

**The Centre for Peace and Development Studies
University of Limerick
Submission to the Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid**

Introduction:

The Centre for Peace and Development Studies (CPDS) at the University of Limerick welcomes the review of the Irish Aid White paper. We are an interdisciplinary community of scholars researching conflict, peace building, security and development and the connections between these. Some of our members individually participated in the review, or contributed as part of other networks; a cluster of members came together to deliberate on the questions posed by Irish Aid and on points arising from the public debates generated by the review. We offer the following submission, focusing on the challenges of the current context and ways of responding to these, to highlight issues we believe are worthy of further examination in the review process.

Progress made:

Ireland should be encouraged by the progress made since the publication of the White Paper in 2006. The CPDS acknowledges the value for money that Irish Aid offers; its programmes are regularly externally rated as among the most effective. It welcomes Irish Aid's commitment to cooperation and harmonisation as recognised in OECD DAC Peer Review (2009). Despite the recent reduction, Ireland's commitment to aid has been impressive in recent years – it is among the largest donors per capita globally – and it should continue by fulfilling its pledge to meet a target of 0.7% on GNP of ODA by 2015. The CPDS commends Ireland's assurance of 100% untied aid, making it a positive role model for other EU donor countries; this assurance must remain a core principle for all development support.

Other positive aspects of Irish Aid's work include its focus on key sectors, including education, and on priority countries. Firstly, the support that Irish Aid has given to education within partner countries is delivering results, while Irish Aid's efforts to forge links to learn and share educational practices, and facilitate research between Ireland and partners in the South is producing mutually beneficial exchanges for both schools and higher education institutions. Secondly, maintaining a strategic focus on a number of priority countries underpins progress; it allows the emergence of long term relationships and understandings which can be capitalised upon to expand development and trade initiatives. These elements of Irish Aid's programmes should serve as a foundation for future ways of working.

Changing context:

Communicating Irish Aid's achievements

The economic and political setting in which the Government manages its aid programme has become very challenging compared to 2006, when Irish Aid's first White Paper was published. Most significantly, there are fewer resources – as reflected in the 30 per cent contraction in the budget allocated to Irish Aid since 2008. Accordingly, there is a fresh imperative for using funding in the most

cost-effective way possible. Given resource limitations, there may be a case for concentrating resources on fewer priorities – and re-ranking existing priorities. Ireland’s fiscal crisis and domestic spending cuts may have led to a more critical public sentiment about aid: leadership of the programme needs at this juncture to be especially assertive and skilful.

A key domestic challenge in managing and maintaining Irish Aid commitments is to communicate to the Irish public the value of Irish Aid’s programmes, in the language of national interest, without representing the programmes in any way that compromises their freedom from commercial or security interests. One way to do this would be to continue to stress in domestic public projections of Irish Aid, the way in which it has been singled out for favourable assessment, by the OECD’s DAC, for example. The point could also be made that such assessments help to enhance the Irish government’s reputation – at a time when boosting external confidence in Irish public policy is strategically vital. In this particular arena of foreign policy Ireland enjoys disproportionate influence – and can play a lead role, including in shaping global policies on food security and hunger. Ireland’s record as an effective aid donor also enhances its reputation in key EU policy forums. Through nearly forty years of experience of poverty alleviation-focused aid programmes, Ireland has gained expertise that is relevant to Ireland’s domestic concerns, including improving public health, enhancing gender equality, meeting basic needs, and addressing climate change. The lessons from aid programmes could be applied in domestic settings; arguably this already happens. On the issue of public support, opinion polling tends to indicate that whereas aid remains relatively popular with the Irish public (compared to public responses to ODA programmes in other countries) many people remain ignorant of how aid is used: in general emergency relief generates readier public approval than developmental aid, but CPDS would encourage further efforts to broaden the public’s understanding of the importance of development aid, as a tool for preventing the need for some emergency interventions.

Priority countries and a broadening of focus

Even if Irish Aid manages to sustain public support for increasing budgetary allocations in line with international targets, there may still be good reasons to revisit existing priorities. The selection of the existing range of priority countries in Africa and in South-East Asia is often explained in public with reference to their relative poverty. It would be useful for Irish Aid to specify at what point a case may be made to exit a particular country and whether there are political criteria that priority countries need to meet to maintain Irish Aid commitments (more about this in the ‘key issues’ section below). Viet Nam is today rated by the UNDP as a country at a “medium” level in its Human Development Index and though with respect to such rankings the seven African priority countries are still considered to be in the “low” category, this may change given very rapid rates of growth in some of them.

