



Dóchas

The Irish Association of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations

A History of Dóchas

1974 – 2004

The First Thirty Years



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Abbreviations

ACDC	Advisory Council on Development Co-operation
AGM	Annual General Meeting
APSO	Agency for Personal Service Overseas
CEC	Commission of the European Communities
CONCORD	European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development
CONGOOD	Confederation of Non-Governmental Organisations for Overseas Development
DAC	Disaster Appeal Committee
DAOC	Development Activities Overseas Committee
DCI	Development Co-operation Ireland
DEC	Development Education Commission
DEEEP	Development Education in Europe Exchange Project
DESC	Development Education Support Centre
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
EC	European Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union
HEDCO	Higher Education for Development Co-operation
IA	Ireland Aid
INA	Irish National Assembly
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
ND	National Delegate
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NGDO	Non-Governmental Development Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODAD	Overseas Development Aid Division
RBAG	Rights Based Approaches Group
RTE	Radio Telefís Éireann
UN	United Nations
UNGASS	United Nations General Assembly Special Session
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
VALC	Voluntary Agencies Liaison Committee

About Dóchas

Dóchas is an umbrella organisation of Irish Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) involved in development and relief overseas and/or in the provision of development education.

Dóchas provides a forum for consultation and co-operation between its Members and helps them speak with a single voice on development issues. Dóchas is not a funding agency and is not involved in overseas projects.

Dóchas was formed in October 1993, and is the result of a merger between CONGOOD – which represented the common interests of Irish Development NGOs since 1974, and the Irish National Assembly – which linked most Irish Non-Governmental Development Organisations (NGDOs) into CONCORD, a European Union network representing over 1100 NGDO's.

Dóchas aims to add value to the Irish development sector, by providing its members with a forum to come together, share experiences and learning, and to deal with issues collectively. In this way, Dóchas contributes to enhancing the work of its members, but it also represents the views of Irish NGOs in relation to the Irish government, in particular the Department of Foreign Affairs and its development cooperation directorate, Irish Aid (formerly Development Cooperation Ireland).

Membership of Dóchas is open to non-profit making NGDOs independently established and located in the Republic of Ireland or in Northern Ireland, who regard international development cooperation – including development education – as an important aspect of their aims and work. A full list of the rules and criteria for

membership is available from the Dóchas office on request. A list of Member organisations is available from the Dóchas office or on our website.

Dóchas is governed by its members, through the Annual General Meeting which elects an Executive Committee to manage the network on behalf of the members. The Executive Committee is assisted by a Secretariat which is responsible for the day-to-day business of the network.

Dóchas is funded by membership contributions and a multi-annual grant from Irish Aid. Dóchas has also received occasional funding from other sources, such as the European Commission.

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1. Background

While Dóchas was established in 1993, its roots can be traced back to the 1970s, when Irish Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working in the development field decided to come together in order to provide a stronger voice and more effective lobby on development issues.

Prior to the 1970s, there were relatively few Irish NGOs working in the development area. However, the rise of television – and the resulting new phenomenon of live coverage of humanitarian crises such as the Biafra war – and Ireland’s accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, meant that development issues and Ireland’s relationship with the developing world received greater attention.

As a result, a number of new NGOs were formed, and the official Irish governmental aid programme, Irish Aid, was set up in 1974. At the same time, Development NGOs felt the need to create a network, to provide a collective platform for interaction with the new state body, and for putting pressure on the government to dedicate sufficient resources to the overseas aid programme. Thus, in 1974, the Voluntary Agencies Liaison Committee (VALC) was created.

In a parallel development, the European Commission invited NGOs to set up a representative body, which came to be known as the EC-NGO Liaison Committee, in order to facilitate its interaction with the growing European NGO sector. This led to the creation to the Irish National Assembly (INA), which was the conduit for the interaction of Irish-based organisation with the new Liaison Committee.

In 1977, VALC was replaced by a new body, with a more permanent structure. The new body aimed to increase co-operation between development NGOs in Ireland, and was called the Confederation of Non-Governmental Organisations for Overseas Development (CONGOOD).

In 1993, both CONGOOD and the INA amalgamated to form Dóchas, the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations.

2. VALC – The Beginnings of NGO Cooperation

The creation of Irish Aid as the official government development assistance programme in 1974, led Irish NGOs to believe that there was a need to establish a solid and effective body to negotiate with and lobby the government on Ireland's role in developing countries. The CEC Development Directorate also preferred to deal with a single representative body of NGOs from each member state. Moreover, it was believed that the existence of a forum of development NGOs in Ireland would constitute a declaration of the importance of development in Irish society and an opportunity to involve a broad spectrum of Irish people in the debate around development issues.

