Liberia
Solidarity Group

Liberia Solidarity Group's Submission
to the Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid, 2012

Nature of Views: On behalf of organisation

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organisations, including community development groups, women's initiatives, human rights organisations and community education projects.

Liberian people are committed to building a new society that is stable, just and sustainable, where respect for human rights is embodied in constitutional, legislative and regulatory processes. They also recognise that this can only be achieved with the cooperation and partnership of countries in the Global North whereby mutual endeavours can be devised and implemented.

This submission will illustrate how Irish Aid can make a real impact across the range of key issues identified by Government; hunger, fragility, climate change, basic needs, governance & human rights and gender equality. It highlights the positive role civil society is playing in Liberia and promotes the expansion of funding to civil society. It notes that support for ethical trade with Africa should not preclude a continued focus of aid on development. Finally, it makes the case for Liberia to become an Irish Aid programme country.

Progress Made

The White Paper on Irish Aid notes Ireland's role as supporting peace and fostering democracy in Liberia; including supporting the disarming and reintegration of soldiers back into the community, assisting in the 2005 election process and the deployment of the Irish Defence Forces as part of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

This commitment of support for peace and democracy in Liberia was further developed in the White Paper which committed to a strong focus on governance[3] and strengthening civil society through the direct funding of NGOs[4]. Ireland's focus on supporting long-term reconstruction and development, working in cooperation with the Liberian government and other partners, has seen substantial positive results.

Irish Aid provided funding and has supported the Liberian Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy, making a vital contribution to areas such as health, water and sanitation, good governance and infrastructure. Irish Aid has also provided some funding to Liberian civil society organisations and this has made some contribution to the development of a robust civil society. However, the limited level of support for civil society development has reduced the potential benefits for the advancement of Irish Aid priorities, which can only be attained through grassroots partnerships leading sustainable positive change.

A key part of Irish Aid's programme in Liberia has focused on the strengthening of the country's health systems and basic primary health care services with the majority of funding channelled through the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare's Health Pool Fund. This was supplemented by the funding of a number of community health initiatives through NGOs. This community approach to health has the potential to supplement and support other Irish Aid priorities, in particular gender equality, by supporting women's access to health information and primary healthcare in the community.

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[3] Government of Ireland (2006), *White Paper on Irish Aid*, p. 74.
[4] ibid, p.75.

Changing context

The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, together with strategies such as the EU's Agenda for Change and Ireland's recent Africa Strategy reflect an increasing emphasis on the role of economic growth as a driver of development, and a focus on new actors, including the private sector in development cooperation. Trócaire believes an emphasis on economic growth must not take a narrow business approach, but rather acknowledge that sustainable development requires a dramatic shift towards integrated economic, environmental and social sustainability[5]. **As a result it is integral that Irish international policy should support not undermine its aid programme and that human rights remain the cornerstone of Ireland's international policies despite the increased focus on economic growth as a driver of development.**

The Liberia Solidarity Group welcomes the consultation document's continued focus on Africa and its continued support of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). It also highlights that many programme countries are reducing their reliance on donors with countries such as Uganda raising resources domestically from remittances and from foreign direct investment[6]. As a result it is our view that by focusing on LDCs, and Liberia in particular given its place on the UN Human Development Index, Irish Aid can maximise its impact in achieving the Millenium Develoment Goals (MDGs) and fulfilling its overarching objective of poverty reduction whilst increasing aid effectiveness. Given the similarity in size and population of Ireland and Liberia this likeness in scale also provides an opportunity for maximum impact with refocused resources.

