AWEPA Submission to Irish Aid White Paper Review, April 2012

Introduction

The purpose of this submission is to give a concise account of policies which the AWEPA Irish Section has developed and supported in its work in recent years. It is hoped that this should form a useful set of recommendations for inclusion in Irish Aid's White Paper Review.

This submission has been authorised by the leaders of the AWEPA Irish Section, by the leading AWEPA Members from each of the main political parties and from the technical group of Independents. Furthermore, as per its letter to Ms. Nora Owen on 27th February 2012, the international leadership of AWEPA has entrusted AWEPA's submission to the AWEPA Irish Section.

The AWEPA Irish Section is fully supportive of this review and its consultative process. It greatly appreciates this opportunity to make its submission. As national public representatives dedicated to upholding the profile of Africa, AWEPA offers its own perspective as a cross-party group of committed and engaged Irish parliamentarians.

Key Issues

1. Aid Effectiveness and Parliaments

The AWEPA Irish Section has devoted the greatest part of its strategic efforts in recent years to ensuring greater aid effectiveness. In the course of its work leading to the 2008 High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, AWEPA's delegation discovered an accountability gap in international aid processes whereby parliaments were being bypassed or unengaged. Consequently, AWEPA campaigned for the role of parliaments, North and South, to be recognised and it called for greater participation by parliamentarians. As a result, the specific role of parliaments "in the oversight of development processes" was endorsed by the 2011 Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness.[1]

AWEPA has received significant support from the Irish Government, Irish Aid and from leading NGOs in establishing this principle. Each party has recognised the accountability gap in question: the democratic role of parliament in checking and balancing government's actions in the area of overseas aid had been eroded. Furthermore, each party has identified the value of redressing this situation and, in partnership with civil society, creating a more representative, integrated system of aid oversight.

It is envisaged by AWEPA and Irish Aid that this new system of oversight would link donor to recipient countries by engaging parliamentarians from both countries, and also reach to local levels where ordinary citizens (constituents, parents, local journalists) could validate aid's effectiveness. There is an added value to this process whereby Irish AWEPA Members could testify as to the value of Irish overseas aid to the Oireachtas, to their constituents and to the Irish media.

The AWEPA Irish Section's Members have already visited a series of Irish Aid programme countries and met with fellow MPs in order to establish aid effectiveness 'joint-monitoring teams'. The Section intends that its work over the coming years will prioritise these efforts, working in small teams with parliamentarians from Irish Aid's programme countries to track aid from its source in Ireland to its delivery points in Africa.

It is hoped that the Irish Aid White Paper Review will endorse the principle of parliamentary oversight as an essential component of aid effectiveness, as already done by the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. It is further hoped that the White Paper will describe in some practical detail, as outlined here, how Irish parliamentarians could create greater transparency, openness and effective monitoring of aid at the country levels of Irish Aid's programme countries.

In its 2006 White Paper, Irish Aid recognised the importance of supporting parliaments as vital democratic institutions in Africa. The AWEPA Irish Section hopes that this commitment by Irish Aid will be renewed in the White Paper Review and extended to incorporate parliamentarians' role in overseeing aid effectiveness.

[1] Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, Article 21, P6.

2. The Millennium Development Goals

As a corollary of its efforts to ensure the greatest possible effectiveness of aid, the AWEPA Irish Section supports the full implementation of the UN Millennium Development Goals. It calls on the Irish Government to honour its financial commitment to reaching 0.7% GNI spending by 2015.[2] The AWEPA Irish Section takes the view that the Millennium Development Goals are of critical importance to a generation's development aid efforts and, should they fail, a public promise by the West to save and transform the lives of hundreds of millions will have been broken.

The AWEPA Irish Section fully supports Irish Aid's position that poverty reduction through the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals is its main objective and it hopes that this objective will be re-emphasised by the Irish Aid White Paper Review.[3] The AWEPA Irish Section will continue to advocate publicly, as it has done in recent years, for the full implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and for the Irish Government to meet its full financial commitment.

