

Strengthening Ireland's contribution to the reduction of global poverty and vulnerability through the application of research and evidence



**REDUCED HUNGER,  
STRONGER RESILIENCE**



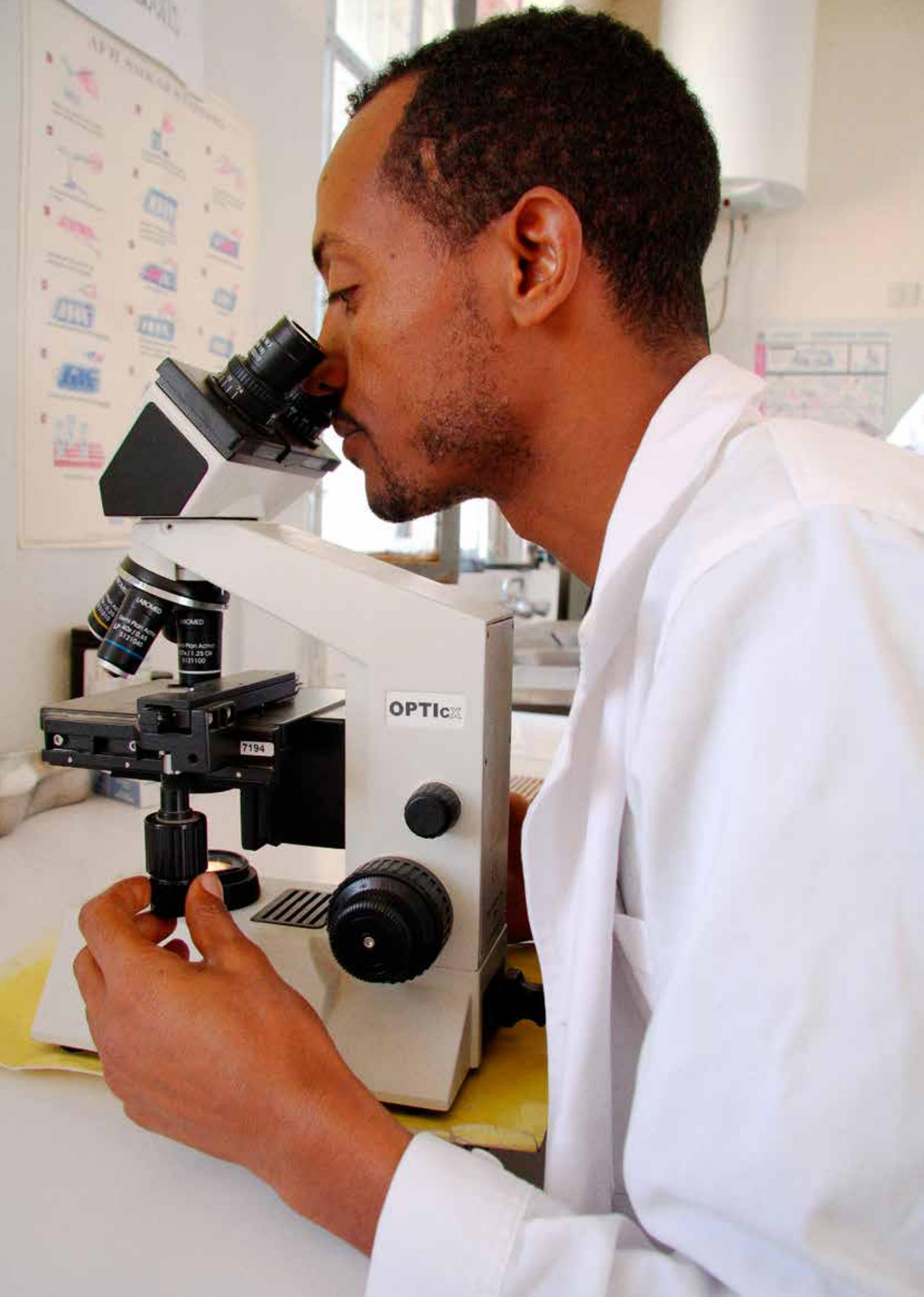
**SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT, INCLUSIVE  
ECONOMIC GROWTH**



**BETTER GOVERNANCE,  
HUMAN RIGHTS AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY**

# Irish Aid Research Strategy

2015-2019



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# Foreword

In 2013, *One World, One Future: Ireland's Policy for International Development* was launched. This was followed up with a Framework for Action to guide the implementation of the Policy.

Ireland is committed to combating global poverty.

To make development effective, we must learn from research and evidence, through our experience and the experience of others.

