

Submission to White Paper on Irish Aid

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2.0 Response

Introduction:

My submission to the White Paper on Irish Aid has two parts. The first relates to a general issue of Governance, and how this applies to Irish Aid, specifically the need for Transparency, Accountability and Responsibility. The second relates to good practices regarding the development of Strategy in general, and how this applies to Irish Aid, specifically the need for proper Fitting, Filling and Finding of the different elements to arrive at an efficient and effective Strategy.

Progress Made: Has the Government been successful in implementing the commitments contained in the White Paper on Irish Aid?

Yes, as far as I can say. My focus is on the future.

Changing context: What are the implications of the changes in the global and domestic context for the Government's aid programme in the future and how will these affect current priorities?

Irish Aid should re-think its approach firstly because Africa has changed from a continent in a food security crisis to one that needs support in its development, and secondly because Irish agencies and people are well positioned to provide effective and efficient support for targeted development initiatives that would help African countries to strengthen their own capabilities to develop themselves.

Key Issues: How should the Government respond to the key issues of hunger, fragility, climate change, basic needs, governance & human rights, and gender equality? Are there other issues?

Irish Aid should focus more on governance.

Given the limited resources and the need to focus these, which issues should the Government prioritise in its future aid programming?

Assistance with governance, education and research

Ways of Working: How can the Government further strengthen its ways of working in delivering an effective aid programme, with a view to delivering real results in poverty reduction?

A. Transparency, Accountability and Responsibility of Irish Aid Governance

1. Initially my comment on the White Paper relates to observing Irish Aid's performance since the last review, and my opinion that there should be more transparency, accountability and responsibility generally in the Public Sector, not just regarding Irish Aid and its relationships with various agencies.
2. To be specific, I believe that there is a need for more vertical and lateral coordination, between high level aims and goals and low level activities "on the ground".
3. Much of my overseas development experience over two decades is with China, following which I concluded that there is a great need for a cross-department Ireland-China Task-Force that can deliver on specific targets. I believe the same applies to the Ireland-Africa relationship, and can be achieved by refocusing Irish Aid. I would have Irish Aid work more directly with people involved in projects, rather

than indirectly through bodies such as the Higher Education Authority, or through consultants. So much can be lost in filtering feedback and response through multiple agents that are not directly involved.

4. From my experience over twenty years with the University of Dar es Salaam, UCD's Development Forum, its Sandwich PhD and the UCD-TCD Masters in Development Practice, my impression is that Irish Aid relates to the universities in an excessively indirect way, and is unaware of what money is well- or poorly-spent, and what needs could be met by more targeted funding. For example, some research and development projects in Africa wither because of a lack of small funds to travel in Africa to collect data.

5. I believe a continuation of this problem is embedded in the White Paper's proposal in the "Synthesis Paper: Thematic Reviews of Development Education" to rely less on "grant-giving" and more on a "commissioning approach":

a. as in a "more commissioning based approach ... in relation to research for development education"

b. "the development of specific training modules at different levels"

c. "more targeted research on good practice, linked to priorities"

While the move from "grant-giving" to "commissioning" is a welcome improvement, it is a small step compared to what I would like. I would go further, and focus on better guidance, control and management of Irish Aid's work, whether through the universities, experts in development, civil servants, or consultants. For example, in "Irish Aid's Approach to support for Development Education from 2012" I welcome its proposal that "Irish Aid work with other government departments and key strategic partners to create a more coherent sense of shared leadership of the development education agenda". Working with agencies sounds like "top-down" interaction between administrators. It should be much more direct and with the people actually doing the work.

Making decisions more transparent, accountable and responsible may be uncomfortable for public servants, and so is not likely to appear in a White Paper. Having spent a life-time in research in business schools I would like to assure public servants that their lives would be a lot easier, and they would achieve so much more, including get more cooperation from their colleagues, if their working context was a lot more focused on the direct delivery of tasks, and less on meetings, coordination and reports. Transparency helps one to know which of your colleagues is doing what, without having to ask around. Accountability shortens the loop to ensuring something is done, and offsets the requirement to have agency-to-agency communication. Knowing who has responsibility for everything reduces time-wasting, frustration and duplication.

6. In the same document it indicates that "relevant research can be integrated into funding applications for strategic priority grants and strategic partnerships. Irish Aid will also reserve the right to commission specific policy research through Competitive Calls. In addition we will have a stronger focus on dissemination and access to existing research." I am concerned about who is guiding Irish Aid's research, because I don't notice any reach out for help from our universities, whose commitment is precisely to this research, only of a link to the Institute of Development Studies in the University of Sussex.

B. Fitting, Filling and Finding the Right Strategy for Irish Aid

1. My initial reaction to reading the White Paper as a management document is that it is a somewhat vague and general indication of policies and aspirations. I presume its authors took advice from experts in management, seeing as this would be available for free from those interested in Africa and who teach and research management in the third-level sector; but I wonder who these people were. A White Paper should start with a definition of what it is expected to achieve, and then should follow a deductive process:

a) Fitting its approaches to the situation on hand

b) Filling the outstanding gaps in the targeted context,

c) and Finding the exactly right things to do

2. Reviewing the content of the White Paper it seemed as applicable to the era 2006-2012, as to 2012-2018, and that it may be responding a bit too much internal Irish Aid impressions and not enough to what is current "on the ground".

