

Fianna Fáil Submission

The Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid



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Introduction

The White Paper on Irish aid produced in 2006 was a seminal moment for Irish development policy and Fianna Fail welcomes the review of the white paper on Irish aid as an opportunity to reaffirm Ireland's commitment to the aid programme and the core principles of the programme.

Fianna Fail is hugely proud of the Irish aid programme and the success of the programme to date and we want to see the quality, focus and effectiveness of the programme protected in the years ahead.

The current Government must remain firm in its commitment to meeting the UN target for Official Development Assistance of 0.7% of GNP set by Fianna Fail in Government.

While we recognise that the Irish aid programme is now operating in a very different economic environment to when it was produced in 2006, we believe that the core priorities can still be met and must remain the same.

Instead, we must look at achieving the greatest value possible for taxpayers within current budgets, ensure that efficiencies are achieved wherever possible and that there is rigorous scrutiny of all funds allocated from the aid budget whether that be to Irish NGOs or to multilateral agencies.

Since the publication of the white paper in 2006, Ireland's aid programme has undoubtedly become more focused and effective in tackling poverty in the poorest countries in the world. The programme is achieving real and tangible results in the nine programme countries in which it is operating.

Ireland's aid programme continues to be recognised as a world leader in terms of the effectiveness and quality of the programme. The quality of aid from Ireland, as measured by the OECD, is ranked among the best globally.

This provides us with a unique role on the international stage to advocate and support other nations in adopting similar models for development. Despite the

difficult economic situation in Ireland, Irish taxpayers continue to show strong public support for the Irish aid programme. This allows us to put pressure on wealthier states to show similar commitment to meeting the UN target for Official Development Assistance of 0.7% of GNP.

Has the government been successful in implementing the commitments contained in the white paper on Irish aid?

There has been significant progress in terms of meeting the majority of the commitments contained in the 2006 white paper with further potential for improvement in a number of areas.

These include a continued focus on Africa, an increase in the number of partner countries, further programmes developed in fragile states such as Sierra Leone and Liberia, a regional programme in South East Asia, focus on human rights, strengthened the focus on quality standards, transparency and accountability in its funding for NGOs, extend the funding cycles with key partners, develop a rapid response initiative and establish a hunger taskforce, met its commitment to spend €100million a year on HIV and AIDs , rigorous accounting and audit controls to ensure a transparent and effective aid programme. And an Information and Volunteering Centre that has promoted Irish volunteerism in the developing world.

The 2006 white paper made commitments on the establishment of a conflict resolution unit. We committed to “work to develop a distinctive role for Ireland in the areas of conflict-prevention and resolution and peace-building, drawing from our political, diplomatic and aid experience and resources”. While a unit was established within the Department of Foreign Affairs, we believe the role of this unit could be developed further. Given the institutional knowledge with in the state of resolving conflict this has real potential to become a flag ship project. The Unit should be clearly equipped with the capacity to assist in conflict resolution initiatives across the globe.

The Rapid Response Initiative has significant potential in drawing on professional private sector expertise in tackling the root causes of food insecurity and requires further development.

Since 2011 the government has expanded the focus of the Foreign Affairs committee to include trade. One of the initiatives being supported by Irish Aid since the 2006 white paper is Trade links. Any ongoing assistance to these initiatives that would assist trade and would allow those in partner's countries to trade their way out of poverty should be supported. An assessment and evaluation of how effectively Trade Links is currently functioning and how it could be expanded should be carried out.

What are the current implications of the current economic situation and how will this affect the programme's priorities?

One aspect of the previous white paper that could be improved upon is the identification of priorities within the commitments outlined in the 2006 white paper.

In light of the current economic situation, the review of the white paper provides the Government with the opportunity to bring forward an implementation strategy for the priorities that must be achieved in the years ahead.

At present, approximately a third of our aid budget goes to EU institutions, international institutions such as the UN and their associated programmes such as the World Food programme.

The changed economic context also provides us with an opportunity to look at how we fund multi-lateral agencies, the return for this investment and if we are playing a strong enough role in putting our own priority areas on the agenda at an international level. It is important to ensure that proper structures are in place at an EU level to support the effective governance of how money is spent.

We must ensure that our aid strategy is complementing our EU partner's work and that we are using this platform to push harder for certain priorities at an EU and UN

level, for example, pushing forward the hunger agenda and pushing for better governance.

While we continue to fully support funding these agencies, we believe it is important that there is oversight and full transparency in how these funds are being spent and that Irish taxpayers can be satisfied that these funds are producing real results in terms of meeting the millennium development goals. It is important that there is greater impact reporting from UN agencies.

What issues should the government prioritise in its future aid programming?

The *White Paper on Irish Aid* emphasises the importance of good governance for poverty reduction and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The *White Paper on Irish Aid* describes governance as “the political and institutional capacity of a country to elect accountable government, create and uphold laws, promote and protect people’s rights, meet people’s needs and effectively and fairly manage the resources of the state”.

It highlights the relationship between governance and human rights, drawing attention to international human rights standards that apply both to donor countries and recipient countries.

The countries where Irish Aid works face a number of governance challenges. These include political systems that are not yet sufficiently accountable to their citizens, weak civil society, poor human rights record and internal conflicts.

In such environments, corruption and abuse of power can be endemic. Irish Aid has been supporting good governance work for many years and the lessons learned to date must inform Irish development policy into the future.

While we recognise that real change takes time and that ultimately partner governments are accountable to their own citizens. They also have a responsibility to donor countries and a responsibility to respect internationally accepted governance norms.

