

Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid

2.0 Response:

Introduction:

This is a personal written response to the call for submissions issued by Irish Aid, and does not represent the official views of the University to which I am affiliated. I am an academic specialist in Development Studies with 15 years of research and teaching experience. My responsibilities include conducting research, educating undergraduates, postgraduates and research staff, and providing outreach to the general public on development issues and public policy. My research and teaching mainly focus on equity, rights-based approaches, sustainability and governance.

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

The answer to this question is that the Government has been **largely successful** in implementing the commitments set out in the White Paper. Most of the detailed commitments, outlined as 48 Key Decisions outlined in the White Paper have been acted upon and progress made.

The 2006 White Paper on Irish Aid represented significant milestone for the Irish Government, consolidating positive aspects of development cooperation and placing them on a firmer footing. It made a clear case for aid and set out a vision based on global responsibility and fairness. Alignment with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) ensured that Irish Aid's programme would work with multilateral and global aid priorities. Ireland has built a very positive reputation for its aid programme and for being an 'honest broker' amongst donors. Despite being a small nation with a relatively recent aid programme, it is perceived as an altruistic and progressive actor which works positively individually and in concert with 'like-minded' donors. The development cooperation programme is consistently pro-poor, Africa-focused, liberal and supportive of peace and human rights. As the 2010 OECD Joint Implementation Report observes, Ireland is a former colony that has experienced both famine and conflict, a long history which helps it identify with the development objectives of partners. Irish Aid has definite and highly respected commitments to tackling hunger and to supporting the social sectors of education and health. Policy has progressed, away from project-based and ad-hoc forms of development assistance, and towards longer term policy programming according to stated principles and priorities which have been informed by mutual dialogue with major civil society NGO partners. The structures that have been set in place aim to deliver longer-term interventions according to good aid practice. More recent changes and the new Africa Strategy (2011) reflect somewhat of a shift in donor style, reflecting greater emphasis on audit and results and placing a greater emphasis on trade. These changes are discussed in more detail in the next section on changing context.

Ireland has worked cooperatively with other donors to consolidate a consensus on good aid practices. The 2010 World Bank research report on Aid Quality and Donor Rankings (Knack et al

2010, 2) ranked Ireland highly for donor quality. However, measures of donor quality are based on 'plausible but largely untested beliefs about best practices in aid management' (Knack et al, 3). Donor effectiveness is **not** necessarily synonymous with an accepted definition of aid effectiveness, and is not the same as **development effectiveness**. Development effectiveness is conceptually linked to the **Right to Development**, reflecting alternative priorities of democratic ownership and benefits to the poor and marginalized (Reality of Aid 2011). Measures of donor quality indicate that Ireland is in the leading group for what donors understand to be 'best practices', with Ireland occupying the top ranking for the criteria of alignment and harmonisation, and ranking fourth overall on donor quality, out of 28 bilateral and multilateral donors. Ireland naturally wishes to capitalise on this leading status and improve, and this desire intensifies the focus on 'managing results for development'. The Paris and Accra aid effectiveness commitments have been major drivers for improving monitoring and implementation, but domestic requirements to justify the aid budget, demonstrate value for money and 'do more with less' have become equal push factors in recent times of budget cuts.

The Joint Evaluation of the Paris Declaration - Study on Irish Aid (2010) indicated that engagement in the aid agenda by academics and NGOs (even those funded by Irish Aid) was less strong than in other countries and that there should be more public discussion of what makes better aid (Joint Implementation Report 2010, at 67). The lack of public discussion means that Ireland lacks strong and wide ranging domestic drivers outside Irish Aid pushing for improvement (at 68), however, Irish Aid has been proactive in driving internal, top-down reform.

