

Nature of Views: On behalf of Committee members

Organisation: Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade

Role in organisation: Chair

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Members of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade

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Section 1: Introduction

The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade has a responsibility in terms of oversight of the policies, administration and expenditure of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Development Cooperation is an integral part of Ireland's foreign policy and the Irish Aid Programme, with a budget of approximately €639 million for 2012, is by far the largest programme operated under the aegis of the Department.

The Joint Committee has examined the objectives and impact of the Irish Aid programme and the wider global development context in a number of ways since its establishment in June 2011. The Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid was identified as an issue of priority in the Committee's 2012 Work Programme.

The Committee's examination of Ireland's development policy has included formal hearings in relation to Vote 29 on International Cooperation and broad policy discussions with both the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and with the Minister of State for Trade and Development. The Committee has also had meetings with UN Assistant Director General Catherine Bragg and with EU Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva as well as hearings on specific issues including on the food crisis in the Horn of Africa and development challenges in Haiti. The Committee has also had numerous meetings with Department of Foreign Affairs officials and with NGOs and Ambassadors on aid-related topics.

A delegation from the Committee undertook a field visit to Ethiopia in November 2011¹, which provided an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of projects and programmes on the ground supported through Irish Aid and through partner organisations. The Chair of the Committee participated in the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in Busan, Korea in November and took part in a meeting on the Review of the White Paper with some of Ireland's African partners and with Irish NGOs.

In March 2012, Dóchas appeared before the Committee to discuss their submission on the Review of the White Paper. Minister of State Costello consulted the Joint Committee on the Review of the White Paper at the Joint Committee meeting on 18 April 2012. In addition, the Committee regularly receives policy documents and correspondence on a broad range of development issues from domestic and international organisations and individuals for its consideration. The Committee

¹ See Report 'Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade Visit to Ethiopia (14-19 November 2011)' April 2012 Report Number 31FANT005

received copies of submissions relating to the White Paper Review from Dóchas, Trócaire, the Debt and Development Coalition and from the Disability Inclusion Taskforce.

This varied series of meetings, briefings and visits has helped to inform the Committee's views on Ireland's development assistance policy. This submission seeks to distil some of the key issues and themes which members of the Committee ask be considered in the context of the Review.

Section 2: Progress Made: Has the Government been successful in implementing the commitments contained in the 2006 White Paper on Irish Aid?

There is broad cross-party support in the Houses of the Oireachtas for the Irish Aid programme. This is based on wide support for the core principles of the programme and substantial confidence in its effectiveness, which has been recognised internationally, including through the OECD Peer Review mechanism. There is clear evidence in a number of Ireland's programme countries that aid is working and a number of members of the Committee have seen this at first hand since 2006. It should be recognised also that Ireland has played an important role in recent years internationally in setting the development agenda, in particular in the fight against hunger and under-nutrition. Nonetheless, it is clear also that not all commitments made in the 2006 White Paper on Irish Aid have been met, most notably the commitment to reach 0.7% of GNP on Official Development Assistance in 2012.

Section 3: 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?

The review of the Government's aid programme must reflect the changed domestic and global context.

At home, reductions in public expenditure have resulted in a decline of 30% in Ireland's aid budget between 2008-2011. The Joint Committee calls for predictability of funding for the aid budget over the coming years and a recommitment to reach 0.7% of GNP on Official Development Assistance by 2015.

The impact on development cooperation of Ireland's approach to domestic policy areas with global reach such as climate change, taxation and ethical investment needs to be considered in a coherent all-government way.

The very difficult budgetary environment has also had an influence on NGOs as they have come under increased pressure to demonstrate how they make choices on resource allocation and what results they have achieved. On average, about 32% of the Department's International Cooperation Vote is channelled annually to NGOs and the Joint Committee supports this approach and the close cooperation between the Department and a wide range of NGOs in long term development,

humanitarian response and development education. The Joint Committee strongly supports the work currently being carried out by Irish Aid to design a new system of resource allocation based on a more performance-focused and result-oriented approach which would provide clarity, inter alia, on administration and overhead costs. The White Paper should include a commitment on the part of the Irish Aid programme to use best practice emerging from the aid effectiveness agenda, especially the greater focus on achieving results, in allocating resources across its programme countries, to NGOs and to other international partners.