One of the first priorities identified was to promote Development Education within the NGOs themselves and among the public at large. However Development Education was treated with a measure of scepticism by some of the NGOs. Even among the organisations themselves, development was often still a poorly defined concept and some felt that debate on development through Development Education activities could represent a challenge to the NGO's established programmes. Nevertheless, there was widespread recognition of the need to inform the public of the seriousness and complexity of development issues, which in turn necessitated a co-ordinated and organised front.

A growing awareness in Ireland of humanitarian crises and development needs in general, had led to a popular desire to respond with assistance. However, in the early years there was little clarity around how to respond to these challenges, the timeframes

involved and the demands that would be made on organisations and individuals. While media awareness of famine and crisis in developing countries, such as Nigeria and Ethiopia, had reinforced the need for Irish support, there was a worry that frequent appeals launched by different organisations in Ireland would have been seen as an uncoordinated response and, above all, evidence of competition between different NGOs.

Therefore, in response to this, 14 development NGOs set up the Voluntary Agencies Liaison Committee (VALC). VALC, established in 1974, was an informal committee with no constitution. It also lacked dedicated resources, such as an office, staff and funding¹. Its work was carried out on a rotating basis by volunteers from its member organisations. The Committee sought to influence government development policies through developing common positions and joint actions.

VALC was thus the beginning of co-ordination among NGOs across a wide range of development issues.

¹ VALC's informal status left very little recorded information on its founding or its work. Information for this work has been gathered mostly through the recollections of the people involved at the time.

3. CONGOOD

In February 1977 VALC was replaced by the Confederation of Non-Governmental Organisations for Overseas Development (CONGOOD). A more organised network, CONGOOD was formed to promote closer working relations between the member agencies as well as, wherever possible, to help them speak with a single voice on development issues.

Setting up CONGOOD was not an easy task and involved an ongoing struggle to find the resources and facilities to continue its work. In its very early days, the Confederation depended on special arrangements with some of its member organisations to provide office space, materials and a postal address and relied on voluntary assistance provided by the membership.

From July 1977, the new network operated out of the offices of the Irish Leprosy Association in Leeson Street, with the assistance of a part-time Secretary. Bill Oliver occupied this position from March 1977 to March 1979 and Kenneth McClenaghan (Irish Leprosy Association) from March 1979 to May 1980. In May 1980 an Executive Secretary, Ann Fitzgerald, was recruited and CONGOOD moved to its own premises in Ely Place² shortly afterward. In November 1980 a Secretary to the Executive Secretary, June MacMillan, was recruited, increasing the staffing to two. Some months later, Ms. MacMillan left to take up a function at the Advisory Council on Development Cooperation, and in May 1981 her position at CONGOOD was filled by Anna Farrell.

² In subsequent years, the organisation was housed in Kildare Street, Baggot Street, Herbert Street and Deer Park Road in Mount Merrion, before moving to Harcourt Street in 2003.

On 29 April 1983 CONGOOD was registered as a Company limited by guarantee, and at the same time was granted a Charity Number by the Revenue Commissioners. At the time of its incorporation, CONGOOD had 17 members. Membership was open to all organisations that were non-profit in nature, were involved in development cooperation and or development education, and were “independently established and located in the State or Northern Ireland”.

CONGOOD’s income was derived from membership subscriptions. In 1977 the minimum fee was £25 and the maximum subscription was set at £500. At that time Members also paid a membership fee in respect of each Commission or Working Group in which they participated. The minimum contribution was £25 and the maximum was £100. From 1978, a new system was introduced under which members paid an annual subscription based on a percentage of their income for the previous financial year. The minimum fee was £50. Day-to-day management and administration of CONGOOD, as well as the external relations, were the responsibility of the Executive Committee, which also oversaw the work undertaken by specific issue-based working groups. The Executive Committee was elected by the membership at the Annual General Meeting, held in March or April each year.

In 1977 Michael Coote (Church of Ireland Bishops’ Appeal) was appointed the first chairman of the organisation, leading CONGOOD during the first years with all the challenges of bringing established organisations together with new, financially weak or inexperienced ones³. Subsequent chairs were: Jerome Connolly (Irish Commission for Justice and Peace), Ronald Smiley (Gorta), Brian McKeown (Trócaire) and Elizabeth Ferrar (Church of Ireland Bishop’s Appeal), who became the first female chairperson of CONGOOD.⁴

³ Michael Coote died recently in February 1999 and Elizabeth Ferrar in August 2001.

⁴ Her appointment necessitated an alteration to the CONGOOD constitution, with the replacement of the word “chairman” with the word “chairperson” throughout the text.

3.1 CONGOOD working plans

A number of issues were addressed by CONGOOD during the late 1970's and early 1980's. Some of the most salient included the following: development education, the level of funding for Irish overseas development assistance, the criteria by which the Department of Foreign Affairs selected bilateral programme countries, the need for a Minister of State for Development Co-operation and elections to the European Parliament.

