

Irish Aid White Paper Review 2011

Submission from Trócaire Malawi Office

1. Introduction

In support of Irish Aid’s civil society consultation in Malawi as well as the broader consultation among Irish Government Embassy staff being held in Malawi at the end of the month, Trócaire’s office in Malawi wishes to use these opportunities to set out our view as to the main issues we believe should be the focus of the White Paper Review. While approaching the issues from a thematic perspective, our submission addresses the specific Malawi context. We hope this is considered useful, not just for the way in which it grounds some of the high level concepts such as “Civil Society Space” and “Climate Change” in a specific country example, but also because of the particular context of an Irish Aid Programme Country.

This submission should be read in conjunction with the main Trócaire submission from our Head Office in Ireland.

2. Progress Made

We warmly welcome the Irish Government’s decision to make Malawi an Irish Aid priority Programme Country and congratulate the Government on the steps to date in appointing highly qualified Irish Aid staff to oversee and review programme interventions. We acknowledge the added value from an Irish Aid country presence and the manner and extent of the engagement with the Malawian Government and with other Government Donors.

3. Changing context

Malawi has experienced sustained political, economic and social crises over the last 18 months. In addition the President of Malawi has alienated many of the sectors that were supportive of him during his first term in office, namely the Church, civil society, the international community, much of the private sector, and some of his own party members and government workers. This has multiple implications for the Irish Aid Programme in Malawi, which we refer to below.

4. Key Issues

Civil Society Space

Trócaire believes that a strong, independent and critical civil society (including an independent media) is vitally important to improving governance.

There are a number of lessons from the recent crisis in Malawi and the subsequent clamp down on civil society that in our view are relevant to Irish Aid's work in Malawi and other similar contexts in which it works¹:

- Civil society strategy and coordination are essential
- International linkages can help to build space
- Accountability to local constituencies matters
- Government is not a uniform entity
- There are opportunities to build space at the local level
- The influence of faith groups, in particular the Christian Churches, remains high
- Civil society is not well prepared to manage the security risks presented by the changing environment in Malawi

All of the above lessons revolve around questions of capacity of civil society organizations and their links to international bodies, local constituencies, faith groups, and moderate elements of Government. The development of civil society capacity, including its own internal governance capacity, is therefore a key issue for Trócaire and has been identified as a priority by our partners².

Recommendations:

- 1) We wish to acknowledge Irish Aid's contribution to civil society funding in Malawi, which is significant and welcome. We ask that Irish Aid continue to strengthen its support to Civil Society and seek to work with the Government of Malawi to respect and promote the role and independence of civil society in development.
- 2) We note with strong approval that Irish Aid commits more than 15% of its total expenditure to Governance and civil society projects. We recommend Irish Aid consider ensuring that the 15%

¹ These lessons are drawn from research commissioned by Trócaire and CAFOD on Civil Society Space, "Civil Society At Risk: Protecting and Enabling Civil Society Action" July 2011

² During a meeting on the 27th October 2011 in Lilongwe to develop an updated Trócaire programme strategy for Malawi our partners themselves identified the need to create a strong Civil Society network or 'social movement' to provide evidence for accountability, with a 'Governance Platform' to support coordination mentioned specifically as a suitable initiative to pursue. Faith-based organisations were also said to be particularly important to be included in such a network or Platform.

of expenditure figure is a fixed minimum proportion of total Irish Aid expenditure in all Irish Aid Programme Countries. It would also be helpful if Irish Aid were to spell out what they mean when they say funding to “civil society”. We recommend under this heading that Irish Aid only includes the building of civil society’s internal governance capacity and the direct funding to those organizations that are working on governance, human rights and media freedom.

- 3) We call on Irish Aid and the Irish Government to use its influence in the EU to work to champion the development of minimum standards for an enabling environment for civil society in developing countries, and for the Irish Government to speak out when civil society space is threatened.
- 4) We note Irish Aid’s perspective “that it is careful to use a mix of aid modalities in Programme Countries”, i.e. “budget support, sector support, projects, partnerships with NGOs - based on what is feasible in each case”³. We believe, in the context of the closing of civil society space in Malawi, that Government budget/ sector support should be under close review and we urge the Irish Government, through the fostering of even closer links between the political and development divisions of the Department of Foreign Affairs, to react quickly and courageously when there is notable deterioration in the political and economic governance in a country.
- 5) Finally we urge Irish Aid, in discussing the development of trade links between Ireland and developing countries not to lose sight of the fact that in many African countries, including in Malawi, many of the larger indigenous businesses that could be in a position to trade with Ireland are controlled by an elite that overlap with the political elites in country and that conspire to hold monopoly control over industries within the private sector.

