

Comhlámh Trade Justice Group (TJG) Submission to the Irish Aid

White Paper Review 2012

Introduction

We are a group of activists who volunteer our time and energy to campaign, inform and advocate on issues of trade justice, trade and development policy, social justice and human rights in international development. We are supported by Comhlámh staff and expertise, but the views expressed here are those of the group, and not the organisation Comhlámh. We recognise that the global North and South are connected by more than aid contributions; we are connected by global trade networks, food production, environmental issues and concerns, and most importantly, our shared humanity. As active members of Irish and global society, we are pleased to take this opportunity to contribute to the White Paper review. Ireland's aid policy is of national concern and we welcome this occasion to have our voice heard, and incorporated into the forthcoming development priorities of Irish Aid.

Key points of consequence for TJG

Our main concerns and priorities for the future of the Irish Aid programme over the coming years are:

- **Development education:**
 - We are concerned about Irish Aid's cuts in funding for development education activities. One of Irish Aid's primary commitments is to educate the Irish public and civil society about global development issues. This includes adult citizens as well as children, and removal of funding for this type of work is perturbing for the TJG, as active members of civil society.
 - Unfair trade rules, Western insistence on market liberalisation and European subsidies are just some reflections of the economic power imbalances prevalent in our global society. We believe it is the Irish government's responsibility to prioritise and support debate on issues of global justice, stimulate critical voices within Irish society to engage with Government, and encourage an active and participatory democracy.

- **Trade justice:**
 - As trade is being put forward as one of the key development tools, the TJG is concerned with the potential pernicious effects of trade liberalization, especially under the EPA negotiations, which would require developing countries to liberalise at least 80 per cent of their trade with the EU within 15 years. There are many voices that predict that local and regional producers will lose significant market share to the benefit of European companies, resulting in shrinkage in intra-African trade and a decline in output, undermining the core objectives that Irish Aid promotes, namely reduction of poverty and food security. As promised under the Cotonou Agreement, the EU needs to listen to and act on ACP concerns, and alternative trade proposals from African Nations need to be taken seriously. This is particularly important in light of the EU's legal obligation to provide a Cotonou-equivalent.
 - Instead Irish Aid should consider supporting aid for trade initiatives, and ensure that developing countries have the policy space to develop their own economies. Such

initiatives should focus on increased value addition, allowing African countries to build-up their manufacturing capacity, gaining monetary benefits as well as confidence fostered by independent development. Furthermore trade preferences such as the EBA initiative need to be adjusted as Rules of Origin often hinder developing countries from fully benefiting from this offering, due to the cumbersome administrative procedures.

- Policy coherence:
 - We welcome the concept of “an overall coherent approach across Government”. We respectfully ask Irish Aid to actively ensure this approach, in both policy and action, does not prioritise growth in rich EU nations at the expense of the poor in developing nations.
 - The continuing interdependence of Northern and Southern economies foists a duty and accountability on those in positions of power. We urge Irish Aid to remember their commitment to responsible and untied aid practices; ensuring unfair trade policies in favour of European states do not subvert Irish Aid’s “vision of a fair global society”.
 - Ireland should strengthen its capacity and approach to Policy Coherence for Development, especially in the context of the new Trade responsibilities of the Ministry.

- Ireland, the EU, and development:
 - The White Paper acknowledges that the EU is the most important economic and trading partner for developing countries and states that Ireland will seek “to strengthen coherence at EU level, in order that policies in all relevant areas reinforce the Union’s development objectives”. However Trade policy promoted on Ireland's behalf by the European Commission such as the India – EU FTA and EPAs continue to be contrary to Ireland's and the EU's commitments to human rights-based development (particularly the right to water, food and the right to life and livelihood) and pro-poor development.
 - Ireland should step up its efforts to make sure that trade policies drafted at the European Commission on behalf of Ireland and other members of the EU promote a pro-poor, just and sustainable development for our trading partners in the South.

We ask that the above points be incorporated into Irish development and humanitarian policy. We urge Irish Aid to refuse to put the few above the many. We call on Irish Aid, as an advocate of untied aid, to allow developing countries to trade their way out of poverty, by supporting global solidarity and universality in the upcoming White Paper.

Sincerely,

Comhlámh Trade Justice Group