

**Dóchas submission to Irish Aid
re new Civil Society Funding Mechanism**

July 2011

Dóchas submission to Irish Aid re new Civil Society Funding Mechanism.

Following a consultation meeting between Irish Aid and Dóchas members on 20 June 2011 where Irish Aid presented the draft application and appraisal process for a new funding mechanism for civil society partners, Dóchas has compiled comments and proposals from members regarding the application and appraisal process, appraisal criteria and other considerations.

Dóchas welcomes Irish Aid's renewed commitment to partnership with civil society and Irish NGOs, and welcomes Irish Aid's consultation with Dóchas members and the chance to provide our feedback on the proposed new funding framework.

1. Comments & proposals on the Appraisal process :

▪ Appraisal decision making

Dóchas proposes that the dialogue in the appraisal process be expanded beyond the written application to also include an oral presentation. The oral presentation could form a mechanism for dialogue to complement the written submission. This could present an opportunity for a concise summary of the proposal together with the clarity of a Q&A session that could enrich the appraisal process. This could be beneficial to both parties and from Irish Aid's perspective particularly in relation to risk assessment/management.

We acknowledge the challenge of having over 100 organisations to appraise, given the capacity constraints within Irish Aid. As such, we would suggest that this oral presentation could be for a limited number of applicants, perhaps those over a certain budget threshold.

▪ Appraisal scoring and transparency

Dóchas stresses the need for transparency around the scoring system. Dóchas proposes that the scoring system, guidelines, and relative weighting of criteria are shared with applicants, and are available in good time so that agencies are clear on how scoring will be undertaken. This is particularly relevant for agencies that will not get a chance to interact with Irish Aid beyond a single written submission.

Dóchas proposes greater transparency through provision of feedback on proposal appraisal including individual scores and breakdowns. Furthermore, following appraisal we would welcome that a list of proposal scores be shared together with their corresponding resource allocation. This could be done with applicants listed

anonymously, and would result in greater trust and confidence in the allocation process.

Dóchas proposes that there are clear explicit criteria for the organisations that get invited to apply for programme funding.

- **Quality Assurance**

Dóchas proposes that external reviewers should be involved in proposal appraisal, and for some form of quality assurance mechanism to be put in place.

Dóchas members request clarity on how consistency of proposal appraisal will be ensured, given the volume of applications, the limited time-frame, and possible use of external consultants in the appraisal process.

- **Predictability**

Dóchas members stress the importance of having a predictable flow of funding in future years within a multi-annual grant agreement. While acknowledging that the government budgets on a yearly basis, there should be some guarantee of funding in future years, perhaps with a pro-rata % change indicated in the budget.

- **Format for financial information**

Dóchas requests that there would be some consistency in terms of how financial information is provided, in the form of specific formats for budgets and expenditure reports.

- **Timeline**

Dóchas requests clarity on how organisations can transition from one-year to multi-annual funding. What will the timeline/process be for programme applications (former BG & MAPS) after 2011?

- **Funding levels**

Will there be any indication in the funding criteria on the levels of funding available (ie. what the maximum 'caps' for applications might be)?

2. Comments & proposals on the Appraisal Criteria:

- **Organisational capacity**

Dóchas proposes that organisational capacity and successful performance would form the primary criteria for funding allocations. Organisations should be

benchmarked on merit, in addition to having a track record of previous grant allocations.

Prior to the last Block Grant round, Irish Aid requested that organisations make efforts to diversify their income streams and reduce dependence on Irish Aid. Progress in income diversification should be recognised in the new funding round.

- **Learning**

Learning should feature explicitly in the appraisal criteria and Dóchas suggests that evidence of the use of learning from previous programmes in ongoing programme development and implementation should form part of the appraisal criteria. This is particularly relevant in relation to innovative approaches and/or previous programming that had unintended or even negative outcomes.

Mutual learning of MAPS funded partners may have been weak in previous rounds, but examples like the joint learning on DRR show how there have been some successes, and there is room for further expansion within the new framework. Dóchas can play a key role in facilitating peer learning through its core work on encouraging coordinated learning and improved NGO quality using working groups and other mechanisms.

- **Results and risk / innovation**

Dóchas welcomes Irish Aid's focus on demonstrating results and impact. However we highlight that it can be difficult to balance innovation with results. By focusing too narrowly on avoiding failure by achieving short-term successful results, this can hinder the development of more innovative and risk-taking approaches which may initially have high failure rates.

Dóchas requests further clarity on how this tension between risk and results will be reflected within the appraisal criteria. Can organisations set aside a certain % of a proposal explicitly for high-risk innovations? Could something similar to DFID's poverty action fund (innovation), or USAID's Development Innovation Fund be established? Both of these mechanisms provide smaller separate funding streams for high-risk innovations, and encourage NGOs to work with non-traditional partners.

- **Public Engagement**

Dóchas welcomes that engagement with the Irish public will form part of the appraisal criteria. We would stress the need to recognise that agencies have many different ways of engaging with the public – related to issues of size, capacity, approach and ultimately in the delivery of their own organisational vision and mission - and that most attempt to do this in line with good practice principles and adherence

to relevant codes of conduct. In addition to such adherence/alignment, agencies could be assessed on how they rationalise their approaches to such engagement and how this is articulated i.e. in organisational communications framework/plans.

- **Value for Money**

Appraisal criteria for *Value for Money* should reflect the diversity of approaches by different members (e.g. service provision or advocacy) and should be sensitive to the fact that some interventions are simply more expensive than others depending on context and issues such as location, security etc.

Dimensions that Irish Aid could look at include clear business case/rationale for the proposed approach, clarity re target and outcomes, adherence to best practices, cost of delivery versus alternative providers (e.g. Commercial or government) etc. Procurement policies could also provide a good indicator for *Value for Money*.

- **Approaches to programming**

Dóchas requests further clarity on how approaches to programming will be considered within the appraisal criteria, such as targeting the most vulnerable, actively involving programme beneficiaries, conducting strong context analyses, using rights-based approaches, addressing gender equality, long-term sustainability, etc. Assessment of many of these approaches are presumably implicit in the criteria of programme logic, and clarity of purpose, but it is hoped that further clarity could be provided regarding assessment and weighting of quality approaches to programming within the appraisal process.

- **Country strategies**

Dóchas members acknowledge the need to strengthen alignment with country-level strategies, plans and policies, while recognising the challenges and constraints posed by the diversity of approaches, support for civil society and capacity limitations. Clarity is requested on whether alignment to country plans, and/or Irish Aid CSPs will form part of the appraisal criteria.

- **Sustainability and Scalability**

The ability of programmes or projects to be sustained after Irish Aid funding has finished should remain an important consideration. Likewise the ability of programmes and projects to be scaled up must be clearly articulated as part of the application.