



Women's Human Rights Alliance

Submission to the Review of the White paper on Irish Aid

April 25th 2012

1. Introduction

The Women's Human Rights Alliance (WHRA) was established in 2001 as a coalition of human rights and women's organisations promoting a human rights approach to the advancement of women's equality in Ireland and internationally. The purpose of the Alliance is to promote women's human rights, monitor the implementation of international commitments as they relate to women, raise awareness of economic, social and cultural rights and to develop the capacity of women's organisations to engage in women's human rights advocacy. The Alliance is made up of women's organisations, human rights organisations, academics and individuals with a particular interest in women's rights.

The WHRA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation paper for the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid. Our contributions will focus on gender equality and the promotion and protection of women's human rights.

2. Progress Made in relation to the White Paper on Irish Aid (2006)

The WHRA commends the core guiding principle of The White Paper to 'support the promotion of human development, human security and justice, the building and strengthening of democracy, the promotion of gender equality and the promotion and protection of human rights'. In particular, the WHRA stresses the pivotal role of the Irish Aid Gender Equality Policy (GEP) of 2004 in putting into practice Ireland's strong stated commitment to the promotion of gender equality throughout the Irish Aid programme. We note that the strength of the Irish Aid Gender Equality Policy of 2004, and of the stated commitments to gender equality in the White Paper is their grounding in international obligations to women's human rights including: UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the Cairo Programme of Action (1994) and the Beijing Platform for Action; UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Women Peace and Security; and the UN Declaration and Millennium Development Goals. The Gender Equality Policy contains goals, objectives and principles which identify gender equality as the goal and gender mainstreaming as the strategy. Importantly, this includes recognition of the necessity to undertake specific measures (including women's empowerment) to redress the power imbalance between men and women.

However, there is no explicit reference in the White Paper to the Irish Aid Gender Equality Policy of 2004, or to the Action Plan necessary to ensure its implementation as called for in the Gender Equality Policy. This is a deficiency that should be remedied.

We welcome the inclusion in the White Paper of the key decision 'to include Gender (along with Environment, HIV/AIDS, and Governance) as one of four issues that 'will be mainstreamed into the work of Irish Aid' alongside 'specific actions' to be taken in each of the four areas. This commitment in the White Paper to the twin track approach of mainstreaming gender equality considerations into all policies and programmes combined with targeted actions to improve the position and status of women has much potential.

The WHRA acknowledges and welcomes the progress that has been made towards implementation of the Irish Aid Gender Equality Policy, including the various strands of the gender mainstreaming process, increased attention and resources to gender based violence, and the development of a National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The establishment of a dedicated Gender Equality Budget is particularly welcome.

The publication of the *Gender Equality Policy Review Report – 2010*, and the first *Annual Gender Monitoring Report 2010: Report from Irish Aid's Gender Network*, reflect significant advances in relation to transparency. We hope that consistent annual reporting will be continued and strengthened in the coming years.

Deficiencies and challenges

We are concerned that major deficiencies and challenges remain in meeting commitments to gender equality and women's human rights and call on the Government to comprehensively address them. This includes a number of deficiencies set out in the *Gender Equality Policy Review Report - 2010* as indicated in the following excerpts:

- *Understanding Concepts and Approaches to addressing Gender Inequality:* Not all staff members across the organisation fully understand the concepts related to gender equality, empowerment or transformative approaches contained within the Gender Equality Policy and are unsure of how to apply them to their work.
- The 'twin-track' approach is not set out clearly enough within the policy and needs to be clearly elaborated through training/guidance for staff [e.g. in relation to HIV/AIDS or Hunger programming].
- *Country Strategy Paper (CSP) Development:* The extent to which...gender analysis informs the development of the country programme varies from country to country and...could be strengthened by highlighting the intersection of gender with other issues... Reporting on gender equality in annual reports remains weak...
- *Dialogue with Irish Civil Society organisations (CSOs):* CSO partners highlighted that any policy dialogue that has taken place with Irish Aid on gender equality has been "sporadic and ad hoc with little advance notice".... The Joint Consortium on GBV is the only forum where dialogue on gender related issues takes place. CSOs noted that they are unaware of where, when and how Irish Aid engages in policy dialogue on gender equality at international level and would like more opportunity to comment on the development of national positions.
- *Institutional Capacity Development:* The majority of staff at HQ and in the missions have not received any training on gender equality yet are expected to be competent in gender mainstreaming.

- *Supporting partners' capacity development:* There is need to reflect on Irish Aid's engagement and lessons learnt with respect to supporting national women's machineries, including in post-conflict situations.
- *Monitoring expenditure on gender equality:* Funding for gender equality and women's empowerment is frequently underreported. There is limited understanding of how and when the cross-cutting codes should be used and no current capacity to implement the DAC gender equality policy marker (beyond the Financial Controller and the Gender Adviser).

