

Pre-Elections Briefing Paper: How Ireland Can Help Eradicate World Poverty

September 2006

SUMMARY

The next five years will be crucial if the world is to achieve the Millennium Development Goals including halving absolute poverty by 2015.

With its record of growth and prosperity, Ireland now has an unprecedented ability and responsibility to help make poverty history. But decisive action during the lifetime of the next government is needed.

This document sets out a number of key areas where Ireland can make a real difference in the lives of the poorest of the poor.

Dochas calls on all political parties to ensure that Ireland takes the steps required to strengthen international efforts to meet the needs of the world's poor.

Political parties can help make poverty history by including clear commitments in their elections manifestos to:

- Introduce legislation to safeguard Ireland's continued commitment to spending, from 2012 onward, at least 0.7% of GNP annually on overseas development aid.
- Assure that the Irish Aid programme remains a central part of Ireland's foreign policy, and to strengthen the policy coherence between our aid programme and all other areas of Government policy.
- Maintain the clear focus of the Irish aid programme – and provide adequate management resources - to ensure its maximum impact in terms of improving the lives of the poorest people.
- Reinforce the strategic engagement of Irish Aid with major stakeholders in Ireland, in order to strengthen the quality as well as the public ownership of the aid programme. This renewed emphasis on the quality of aid should involve reversing the decision to relocate the aid administration to Limerick and significantly increasing Irish Aid's staffing levels.
- Build on Ireland's leadership role at EU level towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Ireland can play this role by calling for targeted and transparent spending on social sectors (health, education) in developing countries.

Introduction

The members of Dóchas, the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations, welcome the cross-party support in the Oireachtas for a strong Irish role in international development cooperation. Thanks to this broad political support, Ireland has built up a high-quality programme of cooperation with governments, international organisations and civil society groups, that is capable of making serious headway towards eradicating global poverty.

Dóchas believes that it is essential that this national consensus on the priorities of development aid is maintained and strengthened. The next five years will be of crucial importance for Ireland's aid programme, as mechanisms and resources are put in place to ensure that Ireland can play a leading role in the international community's efforts at achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).¹

As member of the OECD grouping of nations, Ireland's prime responsibility under these internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals is to develop a global partnership for development, by putting in place the policy framework and the resources required for the attainment of the Goals. To this end, Ireland must intensify its efforts to promote the quantity and quality of aid and ensure that all Government policy is coherent with the objective of eradicating poverty.

In this paper, Dóchas members set out a range of policy suggestions, to be implemented in the life of the next Dáil, that will ensure that Ireland can live up to its responsibilities to the international community and the world's poorest people in particular.

These recommendations relate to:

- **The quantity of aid**
- **The quality of aid**
- **Policy Coherence**
- **Trade**
- **Debt**
- **Accountable Government and Corruption**
- **HIV and AIDS**
- **European Union aid**
- **Climate Change**

¹ See among others www.un.org/millenniumgoals

1) The Quantity of Aid

In September 2005, the Irish government committed to meeting its international obligation of spending 0.7% of GNP annually on official development assistance (ODA) by 2012. It is vital that Ireland delivers on this promise and ensures the continued delivery of a high-quality aid programme.

Dóchas urges political parties to commit to:

- Ensuring that Ireland fulfils its promise to spend 0.7% of GNP annually in official development assistance by the year 2012 at the latest.
- Publishing new legislation to ensure that after 2012, all Irish governments maintain annual ODA spending at a minimum of 0.7% of GNP.
- Actively supporting innovative forms of development financing, especially those that share decision-making with partner country governments and civil society.

2) The Quality of Aid

Ireland's overseas aid budget will expand significantly over the coming years, thanks to overwhelming public and political support for development assistance. It is important to realise, however, that this support is based on the fact that the aid has a demonstrable impact and makes genuine differences in the lives of poor people.

