in Irish Aid's programme countries either through the religious, educational or cultural links that migrants have with their home countries. I would suggest that any submissions coming from diaspora groups be seriously considered by Irish Aid while balancing their views, in an overall sense.