



SUBMISSION TO IRISH AID WHITE PAPER REVIEW – April 2012

1. Progress since the last White Paper.

1.1. In general, Ireland's development cooperation programme has enjoyed a high level of support and approval in the eyes of the Irish taxpaying public over the 40 years since its inception. This broadly benign disposition of the Irish public towards development aid has remained reasonably steady during the last three years of austerity and recession, and reflects a significant level of cross-party consensus. It also reflects well on the way in which Irish Aid has taken seriously the imperative of enhanced quality and effectiveness across all 'pillars' of the aid programme – multilateral, bilateral, co-financing with civil society, emergency and recovery, etc.

1.2. However neither the public perception, nor the cross party political buy-in, nor the quality of the programme (attested by a recent OECD-DAC Peer Review) can be taken for granted in the very volatile climate of public opinion and sentiment which currently obtains in Ireland. Budget cutbacks have been applied on three separate occasions since the onset of the recession, one such cutback being particularly severe. It is therefore all the more timely and important that the present public consultation exercise around the White Paper Review is taking place, and is actively promoting public engagement with, and critique of, our development aid programme and its modalities of delivery.

1.3. There is now a growing appreciation internationally that universities serve as important engines of highly-skilled professionals across a range of disciplines, including health sciences, engineering, and education. The forthcoming White Paper offers a good opportunity for Ireland to acknowledge this explicitly, and in so doing to signal a more genuinely strategic engagement with further and higher education, as an integral part of our development cooperation programme.

1.4. The publication of the Africa Strategy document (September 2011) was a welcome move, in terms of Ireland beginning to take a continent-wide and more strategic view of our future engagement with Africa. However the document's sole reference to academic and research cooperation (paragraph 5.22) was extremely cursory, and failed to take account of the enormous scope for Irish institutional expertise (both North and South of the border) to make a dynamic contribution to sustainable capacity development in African institutions, while at the same time enriching and broadening our own institutional capacity on this island. [We return to this theme under 'Key Issues' and 'Ways of Working' below]. This omission from the Africa Strategy is also surprising given the central

role afforded higher education Ireland's own economic and social development over the past twenty years or so, first in producing a highly skilled workforce and, second, in developing the country's research capacity. The White Paper now offers an opportunity to make up for what was missing in the Africa Strategy by endorsing joint research capacity building with Africa as an important element of our future strategy.

2. Changing Context

2.1. The Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF4) (November 2011) crystallised a number of policy threads which were already gaining currency in the aid domain in general and within Irish Aid in particular:

- ✓ An over-arching emphasis on poverty reduction and strong pro-poor targeting of aid;
- ✓ Giving concrete expression to a development paradigm which is increasingly Southern led and promoting greater Southern ownership;
- ✓ Recognition that civil society organisations (CSOs) play a vital role in enabling people to claim their rights, in promoting rights-based approaches, in shaping development policies and partnerships, and in overseeing their implementation.

2.2. The HLF4 endorsed certain common principles as characteristics of good development practice:

- a) Ownership of development priorities by developing countries.
- b) Focus on results.
- c) Inclusive development partnerships. Openness, trust, and mutual respect and learning lie at the core of effective partnerships in support of development goals, recognising the different and complementary roles of all actors.
- d) Transparency and accountability to each other. Mutual accountability and accountability to the intended beneficiaries of our co-operation, as well as to our respective citizens, organisations, constituents and shareholders, is critical to delivering results.

These principles should now also be incorporated into the revised White Paper, thereby underlining our adherence not just to good development practice, but beyond that to a range of international commitments to which we have signed up; for example - human rights, decent work, gender equality, environmental sustainability and disability.

2.3. Another notable feature of the HLF4 in Busan was the emphasis on **Fragile States and Peace-building** (Para 26). There is a maxim that peace is a pre-requisite for sustainable development. Among the donor community, Ireland has more authority than many to engage meaningfully in support for conflict resolution initiatives, having itself had to grapple with the complexities and the oscillations of our own peace process. Relevant expertise in this area can be harnessed from both higher education and civil society bodies in Northern

Ireland and the Republic. Some valuable work in this area has been done, particularly in Liberia and Timor Leste. However there is clearly scope for much greater and more systematic mainstreaming of conflict resolution theory and practice throughout the Irish Aid programme, which would further enhance its quality and distinctiveness. The downside is that the outcomes are not always tangible, are difficult to quantify, and very susceptible to external and / or unpredictable events. However just because peace and reconciliation pose particular challenges in terms of results based management is insufficient reason not to mainstream them into our development practice and programming.

