



## Irish Aid South Africa Country Strategy Programme (2008-2012) Evaluation

*In early 2012 Irish Aid commissioned an independent evaluation of the Irish Aid South Africa Country Strategy Programme. The evaluation was carried out by two consultants from IOD PARC. The following is a summary of the main findings of this evaluation.*



## Purpose of the Evaluation

South Africa is one of the African “Programme” countries supported by Irish Aid through multi-annual programmes of assistance. All Country Programmes are externally evaluated regularly so as to assess progress and impact and identify any necessary adjustments.

This evaluation examined Irish Aid support to South Africa under the Country Programme in the period 2008-2012. The purpose was to provide an independent assessment for all interested parties of the extent to which Irish Aid support contributed to a reduction in poverty and inequality. The overarching evaluation question examined was: *to what extent did the Irish Aid country strategy contribute to the reduction of poverty and inequality in line with the Government of South Africa’s policies and targets?* Within this overall question, the evaluation examined five standard criteria for evaluation of this kind, namely programme relevance to South African needs, effectiveness in meeting targets, efficiency in terms of resources used, sustainability beyond the funding period, and ultimate impact.

## Evaluation Approach and Method

The evaluation team had in-depth discussions with Irish Aid in Ireland and South Africa, as well as interviews with representatives of the National Treasury of South Africa (Irish Aid’s formal partner) and a wide range of development partner bodies in South Africa responsible for implementing the programme. The evaluation team also used a wide range of documentation provided by Irish Aid and its partners, including studies commissioned by Irish Aid South Africa. The evaluation team collected and analysed information with the following three perspectives in mind:

- the overall strategy adopted to implement the Programme;
- the three strategic objectives of the Programme, (i.e. improving pro-poor service delivery in Limpopo Province, with specific focus on water/sanitation and education, reduction of HIV and AIDS and mitigating impact, preventing gender-based violence and reducing impact);
- the specific sector and geographical areas of engagement of the Programme.

Particular attention was given to examining two distinct aspects of the Programme, firstly, the benefits of having a stand-alone component on gender-based violence and secondly, the approach of supporting collaborative funding mechanisms to foster civil society partnerships which in turn improve partner results.

## Key Findings and Conclusions

**Programme design:** The evaluation found that the design of the Irish Aid Programme was carefully focused and showed a high level of consistency with Irish Aid policies and priorities. However, Irish Aid has no specific policy position on working in emerging middle-income countries such as South Africa to guide planning. Targeted results were specified using guidance and planning tools that were being rolled out by Irish Aid at the time it was prepared. Indeed, South Africa was one of the first country programmes to engage with this “results based” management approach.

**Response to needs:** The country strategy responded to the broadly-identified needs in Limpopo Province. However, in practice it has taken time to get a better understanding of what works or what does not work in the ‘delivery chain’ of the Province; where improvements could make a difference to the quality of and access to service provision for the marginalised. The country strategy proved to be increasingly relevant to the specific needs of civil society organisations for collaborative working.

**New areas of engagement:** There has been solid progress in addressing a relatively new area of engagement for Irish Aid – gender-based violence. This is an endemic issue in South Africa. Irish Aid activity has led to emergence of a strong platform for addressing gender-based violence at national level and in Limpopo Province.

An innovative way of channelling funds has been set up through a Joint Gender Fund mechanism on HIV and AIDS. Irish Aid played a critical role in establishing this fund. At national level Irish Aid helped to give prominence to the issue of how vulnerabilities particularly affect women and children.

**Funding mechanisms:** The Programme has used a wide range of funding mechanisms consistent with the Government of South Africa’s policies and priorities. In most cases the use of a range of funding mechanisms proved effective when engaging with NGOs, but has generally proved to be less effective when working through Government.

**Innovative partnerships:** The emphasis of Irish Aid’s support to South Africa is on using innovative partnerships and approaches aimed at improving the lives of the most marginalised and vulnerable. There have been some important successes in this regard through the work in Limpopo Province (where over 70% of total programme expenditure was allocated). Of particular importance are the forging of effective and high potential collaborative partnerships between civil society organisations in the HIV and AIDS and the water sectors. Both sectors are important for improved service delivery outcomes. Support is also starting to make a difference within the education structures in Government, especially at the critical interface between local education officials and School Governing Bodies.

**Changed environment:** The successes of the Programme were achieved in the context of a changing operating environment. This included the economic crisis in Ireland which resulted in significant (over 50%) budget reductions for South Africa from 2009 onwards, and in terms of the challenging context of implementing programmes through the Provincial Government in Limpopo. In 2011 the South African Government took over the direct running of five Provincial Departments, including Education and Health.

**Effectiveness and efficiency:** In terms of efficiency of operations, the evaluation found a good, effective and efficient use of the human resources within the Embassy and examples of good support from headquarters. Overall, there is a stable and good quality team showing flexibility, cross working and appropriate use of skills. There is evidence that teams may have struggled at times to adopt the strategic view demanded by an ambitious programme.

