

Submission to Consultation Process for Development of new Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021- 2024

Introduction

This submission will focus on the first two questions listed in the consultation document, i.e.

- How can Irish Aid support life-long learning and increase public understanding of and engagement with development and global citizenship issues as well as increasing awareness of the Irish Aid programme?
- Are there other groups or organisations we should seek to work with in order to build this awareness and engagement?

It focuses on the practice and benefits of twinning partnerships between local communities and schools in Ireland and the global south, and the positive impact such partnerships have on effective development education at local community level. I believe that development education in Ireland is losing out on the positive contribution that twinning partnerships could make if the practice was harnessed strategically and funded accordingly.

Twinning partnerships between communities in Ireland and in less developed countries generate mutual social, community, environmental and economic benefits. As local communities seek out and embrace new and cost-effective ways of mobilising resources and deep-rooted community support for projects in developing countries, twinning partnerships – parishes, schools, credit unions, St. Vincent de Paul branches, Lions Clubs, etc. – are common organisational structures. With the right vision, knowledge and know-how, some of these partnerships are very effective, well organised and have endured, whilst others are less so for a variety of reasons.

Twinning is about practical solidarity and the sharing of culture. The link is part of development education, the creation of grass-roots awareness of the SDGs, and the commitment of communities in Ireland to raising their sense of global consciousness and partnership between them and the global south. The human contact in a twinning brings the partnership to life for both communities and deepens their understanding and involvement.

Twinning partnerships can replace the linkage and solidarity between communities at local level in Ireland that our missionaries in their thousands provided for many decades and which ensured an enlightened understanding and commitment by Irish citizens to the country's overseas aid programme since its inception in 1974. This type of engagement and collaboration involves a whole community in various ways and levels. This inclusiveness serves to distil information in a very personal way about the needs of communities in the global south, and how proper analysis and evaluation of options are necessary in order to provide sustainable solutions and good practice in development interventions.

Twinning Partnership in Practice

Community partnership gives ownership and fulfilment to partners in Ireland. A good example of this is the twinning partnership between Spioraid Naoimh Parish in Cork and Turkwel Parish in Northern Kenya which was established in 2005. Details of the very direct and practical benefits of this inter-community relationship are set out in this article - <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/40279> - which I published in August 2020. The experience of this partnership illustrates the depth and the benefit of the relationship, and how

voluntary effort can be mobilised and contribute to a fuller understanding of development. It puts development education into practice in a very meaningful way at local level where it counts.

Other examples of successful twinning partnerships are the Westport – Aror Partnership (Kenya) in place since 1982, the Athenry – Simanjiro Partnership (Tanzania) in place since 2005, the Diocese of Meath schools twinning programme (10 schools) with schools in Myanmar, and on a smaller scale the Sacred Heart Parish in Waterford and Zwelihle in South Africa.

The Young Social Innovators Programme was extended to Zambia in 2015 as a direct result of the twinning relationship between a Presentation school in Carlow and a community school in Kaoma. What was a small seed sown through that partnership has sparked a programme of social innovation that, as it expands, has huge potential in building up a population of active and responsible citizens among the youth of Zambia.

Partnership America Latina (PAL) was set up in Dublin in 2007 to support the work of the Little Sisters of the Assumption in Latin America. Initially it provided support for disabled people visiting hospitals in Lima, enterprise development to create jobs to eliminate the cycle of poverty, and services for youth. Currently, it has enlisted the skills of citizens of Latin American countries living in Dublin to engage with and support projects back home. In addition to the benefits in development in Latin America, there are also benefits in social and cultural integration here in Ireland.

The significant benefits that twinning partnerships generate, not just in terms of development education but equally in development interventions, are brought about very cost effectively and with huge voluntary participation by local communities who are an integral part of the activities. It typifies community development at its best and appears an obvious arena for Irish Aid to utilise in its renewed development education strategy.

Institutional twinning, e.g. teacher training colleges could contribute very significantly to upgrading the quality of teachers in many developing countries, especially now when many of these countries are focusing more on investment in education, e.g. Ghana. Good quality education is critical in eradicating the cycle of poverty. An informal partnership relationship is *The Harambee Education Fund* which is an initiative of students and staff of IT Tallaght that provides secondary education scholarships to children living in needy conditions in Mukuru slum in Nairobi, and is strongly supported by the Kenyan Ambassador to Ireland.

The project - *Education Action Plan about Millennium Development Goals through Schools Twinning between North and South* - was co-financed by the European Union and coordinated by the University Ca Foscari of Venice. Its purpose was to educate youths and their families on sustainable development in order to modify their behaviours relative to the issues and difficulties faced by the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. Twinning was used here to create awareness and action by young people around the MDGs.

When Mr Redwan Hussein Rameto, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia met with the JCFAT in the context of its review of Ireland's aid programme in 2017, he spoke of Irish universities twinning with their Ethiopian counterparts. Professor Patrick Paul Walsh of UCD noted to the Committee 'the need to scale up the successful partnerships already in place and also to focus on teacher training'.

ESTHER Ireland uses the twinning model to foster effective north-south and south-south partnerships that can build capacity of the health workforce and health institutions. Through ESTHER Ireland, the HSE aims to facilitate Irish hospitals and other health institutions to engage in partnerships with similar institutions in less developed countries – Ref: http://www.esther.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Partnerships-Panorama_print.pdf and <https://www.irishaid.ie/news-publications/news/newsarchive/2016/july/tanzania-hospital/>.