I am delighted to present Irish Aid's first Research Strategy which will guide our work on development research over the next five years. Our commitment to putting research into use is at the heart of the Strategy.

No one institution, in Ireland or internationally, can go it alone in providing solutions for today's complex development challenges. To make progress, we need to work together.

The Research Strategy will mark the beginning of a new chapter for Irish Aid and our partners to ensure that research makes a real difference in the lives of the world's most vulnerable people.



**Seán Sherlock TD**

Minister of State for Development, Trade Promotion and North-South Co-operation

May 2015



# Summary

Irish Aid is the Government's official aid programme administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, working on behalf of the Irish people to address poverty and hunger in some of the poorest countries in the world.

## Our commitment to research and evidence

*One World, One Future: Ireland's Policy for International Development* emphasises the importance of learning and building evidence on approaches that are most effective in reducing poverty. We recognise that we, and all of our development partners, need to continually update our knowledge and ensure that our decisions, policies and programmes are based on sound evidence of what works and what does not. We do this by learning from practice, from reviews and evaluations, and from the best available research that can deliver new ideas to make a real difference in the lives of poor people.

## Research Goal

Poverty and vulnerability are reduced through the application of research and evidence.

## The Research Strategy

The Strategy outlines how Irish Aid will help shape the future development research agenda through targeting the most pressing development issues affecting the poor. It places emphasis on ensuring that the research we support is of high quality, well communicated and used effectively to influence policy and programmes. We will prioritise the need to build research capacity where it is needed most, across research partnerships, institutions and networks at country level.

We recognise that achieving these objectives will be challenging and will take time. However, over the next five years, we will build on our considerable experience and work with our partners, nationally and internationally. In doing so, we will support high quality, policy-relevant research in areas and ways that can have the most influence.

We also recognise that we need to build our institutional capacity and expertise around research. This Strategy will help us strengthen our internal ways of working and link what we do on research to other areas of our work. It will help us use research to better inform our own development policies, practice and decision-making. We will strengthen our internal oversight mechanisms. We will monitor progress on how we are delivering on the Strategy and we will report our findings and share our experience.

## Three objectives of the Irish Aid Research Strategy

To build evidence, new and existing, on Irish Aid priorities for poverty reduction

To strengthen communication and policy uptake of Irish Aid funded and other research

To improve capacity to plan for, conduct and apply development research in Irish Aid partner countries

# Chapter 1: Background and Context

## Research is central to our Policy for International Development

Ireland’s commitment to development research is embedded within *One World, One Future: Ireland’s Policy for International Development* and the *Framework for Action* which guides the implementation of the Policy.

The Policy highlights the importance of maximising our impact through developing a sharper focus, working in partnership with others and concentrating our efforts where we can make the most difference. The *Framework for Action* is a management instrument which will assist in strengthening the effectiveness, accountability and impact of the Irish Aid programme. The *Framework for Action* sets out ten high level outcomes reflecting the development results to which Ireland will contribute.

**Figure 1: Ireland’s High Level Outcomes on International Development**

<p><b>GOAL 1:</b> REDUCED HUNGER, STRONGER RESILIENCE</p> <p><b>GOAL 2:</b> SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH</p> <p><b>GOAL 3:</b> BETTER GOVERNANCE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY</p>	<p><b>Outcome 1:</b> When crises and conflicts occur, the loss of life is minimised and human suffering is alleviated</p>
	<p><b>Outcome 2:</b> Poor citizens, communities and states are better prepared for, better able to cope with and better placed to recover from stresses and shocks</p>
	<p><b>Outcome 3:</b> Poor individuals, families and communities have improved food and nutrition security</p>
	<p><b>Outcome 4:</b> Better functioning, climate resilient food systems and markets are accessible to and benefit the rural poor</p>
	<p><b>Outcome 5:</b> Developing country economies are more inclusive and sustainable (social, economic and environment)</p>
	<p><b>Outcome 6:</b> Developing countries are better able to use domestic resources to reduce poverty</p>
	<p><b>Outcome 7:</b> Poor and marginalised citizens are better able to attain a decent living, including improved health and education outcomes and increased and improved employment opportunities</p>
	<p><b>Outcome 8:</b> Reduced inequalities between women and men in accessing resources and benefits of development</p>
	<p><b>Outcome 9:</b> Public governance systems and structures are more responsive and accountable to citizens, in particular the poor and marginalised</p>
	<p><b>Outcome 10:</b> Poor and marginalised citizens realise their rights and actively participate in the development of their societies</p>

## **Our Policy is informed by engagement with our research partners**

The development of Ireland's International Development Policy involved consultations with national stakeholders and key international partners which included significant engagement from researchers and research institutions. The feedback reinforced our own analyses of the importance of ensuring that our work and the work of our partners is underpinned by relevant and credible research and evidence. Ireland's commitment and experience on research related to health, education and agriculture was highlighted, as was the need to target our research efforts in ways that can best respond to the challenges of the changing global environment and align with our overall policy priorities.