The AWEPA Irish Section also looks forward to contributing to improving and reviewing the Millennium Development Goals where necessary, for example in the quality of primary school education and in improving access to essential medicines by poor people.[4]

[2] This position is informed by the AU/NEPAD African Consensus and Position on Development Effectiveness of September, 2011.

[3] Irish Aid White Paper Review Consultation Paper, P5.

[4] MDG 8, Target 8.E: "In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential medicines in developing countries." The 2011 UN report "Strengthening the Global Partnership for Development in a Time of Crisis" highlighted the existence of large gaps in the availability of medicines in both the public and private sectors, as well as a wide variation in prices which render essential medicines unaffordable to poor people.

3. Human Rights

As an organisation founded to end apartheid, AWEPA is first and foremost a human rights organisation. Furthermore, AWEPA takes the view that human rights are integral, and should never be seen as inimical, to international development.

To quote from the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UD), AWEPA Members believe in "fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom".

During its work in recent years, the AWEPA Irish Section has addressed a number of issues of particular concern and deteriorations of human rights standards in Africa. It hopes that this section may provide useful suggestions for inclusion in the White Paper Review and it fully endorses Irish Aid's statement that "Human rights are at the centre of development".[5]

The AWEPA Irish Section advocates a policy of positive engagement on human rights concerns by Ireland's official representatives abroad. Over many years of campaigning on human rights abuses in Zimbabwe - on which AWEPA had two cross-party resolutions passed in both the Dáil and Seanad - and more recently in cases in Uganda, Malawi and Ethiopia, the AWEPA Irish Section has sought assurances that Ireland had officially raised its concerns bilaterally, and at EU and international levels.

The conviction behind this policy is that a contradiction between human rights and development aid priorities should not be allowed to emerge. The AWEPA Irish Section does not advocate an uncooperative approach on human rights concerns but one of consistent, positive engagement by Ireland's official representatives.

In all cases, Ireland should remain engaged where there are difficulties at the interface of development priorities and human rights concerns. In particular, where there are allegations of manipulation of aid for political purposes, both Ireland and the AWEPA Irish Section must be actively engaged to gain assurances that aid is fairly distributed. The possibility of manipulation of food aid, in particular, threatens immense damage to aid's reputation and to human rights. Full scrutiny should be exercised to counter these concerns in any of Irish Aid's programme countries.

In Zimbabwe, the AWEPA Irish Section has learned that attendance by international diplomats at court cases where there are human rights concerns can lead to positive outcomes. The AWEPA Irish Section advocates that Ireland's representatives should attend court cases in Africa where there are human rights concerns and where it is felt this could have a positive bearing.

There are great pressures emerging in a number of African countries for better standards of elections and electoral safeguards. Just as events in North Africa and the 'Arab Spring' represented a rising demand for greater standards of democracy and governance, elements of protest in many sub-Saharan African countries at recent elections contained the same demands. AWEPA supports the

[5] Irish Aid White Paper Review Consultation Paper, P16.

role of parliaments and good governance in bolstering development. It also recognises that genuine elections by free voting procedures are a human right (UD, Article 21). Recently, the AWEPA Irish Section elected a new Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Elections, Michael McNamara TD. It looks forward to supporting Irish Aid's efforts in support of genuine elections in Africa by all effective and impartial means.

A core human right is the right to decent work (UD, Article 23, MDG 1B). Exploitation of workers in existing industries, including suppliers to Irish companies, must be combatted in order to defend the reputation of private sector investment.[6] Furthermore, in the context of expanding industrial production in Africa, there is an opportunity for Irish Aid to assist Africans in embedding better labour and environmental standards in advance of such expansion. Along with the extractive industry sectors, the prospect for greatly increased agricultural production in Africa dominates predictive models. For example, the World Bank book "Awakening Africa's Sleeping Giant" envisages transformative change across the continent, with mass agricultural production sweeping from west to south-east Africa.[7] In order to prevent historical patterns of exploitation, labour and environmental safeguards must be built into these development models. Irish Aid has a great opportunity to advocate in the interests of many millions of Africans' human rights here.

