

# **Evaluation of the Irish Aid Ethiopia Country Strategy 2008-2012**

## **Regional programming - reality check and policy channel**

### **Learning Brief**

*Submitted by*



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## 1 Background

1.1 Ireland has been a development partner of Ethiopia since 1994 and the work of Irish non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and missionaries predates that. The support has been an important component of Irish Aid's global programme and is highly valued by the GOE for contributions to development at local, regional and federal levels. A prominent strand of the Irish Aid portfolio has been support directed through regional government and projects at regional level. Ireland has become associated with Tigray Region partly for historical reasons dating back to the 1984 famine, to the regional focus of Irish international NGOs and to early work when the aid programme started in 1994. In fact, they have been strongly involved with work in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) as well, but are better known for the relationship with Tigray. In the recent past from 2002 to 2004 out of a total programme of €77.8 million, 29 per cent was targeted at SNNPR and 23 per cent at Tigray.<sup>1</sup>

1.2 This Learning Brief has been developed as part of an independent evaluation of Irish Aid Ethiopia's Country Strategy Paper 2008 to 2012. The focus of the Brief is on assessing what added value the regional components contribute to the country strategy.

1.3 The aim of this short paper is to:

- Summarise and contrast the characteristics of the SNNPR and Tigray
- Review Irish Aid's experience in SNNPR and Tigray
- Assess the learning experiences provided by Irish Aid's engagement in SNNPR and Tigray and
- Provide a number of key learning points and possible ways forward

## 2 Evaluation questions

2.1 The terms of reference for the Ethiopia CSP evaluation included a specific question about aid modalities: *'How coherent and effective was the mix and range of aid modalities adopted?'* This was developed into sub-questions, one of which dealt explicitly with the influence of regional programmes, asking about the use made of information and learning from regional programmes to influence policy and partnerships (especially in Tigray). That theme is taken up in this Learning Brief.

## 3 Characteristics of SNNPR and Tigray regions

3.1 Under Ethiopia's federal system of government, the country is divided into nine regions. Ethiopia is a large and diverse country and the two regions differ in terms of their history, ecology and socio-economic development.

3.2 SNNPR, is in effect, as the name suggests, a confederation of ethnicities. Over 50 different ethnic groups make up this most diverse of regions. SNNPR is one of the largest regions in Ethiopia, accounting for around 10 per cent of the country's land area and is home to almost 20 per cent (16 million) of the country's population, many of whom are dependent on farming small holdings of just 1 - 1.5 hectares.<sup>1</sup> Many areas are food insecure. The region has very diverse agro-ecological conditions: arid, semi-arid and hot in southern lowland areas and tropical and humid in the highlands of the north and northwest. The peoples of SNNPR are equally diverse. The Gurage are known for their business acumen and productive agriculture

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<sup>1</sup> Development Cooperation Ireland (2005) Aid Modalities in Ethiopia, Box 4.5

while the Surma follow a largely nomadic lifestyle, to give just two examples. Cycles of violence in the early part of the 20th century have contributed to the inter-ethnic conflict found in some of the area today.

3.3 Tigray on the other hand, is a smaller region, ethnically much more homogenous and with a higher degree of political cohesion. The pattern of government adopted by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government has its political and cultural roots in revolutionary Tigray<sup>ii</sup> and its recent direct experience of war. Many of the top leaders in the dominant political party and the army are from Tigray.

3.4 Agro-ecologically, Tigray is diverse and includes highland and lowland areas with varying annual rainfall. Drought and food insecurity have been recurrent occurrences throughout much of the region in the last 50 years and much of the land area is characterised by soil loss and erosion.

3.5 The Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey, 2011<sup>iii</sup> presents a number of poverty indicators by region. Tigray, in comparison with SNNPR has a higher percentage of the population in the highest wealth quartile than SNNPR (23.7 per cent as compared to 16.2 per cent) but also has a larger percentage in the lowest (poorest) wealth quartile (25.8 per cent compared with 21.7 per cent).