Climate Change Adaptation

It is Trócaire’s general view that the Irish Aid White Paper should seek to deepen its climate change analysis in its overall assessment of development challenges.

Our analysis of the Malawi situation is shaped by a Trócaire commissioned two year household survey on Climate Change adaptation covering four countries, one of which was Malawi.

The research found that food security is a fiercely political issue in Malawi. While diversification is emphasised in Malawi through government policies such as their Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) and Agricultural Sector Wide Approach Policies (ASWAp) as a way of achieving food security and more recently as an adaptation measure we found that there is great disparity between this description and the actual results from the interventions offered.

³ From Irish Aid’s Consultation Paper on the White Paper Review

In particular, the description of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme as ‘a vehicle for crop diversification’⁴ contrasts sharply with its failure to provide sufficient subsidies for any seeds other than maize. One female focus group participant during the research explained that *‘the coupon is supposed to allow you access to MH18 [hybrid maize], pigeon peas, groundnuts and cow peas but these are not available here. You have to go to Balaka if you want these and the cost of travelling there is equal to the cost of buying the seeds here without the coupon’*.⁵

Much of the Government donor support for the funding of the FISP was based on the fact that it would promote crops other than maize.⁶ We commend Irish Aid for setting aside a proportion of its funding for FISP for the purchase of pulse seeds.

Nonetheless, the continued overall narrow promotion of maize through subsidisation does little to encourage small farmers to try out other crops and if anything reinforces the idea that maize equals food, therefore undermining the value of crop diversification in a changing climate.

Another finding from the research is that those people that are engaging in strategies to diversify crop production are only doing so following contact with NGOs that are promoting these approaches. However the research finds that there is a lack of appropriate and widespread training and technical support to ensure that a diversified approach is adopted more broadly.

Recommendation:

We urge Irish Aid to direct time and resources to work with the Malawi Government to ensure that there is coherence between their agriculture and Climate Change adaptation policies. Support to the Malawi Government to develop a climate change policy that is coherent with their Disaster Risk Reduction and agriculture policies would be particularly welcomed. In doing so Irish Aid could show the interconnected nature of all these challenges, showing how, in the case of Malawi, food security, soil depletion, and climate resilience are all interrelated.

HIV

The Irish Aid Consultation Paper of December 2011 asks if the issues it sets out, namely “hunger, fragility, climate change, basic needs, governance & human rights, and gender equality?” should be the development priorities for Irish Aid. We answer that all these issues are prevalent and critical in Malawi and we agree with the proposal to prioritise these issues.

⁴ Chinsinga et al. (2011) ‘The Political Economy of Adaptation through Crop Diversification in Malawi’ in IDS Bulletin Volume 42 Number 3 May 2011. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.: Oxford.

⁵ Female respondent, Chimdikiti, 8th September 2011

⁶ Chinsinga et al. (2011) ‘The Political Economy of Adaptation through Crop Diversification in Malawi’ in IDS Bulletin Volume 42 Number 3 May 2011. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.: Oxford.

However we strongly urge that Irish Aid also sustains its focus on the issue of HIV.

During the Trócaire meeting with our Malawi civil society partners in October 2011 our HIV partners said that HIV and Gender funding is decreasing in Malawi. They also noted that while there has been improvements in reducing the numbers of people with HIV in Malawi and Southern Africa more generally, that the HIV rate is almost 1 million people out of a population of 15.4million and that AIDS is still the leading cause of death among adults. They and Trócaire believe that access to ARVs is a matter of human rights and that there can be no limits on access because of lack of political will to release sufficient funds. We and they believe that, as results are just starting to show from increased investment, now is not the time to downgrade the funding for and prioritisation of HIV investment.

Recommendation:

We urge Irish Aid to maintain a prime focus on HIV as part of its White Paper commitments. This means continuing to support and advocate for the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria as one of the most effective aid delivery mechanisms currently available. We recommend that Irish Aid consult widely with Southern civil society, including in Malawi, before publishing and finalising their HIV Policy and Strategy. Trócaire in Malawi would be happy to help in any way we can in helping to facilitate this consultation.