With a small office, and little resources in terms of equipment and funds to run its activities, most of CONGOOD's work was carried out by CONGOOD members who participated in its three working groups:

- a) Development Education Commission (DEC);
- b) Development Activities Overseas Commission (DAOC);
- c) Disasters Appeal Committee (DAC)

a) The Development Education Commission (DEC)

The Development Education Commission had the task of providing the Irish public with information on development issues, as well as to show how member organisations were seeking to address development needs. Information sharing, lobbying of government on development issues, public education campaigns and the joint production of development literature were principal means of furthering its objectives.

In September 1978 the DEC launched a pamphlet entitled *World in Crisis*. This sought to present an Irish view on development. Produced by the members of the Development Education Commission, *World in Crisis* was launched publicly to great acclaim nationwide⁵. As development issues became more popular among

⁵ CONGOOD received a grant of £5,000 from the Department of Foreign Affairs for this publication, out of the Department's total expenditure on Development Education that year of £33,840 (ref: Dáil Éireann - Volume 311 - 13 February, 1979)

politicians, civil society and the public in general, the booklet was distributed to secondary schools, students, teachers, farmers, religious congregations and others interested in the issues. The Commission subsequently produced a number of other publications, including:

- *A Glossary of Development Terminology* (1980);
- *Briefing on the Brandt Report* (1980);
- *75:25 Ireland in an Unequal World* (1984);
- *A Guide to Development Education Resources – Activities in Ireland* (1984);
- *75:25 Ireland in a Still Unequal World* (1991); and
- *75:25 Ireland in an Increasingly Unequal World* (1996)

These constituted a significant achievement for the Commission as part of its development education agenda.

Another significant activity of the Commission was its involvement in the CONGOOD Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) campaign in 1987, which was launched following the government's decision to cut the aid programme by 26% - which would mean a fall from IR£43 million in 1987 to IR£32 million in 1988. This involved lobbying government and political parties to increase Ireland's ODA and to keep the public and Dáil deputies informed about the Aid cuts⁶. Arguments in favour of and against Aid were also debated during the campaign, which targeted young people and teachers groups.

In addition to this campaign, the DEC ran a separate campaign, calling for 0.05% of bilateral aid to be spent on Development Education activities.

⁶ (9th/ AGM 1986)

In 1980, the Department of Foreign Affairs created the Development Education Support Centre (DESC). This centre had a very similar agenda of work to the CONGOOD Commission and as it could compete for Development Education funding with CONGOOD members, it presented a significant challenge to the Commission. CONGOOD met with the Department of Foreign Affairs on a number of occasions to discuss the lack of communication leading up to the creation of DESC. As a result of these contacts, CONGOOD was given two seats on the DESC liaison committee, although it had sought membership of the Executive Board.

The Development Education Commission was one the strongest working groups set up within CONGOOD. As well as undertaking its own full range of activities the commission provided a driving force for maintaining the very existence of CONGOOD itself.

b) Development Activities Overseas Commission (DAOC)

This Commission was established to interact with the Department of Foreign Affairs on its priority country programmes, on the overseas work of development NGOs and to improve the co-ordination between CONGOOD members working overseas.

The Commission attempted to develop a close working relationship with the Overseas Development Aid Division (ODAD) of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Project proposals from member organisations were discussed by the commission before being submitted to ODAD for co-funding.

In 1982 the Commission developed guidelines for the evaluation of projects supported by CONGOOD members in developing countries. However, the disparate nature and variety of projects being implemented by its member organisation overseas, led to considerable discussion on the applicability of the guidelines themselves.

In terms of Development Policy, the Commission established dialogue with the Advisory Council on Development Cooperation

(ACDC), which was created by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) in 1979. The ACDC was established to advise the government on all aspects of development cooperation and on issues relating to co-funding of NGO projects, evaluation and monitoring. These efforts to establish co-operation were unsuccessful, as the Commission had neither the resources nor capacity to engage meaningfully with the ACDC.

The Commission also contributed to the CONGOOD Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) Campaign in 1987, which sought to raise Ireland's ODA to level of the UN target of 0.7% of GNP by 1990.

However, of the three working groups set up by CONGOOD, the Development Activities Overseas Commission encountered the greatest difficulties in pursuing its goals. Relations and communications with the ACDC were poor. Commission members felt that there was little willingness on the part of the Council to engage with CONGOOD concerns and proposals. As member organisations were substantially co-funded by the Overseas Development Aid Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Commission saw its activities and its potential to influence activities as quite limited.