3.6 Recent results from WCBS<sup>iv</sup> highlight a number of further characteristics. Compared to other regions, citizens in Tigray have the best public services in many respects but they also expressed the greatest concerns about unfairness and corruption.

3.7 However it should be noted, particularly for SNNPR but also for Tigray, that figures presented on a regional basis should be treated with caution. The diversity within each region means that regional figures are inevitably generalisations. Extreme poverty as well as comparative wealth is found in both regions.

## **4 Irish Aid's involvement in SNNPR and Tigray**

4.1 A major modality for programme implementation for Irish Aid from 1994 to 2002 was five Area Based Programmes (ABPs), two in Tigray and three in the SNNPR. The former Zonal administrative units were the focal point for these ABP engagements. Following the Government of Ethiopia's (GOE) decentralisation policy and the phasing out of the Zonal administrative structure, administrative and financial management functions were devolved to woreda level. This necessitated a change to Irish Aid's approach to regional assistance. In SNNPR this led to a focus on health and HIV/AIDS and some support to livelihoods. In Tigray the support was concentrated on livelihoods plus a block grant to the Regional Government. Although the regional programmes are well aligned with the thematic pillars of the CSP, there are no specific statements about a regional focus nor an explanation of a strategy for continuing engagement with the regions. Without a strategy, it is not quite clear what the purpose of a regional programme is.

### *Modalities of Regional Programmes under CSP (2008-10)*

4.2 In terms of modalities, Irish Aid has continued to be guided by the practice of i) aligning with locally-owned priorities, programmes and systems; ii) supporting the development of "one plan, one budget, one report"; iii) participation of Irish Aid advisers in joint planning, monitoring and reviews, and iv) mainstreaming of, under the 2008-12 CSP, gender, HIV/AIDS, governance and the environment.<sup>v</sup>

4.3 In SNNPR this led to the provision of a grant (€0.65 million over the CSP) to the SNNPR Bureau of Finance and Economic Development (BoFED) for disbursement to the bureaus of health and education. In addition, a number of CSOs promoting sexual and reproductive health

and livelihood enhancement, are supported (DKT, Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia, SOS Sahel smallholder livelihoods, Farm Africa Eco-region sustainable management and rural women's empowerment; Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Association.

4.4 As in SNNPR, Irish Aid support to Tigray employs a range of modalities. Primary amongst these in terms of monetary value is the block grant to BoFED: €3 million in 2008/9 and 2009/10 and following the financial crisis to €2 million and €1 million in 2011 and 2012. Support to Tigray is supplemented by a number of smaller projects (Mekelle University M.Sc. programme, a tourism project, Women's Association of Tigray – loans for small businesses, HIV/AIDS support, poverty monitoring, sweet potato promotion, agricultural operational research, a UNICEF pilot cash transfer project) and a small liaison office.

### *Objectives of Regional Programmes*

4.5 The current regional partnership agreement (2010 to 2012) between Irish Aid and SNNPR has three objectives.<sup>vi</sup> Documents for individual CSOs also list objectives relevant to their intervention area.

- To increase and improve capacity of front line and mid-level staff in health and HIV and AIDS.
- To improve access to and quality of health services for the poorest, especially neonatal, maternal and child health.
- To increase capacity in the education sector to respond to HIV and AIDS.

4.6 CSOs supported in SNNPR generally work in a small number of woredas<sup>2</sup> within the Region.<sup>vii</sup> Over and above the initiatives and objectives listed above are contributions made to federal programmes: Protection of Basic Services (PBS), Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP) and MDG Health Fund are expected to contribute to the development of SNNPR as part of country-wide programmes.

4.7 For Tigray, authors of a recent evaluation state<sup>viii</sup> *“It was not an easy task to identify the discrete Tigray Programme from the 2008-2012 Country Strategy Paper itself”*. The authors highlight that there are no explicit objectives for the region: they identify eleven *de facto* objectives from different documents relating to the country strategy and former Tigray region Strategy Programme. These range from improving the enabling environment for rural growth; through harmonising assistance with Government of Ethiopia's systems and providing support to improve them; to learning from experience at grassroots level, assessing the impact of national programmes on actual services and feeding that experience and first-hand knowledge into improved policy dialogue at regional and national levels.