While Liberia has made some tangible progress in the implementation of its Poverty Reduction Strategy (2008-2011), it is still one of the world's poorest countries and was ranked 182 out of 187 countries on the 2011 UN Human Development Index. The country continues to face considerable challenges in delivering basic health services and in rebuilding critical infrastructure devastated by the civil war. It is predicted that the Millenium Development Goal of halving world poverty will be reached by 2015. However, it is estimated that 64% of Liberians live below the absolute poverty line. As a result development aid can play a major role in

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[5] Trócaire (2010), *Business and Human Rights: Advocacy Manual*.
[6] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2011), *Consultation paper for the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid*, p10.

poverty reduction in Liberia. The development of basic utilities and essential services such as health and welfare services are still essential. Irish Aid's role in Liberia has already had an impact in areas such as health, water and sanitation, good governance, infrastructure and supporting civil society. **Strengthening this support would further reinstate Ireland's commitment to Liberia and set a roadmap for Liberia to become a full programme country while maintaining a regional approach to West Africa.**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a key focus of the White Paper and have been a useful mechanism for supporting development, although Irene Khan has highlighted the limitations of the MDGs in tackling inequality due to their lack of focus on human rights[7]. As the commitment period for the MDGs expires in 2015, there is an opportunity within the White Paper review for Ireland to reiterate its role in providing a 'cutting edge'[8] aid programme by advocating for a new set of "Sustainable Development Goals" based on human rights and sustainability. **Sustainable Development Goals can contribute to meeting basic needs in a way that also meets Irish Aid's other key issues, such as governance & human rights, fragility and gender equality.** This would complement and enhance the effectiveness of the valuable work Irish Aid currently undertakes in Liberia.

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[7] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2012), *Informal Summary of Twelfth DFAT-NGO Forum on Human Rights*, p.4-5.
[8] The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (2009), *Peer Review of Ireland*.

Key Issues

Hunger, Basic Needs and Climate Change

Irish Aid's support for governance and human rights is helping to renew Liberian democratic structures and support economic and social development.

In continuing to build on Ireland's successful support for the fragile Liberian state, there is a need to remain cognisant of the interplaying issues of hunger, basic needs and climate change and their effects on the establishment of a peaceful, stable democracy. This is particularly important given that Liberia is one of the world's Least Developed Countries and the Government's commitment to having maximum impact in the world's poorest countries. Irish Aid has consistently restated its commitment in playing a leadership role in the fight against global hunger and food insecurity evident through its Hunger Task Force.

This submission will, however, focus on the key issues of fragility, governance and human rights, gender equality and trade in development.

Fragility

Liberia has established a fragile democracy evident by two democratic elections. It has also shown its commitment to state building through hosting a two day meeting last year with other fragile states entitled 'State Building and Peace Building'. Irish Aid has underlined its greater attention on fragility[9] and therefore we feel addressing fragility is essential in terms of meaningful impact. Irish Aid can play a role in further strengthening governance through state-building initiatives which increase the capacities of the state to perform its basic functions[10]. **These initiatives should focus on good governance through transparency and accountability. Concurrently the vital role of a robust civil society in promoting good governance and human rights must be recognised and supported** so civil society can hold the state to account but also so it can play a lead role in empowering citizens to participate fully

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[9] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2011), *Consultation paper for the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid*, p.5.
[10] The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2011), *2011 Report on International Engagement in Fragile States: Republic of Liberia*, p.11.

in the democratic system and to access their rights. By directly supporting indigenous civil society Irish Aid can play a role in increasing democratic ownership, while also addressing fragility through a long-term approach that will bring an enduring stability. In this way Irish Aid is underlining a sustained commitment to Liberia which will prove more effective than short-term programmes.

Governance & Human Rights

Irish Aid's commitment to governance and human rights is a strong feature of the 2006 White Paper which should be continued and enhanced. Liberia in particular benefited from Ireland's support, through the UN Mission in Liberia, in re-establishing democratic institutions in the post-conflict period. In the aftermath of a second set of peaceful democratic elections in 2010, **Irish Aid should now focus its efforts on supporting the vital part that civil society plays in a thriving democracy to underpin good governance and human rights**. The Liberia Solidarity Group particularly welcomes Minister Costello's reiteration of the importance of human rights in Ireland's aid programme with a concern for protecting the space for civil society, human rights defenders and human rights institutions[11].