Lack of clarity over the objectives of the Commission inside CONGOOD as well as the different interpretations and opinions on the various development theories led to a situation where the Commission was frequently limited by its inability to reach consensus. Attendance at meetings began to fall which resulted in the Commission ceasing to function. These and other factors led the Executive Committee to request in May 1984, after a period of inactivity, that the Commission function on an ad-hoc basis only. This, in effect, saw the end of the Commission, as it failed to meet again.

c) Disaster Appeal Committee (DAC)

Emergency relief had been a key factor in the growth of the Irish aid sector during the 1970's. As a result of this focus on emergency assistance, a number of Irish aid agencies determined that a well

coordinated fund-raising campaign was called for. They agreed that such a joint campaign would be likely to mobilise greater resources for the victims of large scale disasters, and would also reassure the general public about the effectiveness and efficiency of Irish organisations working overseas. This conviction resulted in the creation of a committee to allow member organisations to respond to crises in developing countries in a unified and co-ordinated manner.

The Committee had been established autonomously before CONGOOD but was brought under the CONGOOD umbrella in 1978. However, in 1980 it was decided to re-confer autonomy on the DAC. It came back under CONGOOD again in 1983 but was subsequently taken outside the organisation again in 1985. It ran one further disaster appeal as an autonomous body and ceased to function thereafter.

The DAC launched its first appeals in the early 1980's. Emergency appeals in response to famines in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia (1984) for the besieged city of Aswara, and to provide humanitarian aid for refugees received a satisfactory response from the public. The Committee negotiated with the larger banks and succeeded in setting up special schemes to facilitate members of the public who wished to contribute to the various emergency appeals. The use of the media as a vehicle to raise awareness about the crises in the developing world and to appeal for support and contributions was also developed at this time. Negotiations with state broadcaster Radio Telefís Éireann (RTÉ), resulted in the station providing advertising space and time at reduced rates.

The work of the DAC helped to improve relations among the fundraising organisations by replacing, to a large extent, the competition that existed between them for public donations, with a more collaborative and co-ordinated approach. At a certain stage, the Executive Committee of CONGOOD suggested that the Development Education Commission should work with the DAC so that development education activities would provide a better understanding of why and for what people were donating money, clothes and other resources

The Committee also campaigned for greater Irish government intervention in developing countries where crises and disaster were taking lives, as well as to increase its development assistance in general.

DAC's ability to generate its own resources led to a certain functional independence from CONGOOD itself. At the 1980 Annual General Meeting (AGM) the Chairperson of the DAC confirmed that the members of the Committee had decided to re-establish the autonomy of the DAC.

However, the success of the Committee's work was threatened to some extent by the success of the higher profile Band Aid initiative in the mid 1980's. The greater access to worldwide media and the influence of its celebrity campaigners allowed Band Aid to attract significantly more resources than the NGOs could through the DAC. Support from the Irish government, for example, to Band Aid in this period totalled nearly £1.4 million compared to £40,000 raised by the DAC. The Committee felt that the Government did not treat its work seriously and that support to Irish development NGOs was less of a political priority than support to high profile initiatives. Furthermore, members felt that they could raise more money using their own names, which by then were more recognisable to the public than that of the DAC.

3.2 CONGOOD and its external links

In the national context CONGOOD cooperated with three important national entities:

- a)** Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Development Co-operation Division;
- b)** The Agency for Personal Service Overseas (APSO);
- c)** The Higher Education for Development Cooperation (HEDCO)

a) Department of Foreign Affairs

The Irish Government's official development assistance programme started in 1974. From modest beginnings the programme began to grow significantly when Michael O'Kennedy became Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1975. O'Kennedy, who had lobbied for increased official development assistance while in opposition, increased the budget for the programme and created its identity as Irish Aid. CONGOOD also sought to build support for the Irish Aid programme. In 1980 it persuaded the Oireachtas All-Party Committee on Foreign Affairs to invite Jan Pronk, the then Deputy Secretary General of UNCTAD to address members of Oireachtas. The briefing took place at Leinster House in Dublin in November and was attended by 35 TDs and senators. Pronk stressed the role of Ireland in the European Union and focused on the importance of countries like Ireland increasing their development assistance budgets so as to gain voice and authority in high-level decision-making on development in Europe.

In 1981, a report produced by the Independent Commission for International Developmental Issues, commonly known as the Brandt Report, advocated substantially increasing aid from Western Europe to developing countries. It was one of the most influential pieces of work undertaken on development aid in the post-war period and CONGOOD actively engaged itself in promoting the report and its recommendations, as a means of influencing politicians in support of the official development assistance programme.