4.8 The last objective under the Tigray programme – to learn from experience at grassroots level, to assess the impact of national programmes on actual services and to feed that experience and first-hand knowledge into improved policy dialogue at regional and national levels – has been frequently raised in discussions. This objective is frequently given as the reason for Irish Aid having regional programmes. The title of SNNPR Mid-term Review – Learning from the Ground – also reiterates this importance of learning in the context of Irish Aid's support to the regions.

4.9 A further objective that has been mentioned (and also applies to federal level support) is the facilitation through additional funds, for innovation. This is most likely to be possible where funds are additional and not off-set. Offsetting is where the Federal Government reduces grants to regions pro rata against aid funds received directly for regional programmes. The aim is to maintain the federal target for share of funding allocated to each region.

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<sup>2</sup> Except DKT and Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Association (CCRDA) who are working over a wider area. SOS Sahel has also worked in three woredas on red pepper as an income diversification crop for SNNPR. The project has since been scaled up to 26 woredas.

## 5 Lesson learning opportunities

5.1 The regional programmes present a number of opportunities for enhanced learning. By looking at differences and similarities between regions, this will not only help Irish Aid and its partners deepen the understanding of entry points and constraints to implementation but findings from SNNPR and Tigray are also expected to enhance systematic learning from regional experience into programmes supported at the federal level.

5.2 To structure the opportunities for learning within this document and as they are expected to be cross-cutting across all projects and programmes, Irish Aid Ethiopia's four areas of mainstreaming have been used: Governance, Gender, HIV/AIDS and the Environment, to develop areas of enquiry for comparison between regions. As suggested in the evaluation of CSP (2012), M&E might be considered as a fifth mainstreaming area. Some examples of questions that might be asked to facilitate learning are given in Box 1 below. It is not the intention to answer the questions exhaustively here. Rather they are seen as a guide to the type of questions that might be explored. However Irish Aid experience is briefly discussed below.

### Box 1 Example questions of learning from Irish Aid Regional Programmes

#### Governance

1. What are the linkages across Irish Aid's work within a region – are they coherent with a view towards learning?
2. What are the linkages with programmes supported at the federal level – how has and how can experience gained at the regional and sub-regional level be fed into federal programmes. How does this differ between regions and what can be learnt from these differences?  
*These are the key question for IAE given the rationale for having regional programmes and also applies to subsequent questions*
3. The nature of partnership – what are the elements that have either contributed to or held back satisfactory progress? How do these differ between the two regions?

#### M&E

4. Are the constraints to effective monitoring and evaluation the same or different between regions? Are there any lessons that can be learnt?

## 6 Key findings from Irish Aid's regional experience in Ethiopia

*Q1: What are the linkages across Irish Aid's work within a region – are they coherent with a view towards learning?*

6.1 A recent mid-term review of the partnership in SNNPR,<sup>ix</sup> noted that Irish Aid's support and partnership approach are highly valued by both government and civil society partners and initiatives supported contributed to the objectives of the CSP. However the effectiveness of the programme was undermined by a lack of cross-programme linkages. The review saw a lack of awareness and collaboration between partners working in related areas as a missed opportunity.

6.2 The absence of a coherent Tigray programme statement has already been noted. A recent review<sup>x</sup> also highlights a related point: *"It is recommended that Irish Aid rebalances the thematic team structures with clear leadership, management and oversight responsibilities so that the Tigray programme is understood in its entirety, and sufficient effort is put into relationship management ..."*

*Q2. What are the linkages with programmes supported at the federal level – how has and how can experience gained at the regional and sub-regional level be fed into federal programmes.*

6.3 From discussions that were undertaken as part of the CSP (2008-12) evaluation, experiences from Tigray were said to have provided learning and credibility used in dialogue at federal level. Seven areas of influence are listed in the Tigray review (Box 2).<sup>xi</sup>