The current Gender Equality Budget (the allocation of human and financial resources to support implementation of the Gender Equality Policy at headquarters and programme country level) is inadequate. At 0.8 million Euro in 2010, this is approximately 0.12% of total development aid expenditure.

According to the 2012 OECD report: *Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*, the share of sector-allocable aid that Irish Aid allocated to initiatives that had gender equality as a **principal objective** in 2010 was only 3.5% (USD 12m of USD 434m). And the proportion of Irish Aid's non-sector allocable aid to women's equality organisations was about 5% (USD 10M out of USD 194M). These funding shares are very weak and are not indicative of a serious commitment to promoting gender equality.

3. Changing context

Notwithstanding the commitments of the world's governments to the language and principles of women's human rights, as expressed in the binding international treaties, policy instruments and MDG development targets, the tendency of gender equality commitments to remain on the level of rhetoric rather than being translated into effective, well-resourced, and practicable strategies is widespread. There is considerable backlash against the notion of gender equality and women's empowerment in particular as they relate to the sexual and reproductive spheres. This is evidenced by the failure of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2012 to come to a final agreement -- for the first time in its history -- because members could not reach consensus on key women's human rights concerning sexual and reproductive rights.

At the same time, current aid modalities whereby donor governments direct aid through general budget support and sector-wide approaches have resulted in fewer and less accessible funding streams for women's human rights advocacy organisations within civil society. Such organisations are best-placed to engage with their governments to secure real gains on gender equality and women's empowerment.

In addition, as the future of development policy beyond the Millennium Development Goals is under discussion in relation to the Agenda for Change and in the context of the upcoming Rio+20 conference and the twenty year reviews of the Cairo Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action, to be held in 2012, 2014 and 2015 respectively, civil society organisations are extremely concerned at a shift away from the social dimensions of sustainable development and an increasing focus on the private sector.

The changing global economic context is of particular relevance. It is well-documented that persistent gender norms that foster discrimination and violations of the human rights of women in all spheres mean that women, particularly those who experience forms of multiple discrimination tend to be most vulnerable to the impacts of economic downturn, climate change, conflict and humanitarian disaster.

4. Key Issues

Gender is a cross-cutting issue in the 2006 White Paper on Irish Aid. However, it is not at all clear that gender has been effectively mainstreamed across all areas of the aid programme, across all priority issues (hunger, fragility, climate change, basic needs, maternal mortality, governance, human rights), or across all of the intergovernmental fora at which policy on women's human rights, gender and development are negotiated.

Irish Aid must ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are more than rhetorical priorities and that they are mainstreamed across all aspects of Irish Aid's programme. Irish Aid's approach to all of its priority understanding of gender equality must be informed by the principles outlined in the Millennium Declaration, the Cairo POA, the Beijing PFA and the human rights framework of CEDAW and other treaties to which Ireland is a party. Irish Aid, therefore, as a matter of priority, must rectify the omission of an action plan and publish a gender equality implementation strategy informed by international best practice. This strategy must include measurable indicators, realistic time frames and a clear monitoring and evaluation strategy. The 2011 National Action Plan to Implement UNSCR 1325 is an encouraging model for such an implementation strategy.

The implementation strategy should inform the development of Country Strategy Papers, Irish Aid's engagement with partner governments, other donor partners and civil society organisations.

As a major funder of civil society organisations, Irish Aid must support the capacity building of partners on developing and implementing gender equality and women's empowerment including adopting and implementing accepted guidelines on preventing and responding to gender based violence and sexual exploitation and assault and addressing women's sexual and reproductive health.

Irish Aid must ensure that all relevant organisations, including CSOs, supported by the Irish state have gender equality policies and strategies in place, including on responding effectively to gender based violence and sexual exploitation and assault.

3. Ways of Working

3.1 Dialogue with civil society

- 3.1.1 Develop effective and consistent ongoing mechanisms to ensure meaningful dialogue with Irish civil society organisations on gender equality and women's human rights issues and concerns
- 3.1.2 Consult with and be informed by the views of women's human rights organisations in each of the programme countries in the preparation, design, delivery, and monitoring of policies and programmes towards gender equality / women's empowerment.

3.2 Capacity building of Irish Aid staff

- 3.2.1 Develop and provide comprehensive and effective training to Irish Aid staff on the concepts of gender equality, women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming contained within Irish Aid Gender Equality Policy. Such training should focus on building understanding of transformative approaches to gender equality that move beyond meeting 'practical gender needs' to underpinning the achievement of 'strategic gender needs'.