CONGOOD's work and influence were becoming increasingly recognised. In 1981, the then Minister of State Jim O'Keefe, praised CONGOOD's efforts and particularly the work carried out by its Commissions. He also emphasised the role of CONGOOD as the watchdog on the government's official aid programme.⁷

⁷ Seanad Éireann - Volume 96 - 09 December, 1981

b) Agency for Personal Services Overseas

In 1974, the Department of Foreign Affairs founded the Agency for Personal Service Overseas (APSO). Headed by Bill Jackson, APSO provided skilled Irish volunteers for projects in developing countries. APSO's activities generated increased interest in development activities and indirectly helped produce new development related organisations. Returned development workers, many from APSO supported projects, got together and formed Comhlámh. The increasing involvement of ordinary people in development resulted in a growth of development education activities in the 1980's and the setting up of solidarity groups linking developing countries such as Tanzania, Mozambique and Nicaragua with Ireland.

c) Higher Education for Development Co-operation

In 1975, the universities, colleges of education and institutes of technology set up 'Higher Education for Development Co-operation (HEDCO), to promote, support and implement programmes of cooperation with developing countries.

As debates on development issues became more widespread different views on development and the relations between the developing and developed world began to come to the fore. HEDCO sought to bring this debate into the academic arena and to promote the participation of its members in the study of ways to respond to crises in developing countries. The sharing of information and integrated application of the available academic resources would help provide the theoretical basis to legitimise government decision-making and ensure the effectiveness of the government's interventions overseas. HEDCO was an appropriate and effective strategy to bring third level institutions, intellectuals, Government and other groups together in seeking to develop new forms of tackling inequality between North and South.

3.3. CONGOOD and its members

CONGOOD's work, however, was continuously constrained by financial difficulties. These financial problems became an issue among those TDs interested in the work of the development NGOs. Niall Andrews, speaking in the Dáil, referred to the inadequate financial support given to NGOs "like Trócaire and CONGOOD, the umbrella organisation".⁸

As mentioned earlier, CONGOOD depended entirely on its member organisations for funding. Members paid an annual membership fee based on their voluntary income. The Minimum contribution at that time was £50 and this fee was levied on those members who did not have a voluntary income. All other Members were levied proportionately on the basis of their voluntary income. The fact that the larger agencies were paying a larger share of the CONGOOD budget did not entitle them to additional decision-making powers in relation to the work programme and activities of the Confederation. Nevertheless some of the larger members expected CONGOOD to maintain a fairly low profile in certain areas of public discussion and dealings with government, particularly when these organisations were actively seeking public funding for their programmes overseas. At this time there was strong competition for public donations between the different organisations.

In 1982 the Executive Secretary left CONGOOD to return to her previous position from which she had been seconded. A replacement, Noelie Hannon, was recruited in July 1982 but left after less than 3 months to take up alternative employment. The Executive tried unsuccessfully to fill the vacancy and decided to defer the recruitment and to ask the then Secretary to take on additional duties pending the appointment of a new Executive Secretary.

Around that time some members expressed dissatisfaction around the work and profile of CONGOOD with some threatening to

⁸ Dáil Éireann - Volume 331 - 15 December, 1981

terminate their membership of the Confederation. Concern, Gorta and Trócaire wrote to CONGOOD in 1982 expressing the opinion that the organisation was not undertaking its core coordination function of but was involving itself in activities that were the role of its member agencies. Some members wanted a reviewed and simplified CONGOOD. The issue of whether or not to appoint an Executive Secretary was raised again occasionally between 1982 and 1991, when the AGM decided against the recruitment of an Executive Secretary and the budget line was removed.

3. The Irish National Assembly

The Irish National Assembly (INA) was an EC related forum of Irish NGOs concerned with development and linked Irish NGOs into the EC/NGO Liaison Committee in Brussels which, at that time, linked over 700 European NGOs.

The EEC provided major assistance to developing countries and increased funding for development projects became available through both the Directorate General for Development of the Commission of the European Communities (CEC) and through the development assistance programmes of the member countries themselves.

To facilitate the Commission's interaction with the growing body of European Development NGOs, it invited the creation of a structure that could serve as an interlocutor. This led to the creation, in 1973, of the EC-NGO Liaison Committee, which was based on a system of national "platforms" in each of the Member States. The Irish National Assembly (INA) of development NGOs was formed to be the Irish "national platform" of this EC-wide structure.

The INA was responsible for electing a National Delegate to the EC-NGO Liaison Committee as well as representatives to its various working groups and ad hoc groups. The Assembly was not a legally registered Company, did not have charitable status and did not have an office or a secretariat. The administrative work was carried out by the organisation with which the National Delegate worked.

In 1993, following a review of the work of CONGOOD and of the INA, it was agreed to merge the two bodies to represent the

common interests of the NGDO sector at both Irish and European level.

Some of the names considered for the new body included:

- Crinniú (meaning Gathering)
- Dóchas (meaning Hope)
- Forbairt (meaning Development)
- Comhluader (meaning Coming Together for Cooperation)

It was decided to choose an Irish name for the new body, to highlight the Irish identity within the broader European network of which it was part.⁹

⁹ The members chose the name Dóchas, because it was felt that its English meaning (Hope) reflected the sense and aims of the Development NGO sector, and also because it was felt that the Irish name would be easier than the alternatives for our European counterparts to pronounce.