The 2006 White Paper presented development cooperation as a core part of Ireland's foreign policy. Poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals were set out as the main objectives of Irish Aid. The Hunger Task Force was formed as an initiative within humanitarian assistance, with a stated interest in linking relief and development. The high profile of the 2008 Hunger Task Force Report and subsequent appointment of the Special Envoy on Hunger in 2009 raised Ireland to a strong leadership role in the fight against global hunger. The renewed commitment to direct 20% of Irish Aid's budget to hunger and hunger related actions by 2012 has led to a broader appreciation of the relationship between hunger and other development priorities such as health through nutrition.

The 2006 White Paper explicitly states that the promotion of human rights, directly and indirectly, continues to be central to Ireland's foreign policy and all the work of Irish Aid (p.59). This is interpreted in terms of budget lines for 'governance and civil society', comprising around 15% of the total budget, a high percentage compared to the OECD average. This budget supports initiatives to control corruption, and enhance civil society capacity and media freedom. This interpretation however, does not link human rights as a foreign affairs concern with domestic efforts to promote and protect human rights.

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

The response focuses on 1) the changed economic and political context and increased need to manage for results and 2) the shift towards a trade agenda and its compatibility with Ireland's good donor reputation. It touches upon the relevance of a rights-based approach and justice issues to the development of broad, public ownership of the development cooperation programme founded upon shared understandings of 'development effectiveness'.

The design and delivery of development policy is a challenging task, requiring significant policy learning and adaptation. This now takes place within a challenging context of major budget, staffing and organizational fluctuations. These major externalities have affected the operational side of aid programming, oversight and forward planning, though Irish Aid has worked hard to minimise the negative impacts of diminished aid predictability. This submission suggests that a coherent, principles-based policy vision is helpful in this challenging policy context. One major question is whether Irish Aid's good performance so far can be sustained and improved, given the shift from 'doing more with more' when the White Paper was published to 'doing more with less' since 2008.

Some processes of public sector re-organization and reform pre-dated the current economic and social crisis, but continue to impact on the internal re-organization of Irish Aid, its policy remit, its budget and its capacities to respond from the perspective of staffing and expertise. This wider global and domestic context of crisis, contraction and public sector reform will undoubtedly continue to impact on the Government's current and future aid priorities. The deterioration of economic conditions in Ireland, large and disproportionate reductions in aid, broad cuts across domestic as well as international social sectors, and prioritization of neoliberal policy responses all pose significant risks for Ireland's aid reputation and the implementation of its programmes.

Irish Aid's strong alignment with the OECD-DAC framework for evaluating aid effectiveness reaffirms four out of Irish Aid's six original key principles: effectiveness, value for money, transparency and accountability. Irish Aid continues to regard its two remaining principles of *partnership* and *coherence* as essential, emphasising that the aid programme should reflect 'the values cherished by Irish people, including commitments to peace, human rights and democracy' and that it should incorporate a high degree of partnership with recipient countries, with the international donor community and with NGOs domestically and abroad.

While the UN Independent Expert on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty commended Irish Aid for its efforts to further social protection in its aid policies during her visit to Ireland in January 2011, her report on Ireland of May 2011 was critical of the erosion of domestic social protection measures occasioned by the economic crisis, recommending an immediate human rights review of *all budgetary and recovery policies* to ensure compliance with fundamental human rights. The independent expert states that she 'welcomes the strong focus of Irish Aid programmes on social infrastructure and social protection initiatives, but recommends that Ireland *strengthen its ODA provision by further incorporating human rights principles into its policy guidelines and strategies*' (United Nations Human Rights Council 2011, at 40). It will be suggested in the following sections that the changing context invites a more comprehensive approach to human rights and development, going beyond a traditional emphasis on civil and political rights, and financial accountability as an overseas concern, to embrace rights based approaches (RBA) to development, encompassing socio-economic rights and the Right to Development in a more fundamental and comprehensive way.