The Africa Strategy[12] emphasises the move towards a more mature and balanced set of relationships with African countries with sustainable two-way trade and investment flows. **In order to ensure such partnerships are ethical, it will be essential for Ireland to recognise the need to strengthen governance and human rights mechanisms**. Weak governance structures in Liberia have allowed trans-national corporations (TNCs) to have a negative impact on human rights and environmental sustainability, leading to local environmental degradation which may aggravate the long term impacts of climate change, poverty and the country's ability to realise basic needs[13]. The potential for unethical trade to negatively influence Irish Aid's priorities should be acknowledged, and **the White Paper should develop strategies to ensure that good governance and human rights is at the centre of Ireland's ethical relationship with African countries.**

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[11] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2012), *Informal Summary of Twelfth DFAT-NGO Forum on Human Rights*, p.3.
[12] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2011), Ireland and Africa: Our Partnership With a Changing Continent.
[13] Sustainable Development Institute (2011), *Where is the Money?*

Gender Equality

The Irish Government's recent publication of Ireland's National Action Plan for Implementation of UNSCR 1325, 2011-2014, and its sponsorship of the *Voices of Experience* cross learning process on UNSCR 1325 with its particular emphasis on Libera, means that Ireland is well placed to provide a meaningful contribution to gender equality in Liberia.

The Liberian Ministry of Gender and Development's Liberian National Action Plan (LNAP) on UNSCR 1325 recognises that women play a significant role in post-conflict situations that extends well beyond the roles of caregivers and victims. In particular, it acknowledges the need to support women in civil society in order to deal with issues of fragility, emphasising the need for an enhanced role of women in economic reconstruction, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and in security sector reform. It also seeks to support processes promoting governance and human rights. The LNAP established a Civil Society Monitoring Observatory which supports participation, particularly of women's groups, in monitoring and reviewing the plan[14].

There is significant congruence between the LNAP and the recommendations of the Irish Government which emerged from the *Voices of Experience* process. **The Liberia Solidarity Group recommends that a renewed White Paper acknowledge these links and provide for the concrete expression through enhanced Irish Aid support for gender equality in Liberia.**

We particularly note Irish Aid's support of the International Rescue Committee's gender programmes in Liberia. Building on this, **we recommend that it is now appropriate that Irish Aid move to supporting grassroots civil society organisations in Liberia in order to support a more sustainable practice in gender equality throughout Liberian civil society.**

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[14] Government of Liberia (2009), Liberian National Action Plan on 1325.

Ways of Working

Policy Coherence for Development

It is essential that the White Paper advocates a 'whole of government' approach so there is coherence of trade and other international policies with development goals. As Ireland seeks to develop a more reciprocal partnership with programme countries in Africa (DFAT, 2011: 6), the Liberia Solidarity Group welcomes and encourages the Government's efforts to ensure Policy Coherence for Development (PCD)[15].

The Liberia Solidarity Group encourages Government to

- **build PCD into a renewed White Paper on aid;**
- **strengthen the Interdepartmental Committee on Development and other PCD mechanisms;**
- **develop PCD indicators & implement an inter-departmental monitoring plan;**
- **foster the cross-sectoral consultation of relevant agencies and stakeholders concerned with enterprise, governance and human rights to support cross-sectoral ownership of policies and clarity in policy implementation.**

Liberia, as a Least Developed Country, needs Irish Aid's continued and enhanced involvement in order to develop a mature relationship based on reciprocal partnership which can support ethical and balanced trade links between Ireland and Liberia. Business is a source of investment and job creation which can aid in economic development. However, **it is essential to support Liberian government and civil society governance structures to ensure that business and trade does not undermine development** by contributing to corruption, environmental degradation and human rights abuses as it often can when governance systems are not well developed[16].

