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KEY POINTS AT A GLANCE

KEY ISSUES

- Renew commitment to health as a core aspect of development and a cross cutting issue across all themes and sectors, including hunger.
- Maintain the current focus on HIV and major communicable diseases and maternal and child health, building on Irish Aid's achievements and comparative strengths in its contribution towards achieving the MDGs.
- Strengthen national health systems with particular attention to the health workforce, and promote a community systems strengthening approach to health and development.
- Strengthen support and engagement with key global health partnerships where Ireland can make an effective contribution to health outcomes through influence and leadership on policy and practice.
- Ensure development programmes and projects are inclusive and gender-sensitive, equitable and accessible to people disadvantaged by poverty, disabilities and stigma.

WAYS OF WORKING

- Focus on the poorest and most marginalised in countries through support for organisations working at community level, including NGOs and national institutions.
- Collaborate and partner with Irish organisations and institutions that are aligned with Irish Aid's objectives, including Higher Education Institutions, NGOs, the private sector and networking organisations such as the Irish Forum for Global Health.
- Build on existing collaborations with the HSE and Department of Health to achieve greater coherence towards development goals and help mobilise new resources and skilled personnel to produce greater impact from development budgets.
- Increase attention to evidence-based aid, measurement of development results and demonstration of value for money, and make greater use of research capacity in Ireland to support internal measurement and evaluation processes.
- Integrate health as an indicator of performance across other development sectors - all interventions to address key issues such as hunger, poverty and climate change should be able to demonstrate effectiveness on basic social indicators of well-being.

2. PROGRESS SINCE 2006

“Ireland will continue to focus primarily on basic needs, including in the key social sectors of health and education, and in the fight against HIV/AIDS, which at once exacerbates and is exacerbated by poverty. Investment in these sectors is an investment in people, allowing them to contribute more fully to the development of their societies. People are at the heart of the programme.” White Paper, 2006

2.1 IMPROVEMENTS IN HEALTH IN TARGET COUNTRIES

The IFGH acknowledges and is proud of the achievements of Ireland’s development programme during what has been a challenging period. Irish Aid has recognised the central importance of health for reducing poverty and its strong commitment and policy approach has enabled support for health to be one of the successful aspects of the programme. There is good evidence that aid has contributed to the remarkable progress in global health with recent declines in child and maternal deaths and deaths from communicable diseases (Lozano 2011).

By delivering on its €100 million annual commitment to HIV and major diseases, Irish Aid has prolonged and improved the lives of thousands of people through antiretroviral treatment for HIV, insecticide impregnated bed nets for malaria, childhood vaccinations and other lifesaving interventions. Ireland’s most significant contribution in countries has been to support improvements in health systems that are the means to making essential services accessible to all. By focusing on strengthening health systems Ireland has assisted countries to use all available resources for health more effectively, including those from global funds, thus bringing huge benefits to all priority groups including women and children.

2.2 WORKING WITH GLOBAL HEALTH INITIATIVES (GHIS)

Irish Aid’s country level support has been complemented by its funding to global health organisations, such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) Alliance. Although a small donor, Irish Aid has used its reputation and country experience to contribute to Boards and Committees and positively influence global policies and practice. In 2006 Irish Aid was a founding donor of the Global Health Workforce Alliance which has succeeded in mobilising action on the global workforce shortage and improving access to health workers in low income countries. Irish Aid has also been a leading donor for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative - the disease now remains in only three countries. Support to the Clinton Foundation has demonstrated the synergy of working in partnership whereby Irish Aid has ensured a health systems strengthening approach to tackling HIV and AIDS.

2.3 RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Support for health research was an explicit priority in the White Paper and has been achieved through several funding schemes including the Programme for Strategic Cooperation with the Higher Education Authority and the MoU with the Health Research Board. Irish institutions

partnerships and funding instruments. There has been an increasing recognition of the importance of strengthening health systems, including access to trained health workers, as the means to deliver disease specific interventions.