Irish Aid must continue to shape its approach in the area of governance around clearly-identified principles, in particular participation, partnership, transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, and equality.

Irish Aid must support specific good governance interventions drawn from among the following thematic areas: fighting corruption, building democratic systems of government, building effective institutions for service delivery, promote and protecting human rights, building strong civil society, strengthening the rule of law, strengthening media and access to information, strengthening global and regional governance.

Irish Aid must continue to work closely with partner governments, international organisations, and civil society organisations to advance good practice on governance with and in the international donor community.

The continuance of Multi Annual Funding (MAF) is of considerable importance to many of the NGOs to ensure that they are able to plan over the medium term. Of equal importance is the security that MAF give to the communities to allow them to implement major projects. We would encourage the expansion of the MAF scheme

In order to harness the public support for the Irish Aid programme need to inform the public by an ongoing media campaign. This could be done in the following way, for one month every year the focus would be put by Irish Aid on one of our 9 partner countries. The focus will inform the Irish public how their money has made a difference in the lives of the citizens of those countries. Statistics need to be blended with the human stories of the people of the countries we work with. All these need to be highlighted against the Millennium development goals for the particular area that Ireland has responsibility in our partner country to show how our help is having an impact.

It is essential that an appropriate framework is developed to monitor progress in implementation and ensure that best practice is applied throughout the programme.

Building good governance must be central to the work of *Irish Aid* across the development programme. Without it, sustainable development is not possible.

While the main focus of the work of donors in this area is on the actions of governments, we recognise that the responsibility for delivering good governance also rests with citizens, civil society and the private sector.

The international community too has a responsibility to ensure that it not only promotes but also practises good governance. We need to recognise the strong role that we can play at an international level.

It is essential that the *White Paper's* commitments on governance are put into practice.

Governance must be seen as a cross-cutting issue to be taken into account in the planning, implementation and evaluation of all *Irish Aid* interventions.

We don't underestimate the scale of the challenge, but it must continue to be prioritised if Irish aid is to succeed in its overall objective of reducing poverty in its programme countries.

Ireland must look at setting out minimum rules of engagement with donor countries in relation to achieving good governance and it must also set reasonable timeframes for improvement on good governance.

We currently measure the impact of funding in meeting the millennium development goals, but we don't measure improvements in governance.

We need to set clear boundaries/rules around programme countries who fail to make any improvements in governance and what we do in situations where there are clear and consistent violations of human rights and the rule of law.

In terms of priorities, we believe the nine partner countries in the aid programme should be prioritised rather than adding any additional partner countries in the coming years.

How can the government further strengthen its ways of working in delivering an effective programme?

While the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Public Accounts Committee has done an excellent job in providing oversight of the programme, the Oireachtas plays a minimal role in debating development policy and bringing about greater public understanding of the work of the programme.

We have always said that this is a programme that belongs to the Irish people, but unfortunately there continues to be a lack of understanding of development work and the millennium development goals amongst the public. There needs to be increased debate on development policy and the aid programme at a national level.

We would suggest that Government organise an annual national conference on development policy and the Irish aid programme and that there are more regular debates within the Dail. The Irish public must be given a chance to play a role in improving the effectiveness of the programme.

Currently the oversight and auditing of the funding allocated by Irish Aid is carried out by Irish Aid. There is a clear need for reform of this process. There is a potential for less critical reporting by those tasked to do the oversight when their very appointment is paid by those appointing and paying them.

A suggested change is that the oversight would be carried out by the controller and auditor general or by persons appointed by the Department of Finance.

Oversight and auditing must also take account of effectiveness on the ground in our partner countries in terms of the results that are being produced, not just how the money is being spent.

We would also suggest that the Charities Act be implemented in full to ensure that there is transparency in the NGO sector. NGO's themselves are calling for the implementation of this Act to prevent any unscrupulous persons taking advantage of the generosity of the Irish people.

Any hint of wasteful and inappropriate spending of funds would have a detrimental effect on the confidence of the public in giving to any NGO.

In an effort to show the Irish Public the impact that their money is having on the partner countries, Irish Aid should produce an annual impact report in relation to the millennium development goals as part of its annual report.

We would encourage the expansion of the Multi Annual Funding which is of considerable importance to many NGOs, communities and organisations so that they can plan over the medium term and implement major projects.

We would also suggest that by 2015, the Government should evaluate Ireland's nine partner countries under the aid programme and the achievements in each of these countries in relation to the millennium development goals. The Government needs to look closely at which MDGs were achieved and why they were achieved in certain countries and not in others.

The research budget is €30m a year and is given mostly to UK Universities. The HEA-Irish Aid PSC over 4 years was only €12.5m for all the HEIs in Ireland. In general when Irish Aid gives out money it must be governed and managed and accounted by Irish Institutions. The money should be spent to build capacity in Irish institutions that make sure our projects are well researched, evaluated and are done properly at the cheapest cost to the taxpayer.

Conclusion

We fully support the implementation of the Africa Strategy as developed by the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheal Martin TD, and that this strategy provides an opportunity to end dependency on aid in the future. We need to make real efforts to provide trade opportunities for African countries and businesses.

In relation to meeting the UN target for Official Development Assistance of 0.7% of GNP set by Fianna Fail in Government, the current Government must implement a realistic timeframe for when this target can be achieved.

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Fianna Fáil Spokesperson on Foreign Affairs

On behalf of the Fianna Fáil Party