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[15] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2011), *Consultation paper for the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid*, p.5.
[16] CIDSE (2009), *Impacts of Extractive Industries in Latin America: analysis and guidelines for future work.*

The UN "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework for Business and Human Rights (2010) deals with the reality that International Human Rights Law struggles to regulate corporate entities which do not fit into the traditional legal paradigm[17]. The principles of the framework are the duty of the State to protect human rights; the responsibility of the corporation to respect human rights (*do no harm principle*) and the access of victims to remedy for any human rights abuses. In countries with weaker governance systems the state may be unwilling or unable to fulfil its duty of protecting its citizen's from human rights abuses by third parties such as businesses and corporations. In these cases the Irish state has a responsibility to ensure Irish businesses operate ethically and by the standards of the Irish state. **The Liberia Solidarity Group recommends that the White Paper explicitly underlines these principles within overseas policy but also ensure policy coherence throughout all government policies.**

In particular, the LSG is concerned with the Africa Strategy's emphasis on the benefits of extractive industries' role in contributing to sustainable development[18] when there is strong evidence that this is not necessarily the case[19]. **LSG believes that there should be a greater focus on more sustainable businesses such as indigenous small and medium enterprises** which will have a greater distributive and multiplier effect on the local economy and thus more effectively support development. Support for a sustainable agricultural sector through small and medium size farmers and producers will not only support the local economy but also address the issues of food security and hunger. The Hunger Task Force recommends a focus on initiatives for women[20]. This emphasises the gendered nature of poverty which is integral to addressing issues such as poverty reduction, hunger and food security and a renewed focus on initiatives for women is recommended.

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[17] Trócaire (2010), *Business and Human Rights: Advocacy Manual*.
[18] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2011), *Ireland and Africa: Our Partnership With a Changing Continent*, p.16.
[19] Sustainable Development Institute (2011), CIDSE (2009) and Trócaire (2010).
[20] Hunger Task Force (2008), *Hunger Task Force Report to the Government of Ireland*, p.6.

Engaging with civil society

The Liberia Solidarity Group welcomes the consultation paper's committment to supporting civil society and its recognition of the valuable work of civil society organisations[21]. Irish Aid works in environments that have weak governance systems thus the space for civil society is fragile. Work that uses a rights based approach and empowerment model will build community and civil society ownership of development, especially in light of increasing concern about the closing of space for civil society[22]. As a result there is a need for additional support for civil society actors to strengthen civil society. Strengthening civil society expands the constituency of democracy and empowers individuals, groups and organisations to hold the state to account, which in turn promotes good governance and increased accountability and transparency.

In light of this, we would encourage Irish Aid to develop direct partnerships with indigenous non-governmental organisations rather than funds solely being administered through government departments or international non-govermental organisations. Given the current focus on direct relationships and partnerships between Ireland and Africa in the trade sector there is a correlating argument for the **diversification of institutional supports and the development of direct partnerships across broader sectors** such as civil society, health and education. These partnerships would promote a more sustainable form of 'bottom-up development' and build capacity at a grassroots level. The Liberia Solidarity Group itself is based upon a mutual learning partnership between both countries so would encourage partnerships based on a parity of esteem.

Irish Aid should continue to strengthen Liberian civil society by developing direct relationships with indigenous NGOs. **Promoting 'bottom-up development' using a human rights based approach will be most effective if Irish Aid establishes direct relationships with Liberian civil society** which will allow it to more effectively meet grassroots development needs.

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[21] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2011), *Consultation paper for the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid*, p.5.
[22] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2012), *Informal Summary of Twelfth DFAT-NGO Forum on Human Rights* and Trócaire (2012), *Democracy in Action: Protecting Civil Society Space*, p.4.

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[ ] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2011), Consultation paper for the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid, p 6.
[ ] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2012), Informal Summary of Tríocht DFAT/NGO Forum on Human Rights and Treaties (2012), Democracy in Action: Preserving Civil Society Space, p 4