Deprivations of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, security of person, protection against arbitrary arrest, torture and cruelty, and the right to fair and equal treatment before the law are specific human rights concerns which the AWEPA Irish Section has encountered in many African countries. There has also been a rising tide of persecution and abuse of people on the basis of sexual orientation in several African countries. This has tended to coincide with repressions of other sectors of societies traditionally judged to represent a threat to ruling interests, such as members of civil society organisations, trade unionists and professionals. Once again, the AWEPA Irish Section greatly endorses Irish Aid's statement supporting implementation of human rights standards at national levels, in particular with regard to women, children and people with disabilities.[8] It hopes that, along with its own Members' efforts, Irish Aid and Ireland's official representatives will be active in opposition to all of the abuses identified above.

[6] Media reports in Ireland have profiled child labour in Africa, as well as the sexual exploitation of women workers in tea plantations. See "The Real Price of a Cup of Tea," Irish Times Weekend Review, 11 June, 2011.
[7] "Awakening Africa's Sleeping Giant - Prospects for Commercial Agriculture in the Guinea Savannah Zone and Beyond," World Bank/IBRD (2009).
[8] Irish Aid White Paper Review Consultation Paper, P16.

4. Gender Equality

Strategies to create greater gender equality should permeate all discussions about human rights. The AWEPA Irish Section hopes that Irish Aid will reinforce its 2006 White Paper commitment to mainstream gender considerations into all its planning. There has been real progress made in the last number of years, for example in the number of girls attending primary school, and the AWEPA Irish Section urges the continuation of these policies.

The AWEPA Irish Section believes that Irish Aid's gender equality policies should incorporate a commitment to improving women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. In Irish Aid's programme countries, AWEPA Irish Members have witnessed these enduring problems and the huge benefits Irish Aid-funded projects are having in local communities. The AWEPA Irish Section would encourage Irish Aid to support the availability of affordable and effective contraception throughout Africa and consider ways in which adequate family planning can be assisted. In a climate of reduced revenues, the use of indicators and specific plans in this regard would be highly effective. The role of education on these issues is also critical.

The AWEPA Irish Section views this reproductive rights-led approach, based on dialogue with local communities and authorities, as the most effective response both to women's empowerment and the pressures of increasing population growth. The AWEPA Irish Section welcomed the report that Ireland made to the Commission on Population and Development in 2011, as well as its reiterated commitment to the International Conference on Population Development (ICPD).

Gender-based violence is an issue which the AWEPA Irish Section strongly supports the continuation of Irish Aid's policies to oppose. The AWEPA Irish Section supports Irish Aid's policies to counter gender-based violence in all its contexts. It also calls attention to the particular problem of girls' safe passage to and from school where they may be vulnerable to attack. The AWEPA Irish Section is also conscious of the high-value skills of the Irish Army to provide military-to-military training in gender-based violence prevention, a resource which may be under-utilised by Ireland in its engagement with Africa.

Each of these policy proposals are intended as applicable to Sub-Saharan Africa and Irish Aid's programme countries but also to North Africa, where there are greatly increased opportunities for women's empowerment throughout the region following its pro-democracy upheavals. In support of these democratic developments, the AWEPA Irish Section hopes to see effective gender-strengthening strategies extended to North Africa by the efforts of Irish Aid and its partners, including the EU.

5. Trade and Investment

The AWEPA Irish Section supports all efforts towards creating greater shared and sustainable growth in Africa. In the context of the merging of the Government departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Department's 2011 Africa Strategy, the AWEPA Irish Section is anxious to explore and support all means of harnessing investment in Africa as a force for genuine economic development.

