

Submission to Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid

March 2012

Nature of Views : On behalf Of teachers involved in development
education and global learning in BCFE

Organisation : Ballyfermot College of Further Education Global
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Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on the White Paper on Irish Aid.

BCFE, as an organisation, is relatively new to the discussion on development cooperation and the Irish Aid programme. Since late 2007 we have been engaged in development education and in developing a partnership with Evelyn Hone College of Applied Arts and Commerce in Zambia. Our contribution is based on experience of introducing development education and ideas of global citizenship across the curriculum in vocational programmes in Further Education which promote engagement and critical analysis, involvement with the development education sector in Ireland and on our specific experience of partnership with a vocational college in Zambia.

We welcome the democratic inclusive nature of the consultation process. While addressing the main questions posed the focus of this contribution is primarily on education particularly the need to support the development of vocational education in poor countries and on development education and public engagement in Ireland.

Progress Made

In response to the question of progress in implementing the commitments contained in the White Paper on Irish Aid it is clear that very considerable progress has been made. The focus on pro-poor work, on hunger, poverty, health and education recognising linkages and cross-cutting issues, on Africa and on work which empowers with partner countries are all to be commended. The findings of the independent reviews that Irish Aid is well-focused on the world's poorest people and delivering real and tangible results is significant. Commitment to working with partner countries and untied aid are essential in relation to aid effectiveness.

The 30% cut in the aid budget between 2008 and 2011 is a matter of very serious concern. It represents a major reversal and must surely have caused enormous pressure on all projects affected and most especially on the people involved. It has to be recognised that severe decreases in funding undermines existing and developing work and no amount of good ideas can compensate for lack of basic funding. From a global justice and shared responsibility for development perspective the government decision to cut the aid budget by 30% was wrong. In fact this devastating cut, the highest in any area, is in direct conflict with the notion of promoting public engagement and support for the aid programme.

Changing Context

In our view it is important to recognise that, within the changing and complex global context, persistent poverty remains, particularly in sub-saharan Africa;

inequality is increasing in almost every country in the world; poor countries bear the brunt of migration caused by war, famine and conflict. Inequality, social exclusion, hunger, gender inequality and lack of human rights remain significant problems. Increasing numbers of the world's poor live in middle income countries, some of the world's poor live in rich countries. Poverty and inequality are related challenges.

The priorities which have framed Irish Aid policy in recent years - hunger, poverty, health, education, gender equality - remain central. Climate change is increasingly a development and shared responsibility issue impacting on many other issues. The need to contribute to the prevention of and respond to humanitarian emergencies remains.

However there clearly has been significant progress particularly in the areas of education and health. We will return to the area of success in education in the next section

At this time when the debate on post-2015 is ongoing it is worth acknowledging the limitations as well as the successes of the Millennium Development Goals in order to support the emergence of justice-based goals and processes. Halving world hunger by 2015 is surely inadequate leaving significant levels of hunger and malnutrition particularly in the poorest countries. By measuring progress from 1995 the slow down in progress which has occurred in some cases in this period compared with earlier decades has been masked.

In relation to the Irish context it is beyond the scope of this forum to discuss the reasons for the situation the country is in and general government policy. However we question the idea that one view of the situation, unquestioned, is taken as the context for future work. Cutbacks to the aid budget and cutbacks domestically are happening in the context of particular political decisions by the government.

Key Issues

We support the continuing focus on the key issues outlined – hunger, fragility, climate change, basic needs, governance and human rights, and gender equality.

In the context of basic needs we would like to contribute to the discussion on education. Universal primary education is close to being achieved. While improving the quality of primary education, enhancing teacher training and supporting ongoing professional development is an ongoing challenge, children are attending primary education and many are progressing onto and completing second level education.

Our experience from working with our partner college in Zambia is that the lack of places at third level is now a pressing problem. Only about 20% of the

cohort completing second level education in Zambia secure places in universities or in vocational colleges.

Vocational education colleges offer education and training which enable young people to find employment and to create sustainable small start-up businesses. Supporting vocational colleges to develop new programmes in modern high skills technological areas and in creative areas is worthwhile and empowering both to the individual graduates and to the countries.

The potential of technical and vocational education to contribute to social as well as economic development is increasingly being recognised. Ireland is in a position to support the strengthening of the vocational and technical sector in partner countries. Within this context work with UNEVOC, the UN forum for vocational and technical education, should be deepened.

In Ireland the mainstreaming of development and global citizenship education is very important to enable students to understand the globalised world in all its complexity including interdependence, power, injustice and diversity and to develop the skills, awareness and understanding necessary for active participation as global citizens. In Further and Higher education it is important that all students are reached and that justice-based development education is embedded in all vocational studies creating a sustainable base for continuing lifelong learning and engagement based on solidarity and critical engagement.

BCFE is a member of IDEA and supports the IDEA submission to the White Paper fully. Public engagement with global justice issues and a clear focus on human rights and interdependence. Music, art, literature and celebrations of culture, shared and diverse, is also very important in building global solidarity and understanding.

Ways of Working

It is essential that the justice and human rights-based approach of the current aid programme be the basis for policy coherence across departments. We support the idea of re-framing aid in terms of development cooperation and seen this as a shared responsibility.

In particular in relation to trade it is imperative that trade with poor countries should be ethical, fair and supportive of human development. Issues of debt, grossly unfair trading relations and exploitation are central. It is worrying that at the Africa Strategy document, which has only three short paragraphs relating to the Irish Aid programme and which contains many ideas and proposals which are, at the very least open, to question has become somewhat enmeshed in the discussion in relation to the White Paper. Some of the underlying ideas, such as an uncritical/positive approach to the role of multi-national companies in Africa, are alarming. However, the main point we wish to make in relation to the Africa strategy is that it needs to be subject to rigorous scrutiny in relation to the programme of aid/development

cooperation. Incorporation of this document, unexamined, could damage the democratic consultation on the White Paper.

Policy coherence is a key issue and it has an important role in supporting public understanding and engagement. Therefore, for example, our policy in relation to asylum seekers needs to be reviewed urgently.

It is important given the role of the UN and Ireland's role within it to ratify UN conventions. Ireland like many of the wealthy countries of the world has yet to ratify the UN convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families. The experience of some of our students who have refugee status in Ireland in seeking to achieve family reunification in terms of young children being allowed to join them in Ireland has been long and difficult.

While it may seem a small issue the requirements for obtaining a VISA to travel to Ireland for colleagues, for example, from Zambia coming to Ireland seem disproportionate.

Finally on education, development education and the opening of the curriculum to the questions of global issues and interests is very much at the heart of good education. Questioning, critical analysis, engagement, learning about culture, diversity and becoming an active global citizen should be directly supported by the department of education in the longterm.

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