*One World, One Future: Ireland's Policy for International Development* emphasises the need for research to deepen knowledge and evidence on poverty and ensure that both new and existing research and learning is used effectively to influence policy and practice. The formulation of this Strategy included reviewing our own history and experience of research as well as analysing our funding, our partnerships and the research results to which we are contributing. We have also gained from the experience of others, particularly the recent progress made on the development of new research strategies by a number of bilateral donors and the growing body of work on research-into-use best practice.

## **Research provides better evidence of what works**

### **Development research matters and is necessary to be able to respond to the challenges of poverty reduction**

For development cooperation to be effective, it is important that all development actors understand and apply approaches that are most effective to reduce poverty in a changing world. Irish Aid recognises the value of research and innovation to better understand and make a difference to the lives of people. Research, together with learning from experience, reviews and evaluations, is a key component of building this knowledge and evidence for development. We recognise the importance of using the best available evidence and ensuring that our decisions, policies and programmes, and those of our partners, are based on sound knowledge of what works and what does not. Often there are challenges in how research is defined. Irish Aid understands research to be inclusive of the dual concepts of generating new knowledge as well as applying both new and existing knowledge to practical problem solving and planning.

Citrus saplings at Rio des Pedres Agricultural Research Centre, Mozambique. *Photo: Irish Aid*



## Irish Aid support to research is making a difference

Research has been a consistent feature of Irish Aid work since the start of the official development cooperation programme in 1974. Over the years, our research efforts have been strengthened considerably by the influence and direction of the Advisory Council on Development Cooperation (ACDC) 1979-1993; the Irish Aid Advisory Committee (IAAC) 1993-2002; the Advisory Board of Irish Aid (ABIA) 2002-2008; and more recently the Irish Aid Expert Advisory Group (IAEAG).

Irish Aid support to research is already significant and growing. Through a diverse portfolio, we are building knowledge and capacity at partner level on issues that are central to transforming the lives of poor people and providing evidence that can be used to influence policy and practice.

Assessing results from development research and realising real changes in the lives of poor people on the basis of research can be challenging and take a long time. Often, attention is focused on outputs with less emphasis given to how findings can inform policy and be used for the benefit of people and society. We work with our partners to ensure that their research is well disseminated and used effectively to influence development policy and practice. While our financial contribution to research is considerable, we also bring added-value and experience as a donor with a strong poverty and results focus and a commitment to working with our partners to find better ways to capture and measure change.

## Our Research Portfolio

Recent years (2012-2014) have seen an annual spend on research of approximately €30 million (an increase of 20% from 2008). Approximately 60% of this funding is allocated to international and global partnerships; 20% is allocated through partners in Ireland and 20% to institutions working at partner country level.

Research on global hunger (including agriculture and nutrition) accounts for almost a third of our funding. Research on essential services including health, HIV/AIDS and education comprises a further third with the remainder allocated to a range of themes including climate change, fragile states and human rights.

Increasingly, our research work is driven by country priorities, planned through our country strategies and funded from Irish Aid Country Programme budgets.

A researcher observes the germination performance of an Irish potato plantlet at a plant tissue culture laboratory, Tigray Agricultural Research Institute, Ethiopia. *Photo: Peter Heaney/Irish Aid*





Losta Manyamba and Margaret (one year old) at a Community-based Therapeutic Care check up in Malawi.  
*Photo: Daniel Rowan/Irish Aid*

