



Lourdes Youth & Community Services

Submission to Review of White Paper on Irish Aid

Contact Person:
Sarah Kelleher, Director,

LYCS has been undertaking development education (DE) at organisational and local community level for over 20 years. Since the late 1990s LYCS has been promoting and supporting development education in other organisations working in community settings, at first targeting only those operating locally, but gradually expanding to include a broad range of organisations both in the Dublin area and from around the country in its target audience.

From when it first introduced DE into its own activities, LYCS found it to be hugely beneficial in contributing to community development, with clear synergies and opportunities for integration and linking of experiences. By furthering their understanding of global issues and seeing the links between global, local and personal issues, learners become more skilled and more motivated to take actions to improve their own lives, the lives of their community and to contribute to addressing global injustices.

Recognising the benefits of DE for its own work coupled with a desire to bring development education to greater numbers of people who would be unlikely to have a chance to experience it otherwise (through the formal education system or the work of large aid organisations), LYCS continues to use development education itself and to seeks to support other organisations in bringing a global perspective to their work. In the absence of awareness and understanding, there is added value to be gained from 'selling' the benefits of development education within the community education sector. This could be achieved through the establishment and co-ordination of the relevant Government Departments and Agencies led by Irish Aid.

Sectoral Analysis:

There is a little evidence of a strategic process of integration of Development Education in to the community development and/or community education sector nationally. Our experience shows us that there is a low level of knowledge of the benefits and added value that DE programmes can bring to existing community development work, although there is a keen interest amongst workers in the sector to be exposed to DE in a way that will enhance their existing work.

As was concluded in the Aontas report, development education is not widely understood or practiced in adult and community education in Ireland. There is little organisational

understanding and endorsement of DE which makes recruiting hard-pressed community workers to DE training courses more challenging but not unachievable.

The Community Development sector as a whole is coming under increasing pressure with the economic downturn. There is increasing need for the sector to:

- demonstrate the added value of programmes of activity;
- to seek coherent integrated strategies for delivery of actions;
- to seek collaborative opportunities for service delivery; and to maximise their use of resources to meet multiple demands.

Development education can play a real role in the sector by providing mutual benefits and fit with current development activity.

Educational Analysis:

The publication of the 2000 White Paper on Adult Education was a significant development in relation to formal recognition of the role of Community Education in the overall sphere of Adult Education. It identified Community Education as 'one of the most dynamic and distinctive elements of the Adult Education Sector'. It also noted the ability of community education to reach the most disadvantaged learners and those furthest removed from the mainstream of learning. This still holds true today.

The recent establishment of SOLAS is a key watershed in the development of a coherent Further Education and Training sector in Ireland since the publication of the White Paper. It is widely anticipated and hoped that SOLAS will develop a vision statement for Further Education and Training, which will take cognisance of the current range and diversity of provision of services within the Adult Education arena, including Community Education. The proposed merger of local VEC's to establish Local Education and Training Boards (LETB's) will impact on the informal education sector, including community education.

AONTAS, The National Adult Learning Organisation in their submission to SOLAS in February 2012 highlighted the need for any new structures to recognise the role played by community education in attracting the hardest to reach adults. Similarly the Community Education Facilitators Association (CEFA) in its recent Position Paper also stressed the key role of community education in attracting the most disadvantaged adults back to education and training and building their confidence and core skills. Thus Community Education provides real potential as a mechanism by which DE can be brought to key target audiences, those most likely to be removed from the mainstream access points for learning and education. Community Education is broader than the instrumental view of education based purely on skills acquisition; it also seeks to create a learning experience that is transformative at personal and community level.

Overall Analysis of Problem to be Addressed:

In taking a collective contextual analysis, the following have been identified as the challenges to be addressed:

- (a) to spread knowledge of global issues amongst those who would have few chances to engage in development education through formal education and learning or work of aid organisations
- (b) to show the potential of development education to contribute to community development in communities affected by economic and social disadvantage
- (c) to promote the use of development education within the community education and community development sectors
- (d) to increase the motivation & skills of workers in these sectors to incorporate development education into their work and to provide them with the supports needed to do this successfully
- (e) to continue to use development education to help people in marginalised communities analyse issues which affect their own lives, their community and the world and to take actions on those issues, and so to contribute to community development locally.

The Adult and Community Education sector has been particularly affected by constraints on government expenditure. The recent Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) report by Brian Harvey presents hard data on how reduction in government funding has adversely affected this sector since 2008. As funding declines, many adult and community education groups and voluntary organisations are experiencing rapidly contracting capacity, have reduced their services and are unable to retain staffing levels.

As a community development organisation which carries out development education, LYCS will focus primarily in this submission on issues relating to Irish Aid's programme of development education work.

1) The new Development Education Advisory Committee of Irish Aid

In light of the reconstruction of the DEAC, LYCS feels strongly that there is a need for continued representation of the community and voluntary sector on this committee. This sector is one of Irish Aid's stated target sectors, and represents a section of the Irish population who are extremely hard to reach via in mainstream and formal education provision. It is vital that this niche sector is adequately represented.

2) Strategic Partnership between Irish Aid and the adult and community education sectors.

The adult and community education sector in Ireland is diverse in nature. It encompasses the work of a large range of bodies and organisations including:

- Vocational Education Committees (soon to merge into the Local Education and Training Boards under SOLAS),
- the Department of Education and Skills,

- the Local and Community Development Programme (*LCDP*) of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government,
- Area-based Partnership organisations,
- Local Authorities, and
- A wide range of voluntary and community organisations.

A research report by AONTAS (Bailey, 2009) presented a strong case for greater integration of development education into the work of adult and community educators. In order to increase cohesive sectoral awareness of, and support for, development education and to help effect its integration into the adult and community education sectors, LYCS feels the need for Irish Aid to actively promote support for development education at senior levels in the relevant Government departments and statutory bodies. This would require the Development Education Unit of Irish Aid to have a sufficient staffing and funding to carry out this work as well as administration of funding to civil society organisations.

3) Increased integration of development education in initial training for professionals in the adult/community education sector.

Following on from point 2, LYCS feels that more support is needed from Irish Aid for the integration of development education onto the curricula of the various community development training courses for example: H.Dip in Community and Youth Work, MA in Community Education, Equality & Social Activism, MA and Postgraduate Diploma in Adult, Community and Further Education at NUI Maynooth, and the BA in Community Development in Carlow Institute of Technology.

4) The term 'Development Education'

LYCS recommends the replacement of the term 'development education' which is unclear, not well known and easily misunderstood, with a more self-explanatory term such as the one now widely used in the UK, 'Global Education'. This would increase opportunities for the promotion and marketing of development education which in turn would increase public awareness of global development issues and Irish Aid's work.

5) Prioritisation of Development Education

LYCS believes that development education can play a critical role in Ireland's response to key global issues and needs to be a continuing priority for Irish Aid. Development education offers opportunities for the public to have a greater understanding of the Government actions and policy with regard to aid. It can promote educated public dialogue to promote change which is needed if problems such as poverty, inequality, hunger and climate change are to be solved. Development education in the community education sector has the potential not only to foster such public support amongst marginalised communities and people who are generally 'hard to reach' by formal education providers and international aid organisations, but also to motivate and help those people to take an active role in the development of their own communities.

Therefore, it is particularly important that Irish Aid continue its support for development education in the community sector.

Reference

Bailey, N. (2009) *Integrating Development Education into Adult Education using Active Citizenship as a Focus* (Dublin:AONTAS).

Harvey, B (2012) *Downsizing the Community Sector 2008 – 2012*. (Dublin ICTU)