As a nation, Ireland needs to ensure that all the mechanisms are in place to ensure the continued high quality of Irish aid. This involves strengthening public scrutiny and oversight mechanisms, as well as resourcing the mechanisms within Irish Aid and other relevant government departments to appraise, monitor and evaluate programme expenditure.

Dóchas urges political parties to commit to:

- Ensuring Irish aid is provided in a manner that is responsive to, and supportive of, the priorities defined by recipient countries.
- Maintaining the untied nature and poverty focus of the Irish Aid programme. This means specifically precluding the use of aid money for security, migration, trade or commercial purposes.
- Stopping the proposed relocation of Irish Aid to Limerick. The proposed move would negatively affect the aid programme by disrupting on-going work, causing the loss of experienced staff and marginalising the development perspective in inter-departmental discussions.
- Providing the Development Cooperation Division in the Department of Foreign Affairs with sufficient staff and resources to manage the programme effectively.

3) Policy Coherence

Over the past decade, recognition has grown that it's not its own policies that affect a country's potential to develop: the foreign and domestic policies of rich countries significantly affect poor countries' development opportunities. Richer countries' policies in areas such as trade, agriculture and security can impact heavily on developing countries. Lack of policy coherence in developed countries, or blocs such as the EU, often results in their development and poverty reduction objectives being subordinated to more politically prominent objectives.

As one of the world's rich countries, Ireland has a responsibility to ensure that its policies and practices do not have a negative impact on poor countries, and to ensure that its commitment to fighting global poverty is translated in a whole-of-government approach to assisting poor countries.

However, despite pressure from the OECD and the announcement in 2003 of a Coherence Unit within Irish Aid, Ireland continues to score badly in terms of policy coherence.² Dóchas believes that Ireland needs to complement its effective aid policies by a coherent set of pro-development policies in its other external policies.

Dóchas urges political parties to commit to:

- Achieving greater policy coherence for development, for instance by:
 - Putting in place mechanisms to “poverty proof” key areas of Government policy, in order to guarantee that trade, agriculture and security decisions do not have adverse effects on development and the realisation of the MDGs;
 - Ensure regular meetings between the Ministers for Trade, Development and Agriculture and the Department of the Taoiseach to ensure top level leadership on policy coherence;
 - Ensuring greater transparency on Ireland's policy stances in relation to international trade and development, for instance by strengthening debate in the Oireachtas on these matters;
- Adopting the Human Security concept, with the centrality of Human Rights, as its framework for policy-making on foreign affairs and security. Adopting the Human Security paradigm will mean placing human rights at the heart of Ireland's foreign policy.

4) Trade

A fairer trading system is central to the prospects of developing countries to meet the Millennium Development Goals and escape from poverty. Ireland, as an increasingly prosperous trading nation and member of the European Union has an important voice in

² Ireland ranks 13th in a list of 21 rich countries on the Commitment to Development Index of the Center for Global Development See: <http://www.cgdev.org/rankingtherich/home.html>

deciding how the international trading system works and can, if willing, help ensure that trade helps rather than hinders the poor.

Dóchas urges political parties to commit to:

- Supporting multilateral trade negotiations as the best forum in which to create new trade rules and obligations and to fulfil the promise of the Development Round of trade negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO);
- Stopping Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and African Caribbean states in their current form, ensuring that EPAs are non-reciprocal; excluding from them new issues such as investment liberalisation; and ensuring that alternatives to EPAs are developed.
- Preventing trade rules from standing in the way of access to essential services. Ireland can do this by working for trade rules which support the ability of poor countries to successfully regulate essential services in the public interest and opposing any requests in trade negotiations for poor countries to liberalise essential services.
- Ensuring that every Government Department will seek goods with the Fairtrade Mark when purchasing tea and coffee, and other goods.

5) Debt

Despite the progress made at the G8 summit in 2005, debt remains a major drain on developing countries, diverting their financial resources to developed countries. Only 19 countries qualified for the debt cancellation as promised by the G8: at least another 29 still need total debt cancellation.³

Dóchas urges political parties to commit to:

- Supporting full cancellation of unpayable debts of impoverished countries through a fair and transparent international process.
- Using Ireland's influence in international institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, to ensure that poor countries are no longer asked to fulfil conditions that undermine their own development in order to qualify for debt cancellation.