Abroad, food and energy crises as well as increased fragility and vulnerability to environmental disaster, have demonstrated clearly the need for sustainable development for the world's poorest so that they can have some resilience in the face of global uncertainties. As the same time, global poverty is reducing and Ireland needs to continue to develop a rounded approach to our relations with developing countries which re-affirms our relationship as development partners but which also looks for sustainable and shared trade and investment relationships and pro-poor economic growth in the world's least developed countries.

Political crises such as those in Somalia and Libya have raised serious issues regarding the politicisation of humanitarian aid by certain global actors. The Irish Aid programme needs to re-affirm its commitment to principled needs-based and not politically-based humanitarian aid. The Joint Committee also calls on Ireland to use its influence within the EU to ensure the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian aid delivered through ECHO in line with the EU Humanitarian Consensus.

The Committee supports in principle the proposal for an international humanitarian hub in Shannon for the storage and distribution of emergency humanitarian supplies as an important positive addition to the existing international humanitarian system.

The Committee recommends that in times of humanitarian crises, NGOs should provide humanitarian aid by creating a single appeals mechanism for national fundraising and public response with a view to maximising publicity for the cause and to ensure the effective and coordinated dispersal of emergency aid.

Section 4: How should the Government respond to the key issues of hunger, fragility, climate change, basic needs, governance and human rights and gender equality? Are there other issues?

Given limited resources and the need to focus these, which issues should the Government prioritise in its future aid programming?

The Joint Committee recommends that Irish Aid reaffirm a number of its existing salient core principles and commitments, namely:

- untied aid
- commitment to 'least developed countries'
- commitment to reach the UN target of 0.7%

- prioritising the fight against hunger and under-nutrition
- supporting good governance
- protection of human rights

In terms of these priorities, the Committee would encourage the expansion of democracy-building programmes, such as those supporting anti-corruption commissions in programme countries and building tax collection capacity in Rwanda, and other ideas-sharing programmes. The Committee supports Irish Aid’s approach of working in partnership with recipient governments, in line with aid effectiveness best practice. This also provides the basis on which Ireland can engage in on-going dialogue with partner countries regarding human rights, gender equality, and democratic principles including creating space for civil society, and good governance as integral components of a sound development policy. On hunger, the Committee supports the findings of the Hunger Taskforce Report which should continue to inform policy. Further emphasis could be put on the effects of climate change on agricultural production and on issues such as land tenure. There is a need to look also at ensuring cohesion between Ireland’s climate change and agricultural policies and Ireland’s role in the fight against hunger. The Africa Agri-Food Development Fund initiative is welcomed and could be expanded.

Areas which require clearer focus in a revised policy should include disability and mental health as cross-cutting issues. Those with disabilities and mental health issues are more likely to be marginalised and at risk of extreme poverty. Irish Aid should ensure that programmes it funds do not unwittingly intensify existing barriers for people with disabilities in its programme countries. The Government should explore, with like-minded States, ways of bringing more socially aware and ethical considerations into international aid policy.

Section 5: Ways of Working: How can the Government further strengthen its ways of working in delivering an effective aid programme, with a view of delivering real results in poverty reduction?

The Joint Committee recommends that the Government strengthen its ways of working in delivering an effective aid programme both at home and in partner countries. This could include

- Supporting closer coordination between NGOs to avoid duplication and to promote effectiveness and stronger governance within the NGO Sector and through developing better funding methodologies.
- Ensuring cohesion across Government in terms of development policy – to include areas such as taxation, climate change, investment
- Ensuring that there is cohesion between the Africa Strategy and Irish Aid policy more generally. Irish Embassies on the ground, in particular in programme countries, should report annually on progress under both of these
- Continue to cooperate with robust Oireachtas oversight of the Irish Aid programme with a further strengthening of results-based reporting and greater funding transparency

- Communicating more clearly the message to the public, including through maintaining an on-line presence, that effective development works.