3. **“Fitting”**: My impression from the briefing meeting in UCD Smurfit School on March 13th was that that the participants wanted Irish Aid to seek a new “fit” in their engagement with Africa for the next six years. But, the White Paper still emphasises poverty and aid. During the meeting (mainly) African people working in Dublin appeared to want to move the agenda onwards, from aid first to trade, and then from trade to investment. If this discussion had continued I suspect it would have moved toward cooperation on projects. Much of Africa is developing very rapidly. Not only that, but there are now at least three networks of people who could contribute enormously to future development: African people living and working in Ireland, Irish people living in Africa, and both Irish and African people who have lived in one another’s countries. Irish Aid should fit its assistance to these new developments, and these networks.

4. **“Filling”**: Because Africa is no longer under developed, but a rapidly developing region any help should focus on filling in where there are gaps, not just looking at the overall area as a problem. The following are some examples of existing gap-filling programmes, and suggested new ones.

1. We in UCD Business School have, over the past decade, been sending surplus, second-hand, publishers’ free copies, retiring staff business and economics books to the library of the University of Dar Es Salaam, because they cannot afford to buy their own. We wait until we have several thousand books and then send them by ship for a modest cost. This is an inexpensive but very effective way to fill a need, which Irish Aid may already know about, and should extend to all the colleges in Ireland, and to more universities in Africa.
2. The PhD Sandwich Programme, where mainly lecturing staff in African universities do PhDs partly in Irish universities and partly at home, is an excellent cost effective way of skilling up African academic staff, which African universities cannot afford to do otherwise. It also builds relationships between Irish and African universities. It also could be developed into a research programme for Africa.
3. The UCD Development Studies Library supports the PhD Sandwich Programme, the joint TCD/UCD Masters in Development Practice, other masters degrees in DCU, TCD and the Development Studies Centre Kimmage, and beyond, consultants, researchers, NGOs and others. It needs funding, and could be extended into a web-based resource that could be made accessible to any development researcher, executive, lecturer or teacher in Africa.
4. Tanzania, probably no different to many other developing countries, is vulnerable to international exploitation in the area of exploiting its natural gas and mineral resources. The management and administration cultures lack the education and skills to help them avoid being trapped by clever international executives tying them into long-term contracts that maximise the benefits to the global companies, and minimise them to the African countries. Africa lacks hi-tech expertise, global relationships, and access to markets. Ireland, through Irish Aid, is very well positioned as a friendly supportive country to fill this gap, and doesn’t have the compromised vested interests of countries that wish to exploit Africa, or sell arms to governments.

5. **“Finding”**: The last element of a good strategy is to find premium projects that can have an extraordinary impact on development in Africa. Such projects are like the last brick in a dam. Their impact can be a high multiplier of their cost. The following is one example.

In 2006, the Irish Government, in response to a request from the IMF, released Norman Gillanders, an Assistant Secretary of Irish Revenue to work short term with the Rwanda Revenue Authority. (Norman Gillanders has since retired from Irish Revenue.) He visited Rwanda twice in 2006 and on a number of occasions afterwards up to 2010. The following is a quotation from him:

“As requested by the IMF, I set up and trained an operations policy and planning unit in the RRA HQ in 2006. Later, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) funded a study trip to Ireland for the managers and staff of the new unit in Rwanda. The Rwandans had already been studying the Irish Revenue as a model of good tax administration and liked what they saw in Dublin and Limerick. In particular, they realized how a modern data warehouse could be analysed for intelligence on tax compliance how a rules-based risk model could support improved selection of taxpayers for audit.

A modest grant from Irish Aid allowed us to continue to collaborate with the RRA. A risk model was designed and built for the RRA and a data warehouse was created as a by-product. The models were developed for us through the Analytics Institute. The risk model and warehouse will be deployed shortly in Rwanda and have the capacity to greatly improve the RRA's ability to target tax evasion. More importantly, the data warehouse will give the RRA a full set of indicators of organisational performance that should improve the overall RRA operations. The Irish Revenue has technical capacity that is far beyond that of the RRA so what was achieved cost relatively little in terms of staff time. I wrote the rules for the risk model at home, the Revenue IT department was able to remotely download the RRA databases with cooperation from their Rwandan counterparts and two analysts from the Revenue's statistics branch were able to tidy up and restructure the RRA data. A careful account was kept of the project expenditures and presented to Irish Aid each year.

The work continues, with the support of Irish Aid. Lessons learned:

1. Our expertise as a public sector body was "exportable".
2. The cost of the collaboration was small – but the results will be very valuable to the RRA.
3. The Irish Aid grants were essential.
4. The risk model and warehouse would work equally well in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania as these countries have similar tax systems to Rwanda.
5. I suspect these products may be useful in many more developing countries.
6. The project became well known around Africa and enhanced Ireland's reputation.
7. Support of successive Revenue Chairmen was essential.
8. Linking the best of the Irish public service to the work of Irish Aid could produce similar results on a wider scale.
9. If we had the mind to do it, a commercial model could be developed – perhaps when the current crisis has abated."

The above report from Norman Gillanders mentions that the initiative came as a request from the IMF, and there was help from Irish Aid. This kind of initiative should become a typical example of the new strategy. He also refers to the Analytics Institute, of which he and I are board members. This Institute was formed to provide effective and efficient support to any company that needs it. The Public Sector is where it is most needed because it could help save billions. We should not wait for a generation of Irish civil servants to introduce these ideas in Ireland over the next twenty years. We could start now and offer them on a wide scale across Africa. This White Paper represents an opportunity to consider such a departure.

Other comments: If the respondent seeks to address other issues – of direct relevance to the White Paper on Irish Aid – they should do so in this section.

My sense is that the tone of the White Paper and the format in which we have to submit our comments will pre-empt the kind of change I am seeking, that it will be dismissed as "radical".