Irish industries have a huge range of skills and expertise to offer Africa. African agricultural products often lack access to markets and Irish agri-business and co-operative companies may become pivotal in this regard. Given Ireland's traditional knowledge of agriculture, Irish AWEPA Members have consistently demonstrated leadership on this issue, and on the issue of food security, in international discussions with their European and African AWEPA counterparts. The AWEPA Irish Section hopes that this engagement with rural development can be extended to open discussions with Irish food and agricultural companies investing in Africa. Once again, AWEPA's Irish parliamentarians have a wealth of knowledge and experience to offer in increasing the effectiveness of Irish agricultural investment in Africa, and ensuring that it is of mutual benefit.

The AWEPA Irish Section would like to see this engagement extended to other creative Irish industries. Across the private, public, semi-state and higher educational sectors, AWEPA's Irish Members have consistently encountered initiatives and goodwill towards working with Africa. Clean Energy and Environmental Solutions, Information Technology and New Media, Medical Research and Food Science are examples of Irish industries and research bases where there is outstanding potential for trade, investment, skills-sharing and partnerships in Africa.

It is important to recognise further factors of significance in hampering economic development in Africa. Inter-African trade is an area on which Irish Aid and the AWEPA Irish Section have worked together in the context of the East African Community, and on which the AWEPA Irish Section supports the continuation of Irish Aid's work. Similarly, the AWEPA Irish Section strongly endorses efforts to strengthen local trade within African countries and regions. Furthermore, measures to improve tax systems to increase domestic resource mobilisation are critically important to sustainable African economic and social development. The AWEPA Irish Section is eager to support Irish Aid's work in linking its tax initiatives to governance by using AWEPA's network of African parliamentarians at national, regional and local levels, and engaging them in this process.

In rural development, comparative research firmly indicates that smallholder growth in Africa has been undermined by lack of infrastructural development.[9] The AWEPA Irish Section welcomes Irish Aid's efforts to advocate for much greater public and development spending on agriculture in many Irish Aid programme countries and for the creation of fixed public spending targets. Based on its Members' recent experiences in Africa, the AWEPA Irish Section supports Irish Aid's efforts to promote state-led investment in support of smallholder agricultural producers and women farmers. Along with its emphasis on private sector growth and innovation, and mindful of the issue of land security for smallholders and pastoralist farmers alike, the AWEPA Irish Section actively supports Irish Aid and its NGO partners' balanced and effective policies on pro-poor, rural investment.

[9] See, for example, the recent research of Developmental Regimes in Africa at www.institutions-Africa.org

6. Global Issues and Multilateral Engagement

Over the course of its engagement with Africa, the AWEPA Irish Section has found that politics and economics in Africa are often predominated by external forces. Many of the most important issues, from climate change to food security, to domestic resource mobilisation, require international action at multilateral levels. The AWEPA Irish Section urges Irish Aid, the Irish Government and its official representatives to play a dynamic and progressive role in multilateral negotiations affecting Africa. Although Ireland is a small country and a relatively small donor, it has assumed a greater international role by defending the world's poorest peoples.[10] Our reputation as an actor on the world stage must be upheld and reflected by our multilateral actions.

Climate change threatens to obliterate all of the humanitarian achievements in Africa and cause unprecedented disaster. Here there is a compelling logic for Ireland to act urgently at multilateral levels to call for reduced carbon emissions. The AWEPA Irish Section has met successive witnesses to global warming's effects in Kenya, Somalia and Sudan, and it fully supports adaptive measures and additional financial transfers to Africa to cope with climate change's effects. However, in AWEPA's view, there is no greater example of the need for coherence of policy across government departments than in the cause of reducing carbon emissions globally. Along with its efforts at parliamentary level, the AWEPA Irish Section looks forward to supporting Irish Aid's efforts to establish a stronger stance by Ireland internationally and at all multilateral levels on climate change.