The increased emphasis on results management, impact assessment, monitoring, evaluation and audit requires transparent and coherent principles to form the basis for policy and evaluation. 'Effectiveness' must be understandable in terms of clear principles and goals and avoid the risk of imposing technical results frameworks that are neither sufficiently useful nor meaningful. Development policy should take a broad view of accountability, be based on policy learning and lessons from experience and honour Irish Aid's key principles of partnership and coherence. A broader understanding of accountability is enabled by a rights-based approach. Rights-based approaches also enhance our understanding of the large amount of data generated by a 'managing for results approach', encouraging this data to be queried and taken up within democratic processes of constructive accountability within the recipient country, but also through domestic public information and education processes. A rights based approach enables a holistic approach to policy coherence and provides principled justifications and tools for monitoring and evaluation.

The second important change in development assistance policy in the current context is the shift away from emphasising a vision of development cooperation based on solidarity, equity, needs and rights-based arguments towards a vision of development assistance reflecting a broader paradigm shift towards markets, trade and investment-based approaches. Recent government documents such as the Africa Strategy of September 2011 express this shift. Despite numerous mentions of human rights and reassurances regarding the importance of untied aid, this document is confusing with regard to the fundamental principles underlying the aid programme. The lack of clarity indicates to the public that there is ambivalence about how the core principles of solidarity, fairness and responsibility embodied by the aid objective sit with a trade agenda reflecting economic self-interest.

Low-ranking donors in the donor quality rankings such as the US, are characterized by economic and geopolitical self-interest and tied aid, which is associated with agricultural exports and militarisation. Market opening and trade liberalization are understood to be structurally disadvantageous to poor countries and people; these structural disadvantages are worsened by tied aid. These issues, above all else, have contributed to negative perceptions about donor effectiveness and the 'reality of aid' at the global level. The tying of aid to trade is probably most serious with regard to two Irish sectors – agriculture and the knowledge economy, particularly higher education. Given that other key commitments such as aid predictability have already been compromised by the severe cuts to aid budgets, a clearer distinction between Ireland's trading interests and aid and cooperation for development results is necessary to protect Irish Aid's good donor reputation. A rights-based approach can help to identify and distinguish what kinds of arrangements promote development results and provide respected criteria for assessing the compatibilities or otherwise between aid and trade interests.

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?

The response to this section notes the value-added of a rights-based approach to the key issues and suggests that RBA can help to unify and add value to the issues focus, while enabling broad public ownership and understanding of each issue.

The Joint Evaluation of the Paris Declaration - Study on Irish Aid (2010) noted that Irish Aid recognises the need to improve policy coherence across government in interventions concerning trade, agriculture, climate change, food security, environment and defence. These are 'wicked problems' in the sense that there are many different stakeholders in each of these issues, each with different interests and proposing different solutions. This submission suggests that an enhanced understanding of rights-based approaches to policy and effectiveness could help clarify the 'wicked problems' and support the formulation of coherent responses to problems across the currently somewhat fragmented policy areas of trade, development and humanitarian assistance. Rights-based approaches can also underpin results management frameworks, rendering impact assessment, monitoring, and evaluation processes more coherent, meaningful and robust. Development cooperation is complex, requiring significant technical, regional and country knowledge and ethical sensitivity. Recent overviews of aid effectiveness have tended to address the issues of fragmentation, over-specialization and staffing challenges, by encouraging a shift towards generic diplomatic competencies. While this is sensible, this submission suggests that technical competences that cross-cut all specialist sectors such as human rights, gender equity, and sustainability cross-cut and potentially integrate different specialist areas such as hunger, agriculture, health and education. Human rights and development, taking in the Right to Development and rights-based approaches can provide a broadly integrative competence.

