

B: Response

Introduction

VMM (*Volunteer Missionary Movement*) is a lay Christian development organisation which recruits, trains, places and supports the work of skilled Irish personnel working to build the organisational capacities of selected local strategic partner organisations in developing countries of the world, but in particular Africa. VMM focuses on integral human development and supports the work of people and organisations of all faiths and politics, or none.

This submission is partially motivated by the desire to highlight the modest but professional work that VMM does and how the difficult environment of recent years has impacted on it. Given the importance which vocationalism and volunteerism has played and continues to play in Irish society, we also want to highlight the added value which such ethics bring to Irish overseas development assistance through the work of faith based organisations (FBOs) like VMM. The VMM model complements and benefits the work of Irish Aid. With the decline of religious vocations in Ireland and the subsequent transitional impact upon the work of Irish overseas mission development, FBOs like VMM will play an increasingly critical role in consolidating the excellent development work begun by Irish religious missionaries through the placement and support of professional Irish Lay volunteers in the service of mission development. This strategy is currently being implemented with the support of Irish lay professionals through Mísean Cara and others.

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

Judging by the 2009 OECD review on Irish Aid, progress has been made on a number of areas such as aid effectiveness. In addition it articulates well the values that underpin Ireland's commitment to overseas aid and development principles. The increased awareness of issues facing people in the developing world through the funding of development education programmes, Africa Day, and the Irish Aid volunteering and Information Centre and its positive impact on overseas volunteering are to be commended.

However, progress has stalled on some commitments as is laid out in your consultation paper for the review, such as the less than desired support for the African Union and increase in partner countries of one rather than two. Overall however, there seems to be a consensus that progress has been made on many of the commitments made in the White Paper. It must be noted that it is not always easy to obtain this information and this is an area where more clarity is required. Irish Aid needs to improve its in-house research and data analysis capacities, as recommended by the OECD, and publicise the results of such work. This does not mean that external research projects such as the excellent Africa Power and Politics Project should be curtailed, however. Projects such as this are extremely valuable, and not just as academic exercises.

As noted in the consultation paper the current White Paper was written in 2005 and the subsequent downturn has directly caused the reduction in overseas assistance of 30% since 2008. This combined with the lack of progress towards the target of 0.7% of GNI by 2015 pose a threat to various development projects and also to Ireland's reputation as a serious global development partner.

Specifically related to VMM's work, a reduction in grants to Mísean Cara has directly affected our ability to continue our mission of sending skilled Irish personnel abroad in support of development.

Furthermore, Irish Aid has discontinued their funding for volunteering personnel as a special budget line since 2010. This disadvantages organisations like VMM who undertake their development through the placement and support of professionally qualified specialised long term volunteers. This principle, as articulated in the White Paper, has not been upheld.

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?

As VMM receives the vast majority of its funding from Irish Aid through Misesan Cara, its specialised role of undertaking integral human development through the placement of dedicated personnel from Irish and British civil society has been undermined by the reduced funding support for the volunteering sector. The subsequent effect on the Irish advocacy sector of reduced numbers of well trained and orientated volunteers serving overseas in the development sector will have a negative impact within Irish civil society.

The unpredictability of the budgetary cuts is very serious and has had a destabilising effect. The fact that the funding of Irish aid programmes cannot be predicted from year to year makes it difficult to forward plan work with any certainty and undermines VMM's and other NGOs' work overseas.

The specialised role which VMM has undertaken of facilitating a managed transition by religious missionaries to indigenously managed development programmes is seriously undermined through reduced grant support for our specialist volunteer personnel.

Key Issues: How should the Government respond to the key issues of hunger, fragility, climate change, basic needs, governance, human rights, and gender equality? Are there other issues? Given the limited resources and the need to focus on these, which issues should the Government prioritise in its future aid programming?

The work of VMM is designed around four programmatic areas: diocesan development, community development, health, and education. Within these programmes, we run projects engaged in all areas as listed above and more. It is important to realise the importance and critical role of religion in Africa, especially in relation to faith based development. The development potential of dioceses in Africa is immense as church run health and education services in Africa are pre-dominant. It is also important to acknowledge the tension between the secular, professional side of development and the religious, faith-based side. VMM, through its unique position, expertise and values, can act as a conduit between this divide. This allows us to provide a linkage between the historical legacy of Irish missionary assistance and the contemporary continuity of professional service delivery with Irish secular personnel. This, we believe, provides a valuable and complementary method for Irish Aid to respond to the key issues listed above in a synergistic, efficient and value-added manner.

An issue which is alluded to through the ambiguous term 'fragility' but not identified specifically is that of conflict resolution. VMM partners in Kenya, Sierra Leone and South Sudan are continually developing their expertise in this area. We believe it is important for Irish Aid to abandon the term 'fragility' in favour of emphasising its knowledge and experience in conflict resolution and rehabilitation gained through the Northern Ireland experience. The establishment of the Conflict Resolution Unit provides an opportunity to advertise and use Ireland's expertise in the area and the country as a site of knowledge. But the unit's work has not been highlighted and the use of terms such as 'fragility' does not help. There is very little information available on the nature of the unit's work and remit. It seems that an opportunity is being missed here. VMM has sent peace workers and

conflict resolution specialists to South Sudan, Kenya and Sierra Leone. Their knowledge along with that of the Conflict Resolution Unit could be synergised to better build the capacity of our partners in Africa.

