

To: #HQ-DCD PP&E White Paper Review

Subject: Comments from Cork

I'm a medical doctor from Cork and have worked with NGOs in developing countries for twenty years. This involved extensive communications with international donors, including Irish Aid (IA). I have considerable respect for IA as an effective and impartial donor. Thus I followed the review of the White Paper with interest and attended the meeting in Cork last Monday, 5th March.

A few comments on IA's current strategy:

1. We are all aware of the economic situation in the country and I appreciate that the E639 million for 2012 is the limit affordable and acceptable to the Irish tax-payers currently. My recommendation is to have a more restricted regional focus for this money. I suggest that IA confine Programme Countries to Africa and wind down programmes in Asia. Much of the recent poverty reduction in Asia is secondary to engagement with international trade rather than aid. This is not the case with the IA Programme Countries in Africa where aid is making a real contribution to poverty relief. With a limited budget, I feel that we should consider this and the the Irish public would support it. IA would still be offering support to the poorest in Asian countries through the Emergency Response initiative and through financial aid to partner organisations in countries throughout the globe.
2. The programme focus on Hunger Relief is excellent practice considering Ireland's past history and the expertise currently available in Ireland. I feel that the close link between under-nutrition and health status, especially in under-five children and pregnant women, is not sufficiently addressed in the current programme and that there should be more support for a primary health care element in a multi-sectoral food security approach. There is a general turn away from donor support to health programmes worldwide. I feel this is premature in the least developed countries such as the IA Programme Countries and those receiving emergency support, (i.e. Somalia).
3. After many years of working in developing countries and returning home between jobs, I know that the Irish Public has very little knowledge of development issues, donor funding practice and the modus operandi during emergency response. Even my family know little about NGOs work and much less about donor support despite my efforts to get the message across for so many years. I feel that IA has not achieved the objective of increasing public knowledge of development aid. There was a member of the public at our discussion table in Cork last Monday and he had come specifically to find out if IA money was being used by African governments to buy arms because he had read this in the papers. He knew nothing about the strict IA monitoring / evaluation processes and the link between progress on poverty alleviation and continued funding. As he was sufficiently interested in the subject to attend a public meeting, one can presume that people with less interest have less knowledge of how their taxes are spent. I know this information is on websites that are well documented but the message is not sufficiently disseminated. Would more stories on the papers about "a day in the life of an IA recipient", documentaries on television .. etc would have a wider audience? The man in question was well pleased with the discussions on Mon and will be passing on the information to interested parties.

I have returned to Ireland after the years in developing countries and am working part-time in general practice. I would be interested in supporting the IA programme in a voluntary capacity if this would be possible or useful.

Sincerely,
Mary