The Benefits of Twinning Partnerships

Twinning partnership concept is very broad and adaptable to circumstances. The World Bank states: “Twinning is an instrument for building institutional capacity that has been used by many international development aid organizations.” CRS in the USA is one such organisation. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD) have had numerous positive twinning experiences. At the World Bank Institute, twinning has long been identified as an important business strategy for building strong local institutional capacity in its client countries. In 1971, the UN passed a resolution on twinning between cities in industrial countries and developing countries as a means of international cooperation.

At the business and enterprise level, twinning partnerships are possible, e.g. in exchanges focused on the transfer of skills in marketing and distribution in the food sector in developing countries. The World Bank defines twinning as a “process that pairs an organizational entity in a developing country with a similar but more mature entity in another country”, and recognises the method as one of its four primary technical assistance delivery modes, along with long-term advisors, short-term advisors, and training. The Bank uses twinning to transfer relevant operational knowledge between two organizations similar in function and structure. Learning and skills-sharing / knowledge transfer methods are used successfully by companies in the USA as their contribution to business enterprises in Africa and South America.

The total influence and impact of twinning partnerships – which can cross so many sectors - encompass global consciousness, solidarity, learning, networking, humanitarian and development aid in various forms, culture and values, human rights and social justice based on equality, mutual respect and dignity.

Schools Twinning

Nothing brings global learning to life or makes the classroom a more engaging and inspiring place for young people than the opportunity to learn, interact and collaborate with peers in other countries. International school partnerships encourage students to deepen their learning experiences through joint learning activities that explore global and sustainable development themes with international peers.

Pupils’ global learning competencies, communication skills and an appreciation for cultural diversity are reinforced through collaboration and provides motivation to put learning practices into action; making a difference in their community and the wider world. They also offer teachers the chance to share experiences and learn new practices from colleagues in other countries. Covid – 19 has shown how schools can use online tools to work together on projects and to share experiences and methods of teaching. This greatly enhances the communication aspect of a school’s twinning partnership.

The EU fosters school twinning through two programmes, i.e. a) *eTwinning* – a scheme which connects schools and colleges across Europe to develop collaborative projects and share ideas, and b) *Erasmus +* - a scheme for developing partnerships with schools and organisations to improve standards and the quality of teaching and learning in the European context. The EU recognises that twinning is a very important means to help people understand and develop a stronger sense of European identity, and to bring the EU closer to its citizens. The same principle can apply in the global north – south context.

Irish Aid, through WorldWide Global Schools, provides guidance and some funding support for school twinning partnerships. In the UK, much greater support and encouragement of twinning is provided through a range of programmes operated by The British Council. The Council says: “School partnerships are a great way to bring international education to life for young learners, and the benefits of doing joint projects with international schools are wide-reaching”. Those benefits include development education and cultural diversity amongst young people. On 12 August 2018, Inga Rhonda King, President of UNECOSOC tweeted: “Young people are CRITICAL to the implementation of the [#GlobalGoals](#)”.

Twinning can provide Deeper Engagement at Community Level

The White Paper stated: “A ‘whole of society’ approach to the SDGs demands a shift in how we communicate with and mobilise citizens about our development cooperation and humanitarian action, through development education, public outreach and deeper parliamentary engagement.” I suggest that twinning partnerships that engage whole communities at local level and are well structured and governed present unique opportunities to achieve that purpose. They have the same potential for public outreach into the future as that delivered by our missionaries in past decades, and which has been acknowledged by the state as having created a firm foundation of awareness and understanding upon which Ireland’s ODA was launched in 1974 and developed ever since.

Responding to my suggestion on twinning partnerships made to the JCFAT during its consultation on Ireland’s overseas aid programme in 2017, the Committee’s report (page 30) stated: “A further good example of improving development education activities was provided by my submission, referring to the positive effects of twinning partnerships between towns and cities, leading to ‘significant benefits in terms of exchanges at community level, and development awareness/ public education here in Ireland including a keener understanding of Ireland’s ODA, and practical support to less well-off communities in developing countries.’ This is an area where Irish Aid could provide increased levels of support.”

The White Paper stated: “Ireland has a vibrant NGO, missionary and development education sector, which will continue to play a critical role in implementing programmes, but also in creating public awareness and ownership of the Irish development programme, and in holding us to account for our work.” As the number of Irish-born missionaries decreases, so will their traditional influence at home in Ireland in the creation of local community awareness of development needs in the global south. However, I suggest that that lacuna can be filled to a significant degree by effective twinning partnerships.

As supported by the JCFAT, and based on the evidence of the missionary influence on awareness within local communities over many decades, I suggest that future development education strategy should be more supportive in encouraging twinning partnerships as a bridge-building mechanism which:

1. Has significant benefits in terms of solidarity, linkages, collaboration and exchanges at community level that create awareness and understanding of development and promote a just and more equal world, and
2. Provides very practical support to less well-off communities in developing countries such as the Westport – Aror Partnership which has contributed over €800,000.

Evidence suggests that the twinning concept is worthy of careful examination as a potential mechanism for engagement to maximise the impact in development education at the local community level throughout Ireland.