

**Introduction:**

*worldandmedia.com* aims to make it easier for journalists to produce high quality and nuanced coverage of international development issues.

It draws on a wide range of high quality international, specialist and local sources to highlight important and neglected news stories and angles.

The website features original and syndicated articles, a media diary, and a range of resources for journalists, including contacts and key development-related publications and accompanying press releases. It has a large number of subscribers from the national and international media. Stories it features may be picked up by other news outlets or may inform future work by journalists. *worldandmedia.com* is also registered as a news provider for Google News.

While the service is international in scope, it prioritises the Irish media and the activities of the Irish development sector. The service has also attracted significant interest outside of the media, including many subscribers from the international development community.

In order of priority, *worldandmedia.com* aims to:

1. inform, enthuse, and inspire current and new generations of media professionals about development issues;
2. elucidate and highlight neglected big picture issues and crises;
3. provide leads, resources, and original and local angles on current newsworthy stories;
4. promote more balanced reporting of developing countries, e.g., with positive news stories and business/economic news;
5. encourage reflection and self-criticism within the media;
6. report and provoke debate among development professionals.

**Changing context:**

Ireland's changed economic circumstances present an obvious budgetary problem in the short run but they also present an acute challenge to public and media perceptions of the development sector with potential long-term consequences. More than before, Irish Aid needs to justify both the quantity and the quality of its programme. We hope that in the process of meeting that challenge, the effectiveness of its programme will increase and support and understanding will grow among the public and media.

In addition to direct damage, the sharp cuts in Irish Aid funding have undermined Ireland's influence abroad. However, Ireland consistently performs extremely well in external reviews of donor countries – as noted in the consultation paper – and continues to be very active on the international stage and to punch above its weight.

The economic difficulties facing OECD donors act as a brake on coordinated actions that require significant funding. Therefore, particular effort should be put into finding areas where international cooperation could yield significant results at a low cost.

In recent years, several sub-Saharan African countries have been among the fastest growing in the world, partly due to increasing discovery and exploitation of natural resources including land. Attitudes to many African countries have changed dramatically as have the challenges the countries face. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has responded with a new Africa Strategy. Ireland's

relationship with African countries is maturing. However, public and media understanding of the complex changes that have and are taking place, lag well behind.

There remains the risk of further cuts in the overseas aid budget relative to GNP. These would negatively impact on the work of Irish Aid, on the work of NGOs and international agencies funded by Irish Aid, and on the ability of Ireland to lead the international community on development and foreign policy issues. They would also be likely to have some negative effect on current and future Irish businesses operating in or trading with Africa.

### **Key Issues:**

#### **HUNGER, FRAGILITY**

Malnutrition is a severe and underreported problem in South Asia. The high levels of malnutrition in India are particularly shameful given its long established democracy and not insubstantial economy. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade should view this with the seriousness with which it views more obvious human rights violations and seek to pressure, nudge and/or assist India in making more rapid advances.

Ireland should act on the drought response lessons identified by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance and should encourage and insist that other donors do the same [1]. This should include more rapid reaction to food security alerts, updates and briefings from FEWS.NET and others.

Irish Aid has a responsibility to attempt to lead the media to cover unreported and underreported threats, emergencies and longer term problems. However, it needs to be wary of following the media in responding to crises when better use of the funds can be made elsewhere.

#### **CLIMATE CHANGE**

Climate change adaptation should be a high priority for Irish Aid. Coordinated international action in this area should also be more feasible as measures that will improve the resilience of poor countries to disasters and environmental change are justifiable in themselves, independently of the reality or causes of climate change.

It is certainly unjust that it is the poorest who are at greatest risk from climate change. However, the term 'climate justice' may be best avoided as it is fraught with difficulties, particularly when applied to China, India and some others, particularly those with significant forests. While haggling over who pays for what is understandable, China and India should need little incentive to reduce risky emissions as their citizens will make up a significant proportion of the Earth's future population, all of whom will have to deal with the impact of a changing climate.

In addition to carbon dioxide, greater attention needs to be paid to the importance and sources of methane as a greenhouse gas.

#### **BASIC NEEDS**

Improving water supplies, sanitation, basic health care, public health education and teacher training are dull old-fashioned priorities of limited interest to the media that Ireland should do more of and should encourage others to do the same. Such measures set the stage for future growth and potentially do less to distort local economies than some other forms of assistance.

#### **GOVERNANCE and HUMAN RIGHTS**

Irish Aid's work in improving human rights and governance is to be commended and should be more widely known.

Ireland has shied away from linking aid to human rights or the quality of governance. However, there may be a case for redirecting aid when it can a) be used more effectively elsewhere or b) used equally effectively elsewhere and when the movement of the aid sends a signal that is more likely than not to achieve a positive result.

