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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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Comments provided in good faith in this Response to the Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid are informed by over fifteen years commercial and industry experience working internationally, over ten years participating in and contributing to high level international taskforces and expert groups and over ten years not-for-profit experience working in strategic partnership with governments in Africa.

### 1.1 IIMC Profile

IIMC is a technology, consulting and research organisation headquartered in Ireland. IIMC designs and delivers policy, technology, consulting, research and community building solutions that support ICT adoption at national, regional or international level, and organises Ministerial-level Technology Research Conferences supported by the European Commission that bring together key stakeholders from government, industry, research and civil society to share knowledge and experience. Core areas of technological, research and process expertise include: eGovernment, eDemocracy & eParticipation; eHealth; eInclusion; Technology Enhanced Learning and eSkills.

IIMC leverages Network Architectures, Living Labs methodologies, Network, Smart and Virtual Organisation principles and Co-Creation/Participatory techniques to bring together the right stakeholders and skill sets required to address difficult challenges. Leveraging international good practices, IIMC takes account of cultural, infrastructural, legislative and socio-economic differences through necessary adaptation and supporting collaborative ownership by key stakeholders.

Paul Cunningham (President & CEO) was the primary author and co-creator of the National eSkills Plan of Action for the Department of Communications, Government of South Africa. Paul contributes to a number of high level international taskforces and expert groups [Joint Expert Group (JEG8) for 8<sup>th</sup> Africa – EU Strategic Partnership (Science, Information Society, Space), EC – AUC Living Labs Taskforce for Africa, Observer with governmental GMES & Africa Coordination Team and S&T Sub-Committee of CODIST (Committee on Development Information, Science and Technology) of UN Economic Commission for Africa, and has been nominated to join Strategy Council of UN GAID (Global Alliance on ICT for Development)]. He works as an expert with the European Commission (DG Information Society & Media, DG Research); European Science Foundation; SEE-ERA.NET Balkan Programme; Research Council of Norway; and Vinnova (Swedish Innovation Agency).

### 1.2 IST-Africa Profile

IIMC founded the IST-Africa Initiative ([www.IST-Africa.org](http://www.IST-Africa.org)) in 2002. Supported by the European Commission (EC) and African Union Commission (AUC) and co-funded since 2005 under the European Framework Programme (FP6, FP7), the IST-Africa Initiative has developed into a strategic collaboration with Ministries and National Councils responsible for ICT and/or STI (Science, Technology and Innovation) adoption, policy and research in 19 Countries across Africa.

The IST-Africa Partners collaborate at a strategic level to support national and regional research capacity, analyse ICT and STI policies and identify cross-border implementation project

opportunities in key areas including eGovernment, eHealth, Technology Enhanced Learning, eSkills and Living Labs (providing a methodological and replicable framework for assessment of new products, services, processes and business models by end user communities to support socio-economic impact and community development).

The IST-Africa Initiative currently includes

- IIMC International Information Management Corporation (Ireland, Coordinator)
- Department of Science and Technology (South Africa)
- Ministry of Infrastructure, Science and Technology (Botswana)
- Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology (Lesotho)
- Ministry of Education (Namibia)
- Unidade Technica de Implementacao da Politica de Informatica (Mozambique)
- National Computer Board (Mauritius)
- Ministry of Communications and Transport (Zambia)
- Ministry of Information Communication Technology (Swaziland)
- National Commission for Science and Technology (Malawi)
- COSTECH (Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology)
- Uganda National Council for Science and Technology
- Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (Kenya)
- Ministere de l'Enseignement Superieur et de la Recherche Scientifique (Burundi)
- Ministry of Science and Technology (Ethiopia)
- Agence Nationale des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication (Cameroon)
- Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, des Universités et des Centres Universitaires Régionaux et de la Recherche Scientifique (Senegal)
- Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology (Ghana)
- Ministere de l'Enseignement Superieur et de la Recherche Scientifique (Tunisia)
- Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (Egypt)

In part due to the work of the IST-Africa Initiative (including raising international awareness and working with African research institutions through the annual IST-Africa Conferences which are hosted by African Governments and bring together over 500 senior representatives of government, industry, research and civil society each year), almost €60 million of research funding has been secured by African institutions through the European Framework Programme 7 (FP7) since 2005, thus supporting the transformation of what historically have primarily been teaching institutions into what in the future will become engines of national innovation and socio-economic development.

## 2. PROGRESS MADE

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In general, the government has successfully implemented the commitments contained in the White Paper on Irish Aid.

more recently the work of Irish Aid over the last thirty years in Programme Countries. While there is a clear logic behind Ireland's historical priorities for aid, the approach, however laudable, does not sufficiently leverage the strengths of the Irish economy. This is particularly true in relation to supporting active engagement by Irish industry and business with developing countries including Programme Countries, and leveraging key strengths in areas including ICT, healthcare, education, agriculture (including food security), public service delivery and entrepreneurship. One of the key differences in context is the adoption of an proactive engagement strategy with the private sector, as symbolised by the Ireland Africa Economic Forum last September, and the repositioning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This is important in many respects for Ireland's strategic engagement with Programme Countries, in terms of raising greater awareness of what Ireland has to offer in terms of exports of products, services and expertise as well as looking at opportunities for bilateral Foreign Direct Investment.