**Box 2 Areas of influence arising from support to Tigray Region**

- Integrated watershed management experience has helped transform national policy
- Experience with food security influenced the design of PSNP
- Public Health Care strategy
- Irish Aid experience with the Decentralisation Support Activity laid public financial management foundations for design and implementation of PBS
- Influence on DFID and the World Bank over regional approaches
- Longitudinal poverty monitoring
- Field experience from Ethiopia influencing organisational policy processes within Irish Aid

6.4 As well as the positive examples of influence given above, missed opportunities were described in the Tigray review *“there is a weak link between the support to national level work (such as CCRDA’s HIV programme) and Tigray even though 53 per cent of the annual CCRDA (Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations) grant of € 700,000 is spent in Tigray. The same is true of the social accountability component of Protecting Basic Services Phase I where three Tigrayan non-state actors (REST, Women’s Association of Tigray and Adigrat Diocesan Catholic Secretariat) implemented pilot approaches to demand-creation. Senior staff noted that Irish Aid had missed an opportunity, through the Joint Steering Committee, to link learning from this investment with the quality of basic service provision in Tigray supported by Irish Aid through the Regional Block Grant”*.

6.5 From discussions and documentation, partner awareness of Irish Aid’s support to SNNPR was less apparent although Irish Aid’s former area-based programme work in the Sidamo area of SNNPR was praised. A key reason for maintaining programmes in both regions should be to allow comparison between regions. As pointed out elsewhere, the political history of Tigray is unique. This means that what will work in Tigray will not necessarily apply elsewhere. Triangulation with experiences in SNNPR is therefore important in providing policy lessons but this is under-developed to date.

*Q3. The nature of the partnership – what are the elements that have either contributed to or held back satisfactory progress? How do these differ between the two regions?*

6.6 The nature of the partnership with Tigray regional government has inevitably been influenced by the provision of the block grant to the Bureau of Finance and Economic Development. It has enabled Irish Aid to have access to and some influence over regional and woreda level planning and implementation in order to test out the successes and challenges of the federal level instruments.<sup>xii</sup>

6.7 With the loss of funding, incentives for both government and Irish Aid to maintain a strong partnership will be reduced and the advantages in terms of strong relationships may diminish over time. As such the justification for having a regional programme in Tigray will need to be reassessed and the links between implementation at regional and sub-regional levels to the federal level made more explicit.

6.8 As a region perceived to have a number of advantages through their links with the ruling party, and to respond to the needs of the poor as articulated in the current goal and outcomes of the CSP, greater explicit targeting on the poorer geographical areas of Tigray would allow Irish Aid to counter some danger of reputational risk, a long-standing debate within Irish Aid. Tigray



is seen as atypical of the rest of the country having higher capacity and greater freedom to innovate. In addition, Tigray is neither the poorest or least developed region in the country although of course there are large variations in poverty levels within the region.

6.9 However, at this point in time, social capital is strong, Irish Aid knowledge of the region is high and Tigray still provides opportunities for innovation and partnership that are more difficult in other regions. Until this is assessed as no longer the case, the Irish Aid partnership with Tigray outweighs the disadvantages. To maximise developmental impact on the poorest, careful targeting within Tigray could be considered. Careful targeting will also be required within SNNPR though for slightly different reasons. The size and diversity of SNNPR means that Irish Aid cannot provide support to all types of area within the Region. If a focus on nutrition is enhanced, this may be according to agri-ecological zoning as well as poverty. In SNNPR, such targeting may also need to compromise with practicalities due to distances involved and accessibility constraints. But some strategy or guidance with regards to targeting is required in both regions. To maximise systematic learning and the provision of policy lessons, comparison with another region is required.