We believe that prioritising should be done on a case-by-case basis. Different countries have different developmental needs and Irish Aid programmes should be adjusted and tailored accordingly. A one size fits all approach whereby one particular issue is prioritised above all others in simplistic and inefficient.

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

VMM is engaged in sending skilled Irish personnel abroad with partner organisations. In the White Paper Missionary and Faith Based Organisations (FBOs), such as VMM, were recognised on page 77 for their valuable input into Irish overseas development. VMM, with over 41 years experience in placing professional personnel overseas while working alongside our diocesan partners and missionary congregations, has had a valuable impact on the lives of the poor and marginalised.

Furthermore we have built a considerable networking system and have provided vital contributions to the eradication of poverty through our skill sharing placements and counterpart/ mentoring policies. With the aging cohort of Irish missionaries returning home, significant skills gaps have appeared within their management programmes overseas that cannot thus far be met locally. VMM are in a good position to fill these personnel gaps in a sensitive way that is respectful of the missionary charisma and yet fully informed by the necessity of good development practice in the changing climate of international development. This an opportunity for Irish Aid.

The role of the volunteer in facilitating delivery of good development has been given good recognition, especially on page 104 of the White Paper. VMM has expanded its volunteering service over the course of the past seven years and deepened both the pre departure orientation for our volunteers but also raised the professional benchmarks for such services through best practice policies and procedures. We have also strategically focused our skilled personnel towards agreed project objectives with well managed and focused volunteer job descriptions. (See appendix 1, below)

We would like to propose an enhanced ability to do more of the same through a reiteration of the commitment towards the volunteering traditions of Ireland and the funding of such principles accordingly. Irish volunteers must be supported more effectively throughout the volunteering life-cycle of recruitment, training, placement, and return. This would provide greater encouragement for people wishing to volunteer and sending organisations such as VMM. The profile of Irish development would be enhanced by the work of professional Irish men and women abroad.

We also believe a reiteration of Irish Aid's commitment to a managed transition by Irish religious missionaries towards indigenously managed programmes would be valuable. Increasing the grant support to Mísean Cara and associated Faith Based Organisations is required. Also, once indigenous management of programmes has been assumed, Irish Aid funding and monitoring and evaluation should continue to support them. Before and after this process a more HR-orientated funding conditionality would be more beneficial and less restrictive of the work VMM personnel engage in. Such interactions would positively benefit both Irish and African societies

Furthermore, incentivisation through funding support improved networking among Irish NGOs towards better practice and in particular consortia granted development assistance would result in

major benefits, as expertise and knowledge would be pooled and duplication lessened.

In moving towards this approach, VMM believe that a centralised resource service should be utilised and supported by Irish Aid as a clearing house for assessing and facilitating the use of skilled Irish personnel to support the move towards stronger indigenised development organisations within Irish Aid supported developing countries. Such a service has been established as Mission Resource Service (MRS) by VMM as a capacity building HR support service to Irish Missionaries at home and abroad. This we believe will provide a more effective and development orientated service in support of Ireland's overseas development assistance programmes, at home and abroad.

Other Comments

We would like to use this space to give voice to some of our strategic partners. This highlights in a direct way the excellent and necessary work skilled Irish volunteers are doing in some of the most marginalised and impoverished communities in our partner countries.

"I'm a young Bishop, which is an advantage. VMM is quite an experienced organisation in systems strengthening. And my plan is to improve this Diocese and leave it in good shape when I am finished here. Privileged to know VMM and have their technical support. Secondly, this area is very Christian/Catholic and having a partner that is also Christian is a great bonus. Not just sending secular volunteers but volunteers who are comfortable with our ethos and faith. They must also know that this is a country traumatised by war and they must be sensitive to this and identify the difficulty of this at community level. After 3 years I want to see VMM proud that they have left a legacy here of change and see the great support they will have given us".

- Eduardo Hiiboro Kassala, Bishop of Tombura Yambio, South Sudan (March 2012)

"I would like to extend my sincere thanks for identifying our organisation to benefit in the VMM partnership training which I attended at Nairobi. It was a very exciting opportunity for me. I was able to interact with other participants from other all over East Africa. Of course the facilitation was excellent. The numerous activities that were carried out in a workshop setting, individually, and in group meetings enable us to share the experiences and the specialized skills each one of us had. Personally I was very happy with the daily reflections before the start of the sessions. The session activities were dynamic and participatory, asking participants to reflect upon, act and plan ways that they might improve the participants' techniques in safeguarding children.

I feel each one of us learnt something, especially in understanding the concept of child abuse and how to protect the child, whether at our place or at home. I strongly suggest that such organized workshops are necessary in the near future, especially to evaluate ourselves on what has been achieved in our organisation after this training.

Thanks for the constant support given to MMU since 2005. God bless you." (Dec 2011)

- Dr. Kagambe Edmond, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Mountains of the Moon University, Uganda

"The work initiated and done to date by volunteers in the co-ordinator role has been invaluable and key to the development and success of projects in the Province. The support of VMM in providing volunteers has been one of the most valuable contributions to our Province, a sine qua non."

- Development Committee, Rosminian Fathers, Tanzania (Feb 2012)

"You are really mutual partners who are concerned about the capacity development of your partners. We are very grateful and you have made a big impression on us all here in Kiyinda Mityana."

- Fr. Joseph Ssekyewa, Diocese of Kiyanda Mityana, Uganda (June 2011)