4. Dóchas

Since its creation, Dóchas has had an organisational structure which is similar to that of CONGOOD. It has a nine-member Executive Committee which is elected during the AGM and meets approximately six times a year.

The Executive Committee is responsible for the management of the business of the organisation. The organisation's work programme is carried out by a permanent Secretariat and a number of Working Groups which meet on a regular basis. Reports on the activities of the Working Groups are regularly presented at Executive Committee meetings, the AGM and are also included in the Dóchas newsletter.

4.1 Strengthening Dóchas

In 1997 the Executive Committee began a process to strengthen the organisation. In consultation with the membership, the first Strategic Plan was formulated and was adopted by the membership at the 1998 AGM. The Plan brought huge benefits to Dóchas in terms of promoting a more dynamic and engaged Executive Committee, greater communication with the membership, more involvement of members in the Working Groups and an improved relationship with Ireland Aid (now Irish Aid). This resulted in a higher profile for the organisation. New members began to come on board and membership grew from 22 in 1998 to 31 in 2003.

As Dóchas expanded, its membership became more involved, its relationship with Ireland Aid (IA) was enhanced and new opportunities for dialogue presented themselves. However, with

this growth came additional expectations and great strain was put on the organisation's resources (one staff member, a revolving and voluntary Executive Committee, a small office and limited financial resources).

In 2000, the Executive established a Strengthening Dóchas Group, to examine the role and position of Dóchas within the sector and to consider how a strengthened Dóchas could add value to the work of Dóchas members. Following a process of consultation with the membership, it was agreed that Dóchas should have a clearly defined and focussed role in supporting and representing its members; networking, information sharing and collaboration needed to be increased and strengthened; working groups needed to be expanded and strengthened and new groups established. Members also identified a number of additional areas in which they felt Dóchas should be involved (i.e. Quality standards and best practice; improving relations with Ireland Aid (now Irish Aid), etc.

It was clear that if Dóchas was to take on these additional functions and respond to the challenges that were facing the members, it needed to grow and additional resources in terms of funding, staff and office space would be required. This led Dóchas into discussions with IA and during that process, it was found that there was a genuine sense that strengthening the capacity of Dóchas and deepening the relationship between the two bodies would be of mutual benefit. This resulted in the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Dóchas and IA, which was signed into effect on 8th July 2002. The purpose of the MoU was to *“enable Dóchas to become a more actively engaged and better resourced partner of Ireland Aid, in order to reinforce our common overarching goal of reducing poverty throughout the developing world.”*

Under the terms of the MoU, IA agreed to contribute a total of €362,299 to Dóchas over a three year period (September 2002 - December 2005), which enabled Dóchas to develop a strategic partnership with Ireland Aid, to strengthen Dóchas with the recruitment of a new Director, carry out a number of activities through the Working Groups and move to new, more centrally located offices.

a) Dóchas appoints its first Director

During the discussions with Ireland Aid on the development of the MoU, it became clear that Dóchas would need to appoint a Director, who would be responsible for the day-to-day management and development of Dóchas. In July 2002, following the signing of the MoU, Dóchas began a process for the recruitment of its first Director. The position was advertised and following a competitive process, which was managed by outside consultants, the first Director of Dóchas was appointed. Hans Zomer took up the appointment on 1st October 2002

The Director is assisted by a full time Office Manager who runs the office and is responsible for the financial management of the network. This post is currently held by Anna Farrell, a long time staff member who has worked with Dóchas and its predecessor (CONGOOD) since 1981.

During 2004, Dóchas employed a full time Policy Officer, to coordinate the network's campaign aimed at influencing the Irish EU Presidency. A similar, but part-time, position had been created during the 1996 Presidency, but at that time, Dóchas did not have the office space to house the extra staff; the Project Officer, Mary Purcell, was based in the Christian Aid offices in Dublin.

b) Membership of Dóchas

Eligibility for membership of Dóchas is based on the same criteria used by its predecessor. While its membership has grown from 17 in 1993 to its 2004 level of thirty-four member organisations, its dependence on membership subscriptions for funding its activities has decreased substantially, as it receives multi-annual funding from the Irish Government.

c) Dóchas Chairpersons

Elizabeth Ferrar (Church of Ireland Bishops' Appeal) was the incoming Chairperson of Dóchas and was followed by Des McGillicuddy (Irish Missionary Union) who acted as Chairperson

from October 1993 – December 1993. The network was chaired by Jerome Connolly (Irish Commission for Justice and Peace) – from December 1993 until December 1996 and by PJ Howell (Concern) from January 1997 to June 2003 (two terms). Anne Cleary (Aidlink) took up the position in June 2003.