3.2 CHANGED IRISH CONTEXT

Globalisation has changed the health landscape in Ireland. Ease of travel has increased the risk of spread of global infectious diseases to Ireland. The health service has been adapting to the health needs of migrants, many of whom come from developing countries with different patterns of illness and cultural beliefs about health and health care. The International Health Regulations were revised in 2006 and require all countries to respond to public health emergencies of international concern.

There are more sectors, disciplines and development-related initiatives in global health than ever before. There has been steady growth in third level courses offering modules and specific courses on aspects of global health and development. More Irish NGOs are supporting health projects, often focused on specific health issues. The private sector in Ireland has also become more involved in development issues with health-related market opportunities opening up in developing countries, especially in the areas of information, communication technology (ICT) and pharmaceuticals.

Globalisation has also facilitated the migration of health workers – both to and from Ireland. Ireland has a high dependence on foreign trained health professionals and in 2008 Ireland had the highest proportion of foreign trained nurses of any country and was second highest for doctors (OECD 2010). This presents challenges for Ireland to implement the Global Code of Practice on International Recruitment adopted in 2010 as a framework for action by all countries.

The reduced aid budget raises particular challenges for health. Just as Irish Aid has contributed to reducing deaths, cutbacks in funding will cost lives if people are denied access to prevention and treatment for diseases such as HIV and malaria. More people are living with chronic illnesses such as HIV and resource requirements will continue to rise rather than fall in the coming years. Ireland has an ethical responsibility to maintain commitments where funding is for life saving treatment; and – even though budget contributions are small in relative terms – Ireland can retain its influence and emerge as a leader in encouraging other donors to maintain their commitments. It is also important to assure partner countries of predictable funding so they can invest in developing their health systems.

4. KEY ISSUES

4.1 CONTINUE TO INVEST IN THE HEALTH OF POOR PEOPLE

Ireland has a long standing track record and the IFGH recommends that Irish Aid builds on its comparative strengths and renews its commitment to health as a core development priority. Irish Aid should continue to invest in health to achieve health outcomes, and also because improved health is a driver of social and economic development.

deliver essential health services and disease-specific interventions, for both communicable and non-communicable diseases. Support for health systems can be addressed both through country programmes and support to global initiatives such as the Global Fund, GAVI, the Global Health Workforce Alliance and Clinton Foundation.

Ireland can be an international leader in strengthening human resources for health through a comprehensive, cross-sectoral country approach involving Irish Aid, Department of Health and the HSE, and Irish Higher Education Institutes, NGOs and the private sector. Irish Aid should work with the Department of Health and through its MoU with the HSE to support the ESTHER Initiative and ensure successful implementation of all aspects of the Global Code of Practice on International Recruitment of Health Personnel. It should collaborate with and support strategic initiatives in capacity building, research and training by the higher education institutions and NGOs. It should continue to partner with prominent networks such as IFGH that can help facilitate strategic initiatives and ensure Ireland has a strong national and international voice on these issues.

4.4 MAINTAIN THE FOCUS ON COMMUNICABLE DISEASES AND MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

In terms of disease focus, Irish Aid should continue to focus on the priority communicable diseases and maternal and child health issues, rather than shift the balance towards the growing burden of non-communicable diseases. Taking on non-communicable diseases as a small donor would require a huge amount of lesson-learning and would dilute funding and therefore not as much would be achieved. The focus should stay on helping countries achieve, or at least make progress towards, the MDGs; and be part of the process of re-evaluating and directing global efforts in 2015-16.

HIV, malaria and TB along with common preventable and treatable diseases in young children, such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections will continue to be the 'major' diseases prematurely killing poor people. Improving nutrition (see below) and environmental health, by addressing WASH and other environmental determinants of health such as the control of indoor air pollution, integrated vector management and management of risk, should continue to be a priority to prevent communicable diseases. Gender equity should be addressed, not just as a goal in itself (MDG3) but as an issue that is intimately linked and causally connected to MDGs 4, 5 and 6. Support for maternal and child health should encompass the wider health needs of women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health.

