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**IRISH AID WHITE PAPER REVIEW  
– HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL'S RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION  
– March 2012.**

## Response:

### Introduction:

We feel that the collective response from Dochas is a valuable contribution to the White Paper Review. The primary focus of Handicap International's response to the White Paper Review is to provide a complement to the very comprehensive response already issued by Dochas. Our own contributions therefore are limited to a number of specific points that we feel deserve further clarification or modification.

### Progress made & Changing context:

(Please refer to the Dochas response)

### Key Issues:

We want to raise the perhaps somewhat semantic question of the use of 'equality' vs. 'equity' in terms of **gender**. Whilst there is a clear and necessary interaction between the two notions, there still remains the difference between the former being quantitative whilst the latter is normative.

In the context of a rights focus, an emphasis on quantitative equality could potentially detract from the need to have a differentiated approach to the sexes when one is disproportionately affected by a social or economic tendency relative to the other. In other words, equality will not necessarily address a problem that is characterised by disproportionate needs. We can give two direct examples:

- Trachoma: women experience much higher rates of blinding trachoma infections than men. A programme seeking to offer 'gender equal' treatment for eye problems therefore risks not providing the bias in treatment towards women that is required to meet their needs and effectively eliminate the disease.
- Education: girls with disabilities are subject to a 'double-bias' based on their gender as well as their impairment in terms of access to education. As a result any programme seeking to sensitise parents on accessing education for their children ought to place a specific focus from the outset on girls with disabilities.

**Disability.** We concur with Dochas' suggestion that a twin-track approach be adopted by Irish Aid for disability in the same vein as for gender 'issues. However, it is probably also worth emphasising how much the global situation has evolved since the White Paper was initially produced, notably in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Many more partner countries have signed and ratified, or are moving to ratify, the Convention. There is now a much clearer legal context in which the twin-track approach can be situated. Hence the centrality of the Convention as a tool for advancing the interests of people with disabilities cannot be exaggerated.

As result, there are grounds for Irish Aid to promote a much more direct focus on the country-level application of the provisions of the Convention. At the same time, it is vital to recognise and provide for the central role to be played by disabled people's organisations in achieving the application of UNCRPD. In so doing, there will also be

more impetus to the mainstreaming of the needs of people with disabilities in service provision. As a result, the challenge is now for countries to implement the UNCRPD – which means ensuring that rights it entails can be converted into actual services, both support and mainstream. This will mean significant investment in the strengthening of health, social, livelihoods, and education service-delivery mechanisms and strategies (social protection).

As a consequence, and not least given Irish Aid's commitment to date to addressing the rights and needs of people with disabilities, would it not help to begin considering disability as a cross-cutting issue? Hence, we strongly recommend a twin-track approach to disability, including it as a cross-cutting issue in all Irish Aid programmes alongside supporting specific interventions. We would recommend that Irish Aid develops a disability policy in consultation with NGOs and DPOs to define this double-strategy and also undertake the necessary adjustments in its own organization, in the same vein as the 'Development for All' approach pioneered by AusAid.

**Ways of working:**

**Accountability and transparency:** we would like to focus in particular on Irish Aid's engagement with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). It is commendable and worthwhile that Irish Aid will use IATI in order to reinforce its accountability to its partners and the Irish public.

At the same time, it is important that the application of the IATI standard – whether to Irish Aid's own work and/or to its partners – is done on a qualified basis. IATI is undoubtedly a powerful analytical tool and will do much to provide a clear presentation of Irish Aid's, and its partners', work. However, inasmuch as it makes no pretensions to be otherwise, it remains a largely quantitative standard. As a result, the considerable qualitative aspects and nuances of development work will not find direct expression under IATI.

This should not be a problem in itself, but rather carries some risks in terms of how Irish Aid's IATI material would be used outside Irish Aid. Without caveats or clear narratives about IATI representing only one aspect of development work, there is risk that other sections of government, the media, or the public make deductions about Irish Aid and its partners work purely based on the IATI data. In some instance, this could be heavily misleading.

**Working with Civil Society Organisations:** Irish Aid identifies quite reasonably that 'consolidation, focus, and coherence across development NGOs...is also important' (Consultation Paper, p22). Linked to Dochas' commentary on revisions to Irish Aid's Ways of Working, the expectation of greater consolidation and focus is worth pursuing, but exactly how will need to be clarified. Would this imply consortia as a favoured approach? And what would be Irish Aid's role in favouring this? In addition, following the Busan Summit on Aid Effectiveness last November, we wish to underline the importance of civil society participation in defining the local priorities of each Irish Aid office.

**Other comments:**

1. In the context of the financial crises mentioned on p7 of the review paper it would be pertinent in such a context that priority should go to the most vulnerable groups, with no spending that risks contributing to creating barriers for such groups. This could include provisions for disability with reasonable accommodation for it in each programme, eg: including it in the criteria of calls for proposals, requests for disaggregated data, and so on.
2. On the paragraph on working with multi-lateral organizations (p22), we would also suggest that Irish Aid's support for better coordination within the UN should extend to the implementation of the UNCRPD at country level through contributing financially to the newly established UN Disability Multi-Donor Trust Fund.
3. We would also recommend that Irish Aid takes a proactive role in preparing the post-MDG framework through pushing for a stronger priority to excluded groups (People with Disabilities, widows, older people, indigenous groups...). This would be to ensure that they are not left off the agenda in a context of financial crisis that risks deepening existing gaps.

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