4.2 Issues Addressed by Dóchas

Although Dóchas continues to confront new concerns, the major part of its work is on long term and ongoing issues . Lobbying government to achieve the United Nations’ target of 0.7% of GNP for Irish official development assistance, an increase in the European Union’s aid budget and improvements of the quality of development assistance in general, remain central objectives for Dóchas.

In 2004, Dóchas had five Working Groups focussing on the objectives agreed in the Dóchas Strategic Plan. Membership of the Working Groups is open to all Dóchas Members. The Working Groups focus on: HIV/AIDS, Development Education, the Rights Based Approach to Development, ODA and the Irish EU Presidency. The latter was established to lobby the Irish Government on development issues during the Irish Presidency of the EU

a) HIV/AIDS Working Group

The HIV/AIDS Working Group was established in May 2001 to prepare common positions for the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS. With 13 active members, the Group has continued working together to improve and to share learning and expertise on HIV/AIDS in the Irish development NGO sector and to advocate for increased NGO participation in a co-ordinated Irish response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

During the 2004 Irish Presidency of the EU the Working Group prepared a Briefing Paper entitled ‘*The European Union, HIV/AIDS and Human Security – Issues and Challenges for Ireland’s EU Presidency*’.

b) Development Education Working Group

The Development Education Group (DEG) is the only working group that has survived since the early days of VALC. Thirteen member organisations participate actively in the Group.

In contrast to earlier times, the Dóchas DEG does not set itself the goal of producing development education resources. Rather, it focuses on sharing experience among the members and promoting good practice in development education. The DEG is also the link between the Dóchas member organisations and development education practitioners across the EU, through CONCORD and the Development Education in Europe Exchange Project (DEEEP).

c) Rights Based Approach to Development Working Group

The Rights-Based Approaches to Development (RBA) Working Group developed from a series of meetings convened by Christian Aid in 2000 and 2001. The Group aims to promote the notion of poverty as a Human Rights issue, through research on the concept and application of a rights-based approach to development. The group has relied on research work as its principal tool.

The Group held seminars in January 2002 and February 2003 and a conference in May 2003 to clarify and promote the RBA concept and the impacts of its adoption for Dóchas members. The Group engages in international advocacy and debate and conducted a survey of member organisations engagement with RBA, their needs and priorities.

d) Dóchas EU Presidency Working Group

This Group was formally constituted in February 2003, although it had been meeting since early January 2003, to shape and inform Dóchas' lobby strategy ahead of and during the six-month Irish Presidency of the European Union (1 January - 30 June 2004). Representatives of eight Dóchas member agencies actively participated in this Group.

Following consultation with Dóchas members a strategy for a Dóchas Presidency Project was drafted and it was agreed that the project would focus on the theme of Human Security. The Group prepared a funding proposal to the EU, which was subsequently approved, thereby enabling Dóchas to recruit a Policy Officer to co-ordinate the project. Conall O’Caoimh was appointed to this position in October 2003 for a nine-month period.

The project was officially launched at a press conference on 16 December 2003. The Group produced a Briefing Pack entitled “*Human Security: Placing Development at the Heart of the EUs External Relations*”, organised a seminar for new members states on the theme of *Development NGOs in an Expanding Europe* (30 May), and organised a conference on the theme of *External Relations and Human Security in an Enlarged EU* (31 May).

An external evaluation of the project was undertaken in 2004. The evaluation was overwhelmingly positive:

- “Choosing the theme of Human Security as the basis of the project was widely regarded as a masterstroke” with NGO platforms across the EU adopting it as a priority for their future lobby work. It was seen as “A cutting edge topic applied with vigour”;
- There was ... a very positive feeling that every member organisation had been consulted, and that the process began in sufficient time to include all stakeholders.
- “The Human Security pack, [was] well-written and produced.”
- “There was consistent praise for the three staff that kept the project moving at a demanding pace: People described this project as Dóchas finding its feet, and being particularly good for its profile”.

e) Dóchas Overseas Development Assistance Working Group

Following the announcement in 2000 of a Government decision to reach the 0.7% ODA/GDP target by 2007, Dóchas resolved to lobby the Government to ensure this commitment was delivered on. In the three years 2002-2004 Ireland had made no progress towards this goal, with the annual aid budget stalling at 0.41% of GNP, and there was widespread concern among the Dóchas members that Ireland would not “keep its word”.

A number of Dóchas members set up an ad hoc ODA group in 2003 and following discussion with the Dóchas Executive this group was formally ratified as a Dóchas Working Group in March 2004, with the objective of maintaining public pressure on the government to honour its commitment to reach 0.7% target by 2007.