6.10 Capacity and commitment among SNNPR government partners appears to be lower than that found in Tigray. In SNNPR, a joint agreement outlines partner responsibilities and although the situation is said to be improving, scheduling contact by Irish Aid with senior regional government people has been difficult. This has resulted in Irish Aid undertaking tasks that were seen as the responsibility of its Bureau partners. The lack of a representative office, unlike in Tigray, could be a contributory factor here. Quality of data also remains a problem and is given as one reason for the Dutch stepping out of its partnership with the regional Bureau of Health.<sup>xiii</sup> Thus progress has been slower in SNNPR than in Tigray. This reflects the particular value put on the block grant in Tigray but also the realities of many of the regions in Ethiopia. In SNNPR, turnover of government staff has been high, the size and diversity of the region inevitably puts greater strain on available staff, and communications are more stretched. As such, experiences from SNNPR (as well as Tigray) should provide valuable lessons for assessing the appropriateness of policy and quality of data at federal level, even though achievements in terms of results may be lower.

6.11 In SNNPR, the recent MTR believes that lesson learning “*from the ground*” for input into policy dialogue has been compromised because the structure of the partnership did not really serve the purpose but that with modification to partnership modalities, learning around the translation of federal-level policy into actions at the regional and woreda levels can be enhanced.

6.12 In both regions, Irish Aid has established collaboration with agricultural research centres: Hawassa University Agricultural Research Centre through SOS Sahel in SNNPR, and Tigray Agricultural research Institute. CCRDA has had programmes in both Tigray and SNNPR. PBS and PSNP are operational in both regions. All have the potential to provide comparisons and systematic learning.

6.13 However the emphasis of Irish Aid’s support has differed in the two regions, with a much greater focus on health in SNNPR. Interventions are in response to needs of the regions and to the CSP. Within a new CSP that focuses on fewer areas of comparative advantage and interest, such as nutrition, consideration should be given to gaining experience from interventions in both regions.

#### *Q4. Are the constraints to effective monitoring and evaluation the same or different between regions? Are there any lessons that can be learnt?*

6.14 The experience of ‘*ground truthing*’ is appreciated by Irish Aid partners working on federal-level programmes. Joint supervision visits by Irish Aid have focused, though not exclusively, on those regions where support has been provided. Thus Irish Aid’s experience of a



region, Irish Aid's participation on supervision visits and the capture of learning through its own M&E is of value beyond Irish Aid.

6.15 Evaluations are carried out for each of the regions. However as highlighted in the last Tigray review "*Despite the comprehensiveness of the Tigray Regional Support Programme documents Phase II and III, there does not appear to have been an overarching monitoring framework for reviewing the achievements and challenges of the Tigray programme in all its parts*". This would also appear to be true for SNNPR.

6.16 The CSP is based on pillars or themes and linking an overarching framework for each region to a thematically-based CSP is not straightforward. However given the importance of the regional programmes, a theory of change, logic model and strategy for each region with a corresponding M&E framework would not only clarify regional justifications but also allow stronger linkages between interventions in each region. An accompanying narrative or schematic could be used to highlight where regional interventions link to the CSP.

6.17 As noted above, capacity at many levels is higher in Tigray than in SNNPR. The recent SNNPR mid-term review raises concerns about the quality of data from the SNNPR health sector. This is an important issue which needs to be addressed for providing policy lessons at both the federal and regional levels.

6.18 Additional questions to develop this approach further might include, for example: **Gender** How does gender relate to poverty within the region? Are the constraints to tackling gender issues the same or different between regions? **HIV/AIDS** How does CCRDA's experience in SNNPR compare with that in Tigray? **Environment** How does environment relate to poverty within the region? Are the constraints to tackling environmental issues the same or different between regions?

## 7 Lessons learned

7.1 Within the phasing out of the block grant to Tigray, the dynamics of Irish Aid's relationship with the region are likely to change over the longer term. However Irish Aid's relationship and knowledge of Tigray remains strong and provides opportunities for innovation and the achievement of results there.

7.2 However, an association with Tigray does hold reputational risk; Irish Aid has to be clear about its strategy there. A documented strategy would not only assist Irish Aid in defence against detractors but also allow it to be clearer about its targeting within the region. Clearer targeting within the region, at those areas that suffer highest levels of poverty and/or under-nutrition would relate to Irish Aid's poverty focus and explain further Irish Aid's rationale for working in what some see as a more privileged region.

