

Introduction:

I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the call for submissions to Irish Aid's White Paper Review Consultation. I am a recent graduate of both development and global health here in Ireland and as such I am only too aware of both the situation that the Irish government, and thus the Irish people, find themselves in. Additionally, my work in development, as well as my recent studies have also provided me with significant insight into the challenges that the world's poorest and most vulnerable people experience on a daily basis. While we here in Ireland face new challenges and certain difficulties, the poor, living in low income countries in the global south, face graver challenges than we, here in Ireland, could ever comprehend.

Progress Made: *Has the Government been successful in implementing the commitments contained in the White Paper on Irish Aid?*

It is well recognised (and well documented within the Consultation paper) that significant progress has been made over the past six years since the White Paper was launched. Irish Aid has kept commitments on a number of issues including focusing on fragile states, such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, two countries not long out of conflict and two of the poorest countries in the world, but two countries where democracy is budding and where development is having the greatest noticeable impact on the lives of the people.

A continued focus on human rights issues and the promotion of civil society, facilitating advocacy and local, home-grown solutions to challenges and governance, rights and democracy issues. Further, the highly commendable provision of untied development assistance, thus ensuring that the poorest countries can gain most from the assistance the Irish people provide, should continue.

The creation of a Hunger Task Force and a hunger envoy has demonstrated the Irish government's commitment to eradicating hunger globally. Further the dedication of 20% of the budget to hunger-related issues is a welcome one as is the commitment to focus on the key causes of many of the underlying problems facing the global poor.

HIV and AIDS, as a significant underlying cause, in much of Eastern and Southern Africa, parts of Asia, and increasingly in Western Africa, of many of the challenges facing countries, is an important issue to focus on. The commitment by Irish Aid, through the government of Ireland, to focus on HIV and AIDS and other communicable diseases is admirable and highly profound. HIV and AIDS, while slowly steadying over the past few years, roughly the same amount of time as this White Paper, continues to pose a threat to the development of low-income countries. The ability of the poor to overcome obstacles and escape a perpetual cycle of poverty is severely hampered by the ability of this virus to cause so much destruction – physically, socially, politically and economically. Further, the establishment of HIV and AIDS as a cross-cutting issue has been successful and should thus remain and become fundamentally entrenched within the make-up of programmes developed for Irish Aid funding.

Ultimately, I accept much of the progress made through the White Paper over the past six years and anticipate seeing similar commitment to the global poor coming out of this consultation process on the White Paper.

Nevertheless, there are areas in which greater commitment could be made. While the economic crisis has resulted in significant cuts across most Government budgets, cutting of development assistance to those most in need, to the poorest and most vulnerable people in society, increasing their risk and vulnerability, will have dire impacts in low-income countries. Though we may feel we are in crisis we are nowhere near the crisis that the poor experience on a daily basis. We are nowhere near losing our lives, experiencing difficulties in accessing water, for example, nowhere near experiencing diarrhoea on a weekly basis, nowhere near at as much risk of contracting HIV due to, among numerous other things, negative rainfall shocks resulting in being forced to engage in high-risk behaviour to provide for oneself and family members. The cuts in the development assistance budget will have limited impact on the overall experience of the Irish people as they get on with their lives in times of austerity but it will significantly impact those who are most in need and most marginalised within our global society.

Changing Context: *What are the implications of the changes in the global and domestic context for the Government's aid programme in the future and how will these affect current priorities?*

It is noted that much has changed in the past six years both globally and domestically. The global financial and economic crises, increased food and fuel prices, environmental degradation, climate change and the seemingly increased frequency and severity of natural disasters. Similarly, while issues have been put on the global agenda other issues seem to have lost focus. HIV and AIDS, once an issue of focus globally, has, due primarily to the global financial crisis and increasing focus on other pertinent issues, such as hunger, has almost fallen off the agenda altogether.

Recently the Global Fund to fight HIV, TB and Malaria suspended Round 11 due to lack of donor funding commitments, a decision unprecedented and unparalleled in the ten-year existence of the Global Fund. The suspension of Round 11, while a mechanism was put in place in an attempt to meet current funding commitments, will ultimately result in the poorest and largely vulnerable people, those at most risk of contracting HIV and/or dying of AIDS-related illnesses due to lack of access to treatment, will suffer most. This funding shortfall threatens recent progress made in preventing new HIV infections and increasing access to treatment. HIV remains a critical risk and vulnerability particularly for the poorest and most marginalised people. Now is the time for the Government of Ireland and the Irish people to demonstrate continued commitment to protect the extreme poor from the devastating consequences of a new surge of HIV and AIDS. In Uganda recently HIV prevalence has once again crept up. We must ensure that this does not become a regular occurrence across sub-Saharan Africa.