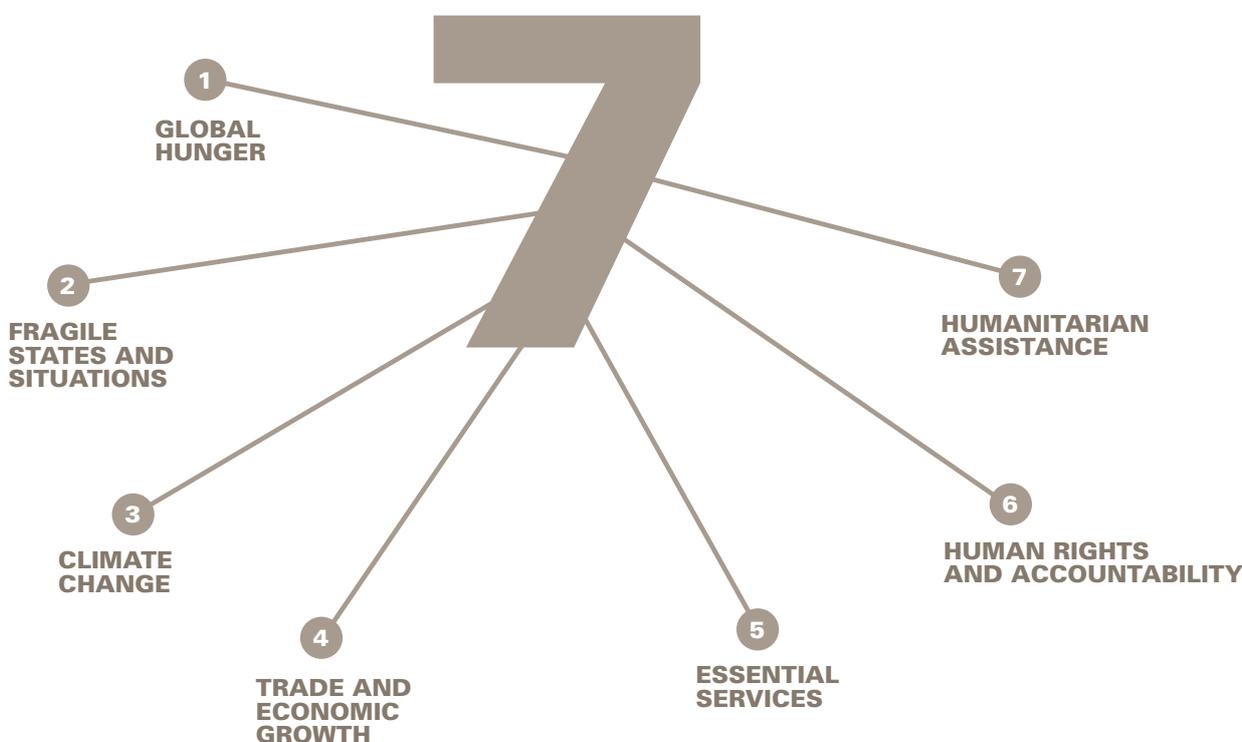
### Investment in research and evidence saves lives

Irish Aid supports research on Ready to Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTFs) for the treatment of severe malnutrition in very poor communities and countries. This revolutionary approach, pioneered by Valid International and Concern Worldwide, allows children suffering from severe malnutrition to remain at home or be treated in community clinics, increasing access and reducing opportunity costs. The research has demonstrated that Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) has higher recovery and lower fatality rates and is up to 90% cheaper than conventional treatments. In Ethiopia, Malawi and Sudan, over a 5 year period, CMAM reached over 70% of the population in need compared to less than 10% for clinic based treatment programmes. It has led to changes in international malnutrition treatment policy and has been adopted by over fifty countries. It is widely used by Ministries of Health and international agencies in both emergencies and longer-term development programmes.

# Chapter 2: Our Research Strategy

The overall goal of the Research Strategy is that **poverty and vulnerability are reduced through the application of research and evidence**. The Strategy prioritises three objectives to be achieved across seven Research Themes.

## Seven Research Themes aligned to our policy priorities



### Research Strategy Objectives

1. To build evidence, new and existing, on Irish Aid priorities for poverty reduction.
2. To strengthen communication and policy uptake of the findings of Irish Aid funded and other research.
3. To improve capacity to plan for, conduct and apply development research within Irish Aid partner countries.

## Objective 1: To build evidence, new and existing, on Irish Aid priorities for poverty reduction

The Research Strategy will consolidate and build on our significant experience. We will focus on seven research themes. Within each of these themes, we will need to concentrate our efforts where we can make the most difference and on areas that are most likely to bring about change, generate learning, and build new ideas and innovation.

### Research Theme

## Global Hunger

Although the world produces enough food to feed everyone, over 800 million people are chronically undernourished and a further billion suffer from micronutrient deficiencies. One in nine people do not get enough food to be healthy and lead an active life. The population of the world is estimated to grow to 9 billion by 2050; most of the increase will be in developing countries. This will place an even greater burden on countries to produce sufficient and adequate food in a sustainable manner and ensure that all people have access to the food and nutrients that they need. Children are most at risk. Currently, undernutrition contributes to five million deaths of children under five years of age in developing countries every year. Investment in nutrition can yield significant returns in terms of future health, learning and productivity.

