

An NGO Response To The White Paper on Irish Aid

Dublin, 23 October 2006

Document 1: "Responding to the White Paper"

In an initial response, Dóchas has welcomed the delivery of the White Paper, the first ever on Irish development cooperation. This document is intended to outline some of the key features of the White Paper, and to contrast them with the elements that Dóchas had called for in its Submission.

Most importantly, this document presents a number of key questions that participants in the 23 October meeting are requested to consider ahead of the meeting. These are:

1. Does the White Paper provide a **vision**, and set out principles, for Irish development cooperation with which the NGO sector agrees?
2. What are the **issues** we need to address as a priority arising from the White Paper?
3. Which issues have been downplayed or **left out**?
4. Is the NGO sector able to presents an alternative **NGO vision and ambition**?

1. The White Paper: Vision & Principles

The White Paper sets out the rationale for the Irish aid programme and principles behind it, and outlines the policy directions proposed. The document is, in the words of Minister Conor Lenihan, "a roadmap for the careful expansion of the programme".

The vision and principles underlying the aid programme can be summarised as follows:

- Ireland engages in development cooperation on the basis of need, unprecedented capacity to provide, moral responsibility, real impact of aid, vision of "a fair and global society", demand from Irish public
- Poverty reduction is the overarching objective; focus on poorest and most vulnerable (LDCs), and on basic needs (health, education, livelihoods and HIV/AIDS)
- 5 key principles will guide Irish Aid: Partnership, Public Ownership and Transparency, Effectiveness and Quality Assurance, Coherence, and Long-Term Sustainability
- Ireland will support: promotion of human development, human security and justice, democracy, gender equality, protection of human rights
- Emphasis (according to the structure of the White Paper) on: the challenges ahead, partnership, continued Africa focus, coherence, effectiveness, public engagement and ownership, proper management of the programme

2. The White Paper: Key Decisions

The key decisions (according to the structure of the White Paper) are clustered around:

Programme Focus	Specific focus on the programme countries, mainly Africa. Trend towards regional programmes. Mix of partnerships and modalities (NGOs, UN, EU, IFIs)
Humanitarian Engagement	RRI, UN role, Hunger Task Force, capacity building for preparedness and response
Peace, Security and Development	New focus on conflict-prevention, resolution and peace-building
Governance & Corruption	Increased emphasis on accountability and addressing corruption
Trade and development	Aid for trade, fair and ethical trade, Traidlinks, Irish development bank
Investing in people	Health, HIV/AIDS, primary education, water and sanitation, infrastructure, Fellowship Programme
Cross-cutting themes	Gender, Environment, HIV/AIDS, Governance
Engaging with the Public	Proposals on government coherence, public debate, volunteering, schools projects, public information, and research

In relation to the challenges ahead, the White Paper places special emphasis on humanitarian emergencies and governance, the latter especially in relation to public accountability and the danger of corruption.

3. The White Paper – The Minister’s Emphasis

It may also be instructive to note that, in addressing the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs on the White Paper, the minister with responsibility for Irish Aid emphasised the following elements in the document:

- The need for vigilance and accountability on spending
 - The new Governance Unit will be tasked to ensure Irish Aid resources are always used for public good and to combat corruption
- “White Paper puts overseas development at the heart of our foreign policy”
- The need to maintain the quality and effectiveness for which the Irish programme is noted
- Irish aid will remain “untied and sustainable”
- White Paper reflects and builds on attitudes and values of Irish people
- Africa to remain principal geographic focus
- Rapid Response Initiative will enable more response to sudden-onset emergencies
- Conflict Analysis and Resolution unit to be established
- Hunger Task Force to be established
- DFA to work on ensuring coherence across all areas of government
- Aim to expand numbers of Irish development volunteers
- Partnerships very important
- Need to present programme successes as well as outline challenges
- White Paper “not the end of something but the beginning of something more ambitious than ever”
- Lots to be done to implement recommendations

4. The Initial NGO Response

In its initial statement, Dóchas welcomed the White Paper's emphasis on partnership and the importance of people in developing countries owning their own development processes. It also welcomed the statement of Irish government support for the role of civil society, North and South, in development processes.

The detail of many of the decisions, policy directions and new initiatives still has to be established, and existing policy dialogue with developing countries and NGOs will need to be strengthened to ensure that the aid programme is effective in making a real difference in the lives of the world's poorest people.

Dóchas also drew attention to the urgent need to ensure that Irish Aid has both the staffing levels and expertise to manage the programme effectively.

Many of the points that Dóchas raised in its White Paper submission have been addressed, though plenty remains to be done to tease out the detail, implications and implementation.

5. The Considered NGO Response

The meeting taking place on 23 October is intended to provide a platform for Dóchas members to come to a more considered response to the White Paper.

At the meeting, we will analyse the content of the White Paper in greater detail, aiming to distinguish between imminent and more long-term changes, and between operational and strategic issues. We aim to consider the White Paper's implications – positive and negative – for the work of the Irish Development NGOs, and for Ireland's aid programme as a whole.

For instance, the issues and initiatives that may require more analysis and NGO attention could include:

- **The Principles and the Vision** – do they suffice?
- **Emergency aid and conflict** – is there too much “emergency” and too little “development”?
- **Governance & Corruption** – defensiveness or real engagement?
- **Volunteering** – an innovative approach, or castle in the clouds?
- **Policy Coherence** – is the commitment there, and will the mechanisms work?
- **Mechanisms** – do the means correspond to the vision? Are they workable?

Dóchas will, of course, be happy to work with members on the analysis of the White Paper.

We hope the documents presented on the day will help prepare you to consider the challenges and opportunities at greater length during the special members meeting on 23rd October.

6. The Key Questions

We would ask you to start considering the following questions in particular:

1. Does the White Paper provide a vision, and set out principles, for Irish development cooperation with which the NGO sector agrees?

Does it capture the values and priorities of the Irish people? Do we agree with what is contained and, perhaps as importantly, is there anything omitted by way of vision or principles that we consider crucial to such a roadmap? (For instance, the DFID White Paper in July had specific sections on following up on commitments made in 2005 to help Make Poverty History, and on reforming the International Development System, including IFIs, UN and EU. The Irish White Paper does not have these, but is that an issue?)

2. What are the issues we need to address as a priority arising from the White Paper?

Among the raft of broad policy proposals, decisions and initiatives, which ones represent particular opportunities or threats for the NGO sector?

3. Which issues have been downplayed or left out?

Do we recognise our priorities, as set down in our submissions during the consultation process, in the White Paper? Are there important issues or challenges that should be included in the paper?

4. Is the NGO sector able to present an alternative NGO vision and ambition?

This is a double question, which enquires both about our technical capability and our willingness to present a coherent NGO perspective on "Development".

The first element relates to NGOs' abilities to prepare themselves to engage on the implementation of proposals in the White Paper – or, indeed, oppose them if required. There are lots of policy proposals and new initiatives announced on which the details will have to be worked out. Do we know what they mean?

The second element is about our vision. In preparing and publishing the White Paper, the government has demonstrated that it is taking development cooperation seriously. It has said it is intent on building on the reputation of its aid programme, being a leader and innovator in international development, and thereby strengthening Ireland's voice in the world. How is the NGO sector positioned to respond to the government's ambition and engage with the aid programme? What are its vision, policies and strategies for development?