As more people in developing countries acquire non-communicable diseases, Irish Aid can respond in a selective way through policy processes rather than funding. For example, as a recognised global leader in the area of tobacco control, Ireland can promote implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in low income countries. Ireland can also advocate for action on non-communicable diseases to improve health for women and children and people with disabilities and mental illness.

4.5 LINK PROGRAMMES IN HEALTH AND HUNGER

more people are living with HIV, including children, and developing different types of impairments, functional limitations and participation restrictions.

Irish Aid should ensure development programmes and projects are inclusive and accessible to people with disabilities.

4.8 SUPPORT RESEARCH AND GLOBAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Research is critical for establishing the evidence base that underpins the Irish Aid programme. It informs policies and programmes and provides information for performance measurement and evaluation. Research institutions across Ireland are engaged in vital health research and can work in a deeper way with Irish Aid to deliver a more effective, evidence-based aid programme. A central objective should be to build capacity in health research systems through north-south partnerships for research and for education programmes such as higher level training to Masters and PhD level for researchers. Irish research institutions could also do more to build the capacity of Irish Aid staff. Irish Aid should maintain its role in supporting international R&D partnerships to develop new drugs and vaccines.

It is important to continue support to initiatives and partnerships that increase awareness and education of global health and development among students and young people – the future of Ireland’s aid programme and its general public. This also includes recognition and support for the expansion and increased quality of global health education across second and third level institutions in Ireland.

5. WAYS OF WORKING

5.1 RENEW COMMITMENT TO THE POOREST OF THE POOR

Ireland has built its reputation on a deep commitment over many decades to serving the needs of people in less developed countries. At this time the Government should renew its commitment to countries that are less well-off and plan to increase the aid budget to 0.7% GNP in the coming years. It should seek to improve predictability of aid through bilateral programmes and global funding instruments.

INNOVATION AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

Irish Aid should continue to show leadership in aid, prepared to be bold, creative and imaginative. As it has done in areas such as nutrition and HIV it should continue to innovate, focusing on areas where Ireland can be successful. For example, new mobile phone and ICT technologies are areas of strength in industry in Ireland which could be harnessed to improve health care and health information.

- Support Irish international NGOs in developing and delivering innovations to improve health and nutrition of poor communities.
- Support the IFGH in providing a networking function for all individuals and organisations involved in global health. Innovative initiatives of IFGH will lead to opportunities for learning and collaboration in development policy, research and education. It will also support Irish Aid's objectives to increase coherence and coordination of the different forms of Ireland's aid as well as strengthen Ireland's voice internationally.

C) COUNTRY PARTNERSHIPS

Irish Aid's bilateral programmes are based on a partnership approach with national governments and other development partners. Partnerships with NGOs, CBOs and academic institutions should be developed further if the community systems approach to development is to be adopted. Irish Aid country offices will not have the capacity to engage intensively at community level, but they fund sizeable NGOs and CBOs whose very mandate is to work at this level. In a more harmonised approach to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the country programmes Irish Aid resources could be more effectively utilised to share roles and responsibilities across this Irish Aid network.

5.3 DEVELOP A STRONGER RESULTS FOCUS

Irish Aid needs to increase its focus on results and outcomes and provide evidence that the aid programme is effective, efficient and is impacting positively on people and communities.

- Use health outcomes as indicators of achievement across other development sectors. All interventions to address hunger, poverty, climate change, etc. should be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of these interventions on some basic social indicators of well-being, such as maternal and child health and nutritional status. Irish Aid should monitor health in all of its country programmes, even if it is not supporting that sector directly, as health indicators often provide the best available routine population data on the effects of food, nutrition and environmental interventions.
- Focus on evaluating quality and measuring quantity through the use of the latest mixed methods approaches. More in-depth evaluation is required than the traditional auditing approach which focuses more on inputs, processes and outputs. Irish Aid should engage with the Irish and international researchers and NGOs to develop innovative and creative methods of impact measurement.
- Support Irish research institutions to undertake research and evaluations to demonstrate the results of Irish Aid overall aid programme, including country programmes.
- Support capacity building for monitoring and evaluation within partner NGOs.