### What we will do:

- › We will support research to better understand the root causes of hunger and under-nutrition and the links between hunger and other development challenges in both development and emergency contexts to ensure an appropriate range of interventions are considered and applied. We will put a particular focus on gender equality as a driver of improved nutrition.
- › We will build on our current expertise and invest in research on the best ways to prevent hunger and help those already suffering from hunger as well as supporting technologies and innovation to meet future food demands.
- › We will target investments in research, including of products that help prevent and treat undernutrition, particularly in women and young children during the first 1000 days (pregnancy and the first two years of a child's life).
- › We will support pro-poor, demand-led agricultural research, including with institutions in our Key Partner Countries, placing emphasis on dissemination to smallholder farmers at country level. We will explore barriers to uptake of research by poor women and men.
- › We will invest in nutrition surveys, data systems, analysis and formative research into behaviours and underlying causes of under-nutrition and use the findings to inform policy and planning.

An agronomist cross pollinates cassava plants at Sugarcane Research Centre in Kibaha, Tanzania. *Photo: Malachy Harty/Irish Aid*

### Producing more and better food

Ireland has a long history of providing support to agricultural research, developing new and more resilient crops. More than 50 new drought tolerant maize varieties have been adopted over recent decades. This has resulted in an increase in yields of between 20 and 50 percent across some areas of eastern and southern Africa. Irish Aid continues to support research on how best to expand this knowledge across more countries and communities.



## Research Theme

# Fragile States and Situations

Countries affected by conflict and fragility are now home to the majority of the world's poor and most vulnerable people. People in fragile and conflict-affected situations are more than twice as likely to be under-nourished as those in other developing countries. They are more than three times as likely to be unable to send their children to school, twice as likely to see their children die before age five and more than twice as likely to lack clean water. Half of all child deaths occur in conflict-affected areas. These countries are particularly vulnerable to external and internal shocks and disasters. All states are susceptible to situations of fragility. The concern of the international community arises when the social contract between the state and citizen is weak, when political processes cannot manage change and the risk of conflict and/or humanitarian disaster is high.

## What we will do:

- › In line with the New Deal, we will support research on governance in countries experiencing fragility and on best approaches to strengthen systems and institutions to achieve peace, stability and development.
- › We will invest in research to better understand the vulnerability of poor people, what works most effectively to prevent and protect them from further hardship and what is most effective to build their resilience to withstand future set-backs and disasters.
- › We will strengthen the evidence base to inform policy and programmes on livelihoods, basic services and social protection in conflict-affected situations.
- › We will, in line with our commitment to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, support research on the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace-building, peacekeeping and in post-conflict reconstruction.

Women carry water at a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), Southern Darfur, Sudan. *Photo: Sven Torfinn/Panos*



## Research Theme

# Climate Change

Our natural resources, climate and weather systems are a shared global resource that we all need to sustain life and livelihoods. However, the continued and increased greenhouse gas emissions into the Earth's atmosphere are causing an increase in global temperatures, rising sea levels, increased water stress and more frequent extreme weather events. Climate change is affecting all countries but its impact is greater in poor countries and felt most by poor people, particularly women and the most vulnerable. It is reinforcing other aspects of poverty, further undermining the ability of people and communities to cope with shocks and putting them more at risk and exposed to hazards.

### What we will do:

- › We will invest in research to better understand how to meet the challenges of climate change, the interconnections between it and other development concerns – especially hunger and food security – and what technologies and

innovation work best to help local communities adapt. We will focus on community based adaptation and contribute to bringing good practice into national policy.

- › We will support and advocate for research on climate adapted agricultural farm practices and sustainable production methods. This includes drought resistant crop varieties and breeds and alternative household energy supply that responds to the needs of poor and vulnerable communities.
- › We will support research that explores the governance and political economy of integrating climate change into development programme planning to better understand entry points and obstacles for improved policy and practice.
- › We will invest in building scientific and technical capacity on disaster risk reduction.
- › We will develop a joint learning platform on climate resilient household food and energy systems across Key Partner Countries and use this learning to inform Ireland's international policy engagements on environment and climate change.

Greceria Mayombo, cook stoves promoter in Malawi. *Photo: Concern Universal*



Ireland supports research to help poor people in low and middle-income countries achieve climate resilient development.