Further, as an underlying cause of many issues affecting people living in low-income countries and as a cause and maintainer of poverty, HIV and AIDS can and will ultimately negatively affect the outcome of all the Millennium Development Goals in low-income sub-Saharan African countries and the outcomes and sustainability of Irish-funded programmes, unless HIV is dealt with effectively.

Key issues: *How should the Government respond to the key issues of hunger, fragility, climate change, basic needs, governance & human rights, and gender equality? Are there other issues? Given the limited resources and the need to focus these, which issues should the Government prioritise in its future aid programming?*

It is welcoming to see the extent of focus the Government of Ireland aims to prioritise following this White paper review. The issues consist of some of the most pressing challenges facing the poorest and most vulnerable people in our global society. While, understandably not all issues can be addressed due to the need to focus and the limited funding available for all pressing challenges facing the poor.

However, certain issues could have been given greater priority of place. The term 'basic needs' is very general and a thorough definition of this is required. Hunger, a key issue for the Government would ultimately come under the term basic needs, one would think. HIV and AIDS, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Education, Food and Shelter are some of the primary issues affecting ability to meet basic needs. While 'Food' would be included under the key issue of Hunger I feel the others (to a lesser extent Shelter in a non-emergency context) necessitate greater emphasis. If the Government is continue its focus on the lowest-income and most fragile countries these are the main issues faced by populations and focus on these issues will ultimately increase their livelihood and ability to escape the 'clutches of poverty'.

While understandably given there are limitations to funding available for development there is a need to prioritise. This prioritisation, however, must focus on the needs of the poorest, what they need most and the underlying causes affecting their ability to gain access to basic services, to live a life free from persecution, discrimination and abuse. While I would recommend the inclusion of HIV and AIDS as a priority issue for the Irish government due to its ability to affect all aspects of the poor's lives, I would hope that the Government of Ireland will, at a minimum, ensure that HIV and AIDS continue to be mainstreamed throughout programmes, with a move away from now defunct awareness raising, towards actual prevention education and support for care and treatment. HIV activities should form significant components of programmes and move towards an integrated programming approach. Further, the Government of Ireland should continue to support HIV and AIDS programming internationally, both through supported programmes, international fora and multilateral organisations where pooled funding increase efficiencies and impact.

The Government should continue, though, to provide leadership internationally by finalising and publishing the HIV and AIDS Strategy; maintaining the commitment to spend €100 million annually on HIV and AIDS and other communicable diseases; ensure the inclusion of People Living with and Affected by HIV and AIDS (through the GIPA principles) on local, national and international issues impacting their lives; promote the Human Rights of People Living with and Affected by HIV and AIDS; and ensure active engagement and participation of civil society, including associations of people living with HIV, in Irish Aid-related processes thus demonstrating accountability.

Ways of Working: *How can the Government further strengthen its ways of working in delivering an effective aid programme, with a view to delivering real results in poverty reduction?*

The Government of Ireland should reassert its focus on the lowest-income countries and on those most in need, including people living with and affected by HIV and AIDS.

Ensure that at a minimum, HIV and AIDS are mainstreamed throughout programmes, moving away awareness raising towards concrete actions. HIV activities should form significant components of programmes and move towards an integrated programming approach. The Government of Ireland

should become global leaders in the mainstreaming and integration of HIV and AIDS into all programmes, thus demonstrating its commitment to this key issue internationally.

Affirm that the Government of Ireland will include and engage with local and international civil society organisations in the design, development, monitoring and evaluation of Irish development-related policies and programmes.

Finally, a coordinated approach with European partners is recommended to increase efficiencies and global impact. Working with donor partners in Europe could facilitate the creation of specialties, with partners specialising in one or two specific areas and all partners working together in a coordinated approach. This, I feel, particularly in the current economic climate would be the most productive and efficient use of resources, capacity and thus increase effectiveness of global European (as well as specifically Irish) development programmes.