This submission suggests that future development assistance policy should be grounded in a more explicit and thorough commitment to human rights and its achievement through rights-based approaches to development. This would enable Ireland to respond in a coherent way to the changing global and national context, the issues of capacity and commitments, and to the complexity of the key issues (of hunger, fragility, climate change, basic needs, governance & human rights, and gender equality). A rights-based approach provides principles, tools and a framework for implementation and monitoring to advance development as part and parcel of the progressive realization of all human rights. Right-based approaches underpin a conception of **development effectiveness** that can be understood and shared by all stakeholders. Rights-based principles, norms, legal frameworks and tools can aid the understanding and measurement of results; help allocate limited resources according to agreed priorities and focus aid programming on the poorest, most vulnerable and most marginalized sectors. A rights-based approach would strengthen the effectiveness and coherence of the aid programme by providing both a principled and a practical approach to poverty reduction and other development results such as improved health and education, greater gender equality, better governance and more sustainable development. This submission suggests that greater policy coherence of development can be achieved by more comprehensive reference to human rights principles of indivisible rights, non-discrimination, participation, benefit and dignity. These principles can be developed substantively and applied, principally the three 'immediate action areas' for the Right to Development identified by the Independent Expert on the Right to Development (Center for Development and Human Rights 2004). These are: food, health and education. The Right to Development originates in the widest objectives of the UN Charter and is defined as a right that acts as a vector of other rights.

On the key issue of trade, the anticipation expressed in the Africa Strategy that trade should replace aid should be treated with caution. A recent report by Value Added in Africa shows that aid is still hugely more important than trade. Aid was worth around €70 per Irish person to the six African partner countries annually in 2008-9, while trade was worth about €0.50. The imbalanced trading relationship between Ireland and its six major African aid receiving partners show Irish exports outstripping African imports by a ratio of 15:1 between 1991 and 2010 (O’Caoimh & McGauley 2011). There are complex reasons behind this imbalanced trend, encompassing changes in Irish manufacturing and complexities of the global supply chain, also evidenced in the recent ADB Outlook report on inequality. This author concurs with Value Added Africa’s argument that Aid for Trade that is focused on processing for entry to Irish and other markets can be a good route to development. Genuine Aid for Trade creates markets for farmers and producers, stimulates job creation, grows the formal sector and tax revenue for government and strengthens Africa’s balance of payments. This increases economic sustainability and reduces aid dependence. However, there is significant risk that Aid for Trade is being confused with market opening (especially in the public perception) for Irish exports to developing countries and the statements made by DFAT in the Africa Strategy reflect the conflation of these two policies. Ireland’s trade with its aid programme countries is highly imbalanced, limited and highly volatile. It is enormously in Ireland’s favour and focused on a limited number of products. While there are prospects to grow trade in both directions, the development effectiveness of Aid for Trade must be clearly made and the contribution to poverty reduction or other development goals clearly demonstrated.

The 2010 Joint Evaluation raised the issue that broader social forces play a comparatively weak role in externally pressuring Irish Aid to improve aid delivery. It finds that the case for aid in general, and aid effectiveness in particular, should be more strongly emphasised. Key constituencies outside Irish Aid should understand aid effectiveness, but also development effectiveness and the role played by Irish Aid in the global context. The public, CSOs, the media and educational institutions are found to have a low level of knowledge about development, despite significant investment in a well-regarded and relatively professionalized development education sector. The low level of knowledge is partly attributed to the long missionary and charity tradition in Ireland, which has led to the development of many fragmented, small NGOs, often based around individual philanthropists, narrow issues or location specific activities. These fragmented and informal institutional characteristics do not lend themselves to a co-ordinated results-based approach. However, some social scientists note that despite its fragmented nature, Irish civil society is also state-centric and highly dependent on the state – being too coordinated with the state also results in a civil society that does not raise the necessarily critical, alternative and counterbalancing views. Academic development studies are less established in Ireland, when compared to other donor countries and academic experts have historically engaged as technical specialists, not public intellectuals. The 2010 Joint Evaluation report suggests that stronger engagement in the aid agenda by academics and civil society is needed to stimulate more public discussion and ownership of the aid programme. They identify a need to create strong and wide ranging external domestic drivers for improving how aid is delivered (Joint Implementation Report 2010; at 67-68). This lack of knowledge, coordination and challenge cannot be fully addressed by technical performance criteria alone. The development community as a whole needs more lively and accessible debate about the principles and practice of development cooperation.