7.3 Irish Aid's ability to provide support at a number of levels, including the grass roots, is an important reason for maintaining regional foci. This has provided lessons and policy input at the federal level. To maximise this aspect of the Regional Programmes, Irish Aid needs to be able to draw lessons and make comparisons between regions. For a number of reasons, SNNPR has proved a more difficult region to engage with. However, comparing and contrasting experiences between SNNPR and Tigray, should add depth to Irish Aid's knowledge and credibility. This is an area that could be enhanced, even to the extent of conducting evaluations that cover both regions. Supporting some interventions that share common characteristics in terms of theme (e.g. livelihood enhancement for improved nutrition among the poor) or institutions (Women's Associations) will allow systematic learning between regions. This systematic learning could be enhanced through evaluations covering both regions.

7.4 One of the conclusions is that effective engagement with the regions is triggered by the nature of resources availed to the regions. One of the reasons Irish Aid is more engaged with the

Tigray region is because of the windows of support provided which have up to now not been subject to offset. On the other hand, the engagement with SNNPR is more complicated since the regional health bureau receives support which is 100 per cent offset and there are less incentives to engage with Irish Aid on policy issues. Additional resources for supporting the capacity of the region (e.g. strengthening the M&E system) could provide a more effective strategy.

7.5 Four key lessons emerge from the experience to date:

- ***To create added value from a regional focus the programmes need to be planned as a coherent whole and have arrangements for lesson learning such as joint reviews, commissioned comparative analysis and periodic events to bring together development partners from each region.***
- ***Lessons derived from regional experience have contributed to dialogue at federal level but this has been opportunistic and has not made much use of comparisons between SNNPR and Tigray.***
- ***The decision to work in a region should be based on clarity of purpose rather than historical relationships.*** For Tigray this means that to maximise developmental impact on the poorest, careful targeting within Tigray is needed. To maximise systematic learning and the provision of policy lessons, comparison with another region is required. For SNNPR, the nature of the partnership needs to be reconstructed to enable lesson learning.
- ***A theory of change, logic model and strategy for each region with a corresponding M&E framework would not only clarify regional justifications but also reveal opportunities for stronger linkages between interventions in each region.***

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- <sup>i</sup> DFID. Intervention Summary Support to WFP Emergency Relief Operations in Ethiopia, 2011
- <sup>ii</sup> Revolutionary democratic state-building: party, state and people in EPRDF's Ethiopia, Vaughan, S. 2011. Journal of East African Studies Vol. 5, No. 4 November 2011, pp 619-640
- <sup>iii</sup> Ethiopia Health and demographic Survey, 2011 CSA and University of Maryland
- <sup>iv</sup> Woreda and City Benchmarking Survey IV, 2011. GoE and World Bank
- <sup>v</sup> Review of Irish Aid's Regional Support to Southern Nations Nationalities People's Region (SNNPR) in Ethiopia. Final Report undated, 2007?
- <sup>vi</sup> Learning from the Ground. A Midterm review of the Partnership between Irish Aid and the SNNPR, 2009-2012. 2012. Suer, F. and Lendebo, E.
- <sup>vii</sup> Learning from the Ground. A Midterm review of the Partnership between Irish Aid and the SNNPR, 2009-2012. 2012. Suer, F. and Lendebo, E.
- <sup>viii</sup> Building on solid foundations: A Review of the Tigray Region Support Programme 2006-2010 for Irish Aid, 2010 Kidane, C. and Jones, B.
- <sup>ix</sup> Learning from the Ground. A Midterm review of the Partnership between Irish Aid and the SNNPR, 2009-2012. 2012. Suer, F. and Lendebo, E.
- <sup>x</sup> Irish Aid 2010: A Review of the Tigray Region Support Programme 2006-2010. By Beverly Jones and Chekol Kidane.
- <sup>xi</sup> Ibid. Page 12
- <sup>xii</sup> Building on solid foundations: A Review of the Tigray Region Support Programme 2006-2010 for Irish Aid, 2010 Kidane, C. and Jones, B.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Francesca Stuer, discussions as part of CSP (2008-12) evaluation, April 2012