2.4. As the role of higher education in contributing to poverty reduction is being accorded greater recognition in international development discourse (noted above), so too should the concept of internationalisation be broadened to include development cooperation activities. We note that this point was indeed included in the September 2010 policy document of the DES *Investing in Global Relationships: Ireland's International Education Strategy 2010–15* (section 3.5.8). Regrettably however it was absent from the Africa Strategy (September 2011). The White Paper offers an excellent opportunity to rectify this omission.

3. Key Issues

3.1. There is need for a broader and more holistic view to be taken by international donor agencies (including Irish Aid) involved in delivery of development assistance programmes to the education sector in the developing world. The established donor practice of arbitrarily segmenting ('targeting') investment into a pre-determined component of the education system of a given beneficiary country fails to maximise the value of such interventions, because it ignores the *entirety* of the system as a whole, and the inter-dependence of its constituent parts / levels. Over the past 20 years, higher education has tended to be undervalued as a key engine for national-level capacity development, policy analysis and advanced skills (see writings of Kenneth King, Damtew Teferra and others). The most obvious example is that effective primary teaching is predicated on effective teacher training capacity – a third level activity.

3.2. Some particular instruments of results-based management, which call for tangible results to be identifiable within very few years) need to be approached with care when it comes to tracking the return on educational investment in general, and on higher education in particular: a longer time scale is needed for the impact to become discernible, and the criteria need to be sufficiently broad to reflect both economic and social benefits of what is after all a 'public good'.

3.3. The 2009 OECD-DAC Peer Review of Irish Aid drew attention to the areas of learning, research and knowledge management. These are essential for continuously improving aid quality and effectiveness:

"Irish Aid recognises that a more systematic approach to learning and knowledge management is needed....Irish Aid relies on outside sources for specific analytical inputs and research relevant to its policy agenda." (p 51).

Historically it has proved difficult for policy-makers and other stakeholders to identify which policies are most suitable when dealing with national priority issues, and to ascertain how policies can best be implemented in situations which differ widely. The most obvious difficulty is that of precisely attributing cause-and-effect. Despite these inherent problems, the ethical imperative of ensuring a better quality of life for the poor, call for a better understanding of how research in the areas of education and poverty can contribute to pro-poor policies and help improve development outcomes. The sheer scale of global need is such that we cannot afford the luxury of efforts and resources being fragmented. Whilst Irish Aid will need to build up some internal capacity for research, it will certainly need to complement this through external research partnerships with universities and expert groups (e.g. Development Studies Association of Ireland), both at HQ level and at field level, in order to adequately address such wide ranging concerns as climate change, food security and the effects of globalization.

3.4. A Research Strategy is currently in preparation within Irish Aid, and we would urge that this should be seen as an opportunity to forge a new and mutually beneficial engagement between the academic and practitioner 'research-for-development' communities within Ireland.

4. **Ways of Working.**

4.1. Increased activity of international **North-South and South-South partnerships and networking**; a prime example of valuable regional networking is the emergence in 2011 of EARIMA (the East African Research & Innovation Management Association).

4.2. A steady increase in **research training**, in particular through more and better structured modalities of postgraduate formation and stronger foundation in research methods (quantitative, qualitative, critical thinking) and cross disciplinary collaboration. The use of a highly structured foundation year of pre-doctoral preparation is one example of this, and has been refined by SANTRUST from a S Africa base, and which has been actively utilizing Irish expertise, through a Memorandum of Understanding with IAPRCB.

4.3. The time is therefore ripe for **imaginative and cost-effective ways of supporting creation and retention of research capacity** in Africa, through a variety of mechanisms, including 'sandwich' postgraduate programmes, regional-level graduate training, and distance mentoring. Irish Aid's existing **fellowship programme** could benefit greatly from incorporating some new thinking along these lines, whilst at the same time ensuring greater integration of fellowships into the mainstream country strategies (as advocated in the last Review of the Fellowship Training Programme). Finally, contact should be nurtured with in-country 'alumni groups' of past beneficiaries of fellowship awards, many of whom now occupy senior positions in public life and civil society.