In a broader sense, there is now a much greater appreciation of the complexity of issues which restrict economic development in Africa. Both in political and public consciousness, the complex arrangements of international agreements on trade, tax and debt demand greater transparency and democratic accountability. In this sense, the AWEPA Irish Section welcomes the contributions of NGOs to opening up this process, most prominently that of Debt and Development Coalition Ireland. On these issues, the AWEPA Irish Section calls for greater consultation between Ireland's representatives to the International Financial Institutions, the Oireachtas and the Irish public.

Deficits of transparency and accountability are also evident in relation to other multilateral institutions, above all the European Union. Empowerment of Oireachtas parliamentary committees to scrutinise and engage with EU development policy is an essential democratic requirement, as envisaged by the Lisbon Treaty. Furthermore, given the volume of Ireland's contribution to EU development aid, the AWEPA Irish Section aims to foster closer cooperation between Irish MEPs and the Oireachtas to help oversee and explain EU development processes. Ireland's upcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the negotiations for the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014-2020 are critical junctures in this process.

On international trade, the AWEPA Irish Section calls on Irish Aid and the Irish Government to do its utmost to ensure multilateral and bilateral trade agreements protect the poorest people and most vulnerable markets within African countries, and that these agreements and are fairly and transparently negotiated. Once again, greater oversight of these processes is required by

[10] In his public acknowledgement of Ireland's global role in Dublin last year, President Obama referred to "a nation that met its responsibilities by choosing to apply the lessons of [its] past to assume a heavier burden of responsibility on the world stage".

parliaments both in Europe and Africa. In the course of its work on the EU-ACP Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), the AWEPA Irish Section encountered Government resistance to allocating a sufficient level of Oireachtas oversight to EPAs, given the importance of these agreements to so many millions of African lives. Led by the current Irish President, Michael D Higgins, and in consultation with African parliamentarians, the AWEPA Irish Section established a number of principles on international trade agreements. The AWEPA Irish Section believes that major multilateral trade agreements should not be rushed through the Oireachtas without full debate and voting, that 'aid for trade' revenue streams are verified, and that Ireland should not sign trade agreements which undermine vital tax bases in African countries, in direct contravention of policy coherence for development.

Other significant issues requiring multilateral solutions, which the AWEPA Irish Section hopes will be reflected in Irish Aid's White Paper Review, are foreign land purchases in Africa for commercial or speculative gain, the adverse effects of speculation in food commodities on international financial markets, corporate 'transfer-pricing' and the safe regulation of African extractive industries' products and profits. Effective actions pursued by Irish Aid and the Irish Government at EU, FAO and UN levels to address all of these issues will be supported by the AWEPA Irish Section.

7. Public Ownership

Along with its efforts to uphold the profile of Africa and bolster real democratic standards, the AWEPA Irish Section actively supports the concept of greater Irish public ownership of our country's engagement with Africa. The AWEPA Irish Section has welcomed the work of Irish Aid and the Irish NGO community in reaching out to the Irish public in information, entertainment and educational activities. It supports the continuation of these kinds of projects and reiterates its support for the consultative efforts of this White Paper Review.

The AWEPA Irish Section further re-emphasises its intention to build a more inclusive system of aid effectiveness, linking parliamentarians and publics in both Ireland and Africa, as its great priority in the coming years.

In the course of its activism over three decades, the AWEPA Irish Section has found inspiration in many of the experiences its Members have had of Africa, and in their encounters with people living and working there. The outstanding skills and dedication of many Irish people working in Africa, and their African colleagues and partners, deserves to be reflected by a higher level of public awareness in Ireland. Apart from the necessity of results-based accountability, the AWEPA Irish Section looks forward to supporting all efforts by Irish Aid to represent the narratives of life in Africa, and the stories of Ireland and Irish people's contributions there, in the years ahead.

The AWEPA Irish Section will continue to foster dialogue and discussion of Africa issues at all levels of Irish society. It supports development education initiatives by Irish Aid and Irish NGOs. It also advocates a higher profile for Africa, and Ireland's engagement with Africa, throughout the Irish education system and in Irish school curriculums.