## Research Theme

# Trade and Economic Growth

Ireland recognises that sustainable poverty reduction can only be achieved where countries have strong and equitable economic growth. This results in poor and marginalised citizens being better able to attain a decent living with increased and improved employment opportunities. Ireland's *Africa Strategy* highlights the importance of linking development cooperation with other elements of Ireland's engagement in Africa. As Africa's economy grows, the continent will require further investment in research and innovation, particularly to better understand people's ability to participate in, and benefit from, wealth and job creation.

### What we will do:

- › We will support research to better understand how countries can mobilise domestic resources in ways that promote more inclusive economic growth and trade.
- › We will support and advocate for research on specific ways that poor people can participate in and benefit from wealth and job creation.
- › We will explore opportunities to learn more about how partner governments can best stimulate decent employment opportunities for poor people, in particular women.
- › We will strengthen initiatives and activities in the areas of academic and research collaboration between Irish and African institutions.

Farmers at Yombo village have formed a cooperative to produce cassava flour and add value to their cassava crops, Tanzania.  
Photo: Malachy Harty/Irish Aid



## Research Theme

# Essential Services

Good health, education and social protection are essential to ensure that everyone has the best possible chance in life to contribute fully to their own growth and development as well as that of their community and country. However, many people around the world, as much as 80% of the global population, do not have full access to these fundamental requirements. Health systems often remain weak and struggle to provide basic services. Women and children are disproportionately impacted. Access to quality essential services is a fundamental human right and key to tackling the multiple and reinforcing dimensions of poverty and vulnerability. Significant advances have been made in the provision of essential services, including those responding to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, to continue to make progress in these areas will require significant investments in research and innovation.

### What we will do:

- › We will continue to invest in research to better understand how the poorest citizens and communities can effectively access and benefit from health, education and social protection services.
- › We will invest in research targeted at the main diseases of poverty – HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis (TB) and Malaria – as well as supporting approaches to ensure that health research and knowledge gets to where it is needed most.
- › We will invest in research on what works most effectively to improve education quality and strengthen learning outcomes.
- › We will support research to better understand how social protection programmes can be strengthened to further reduce vulnerability and build resilience of the very poorest and most marginalised.

Girls from Kuma Garadayat, in South Sudan, celebrate the inauguration of development projects that include a clinic, a women's centre and several schools. *Photo: Albert González Farran/UNAMID*



## Research Theme

# Human Rights and Accountability

The promotion and protection of human rights are fundamental features of just and sustainable development. Good governance and accountability are vital components for the realisation of human rights and key to addressing the inequality, discrimination and exclusion that lie at the core of poverty. Existing evidence shows that local solutions, anchored in local realities and supported by strong leadership, work best. We need to be better informed on the impact of discrimination and inequalities. More evidence and research is needed on the persistent inequality faced by people on the basis of age, gender and disability.

### What we will do:

- › We will continue to build evidence to better understand and promote local development.
- › We will identify how the capacity of key actors (such as local governments, civil society, the private sector, and communities) can best respond to local needs and realities.
- › We will support research on how best to strengthen empowerment and participation in democratic processes to enable citizens to realise their rights and entitlements.
- › We will explore opportunities to support research on the links between disability and poverty, and how best to understand and address disability across all our policy priorities.
- › We will continue to invest in research that contributes to the body of evidence on empowering women and girls, decreasing gender inequalities and reducing gender based violence.
- › We will support research to better understand and respond to the social, economic and development challenges and opportunities faced by children and young people.

Women queue with food vouchers in Dollo, Somalia. Photo: Jennifer O’Gorman/Concern Worldwide



## Research Theme

# Humanitarian Assistance

Globally, 42 million people are displaced as a result of conflict and violence with some 300 million people affected by humanitarian crises annually. Humanitarian assistance, governed by the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, is the assistance and action designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity before, during and in the immediate aftermath of emergencies. Global humanitarian need is growing faster than available resources. Future crises are likely to be more widespread, complex, resource-driven, and involve new threats from biological, technological, and climatic sources. In this environment of increased vulnerability, it is critical to invest in research on improving the provision of humanitarian assistance and demonstrating impact.

### What we will do:

- › We will invest in research that builds evidence of what works most effectively to save lives, alleviate suffering and protect the most vulnerable when crises and conflicts occur.
- › We will support research that builds evidence on how poor citizens, communities and states can better prevent, prepare for, cope with and recover from stresses and shocks.
- › We will support efforts that recognise the current knowledge gaps and need for innovation in the humanitarian system especially on how to improve standards, impact and performance.
- › We will work with our NGO, multilateral and other partners to improve the use of evidence and data for decision making on humanitarian policy and practice.
- › We will support research on the types of indicators that can help us to track the impact of humanitarian interventions.