### 3. CHANGING CONTEXT

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Ireland has amassed an enormous amount of good will and social capital based primarily on the work of Irish people in education and healthcare in developing countries over the last century, and more recently the work of Irish Aid over the last thirty years in Programme Countries.

While there is a clear logic behind Ireland's historical priorities for aid, this approach, however laudable, does not sufficiently leverage the strengths of the Irish economy. This is particularly true in relation to supporting active engagement by Irish industry and business with developing countries including Programme Countries, and leveraging key strengths in areas including ICT, healthcare, education, agriculture (including food security), public service delivery and entrepreneurship.

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## 4. KEY ISSUES

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One enormous potential missed opportunity is the expertise that exists in Ireland in the area of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies). ICT and STI (Science, Technology and Innovation) currently have no visibility as part of Irish Aid's engagement strategy. ICT has application both in terms of developing export markets in software development, consulting and professional services (including call centres and Business Process Outsourcing) and the application of ICT to increase efficiency and impact across all the thematic areas mentioned in the White Paper (including Hunger, Fragility, Climate Change, Basic Needs, Governance and Human Rights and Gender Equality).

ICT is widely acknowledged as a key enabler for healthcare, education, agriculture and public service delivery. This perception plays very well to Ireland's real strengths in each of these domains.

Through IST-Africa (with its long standing strategic engagement with Ministries and National Councils responsible for ICT and/or STI across Africa, including Ireland's Programme Countries), Ireland has the opportunity to take a strategic positioning in leveraging ICT and STI (such as already taken by Finland for example, which has generated enormous visibility and good will based on quite a limited investment in real terms for ICT programmes that started with South Africa, and are now in place in Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia and Namibia for example).

Such a strategic decision can only be mutually beneficial to the development of significant export markets potential across Africa for Irish private sector and for Programme Countries themselves.

In this regard, it is essential that Ireland revisits and expands its recently announced and enlightened BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) strategy to provide tax incentives for Irish business engaging in developing these countries as export markets.

The risks associated with less developed markets around the world, and in particular in Africa (which after all is the long standing primary focus of Ireland's Programme Country approach) are often even greater than the BRICS countries. The government should revise its BRICS strategy to announce a Developing Country Strategy with tax incentives for exports in the next budget. This would reduce some of the perceived risks associated with developing these markets, and reward or at least incentivize entrepreneurship as we continue to strive to develop new export markets.

Finally, it is counter intuitive in the context of Ireland Africa Strategy that the private sector is effectively excluded from engaging with Irish Aid and proposing solutions for which enormous expertise exists in Ireland. Effectively, only the not-for-profit or education sector can secure support from Irish Aid for activities that the private sector could also provide compelling solutions.

Finland for example has a long standing, very successful programme (FinPro), whereby financial supports are made available to Finnish companies engaging in Foreign Direct Investment or other export/joint venture oriented activities in developing countries. We can learn from such examples. Dedicating up to 10% of funds assigned to Programme Countries to such schemes could have enormous pay off, both in supporting exports from Ireland as well as developing new aid concepts.

## 5. WAYS OF WORKING

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While providing predictability of support through multi-year funding commitments is laudable, it also has unintended consequences in terms of lack of flexibility and significant challenges associated with trying to refocus the use of resources based on market developments. IST-Africa has found this to be a serious challenge when trying to get EDF funding reassigned for example. Needs change quickly over a five year period and often resources are tied to tasks that over time lack priority. It should be part of Ireland's strategic approach to have regular "mid-term reviews" so that there is greater flexibility in terms of how resources committed can be redeployed to achieve greater impact.

While it may be internationally applauded that Ireland provides aid without tying this to technical assistance from Irish organisations with relevant expertise, this has clearly resulted in unintended consequences. Other countries enjoy much greater visibility in the countries in which they provide aid due to the "shoes on the ground" strategy that providing technical assistance has to offer, often in countries where Ireland in real terms is investing much greater resources.

It should be possible to strike a balance in Ireland's aid programme that allows for Irish expertise to be delivered as part of an overall package of support that also meets international good practices.

While taking a Programme Country approach can be very effective, in an African context (where after all most of Ireland's Programme Countries are located) this is great need for allocating some specific resources to support capacity building in relevant thematic areas in Regional Economic Communities (RECs), which after all the political mandate from African Member States to support regional economic integration, which is key to developing Africa into a self-supporting continent.

In East Africa for example, because there is no dedicated Desk Officer in the EAC (East African Community), the Ministers responsible for ICT and STI have no forum to discuss cross-border challenges – they attend but cannot contribute or speak at meetings of Ministers of Education.

This is but one example, of where apportioning limited funding or assigning or contracting qualified personnel on a two or three year contract to build internal capacity (such as Finland has successfully done with ECA for example), can have significant regional impact in key strategic thematic areas that can only be to the benefit of Programme Countries in that region.

Finally, there is often a great deal of lack of coordination by donors in how resources are applied, which can lead to duplication of funding or missed opportunities in terms of leveraging success stories and identifying what adaptation is required to repurpose results of a pilot in one country for adoption across a region. Very often one EU Member State is quite unaware of similar or complementary activities being delivered or funded by another Member State in the same country. There are also opportunities for Ireland to consider how successful pilots in one Programme Country could be usefully adapted to the social, cultural and economic circumstances of another.