At the Dóchas AGM in April 2004 the membership adopted the following resolution *“The membership of Dóchas commits itself to campaign publicly and advocate with government for the fulfilment of the millennium pledge by the Taoiseach that Ireland will reach the target of 0.7% of GNP as ODA by the year 2007, and requests the Executive to ensure that a strategy is put in place to implement this resolution”*.

The ODA Group’s strategy included public campaigning and targeted lobbying of politicians. A number of presentations were made to Oireachtas Committees and the group also engaged in publicity work, eg. through taking out advertisements in the national press.¹⁰

¹⁰ The group’s work would receive a major boost with Dóchas’ lead role in the Make Poverty History campaign during 2005.

4.3 Dóchas and CONCORD

Dóchas is the Irish member of the European Confederation of NGOs for Relief and Development (CONCORD)¹¹. Just as Dóchas in Ireland seeks to influence Government policies and public opinion on development issues, Concord seeks to increase the influence European NGDOs can exert on EU external and development policies.

CONCORD was created in 2003, with a view to enhancing the impact of European NGOs in influencing the European institutions. It was felt that the NGDO-EU Liaison Committee suffered from the fact that its National Platform based structure excluded the expertise from the wide variety of NGO networks working on EU development policies. The financial difficulties that the Liaison Committee had got into by 2002, provided NGOs an opportunity to rethink their needs for EU-wide coordination, and this process of reflection resulted in a new structure, whose added value was seen to lie in its capacity to establish joint positions of the entire Development NGO community and to promote the sharing of knowledge and capacity to address vital issues.

Like the Liaison Committee, CONCORD has a structure of National Platforms. However, its membership also includes a second category of organisations: NGO networks and families.¹²

Through its membership of CONCORD, Dóchas is provided with the opportunity to become more involved in issues central to the interests of its members. Dóchas members participate in CONCORD working group meetings and seminars, which bring together organisations from across Europe and experts and academics on major development themes.

¹¹ Previously called the EC-NGO Liaison Committee

¹² Thus, Irish NGOs can be members of CONCORD through Dóchas, but also through their own networks (eg. CIDSE, APRODEV, EuroStep, Oxfam International, etc.)

5. Dóchas moving forward

“Effective networks possess characteristics of strong social capital, leadership, governance and management, joint learning, and mutually beneficial partnership with donors. Effective networks have a diverse, dynamic membership and structure, and are committed to excellence and democratic decision-making processes.”¹³

According to this definition, the Dóchas of 2004 can be said to be an effective network. The strengthening process – started in 2000 – resulted in a new strategic plan and a partnership with Development Cooperation Ireland/Irish Aid and brought new dynamism to the organisation. Dóchas’ membership continues to grow, bringing in a range of new perspectives and experiences.

With this growth comes a renewed impetus to ensure that Dóchas and its members are leading the way in setting and achieving new standards of quality, both within the Development NGO sector in Ireland and wider civil society. Dóchas’ new strategic plan invites the organisation to work on NGO quality and impact, and ensure Dóchas’ own work achieves the highest standards. During 2004, the Dóchas Executive Committee initiated a process of reflection about NGO Governance, which aims to overhaul and document all of Dóchas’ procedures and standards of work. In short, thirty years after its beginnings, Dóchas is in good health and looking confidently towards the future.

¹³ “NGO Networks, Building Capacity In A Changing World”, USAID, 2004

The fact that this is so is in no small part due to the hard work and the experience gained in the previous 30 years. The vision that was the driving force behind the creation of VALC and CONGOOD – the promotion of closer working relations among members and helping members to speak with one voice – continues to inspire the work of Dóchas.

As shown in this brochure, CONGOOD played an important role in the shaping of the official Irish overseas aid programme. It helped shape the orientation of the Irish Aid programme and – through its publications and Commissions – contributed significantly to the public debate in Ireland on development. At the same time, it also reflected changes in the international debate, particularly on the need for NGOs to move away from localised projects to more strategic ways of challenging the daunting problems of poverty, hunger and environmental degradation: over time, the Irish NGOs came to value NGO coalitions and networks more and more.

As a result of these changes and experiences, Dóchas members have worked together to build an active and diverse network, which is also unique. At present, Dóchas serves at once as a community of practice (through the Working Groups), a knowledge network (enabling members to share and disseminate knowledge and experience), a sectoral network (representing the Development NGO sector externally), and an advocacy network (advancing the causes of its member organisations).

But above all, 30 years of NGO networking through VALC, CONGOOD, INA and Dóchas has resulted in a growing sense of mutual trust and respect, and a sense that, when working together, Development NGOs can do more than merely reflect their policy environment; they can actively shape and improve it.

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- Paddy Maguinness. (9/6/04) - Deputy Chief Executive of Concern.
- Tom Ryder (9/5/04) – Director of VSI
- Hans Zomer – Director of Dóchas



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