**Level of achievement:** Given the strengths of the original country strategy design, the funding mechanisms chosen and the results focus, as well as the partnership between Irish Aid and the Government of South Africa, higher levels of success might have been anticipated. However, it was difficult to predict the deteriorating situation in Limpopo Province and how this would affect the operations of Provincial Government Departments, especially their ability to embrace new and innovative ways of working.

**Provincial level learning:** Over the period of the programme Irish Aid continued to support high quality work in Water and Sanitation, HIV and AIDS, and Education which had started prior to 2008. The main change was to work with government in a different way. While results across the portfolio were not achieved at the desired levels, there is value in broader learning from the Limpopo experience. The Country Programme has provided a much clearer picture of what is needed or what is possible through donor engagement and how the key to unlocking service delivery for poor communities in provinces like Limpopo may rest with the building of management competence.

**Overall assessment:** The overall assessment is that through a five year engagement with over €28 million of budget, the Country Programme has made a useful direct contribution to some specific areas of the South African Government's development agenda. This is particularly so in strengthening the HIV and AIDS response and in fostering a platform for civil society to actively engage in building and sharing knowledge and experience on how best to tackle gender based violence.

## **Lessons Learnt and Recommendations**

1. Ireland's experience in South Africa highlights particular challenges associated with providing aid to a middle-income country. There is a need for Irish Aid to look at how it engages in a middle-income country. Whilst South Africa may have more resources and better systems at implementation level compared to a low-income country, there may nevertheless be an equally important need for continuing institutional and capacity development support. Moreover, the challenges for South Africa in establishing fully functioning institutions, especially in those areas of the country that were particularly disadvantaged by apartheid, and continue to be so, may in themselves be greater than those faced in a low-income country.
2. To ensure optimal use of funds, it is important to have a realistic view of actual Government capacity at different levels to absorb funding, implement programmes and sustain initial learning or system improvements. This influences decisions on different funding mechanisms. Irish Aid made a considerable effort with the Provincial Government in Limpopo, however, while there have been successful engagements with individuals there, the majority of the time has been taken up with operational minutiae. As a result there has been very little organisational impact at strategic levels.
3. The Irish Aid experience in the years 2008-2012 demonstrates that relatively small amounts of funding judiciously used by carefully selected Civil Society Organisations, complemented by technical adviser inputs, can have a significant

impact both in achieving immediate results and in promoting longer-term sustainable organisations at the micro level. This combination also provides gains for national level CSOs.

4. The Irish Aid programme is distinctive in the way it has positioned an initiative against gender based violence at a distinct “pillar” of the programme. This enabled the allocation of dedicated human and financial resources to direct interventions, although on a relatively modest scale. It set specific targets on gender (albeit in the area of gender based violence only, rather than more broad based gender equality and women’s empowerment). While having this as a pillar raised the profile and policy attention to the issue within the Irish Aid programme, there is no evidence that it led to more comprehensive mainstreaming of gender across other areas of the Irish Aid programme. The message for country programmes is that having a dedicated gender pillar or programme is not the same thing as mainstreaming gender across the whole programme. It is important to note that mainstreaming gender still requires human and financial resources and a clear results-focused strategy.
5. The evaluation found evidence of a clear commitment to ‘managing for results’ in the programme but its execution has been inconsistent. While the Embassy team has engaged actively with the approach and there have been strong elements of ‘learning by doing it’, monitoring and reporting still appear to be a major challenge. The absence of a monitoring framework for the joint European Union – South Africa Strategy complicated the development of a results-oriented monitoring framework for the Programme that was harmonised with the EU.

### **Implications for the Future**

The results achieved and the valuable learning provides a platform for moving forward. In terms of *next steps* Irish Aid has the basis for a niche role in South Africa, building on some of the successes and learning of the programme. The report recommends concentrating either on one agenda or else a very limited number of agendas.

One such opportunity would be a continued emphasis on the intersection of HIV and AIDS and gender-based violence. This would support South African organisations to facilitate the linkages between national and local delivery, strengthening accountability mechanisms that build local constituencies for change and which are linked effectively to formal legislative processes. It would be important to complement this with support for the National Treasury in overseeing the performance of national level institutions and programmes.

This evaluation found no immediate and/ or natural points of intersection between the ‘development focus areas’ of the Irish Government Africa Strategy 2011 (e.g. enterprise and entrepreneurship) and the experience/ relationships/ poverty focus within the current country strategy. This would suggest a need for further exploration of the context and of Irish Aid’s comparative advantage in meeting the development challenges of South Africa in the future.

If you would like a copy of the full evaluation report please email your request to [eau.queries@dfat.ie](mailto:eau.queries@dfat.ie)