

SUBMISSION TO THE IRISH AID EXPERT ADVISORY GROUP

1 COMPOSITION OF IRISH AID EXPERT ADVISORY GROUP (IAEAG)

Insofar as the role of the expert group is to give guidance to the Minister responsible for Irish Aid and it is specifically requested to provide an “oversight” role in the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid, the composition of the group warrants comment

Whereas the appointment of Nora Owen as chairperson is to be welcomed, the fact that the terms of reference and the 45 page guide to interested potential contributors to the review were all in place before she was appointed, coupled with the fact that the members of the expert group were already appointed, raises questions. For example, is the appointment of the now retired Director General who was responsible for policy and management of Irish Aid, during the period under review, an appropriate member of this group? He has recently been appointed as Chief Executive of past President Mary Robinson’s Foundation for Climate Justice.

He is also accompanied by the second Secretary General at the Department of Finance, which gives a vested and weighty influence to the public sector/civil servant category which is unlikely to have an objective perspective on current policy.

In a joint opinion piece in The Irish Times (31st November 2011) Tom Arnold Chief Executive of Concern International and Mary Robinson recommended “revising biofuel policies so as to balance the potential benefits of biofuel with the negative impact on food and feed markets and climate change achieving sustainability in the global food system.” These recommendations are both long term, if they are at all achievable

There is a certain irony in their statement “gender is a key focus from an agricultural and food and nutrition security perspective” particularly as women and their children are the first victims in the population explosion as predicted by the forecasters.

The theoretical skills of professors from Cork, Dublin and London coupled with a consultant from Uganda comprises the group thus highlighting the absence of any commercial expertise which denies the terms of reference for the department which latterly was also given responsibility for the development of trade with developing countries.

2 SIMON CUMBERS MEDIA CHALLENGE FUND

This is a mechanism of using Irish Aid funds of €280,000 in 2007, 8 and 9 and €250,000 in 2010 a total of €1.09 million so as to influence attitudes predominantly toward African communities and encouraging “radio, photographic, print and new media “ to publish articles on topics as diverse as “Globalization, poverty, education, health, migration, nomadic peoples, environment, sustainable development, international trade, democracy, governance, agriculture, refugee flows, sustainable development, war and conflict, local development,

HIV/AIDs” and the role of Aid programme. Because all projects are intended for an Irish audience, an Irish link would be valuable (ref report for Irish Aid year 2 of-3 may 2009).

The outcome has subsidised the media eg The Irish Times, Sunday Times, Evening Echo, Irish Independent, Irish Examiner, Farmers Journal, Sunday Tribune, Sunday Business Post, Irish Daily Star, Observer, Guardian, RTE Radio and TV and a host of local media and magazines generally in encouraging a range of professional opportunists (ref report for Irish Aid year 2 of 3 2009).

In particular the fund financially aided The Irish Times foreign correspondent Mary Fitzgerald by approximately €20,000 to write a series of articles for The Irish Times and also assistant editor Fintan O Toole who wrote so glowingly about his visit to Africa that he was featured prominently in the annual report of Concern International.

It also funded an article by David Ralph (Irish Times Dec 8th 2011) which was critical of the Tanzanian government in leasing 600,000 hectares of farmland to enhance food security and boost the State’s coffers. Such an opinion is contrary to all professional opinion that it appears there is little or no editorial oversight from the Simon Chambers Fund in writers that it funds.

3 SUAS AND IRISH AID

Probably the most intriguing linkage is the funding association between Irish Aid and SUAS, a registered charity with a bias towards re-education in Ireland and developing countries (f.o.i sourced data).

This enterprise received over € 1.2 million between 2006 and 2009 from Irish Aid

They work with 6 partners in schools in West Bengal, India and Nairobi and Mombasa in Kenya.

They claim that their “programme has grown from providing short term volunteers with ad-hoc capacity building to a more structured integrated approach” “volunteer programme fundraising incorporates the introduction of a deposition acceptance and the increased fundraising requirement to participate on the programme due to reduction in the programme funding.”

In the 3 year strategy the current objective is to recruit 84 volunteer s who would undergo 3 weeks of thematic preparation, including skills training, contextual understanding, culture partnership leading to a 10 weeks work placement (including 1 week dev.ed. Workshop – facilitated at the UN).

Presumably the majority of the candidates are trained teachers who mainly volunteer during normal school holidays. This is a reasonable assumption insofar as “to date 540 volunteer have spent a total of 24,000 days working with our partners” (ref section 3/7 c.s. Fund).

In addition, the Irish Aid volunteering centre paid €50,000 to a consultant from SUAS to provide “interim administration” for the Simon Cumbers media fund in 2009 and also another payment of €56,050 to SUAS for provision of guide services for the Irish Aid Information centre.

SUAS was a founding member of INDI (the Irish Network for Development and International Education) currently working in partnership 50/50 with Trinity College Centre for IT. Education on a team based constructionist learning model (bridge 2 college) for introduction into secondary schools in Ireland

It is interesting to note that neither in the terms of reference for Irish aid expert advisory group or for any of the documentation associated with SUAS is there any reference to the population planning or to the implication of population forecasts

Ireland as a sovereign country participated in and agreed to the issues in the 1994 ICPC conference in which the commitment stated “all couples and individuals have a basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and have the information, education and means to do so”(ref UNPIN).

This commitment was repeated in UN FPA fact sheet 2005, also in World Health Organisation 75th World Health Assembly 2004 and in UNDP State of World Population 2011.

Ireland has **renege**d on the issue of family planning and has as a deliberate policy ignored the UN DSE statement on what influences fertility 2011 “family planning is much less readily available in Africa than it was in Asia. By some estimates a quarter of married women want contraceptives and cannot get them. That reflects reduced aid for family planning.in the past 15 years and political ambivalence about cutting fertility in Africa itself.” Studies have shown that in countries such as Brazil and Mexico, where a cafeteria approach to the choice of contraceptives, offering the full range, has been adopted, fertility rates have plummeted.”

The deliberate omission of any reference in the Irish Aid policy documents or in the Irish Aid funded NGOs to the implications of population forecasts, particularly in sub Saharan Africa, or the total exclusion of any reference to population control/planning from its range of policies, indicates the influence of Catholic ethos which applies the philosophy of Pope John Paul II who declared the “intrinsic evil of contraception”.

Surely in light of medical advances where here in Ireland the ‘morning after pill’ is available to women without prescription (and welcomed by the pharmacists association) such facilities should be the greatest demonstration of gender equality by sharing with the females in developing countries the equal right to choose the number and phasing of their pregnancies.

The only public reference to the issue was by Minister Jan O Sullivan before she was transferred to another ministry when she wrote in The Irish Times in the context of reproductive health care. She said that this is a global issue. In 2011 “some 215 million women worldwide lack access to safe, effective and affordable forms of contraception. Up to half a million women die in pregnancy and childbirth each year. This is simply unacceptable.”

Sadly her successor Minister Joe Costello has remained completely silent on this and has apparently accepted the status quo with the inevitability of the continuing mother and child death toll.

This situation cannot be allowed to continue and should at the very least be in the public debate arena

The promised review of Irish Aid policy must surely take into account the more immediate needs than climate control as championed by Mary Robinson and her organisation Climate Justice and the agricultural reform aspiration of Tom Arnold CEO Concern Worldwide

When a developing country has not the capacity to produce essential food or provide health resources and has a forecast of increasing population, and currently relies or depends on aid organisations, then a policy of some form of population planning is desirable, if not the rate of child birth mortalities and mothers dying in childbirth will not only continue but will rise in numbers.