## GENDER EQUALITY

Quite apart from issues of justice and human rights, improving gender equality has been frequently shown to yield health and economic benefits.

However, there is a case for greater involvement of men in health and equality initiatives [2] [3].

Advancing women's rights should not be at the expense of the self-image and external image of men. Women and children appear to be used more frequently than men in positive stories in the media and government and NGO aid literature. This risks creating negative stereotypes of poor or African men as being somehow less deserving, even feckless.

### **Other issues:**

## COMMUNICATION

Irish Aid needs to communicate what it does and that its aid works. However, it is hard to do the latter when many doubt whether aid works at all.

'Africa is poor, therefore aid does not work,' is a nonsensical argument but a seductive one, particularly for people who know little about the continent. Part of the problem is narcissism – by both critics and cheerleaders. Part is also the lack of awareness of the growth, innovation and diversity of the continent and its countries. Part of the solution is to look beyond aid in the government's external work, while maintaining its high-quality aid programme. It is also important for the media to be able to put aid in perspective both currently and over time.

Irish media coverage of international development and Ireland's aid programme is crucial in shaping public support and political will. It also affects the attitudes of current and future development professionals, academics, journalists, civil servants and ministers. It is therefore critical that it is of the highest quality.

*World and Media* believes that this is a key area of concern that has been insufficiently prioritised. Most organisations understandably focus on communicating their own activities or aim to better inform the public through direct communications.

Funding is a serious constraint for the media (which is why the Irish Aid-supported *Simon Cumbers Fund* is particularly noteworthy). Additionally, there is a perception among some editors that development journalism is worthy but of limited interest to the public. This needs to be countered, not least by journalists. There are also myriad other ways in which the media could be better supported by the development sector.

Irish Aid and some development NGOs have taken a lead in focussing on media coverage in general, by supporting and encouraging, first, Connect-World and, later, *World and Media*. We hope it (and they) will do more in the future.

There are many people working in the media who are interested in reporting development issues constructively and with originality. The Simon Cumbers Fund is a great step towards meeting that demand. The approach first taken at Connect-World, and that we are now taking with *worldandmedia.com*, is to provide a service to journalists to make it easier for them to produce more and higher quality stories of international development.

At different development events, complaints have been made that journalists do a poor job of reporting fairly on African countries, but most international news is reported in the same way: dramatic breaking news without much context or perspective. The difference with Home News is that the bad news is balanced with many other stories (that would not be considered newsworthy overseas) and with people's own rather less dramatic experiences of the country they live in.

Irish Aid's fundamental objective is to improve the wellbeing of the world's poor, who face obstacles beyond insufficient international aid. Communicating complex issues to the media or any audience is a challenge but can be done. The progress made on debt at Gleneagles in 2005 was precisely because the Jubilee Debt Campaign had won the political argument over debt [4].

## RESOURCE EXPLOITATION and LAND PURCHASES

Ireland should assist low-income country governments with optimising their natural and other resources, including recent oil and gas discoveries. Efforts should be made at the international level to safeguard citizens against poor deals that primarily benefit the individuals (and companies or foreign countries) that are signing them, particularly in situations where there is limited democratic accountability.

Countries that are experiencing what may be a once-off resource boom need help in diversifying their economies and avoiding 'Dutch disease'.

## BEYOND AID

We urge Ireland to consider a number of the issues below, and to look beyond aid on the international stage at every opportunity:

- research on neglected diseases;
- small arms trading;
- capital flight;
- investment;
- the expansion of tobacco sales in countries where literacy is low, and public health information and services weak;
- Tobin taxes;
- investigating whether volatility in food prices markets could be reduced;
- conflict prevention (which, incidentally, includes better control of the spread of nuclear power technology);
- advocacy on behalf of neglected and marginalised groups, including the disabled; and
- Western trade distortions/protectionism (particularly subsidies).

At least some of the above take more time and energy than money, so there might be an appetite for action on some of the above among governments (including Ireland's) in current circumstances.

As a small country, Ireland's greatest impact may be achieved through leading joint initiatives with its EU partners, other donors and/or recipient countries.

[1] <http://www.worldandmedia.com/more-africa/drought-response-lesson-one-water-seeds-and-fodder-are-better-than-food-0911.html>

[2] <http://www.worldandmedia.com/south-asia/mentoring-young-men-to-prevent-violence-against-women-0604.html>

[3] <http://www.worldandmedia.com/health/analysis-including-men-in-sexual-health-programmes-0407.html>

[4] Make Poverty History 2005 Campaign Evaluation, A Martin *et. al.*, 2006, firetail, page 37. [http://www.firetail.co.uk/MPH\\_2005\\_Evaluation.pdf](http://www.firetail.co.uk/MPH_2005_Evaluation.pdf)