

# Response

## Introduction:

Children of God Relief Institute – Nyumbani was founded 20 years ago in response to the plight of abandoned HIV+ children through both a residential facility currently caring for 115 children and a community-based care program, currently caring for 3,149 children. In 2004, an outreach was started, through creating a Village, for family groups of children ‘left behind’ because their parents had died as a result of the HIV pandemic and for the other ‘left behind’ generation, destitute grandparents. Currently Nyumbani Village cares holistically for 91 families each living in their own house and each family headed by a grandparent who cares both for biological and other grandchildren. Education for the over 900 children is provided through the Village Primary, Secondary and Polytechnic schools.

## Progress:

Insofar as I can gauge living in Kenya for the past 43 years, the Irish Government has been outstanding in implementing the White Paper commitments. I am aware, however, that there are cutbacks happening now.

## Changing context:

I quote the initial commitment in the White Paper which is both inspiring and right and just:

**First and foremost, we give aid because it is right that we help those in greatest need. We are bound together by more than globalisation. We are bound together by a shared humanity. The fate of others is a matter of concern to us. From this shared humanity comes a responsibility to those in great need beyond the borders of our own state. For some, political and strategic motives may influence decisions on the allocation of development assistance. That is not the case for Ireland. For Ireland, the provision of assistance and our cooperation with developing countries is a reflection of our responsibility to others and of our vision of a fair global society.**

I sincerely hope that Ireland will remain faithful to this commitment despite the changes in the Irish domestic economic scene as well as in the global context. Those of us in the developing world are acutely affected by the world economic recession; in particular, those who were able to survive just above the poverty line have fallen below it. In our community-based care program, for example, instead of a mother/father providing two meals a day, they can only provide one. The need to provide food support for such families under our care has escalated in the last year and half. As a world, we stand to fall greatly behind implementing the Millennium Goals if international aid is cut.

## **Key Issues:**

I strongly believe in the adage: ‘Give a person a fish and they will eat for a day; give a person a fishing rod and they will eat for life.’

I also strongly believe in ensuring that **all** human beings can enjoy their basic rights.

I would encourage the Irish Government to focus their support in these areas. The support the Children of God Relief Institute – Nyumbani received from Misesan Cara, which enabled us to build a new medical diagnostic laboratory, means that we can offer HIV related testing not only to our children but also to the wider community at affordable costs. This is empowering us to help take effective action in health care and in controlling the HIV pandemic.

The Irish Government could also prioritize ensuring food security through agriculture technical assistance, especially in the area of water.

## **Ways of Working:**

My experience over the 43 years I have been in Kenya is that support to faith-based organizations has been more effective in reaching the poor. Faith-based organizations are characterized by great commitment among the members and their non-profit ethos ensures that economic support is utilized in the best way possible. They are also the groups that reach out into the inaccessible areas of any country.

Sister Mary Owens I.B.V.M.