6) Accountable Government & Corruption

Corruption is a serious development problem with complex causes and consequences, both in rich and poor countries.

In developing countries, corruption is seen by civil society organisations as one among many key governance problems. Others include: lack of political accountability, constraints on freedom of expression, and excessive influence of foreign donors and

³ Debt & Development Coalition, "100% Debt Cancellation: Fact or Fiction?"

transnational corporations on national policy.⁴ In these countries, the Irish aid programme should enable citizens, parliaments and others (such as the private sector, media and academics) to hold their own governments to account for the use of all resources, including foreign aid. This must include full transparency in its own aid spending in every country where Irish Aid is present. Ireland should also increase investment in building strong judicial systems and parliaments to provide additional oversight.

In rich countries, the private sector is often complicit in corruption through the use of bribes and other illicit payments to achieve commercial objectives. Ireland can take a stronger stance on this issue by ratifying without delay the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and supporting the peer reviews of the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention.

Dóchas urges political parties to commit to:

- Helping partner country governments and their citizens tackle corruption by supporting the oversight functions of domestic civil society, parliaments, media and the judiciary.
- Publishing current and planned Irish aid flows in Irish Aid programme countries, and encouraging other donors to do likewise.
- Ratifying the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC).
- Supporting the peer reviews of the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention and the full implementation of UNCAC.

7) HIV and AIDS

Despite a scaling up of commitments by the international community in 2001, the consequences of HIV and AIDS continue to cause intense suffering to millions of people around the globe. This has resulted in the vastly insufficient provision of effective prevention, treatment, care and support mechanisms to people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. The United Nations Special Assembly on HIV/AIDS in May 2006 failed to systematically address this.

Dóchas urges political parties to commit to:

- Working with bilateral and multilateral donors to ensure that basic social services, especially healthcare and education, are provided free of charge and free of stigma and discrimination at the point of delivery.
- Strongly pressing for interim targets to achieving universal access to HIV prevention and treatment by 2010, and working at international level to ensure that governments implement policies to achieve the other targets they signed up to at UNGASS 2006.

⁴ Trócaire, unpublished research, 2006.

- Ensuring that IMF and World Bank policies do not restrict the increased spending on healthcare that is required to achieve universal access to HIV treatment, prevention and care.
- Ensuring that southern governments have access to affordable medications and are not restricted in their efforts to use flexibilities in international agreements such as TRIPS.

8) European Union Aid

Almost half of Irish multilateral aid is channelled through the EU. Though Europe is committed to helping achieve the Millennium Development Goals, there are serious problems in targeting EU aid.⁵ Ireland should insist on transparent and targeted spending, which is clearly focused on the MDGs.

Dóchas urges political parties to commit to:

- Targeted and transparent spending on the MDGs both in the EU instrument for Development Cooperation and in the annual EU budget. Ireland needs to work within the Council of Ministers to ensure that these targets are applied across all developing countries with which the EU has partnership agreements.
- Enabling the European Parliament to play its role in ensuring EU budgets and EU programmes are adequately targeted towards the achievement of the MDGs and the elimination of world poverty.

9) Climate Change

Climate change is threatening the development goals of the world's poorest people. By 2100, 180 million people in Africa's poorest countries may have died due to increased disease alone, as a result of climate change.⁶ Carbon emissions are a major contributor to climate change.

Dóchas urges political parties to commit to:

- Ensuring that Ireland meet its Kyoto Protocol commitments to reduce carbon emissions.
- Ensuring further reductions in Ireland's carbon emissions beyond 2012.

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⁵ EU spending on basic education fell from 6% in 2000 to 1.5% in 2004. Source: OECD DAC.

⁶ Christian Aid, The Climate of Poverty: Facts, Fear and Hope, 2006