- 3.2.2 Develop clear guidelines for use across all areas of policy and in training/guidance for staff on the concepts and implementation of the 'twin track' concept of gender mainstreaming. The twin track strategy entails the systematic integration of a transformative approach to gender across all Irish Aid programmes and fields of engagement, as well as adequate direct support to women's empowerment programmes.
- 3.2.3 Put in place, as a matter of urgency, reliable mechanisms for, and ensure adequate training of all relevant personnel in, the tracking of sex-disaggregated data to inform gender analysis throughout Irish Aid, underpin the consistent application of gender analysis in country programmes and the development of Country Strategy Papers, and strengthen reporting on gender equality in annual reports.
- 3.2.4 Continually develop the institutional capacity of Irish Aid—develop a clear programme of incremental and differentiated training on gender equality across Irish Aid, including and beyond induction; and training on coding system to track expenditure on gender equality.
- 3.2.5 Develop an Irish Aid position paper to inform engagement with National Women's Machineries, including in fragile and conflict affected states.
- 3.2.5 Develop training and notes of guidance for all staff to ensure recognition and understanding of the intersectionality and the operation of multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage. Irish Aid programmes must recognise the complex ways in which, for example, rural women, indigenous women, ethnic minority women, young women, adolescents and girls, unmarried women, women with disabilities, LGBT women etc. experience multiple discrimination and disadvantage. Conversely, they must recognise the ways in which certain aspects of experience, location and identity confer unfair advantage on others.

3.3. Policy coherence and implementation

- 3.3.1 Develop implementation strategies in relation to key policy areas: Irish Aid lacks a human rights policy – this must be made a priority and a holistic, transformative women's human rights approach must be a central aspect of that policy. A sexual and reproductive health and rights strategy needs to be defined and implemented.
- 3.3.2 Ireland must take a proactive role in ensuring that the gains at various human rights conferences are not lost, diluted or undermined. Irish Aid and the Department of Foreign Affairs must be more transparent and accountable in relation to the positions taken in relation to gender equality and women's human rights at intergovernmental forums.
- 3.3.3 Ensure that gender is mainstreamed across all Irish Aid policies e.g. Guidance on the Approach to General Budget Support (2008) and Civil Society Policy (2008).
- 3.3.4 Build on the 1325 National Action Plan and pending Monitoring and Evaluation process as a vehicle for developing an integrated gender focused approach to human rights, human development and human security.
- 3.3.5 Update Irish Aid Gender Equality Policy to reflect changes in the internal and external environment and put in place an Irish Aid Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Human Rights Strategy that sets out clearly the twin track approach and provide other necessary training and tools for practical application by staff.

- 3.3.6 The update of the Gender Equality Policy should be used to reaffirm a transformative understanding of gender equality within a framework of commitment to bottom-up participation and realisation of indivisible human rights for women.






3.4 Monitoring and accountability










- 3.4.1 Develop a gender equality results framework which can form the basis of the Annual Gender Monitoring Report, including stronger analysis of expenditure trends on gender equality (women-specific initiatives and gender mainstreaming)
- 3.4.2 Develop more sophisticated gender markers so that Irish Aid staff in the partner countries report in detail on gender expenditure for inclusion in the Annual Gender Monitoring Report.
- 3.4.3 Develop a more systematic approach to gender analysis and disaggregated data and incorporate into Country Strategy Papers. Include the level of unmet need to contraception as a key indicator in reporting on/assessing gender equality in partner countries.
- 3.4.4 CSO funding should be linked to strengthening gender equality results and development of gender specific and gender disaggregated indicators and HQ annual report on gender equality to include analysis of expenditure trends on gender equality (women-specific initiatives and gender mainstreaming.)
- 3.4.5 Ensure that the preferred modality of direct budget support to governments is balanced by funding mechanisms to support women's human rights advocacy organisations in Irish Aid partner organisations.

3.5 Resourcing Gender Equality

- 3.5.1 Ireland must maintain its commitment to reaching the UN target of 0.7% of Gross National Income.
- 3.5.2 Ensure that the preferred modality of direct budget support to governments is balanced by funding mechanisms to support women's human rights organisations in partner countries that work for the empowerment of women and are led by women who have experience and knowledge of the operation of forms of multiple discrimination and how to combat them.
- 3.5.3 Maintain financial support to UN Women at levels provided to its forerunner UN bodies.
- 3.5.4 In order to make the necessary progress, we recommend that the share of the Gender Equality Budget be raised to a minimum of 0.7% of the total ODA budget.
- 3.5.5 Realistic increased target shares for aid must be set as a matter of urgency: for example, a target of 10% sector allocable aid to projects with gender equality as the principal objective and 20% of non-sector allocable aid to women's equality organisations.

This submission is supported by:

-  AkiDWA
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