The CPDS acknowledges that while aggregate statistics may suggest progress against poverty, in countries with very rapidly growing economies, social inequalities may be intensifying and the proportions living in poverty may not change. While we commend Irish Aid for its sustained commitment to its priority countries, we welcome the broadening of Irish Aid’s focus in the shape of the inclusion of ‘second tier’ priority countries such as Sierra Leone, with which Irish

Aid has already had sustained engagement. We also see scope for the use of the priority country offices to deepen engagement with the more fragile states that surround them, providing a monitoring platform for engagement with civil society organisations that may be difficult to support from head office.

Trade versus aid

Both domestically and within recipient countries there are strong calls for Irish Aid to become more aligned with entrepreneurial activity; to align with foreign trading and investment activities and/or to become more engaged in the direct generation of livelihoods. With respect to Irish trade, while we should welcome any fresh thinking about ways in which Irish trade and investment relations with poor countries could enhance poverty reduction we should be very wary of any move to connect aid to more general foreign trade objectives.

Above all, there are good reasons to retain emphasis on poverty alleviation, We appreciate that certain programmes can help to boost employment generation *and* alleviate poverty – agricultural extension and improving poor farmer access to marketing opportunities would be cases in point - but given the persistent dynamics of social inequality in rapidly expanding economies – keeping a broad focus on poverty alleviation and equitable growth is sensible.

Newly discovered natural resources

We note that several of Irish Aid's priority countries have recently started the exploitation of newly discovered natural resources: gas and/or oil in Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia. This may represent developmental challenges as well as opportunities: new extractive economies encounter considerable difficulty in ensuring equitable expenditure of royalties and other benefits as well as their productive investment. The CPDS encourages Irish Aid to advocate the prudent use of such resource benefits, possibly by leading a call for the setting up of country-specific resource management systems akin to the mechanism operating in Timor Leste, of which Irish Aid should have considerable experience.

China

A further game changer in terms of the new aid context is the presence of China as a major investor – and to a certain extent donor, in Africa. China's influence has contributed to the reduction of the influence and leverage of the established aid community of which Ireland is now a part. While Irish Aid has not been tightly conditional in character, a proportion of its financial assistance is directed at budget support and is premised upon mutual commitments between governments about poverty alleviation and human rights. Chinese aid comes without such preoccupations and for African governments increasingly represents an alternative source of external funds. In this setting, government performance monitoring has acquired a greater significance, especially if it can be conducted by local NGOs.

Key Issues

In the current context, addressing hunger and basic needs should remain at the forefront of Irish Aid's agenda. However, the question of how to eradicate poverty depends on progress towards a more equitable economic and political order, as well as attention to the other cross-cutting issues relating to climate change, governance and human rights, fragility and gender identified in the

consultation paper. The CPDS agrees that continued efforts to pursue a rights-based approach, to promote sustainable livelihoods, to halt the spread and mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS, and to mainstream gender and conflict sensitivity in development policy and practice are necessary. It also recognises that these are challenging tasks within the context of global inequalities. Having examined how these four intersecting areas of concern are framed in the White Paper and in aspects of Irish Aid's practice, we propose further reflection on their complexities.

Climate change

The White Paper recognised the importance of addressing climate change in Ireland's development programme. The damage being inflicted to the livelihoods of the poorest by climate disasters and biodiversity loss is emphasised and the Consultation Paper goes further in stating that climate change is reversing previous gains in development. All of this serves to emphasise just how central must be action on reversing climate change for any international development strategy in today's world. The Consultation Paper faces the reality that we may be on the verge of 'tipping points' in the global environment while acknowledging that 'questions arise as to whether the world's governance, economic and financial systems are adequately responding to these changes'. It is to be hoped therefore that this sense of urgency and honesty is reflected in the outcomes to this review and that action on climate change becomes a cross-cutting priority issue for Irish Aid's work.