Testing for malnutrition in Kenya's North Eastern Province. *Photo: Dieter Telemans /Panos*



## Objective 2: To strengthen communication and policy uptake of Irish Aid funded and other research

We will build on existing partnerships where they are delivering results and identify new partners in support of our commitment to putting research evidence into use. We will work with all our partners, current and new, to strengthen efforts on research quality and promote a stronger focus on results and measuring change.

### What we will do:

- › We will review and, where appropriate, deepen our existing partnerships and identify new partnerships to promote good practice, scale-up innovations and influence policies in areas where we can make the most difference and achieve greatest impact.
- › We will work with all of our partners to promote more effective research communication. We will ensure that the research that they do is demand-led, focused on the most pressing policy priorities, and presented in ways that policy makers and practitioners can easily understand and use.
- › We will advocate for better and more systematic communication of research findings and recommendations. We will work with our research partners to develop and plan communication strategies at the beginning of projects and programmes so that research findings are presented in ways that are credible and convincing.
- › We will make clear our expectations of timely communication through research updates, policy briefs and targeted policy recommendations.
- › We will ensure that all research outputs funded by Irish Aid are accessible and freely available.
- › We will deepen our engagement with Irish research and higher education institutions on the thematic priorities of the Research Strategy by building on their experience. This will strengthen the platform in Ireland for collaborative approaches to gather, create and share development knowledge and evidence.
- › We will work with other donors and use our engagement internationally to promote stronger coordination to be better able to identify and influence international fora, events, dialogue and agenda-setting including on post 2015 poverty responses.

Ms. Etrida Luhanga, a smallholder farmer from Malawi, and Mr. Dyborn Chibonga, CEO, National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM), address the Dublin Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Climate Justice, in April 2013.  
Photo: Mac Innes Photography



### **Objective 3:** To improve capacity to plan for, conduct and apply development research within Irish Aid partner countries

To deliver on the Research Strategy, Irish Aid will engage with all of our research partners to better ensure that the work that they do is in response to demand from countries and that the impact and results from their efforts are making a difference to poor people and communities. We will strive to build partnerships where they are needed most – at country level. We will work in particular with partners that support national networks for knowledge sharing, learning and knowledge brokering.

#### **What we will do:**

- › We will attach particular importance to research that takes account of the views and voices of local communities and individuals, women and men alike.
- › We will promote approaches that are more Southern-led and responsive to country identified priorities, with results evident at country level.
- › We will work with government, research institutions and civil society to strengthen capacity for research at partner country level.
- › We will promote stronger collaborations between Irish and international research institutions and those in our partner countries to build networks, partnerships and joint programmes. We will ensure that all joint country partnerships make explicit their expected results from research capacity building strategies.
- › We will deepen our engagement with third level institutions in Ireland by building on the Programme of Strategic Cooperation in order to strengthen capacity of research institutions and networks in our partner countries.
- › We will facilitate collaborative partnerships between government departments and academic institutions in Ireland with their counterparts in our partner countries to advance key areas of research for development.
- › We will explore opportunities for collaborative partnerships between two or more partner countries on key research initiatives.
- › We will engage with other bilateral and multilateral donors at country level to ensure that our approaches to joint partners are coordinated and include a focus on building local research skills and capacity.
- › We will take advantage of linkages between our Fellowship Programmes and the Research Strategy. We will ensure that the issue of international fee waivers for Fellowship students from Irish Aid partner countries will continue to be placed on the agenda in the context of the implementation of the Department of Education's International Education Strategy.

#### **Programme of Strategic Cooperation**

Irish Aid is committed to deepening the relationship with third level institutions in Ireland on research and learning. Our main engagement is through the Programme of Strategic Cooperation (PSC) which seeks to promote linkages and cooperation between higher education and research institutions in Ireland and in countries supported by Irish Aid. The programme has resulted in a significant generation of new knowledge, strengthened networks, partnerships and capacity within universities and learning institutions across Africa. This flagship programme will be reviewed in 2015 to critique progress and build on learning to develop a new phase of support.

## Chapter 3: Maximising our Impact

*One World, One Future: Ireland's Policy for International Development* clearly articulates the need in the current economic environment to maximise the impact of our efforts. Its *Framework for Action* further underpins policy and programming decisions up to 2017 enabling Irish Aid to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of our work. The Framework will serve as the basis for measuring performance and demonstrating accountability for the delivery of planned results. The Research Strategy provides the opportunity to do this in a number of ways that will consolidate and build on current progress and strengthen our efforts to use research to bring about change while building our institutional capacity to deliver.