Rights based approaches are increasingly applied to facilitate an integrative and comprehensive approach to complex issues. RBA provide the foundation of basic norms and principles of human rights, give attention to political processes of decision making, and provide a framework for understanding the rights and obligations of individuals, states and non state actors such as NGOs in all countries, whether they are donors or recipients. Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2004) observe that RBA focus on participation, citizenship and accountability, adding value to development policy and programming in four potential ways: uses of the law; the role of the state; accountability; and engagement with politics and power. A rights-based programme of development cooperation helps citizens in both donor and recipient countries recognise a shared context of cooperation, providing an understandable basis for evaluating development results.

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

The response in this section draws on RBA to suggest partnership approaches that are more inclusive, non-discriminatory, legitimate and participatory. It also suggests that wider intellectual and citizen engagement is needed to enable partnership, coherence and policy learning to stand at the centre of a legitimate and inclusive approach.

Irish Aid currently benchmarks its performance according to the OECD-DAC donor consensus. This submission suggests that this information could be complemented through partnerships with NGO alliances, such as the CSO-led and recipient-focused Reality of Aid alliance. Southern CSOs have asked for more equitable multilateral structures for determining global policies and practices. They want aid relationships to be grounded in international human rights standards and a vision of development cooperation that goes beyond issues in aid delivery processes to focus on **development effectiveness** and concepts of solidarity and partnership (Reality of Aid Report 2010, 180). Their vision of effectiveness accords more weight to democratic ownership and positive results for the most excluded and vulnerable groups.

Irish Aid has shown that it understands the limitations of a narrowly technocratic view of aid effectiveness and that it is able to align with a broader view of aid effectiveness incorporating a definition of development effectiveness based on social and economic justice. This prioritizes the capacity of the poor and marginalised to shape policy and practice themselves - shifting power and enabling rights (Reality of Aid 2010 Report,11). Irish Aid has already shown that it can work in partnership with CSOs to share and learn how to improve effectiveness and develop a common approach to manage for development results (Towey 2010,224). The Civil Society Policy has provided clarity and enabled both sides to work to that policy. The challenge is how this partnership of Irish Aid and development CSOs can broaden from a technocratic to a democratic approach, to communicate the case for development and results to the wider public and engage wider civil society in the aid programme. It has been suggested in the previous section that a comprehensive human rights review could enable this broad engagement.

Capacity for critical policy analysis and active intellectual and citizen engagement takes a long lead time and major investment to build up and institutionalize. The risk is that investment in this capacity may be neglected as it is difficult to demonstrate the benefits in shorter term, results-

focused evaluations. Since the end of 2007, Irish Aid has sought greater engagement from academic sector through the IA-HEA PSC . This research programme has increased engagement and capacity and built critical institutional engagement amongst all the higher education institutions, establishing nodes and centres for development studies and policy analysis in a number of institutions, while some projects have also integrated academic engagement through research with development education efforts. It is suggested here that a rights-based approach would lend greater coherence and shared understanding. It is further suggested that public goods need to be better understood , both domestically and in foreign policy. Public goods - what citizens collectively cherish and benefit from - stand at the centre of the communication and discussion of what development effectiveness means the public. The gaps between the development experts, the development educators and the donor and recipient country citizens need to be bridged, and it is the latter who are the Cinderellas in development policy, despite the aspirations of participation and benefit envisioned by the Right to Development. This submission suggests that a rights-based approach can help bridge these gaps by offering shared principles of equality and non-discrimination, a common understanding of cooperation derived from the Right to Development which provides principles of partnership, participation and benefit, and a framework for action focused on the three immediate action areas of food, health and education.

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