The real challenge, however, is to know exactly what can be done that might effectively reverse the grim trends that the Consultation Paper acknowledges. It recommends a 'greening of development' which it defines as 'achieving a balance between the economic, social and environmental pillars of development'. This is easily said but major debates exist about just how it might be achieved. While a similar objective was stated in the 2006 White Paper (on page 63), it appears that this was not a major theme pursued by Irish Aid since then. It is strongly recommended therefore that on this occasion the immense challenge that this entails will be taken on board and that Irish Aid should take a lead in seeking to influence international thinking on these issues, in conjunction with some of the forward-looking work that has been going on for some time among Irish NGOs (including the Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice). In this regard also, academic centres like the Centre for Peace and Development could be drawn on as partners in helping prepare position papers and identify the principal challenges involved. This needs urgently to move beyond the comfort zone provided by the vague and ambiguous (if not downright contradictory) term 'sustainable development' to probe more thoroughly just how development is contributing to unsustainable economic, social and environmental processes (the concepts of fragility or vulnerability as mentioned in the White Paper can be useful concepts in this regard) and thereby begin to identify some of the fundamental challenges involved. Recent work by the UNDP and the World Bank can also help to inform thinking. Overall, climate change poses significant challenges to the dominant paradigm of development based on economic growth that need to be honestly faced.

Governance and Human Rights

Whilst governments in several priority countries have made impressive progress in meeting developmental targets, at the same time democratic performance has

deteriorated and elite capture and corruption has increased. In such contexts, Irish Aid may need to consider a greater emphasis on programmes concerned with human rights and governance. It might also focus on developing administrative capacity and identifying local 'champions' of policy reforms to ensure successful implementation of aid programmes, since while regimes change, administrative systems often remain. However, the question needs to be asked: 'How serious do such democratic setbacks need to be before the provision of Irish Aid needs to be questioned?' The issue becomes especially difficult if Ireland is engaged in budgetary support to governments that misuse resources and abuse human rights or democratic procedures (even when there may be a very solid development case to be made for budgetary support as a highly effective mode of using aid to alleviate poverty). It is important that the priority government's political record is a key consideration in the proportional allocations between budgetary and sectoral support on the one hand and specific project and NGO assistance on the other. Public information on Irish Aid programmes does not supply sufficient information about the different modes of aid provision in different countries. In all of the priority countries, Irish support for community-based monitoring of government performance in different sectors would represent an indispensable investment.

Fragility

The White Paper identifies the devastating impact of armed conflict on development and makes a commitment to addressing this. Problems of hunger, inequality and diseases such as HIV/AIDS intensify in the context of ill-governed states and complex emergencies. It is therefore inevitable, and to be encouraged, that Irish Aid should be engaged in states with poor human rights records as well as those emerging from war or persistent violent conflict, both through development aid and humanitarian assistance. It is also important that systematic efforts are made to address the serious challenges of working in such environments. It is clear that Irish Aid is already aware of the need for conflict sensitivity and has experience of dealing with issues around fragility including in relation to humanitarian aid and in contexts such as Timor Leste. Further efforts to integrate conflict and peacebuilding as key considerations in country and regional programmes would be welcome. Moreover some of the statements about the relationships between conflict and development in the White Paper need reconsideration to align policy with ongoing efforts to develop more conflict sensitive practice.

One issue to take further account of in reviewing policy on 'fragile' contexts is the problem that security and development are not simply mutually constitutive as implied in the White Paper. Although development is 'essential for security and stability' (on page 56), unless it is equitable it may also be associated with insecurity, environmental degradation and displacement for some - the controversy surrounding the Gibe III dam project in Ethiopia makes apparent some of the tensions which are also present elsewhere. Rather than linking conflict primarily to 'poverty and underdevelopment', it is worth considering the extent to which conflicts over land and mineral resources are related to strategic responses by local actors to pursue accumulation in the context of globalisation (and thus may be connected to neoliberal development policies). Similarly the potential for Irish aid to 'remove or reduce the causes of conflict' needs to be situated within the understanding that international actors are not external to, or neutral, but part of the terrains in which they work, including their social

inequalities. Initiatives to 'strengthen democratic institutions' in partner countries should also involve explicit reflection on the problem that donor interventions and resources inadvertently shape the nature of governance in ways which are not always democratic. These complex realities present acute challenges for all development actors, especially in relation to fragility. Mainstreaming conflict sensitivity; drawing on local knowledge to understand the complexities of particular contexts; and efforts to clarify and strengthen the work of the Conflict Resolution Unit and its relationship to Irish Aid are among the practical steps Irish Aid could take in response.