### Focus on Poverty and Vulnerability

Ireland has a strong commitment to reducing poverty and vulnerability and increasing the resilience of poor people and their communities. Poverty and vulnerability are major obstacles to social and economic development. The poorest people are especially vulnerable as they have few buffers or resources to cope with, or recover from, hazards or shocks. They are also significantly more likely to be affected by ill-health, unemployment, trade shocks, hunger and conflict. If we are to achieve

sustainable poverty reduction, we must improve our understanding of vulnerability. Across all of our research themes we will promote work that seeks to better understand the relationship between vulnerability and poverty, why poverty persists and how best to support people to move out of poverty.

### Putting Gender at the Centre

Existing research has already shown us that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are central to development and the achievement of human rights. We know that when women are healthy and educated and can participate more fully in development, the benefits extend to their children, communities and countries; poverty and malnutrition decline, living standards improve and economic growth increases. Irish Aid is committed to promoting and building on this evidence and to ensuring that women and girls are at the centre of our research efforts. While the links between gender inequality and poverty are well recognised, the strategies for addressing gender inequality are not well understood. We will look at gender as a cross-cutting issue in all our research and ensure that gender is prominent in the design, implementation and evaluation of all research to ensure maximum impact and optimise innovation.

Women of Chimundi village, Dowa, Malawi. Photo: Irish Aid



## Enhanced Partnerships

We will adopt a stronger partnership approach to research, working more closely with our international partners, donors and national level actors, as well as institutions in Ireland. We will scope the development research landscape in all of the countries where we have country strategies to map existing partnership approaches and identify additional opportunities. We will work to build linkages between our current research partners to promote more coordinated capacity building approaches at country level. In particular, we will explore ways to facilitate stronger linkages between our established international research partners, think tanks and institutions in Ireland. In line with Irish Aid's commitment to enhancing the Irish public's understanding of global poverty, inequality and citizenship, we will seek opportunities to strengthen research on Development Education through existing national research partnerships.

## Achieving Results

We will build our institutional capacity and expertise around research and link what we do on research to other areas of our work, particularly evaluation. We will emphasise operational, practical evidence that will make a difference to the lives of poor people. We will place a greater emphasis on the quality, credibility and achievement of results from the research we support. We will work internally across headquarters and our missions to better use research and evidence to inform development and funding of our country strategies, mid-term and other reviews, institutional strategies, sectoral policies and operational guidance. We will document and disseminate the learning and experience of using research to inform our decisions, policies and programmes.

## Assuring Quality

We are committed to transparency and accountability within our research work. The overall responsibility for quality assurance will rest with Irish Aid's Senior Management Group (SMG) who will set the direction in line with policy priorities and evolving needs, and monitor the extent to which Irish Aid policies, programmes and funding decisions are research and evidence-based. We will monitor progress on how we are delivering on the Strategy and report our findings. A Research Working Group (RWG), reporting to SMG, will have responsibility for developing a research appraisal framework, monitoring and reporting on the Strategy, tracking budgets (which are distributed across all sections and programme countries) and developing an evaluation plan for research.

## Effective Communication

We will work with our research partners to ensure that research findings are presented credibly and in ways that policy makers and practitioners can easily understand and use. Part of these efforts will include engagement with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Knowledge Management Task-team. We will identify opportunities for more innovative internal communication and learning exchanges on key findings and updates from Irish Aid supported research. In recognition of the crucial role research plays in building public understanding of development issues, we will work through our Public Outreach Section to ensure that the Research Strategy and findings from research are effectively communicated to the public through the Irish Aid website.

Soya seed livelihoods programme supported by Irish Aid, Nambuma village, Dowa district, Malawi. *Photo: Irish Aid*



# Annex 1:

## Accounting for our performance

Accountability	Mechanism/Responsibility	Frequency
Setting the Research Direction (to ensure it is demand and policy-led)	Irish Aid Senior Management Group	Annually (informed by internal quality assurance mechanisms)
Accountability for Research Expenditure and Results	Internal Research Working Group reporting to Irish Aid's Senior Management Group	Annually
	Annual Report of Irish Aid	Annually
Assessment of Research Quality	External Research Reference Group <sup>1</sup> .	Convened Annually
Assessment of Research Strategy Implementation	Mid-term Review of Strategy	2017
	Final Review of Strategy	2019

<sup>1</sup> The Group will comprise of expertise from across the national and international development community. The key role of the Group will be to help review research quality and share perspectives on best international research practice.



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