Peace building

In relation to conflict resolution strategies, the White Paper acknowledges the importance of multi-lateral peacebuilding missions such as those deployed by the UN and the African Union. We agree that Ireland has a role to play in supporting these missions and that during times of conflict the UN is often the best placed to intervene in difficult security situations. This being said, we also strongly advocate that Irish Aid engage with complementary efforts of peacebuilding and conflict resolution rooted in indigenous methods and knowledge. In the aftermath of violent conflict societies need not only to focus on security, and elections, they also need to recover popular agency to repair social relationships and effect political change; such agency is diminished in conflict but may also be undermined by externally driven institutional solutions in the aftermath. Irish Aid will be more likely to contribute to the formation of a 'lasting peace' through methods which draw upon local ways of understanding the impact of conflicts on the community and integrate indigenous approaches to peace and reconciliation. It could also draw more explicitly upon expertise and lessons generated by bottom-up peacebuilding in Ireland (which might increase the domestic public appeal of Irish Aid's programmes).

Gender, peace and conflict

In relation to the policy of gender mainstreaming adopted by Irish Aid, we welcome a focus on gender. In the light of UNSCR 1325, and newly published Irish National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 launched last year, we note that the resolution is an important step in addressing gender inequality in peace and conflict situations, especially as it opens up the floor for a debate of gender issues in a way previously unknown. However, we emphasise that this historical resolution should not be seen as a 'one size fits all' model for addressing gender inequalities wherein the exclusion of women is posited as 'problem' and the solution is explained as simply to add the perspective of women without taking into account the myriad underlying political and social factors from which gender inequality springs. In other words, it is important to take into account that gender equality may not be achieved by 'adding women' alone but that in post-conflict settings an opportunity to address these underlying issues of gender inequality could realistically be tackled. We therefore would encourage Irish Aid to examine the existing critical dialogue addressed at critiquing UNSCR 1325 in order to broaden the discussion on gender inequality and how it affects the broad category of 'women' in many different ways.

Ways of working with partners:

In addition to the strategies for tackling the key issues identified in the foregoing; the CPDS feels that increased engagement with the developing

countries in agenda setting would serve to enhance the operations and activities of Irish Aid in the future. This could be achieved by providing more emphasis to the development priorities and strategies of Regional and Sub-regional bodies such as the African Union and smaller regional groupings as well as individual states. In line with this need for engagement we welcome the presence of African expertise on the Minister of State's advisory group. Given the continuing importance that Irish Aid attaches to working with and supporting Africa-based development NGOs, as well as Irish civil society partners, we would welcome more opportunities for structured consultation on a regular basis.

Consultation and cooperation with developing nations may take place through cooperation with research institutions and universities in developing countries. Irish Aid has a commendable record of cooperation with third level and research institutions in Ireland. This cooperation could be further enhanced by facilitating links with their counterparts in the South, a theme already emphasised in the present round of your Programme of Strategic Cooperation between Irish Aid and Higher Education. Such linkages should not just be limited to joint research projects. Irish universities have benefited immensely from the presence of students from Irish Aid priority countries as well as support and funding for networking. Further benefits may be received through funding research exchanges for Irish students in developing states; and, possibly more effectively, by funding teaching fellowships for Southern Academics in Irish third level institutions. The abovementioned would allow Irish scholars and policy makers to learn from the experience and perspectives of experts from the countries of interests.

In addition, the CPDS as a research institution takes the opportunity of the consultation of the review of the white paper to draw Irish Aid's attention to the nascent calls for agencies funding academic research to require that the results of research they have funded be made available via open source journals.

In conclusion:

To sum up: The Centre for Peace and Development believes the commitment of public resources to Irish Aid is a valuable investment. In a setting in which the commitment of such resources is likely to confront domestic political challenge, Irish Aid needs to make a stronger case for the benefits it brings. Given the present trend of contracting resources, there may be grounds to reconsider the current range of priority countries especially if Irish Aid is to retain its focus, as we believe it should, on the aim of poverty alleviation. In the next phase Irish Aid needs to pay more attention to the implications of climate change, while more explicitly addressing human rights issues. Fresh efforts should be concentrated in the troubled context of fragile states, but Irish Aid needs to incorporate a sophisticated understanding of the often contradictory relationship between security and development and should promote bottom-up peace-building. In such settings and more generally Irish Aid needs to develop a more critically informed approach to gender mainstreaming. Finally the CPDS believes that collaboration between Irish and developing world research and higher education can be especially effectively fostered by student and teaching fellowships.