



## Evaluation of the Irish Aid Ethiopia Country Strategy Programme (2008-2012)

*In early 2012 Irish Aid commissioned an independent evaluation of the Irish Aid Ethiopia Country Strategy 2008-2012. The evaluation was carried out by a team of consultants from ITAD Ltd.*

*The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluation team.*

*The following is the executive summary of this evaluation.*

## Executive Summary

S1 The full report sets out the findings, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations from an evaluation of the Irish Aid Ethiopia Country Strategy 2008-2012. The evaluation was designed to provide an independent assessment of the performance of the strategy, accountability and lesson learning to the Governments of Ireland and Ethiopia to help inform future strategy for Irish Aid programming in Ethiopia.

### The context

S2 Ethiopia remains the 14<sup>th</sup> poorest country in the world, according to the latest UNDP Human Development Index (2011). It faces immense challenges in addressing chronic food security and providing access to quality basic services. Ireland has had a long history of solidarity with Ethiopia. Design of the bilateral assistance programme is rooted in the Ethiopian government's own national Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty Programme, which spanned the period from 2005 - 2010.

S3 The 2008-12 Country Strategy was a significant departure from the previous one with a longer duration, simplified programme structure and clearer distinction between programmes, cross-cutting issues and processes. The goal was to reduce the vulnerability of the poorest Ethiopians by increasing (a) their livelihood security and resilience in the face of food scarcity, natural disasters etc., and (b) their use of health, education and HIV/AIDS services.

S4 The programme concentrates on two core areas or pillars - food and livelihood security and access to social services. The bulk of Irish assistance under these two pillars is implemented via multi-donor trust funds using local or regional government delivery channels, with around 16 per cent channelled through Civil Society Organisations. The Country Strategy also has a particular focus in two regions of the country: Tigray and the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR).

### The evaluation

S5 The evaluation addressed a set of nine core questions which were set out in the Terms of Reference, these were grouped into four clusters dealing with: development strategy, development results, development processes and development management. The four clusters are used to present findings in the text below and the main report.

S6 An evaluation framework was developed to organise the questions. A theory-based approach was chosen, using the logic models from the mid-term review as a structure for enquiries. A mixed methods approach was taken to collect data, combining secondary data on outcomes and impact with additional qualitative data collection and analysis. In view of the wide range of activities supported under the programme, a sample of projects was evaluated covering two thirds of all budget lines and nearly 90 per cent of Irish Aid expenditure. Information was gathered mainly by reviewing reports and interviewing people. Four original analyses were undertaken on the country strategy, theories of change for some sampled budget lines, the added value from Irish Aid's contribution, and a survey of development partners. The evaluators took positive actions to minimise any effects of bias or limitations in the analysis.

### Findings for development strategy

S7 The 2008-2012 Country Strategy is a comprehensive document that tackles strategy issues systematically. It displays clear alignment with Government plans. Background analysis seen by the evaluation team reveals care to harmonise with the work of other development partners and learn from sector analysis. Core strengths of Irish Aid were identified and used to develop a vision for building 'a recognisable niche'.

S8 The analysis confirmed the continuing move away from projects to more programmatic interventions. The Country Strategy also restated Irish Aid's commitment to maintain the reality check of local engagement, with the intention for staff to prioritise 'field level engagement'. The total budget of €122m for the first three years was divided equally between the two pillars, Social Services & Accountability, and Food & Livelihood Security. Nearly two thirds of it was allocated to the two large government programmes, Protection of Basic Services (PBS) and Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). The remaining funds were to be allocated among 20 budget lines, with an average expenditure of around €750,000 per year, but many much smaller.

S9 The analysis in the Country Strategy, while comprehensive, is relatively descriptive. It provides a clear rationale for 'what' Irish Aid will do, but contains few insights into 'how' Irish Aid should operate in terms of aid modalities, choice of partners and engagement in policy dialogue. This omission comes despite clarity over Irish Aids' experience with all levels of government and at regional level, strong relationships with civil society, its place as a medium sized donor, and its flexibility.

S10 The strategy gives little prominence to the resource allocation among projects and programmes; nor is there any overview of how the smaller budget lines complement the large-scale social programmes; nor too, of the rationale and intended purpose of the regional support. A recent mid-term review of support to SNNPR identified the lack of a clearly articulated or documented strategy as a factor in reducing Irish Aid's effectiveness.

S11 The effects of the financial crisis in Europe were felt early in 2009, only the second year of the strategy. Expenditure in 2009 and 2010 was reduced to 70 per cent and 56 per cent respectively of the envisaged levels. Annual expenditure since 2011 has been around €26 million, about half the original intentions.

S12 Irish Aid supports development in Ethiopia through three distinct channels: funding of international, mainly United Nations organisations; the bilateral programme itself, planned and managed through the Irish Embassy in Addis Ababa; and a third group of programmes funded directly from Irish Aid Headquarters. Excluding the international organisations, some 25 per cent of Irish Aid support to Ethiopia is controlled directly from Irish Aid Headquarters, which is a significant amount. There are a number of areas of potential overlap and yet this work is not formally reviewed for coherence with the bilateral programme as part of the Country Strategy.

S13 Irish Aid has adopted a results-based approach to planning, and staff have a good grasp of the logic of the work they manage. The evaluation team explored this in detail for some programmes and found that more could be done to identify gaps and opportunities for complementary interventions. It was also found that staff are not using that logic in dialogue with partners, thus missing a potentially valuable tool for indicators and monitoring.

S14 Responding to guidance in the Terms of Reference to 'examine strategy as the evaluand'<sup>1</sup> documented decisions were analysed in order to examine strategy behaviour. Judging by the nature of decisions made, the Country Strategy has been a robust guide for Irish Aid, even having to cope with funding cuts.

### **Findings for development results**

S15 The Country Strategy set out 12 performance indicators at the highest levels of programme goal and outcomes. Data are not available for all, nor is it all up to date at the time of the evaluation. But of the ten indicators for which some data are available, eight have improved in line with target values or at least show a positive change, if at a slower than planned rate.

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluating 'strategy as the evaluand' implies taking the strategy as a unit of analysis to assess its quality and how it was received and understood, by the individuals concerned and by development partners, including the Government of Ethiopia.

Two indicators show deteriorating or flat performance. The goal level indicators reflect changes in Ethiopia as a whole, to which Irish Aid contributes in support of Government programmes and alongside other development partners. Progress is seen in the fight against poverty and improving health. One indicator for good governance shows a deterioration. (See tables inset below.)

Goal: To reduce vulnerability of poor Ethiopian women and men, boys and girls	
Indicators	Performance
Proportion of rural households that perceive they are 'Doing Well' (i.e. 'can get by', 'comfortable' or 'rich')	Data scheduled for 2014
Proportion of population below the national poverty line	A reduction in the percentage of population living below \$1.25/day
Improvement in Global Hunger Index ratings for Ethiopia	An improvement in the Index and Ethiopia's relative ranking amongst other countries
Maternal mortality ratio	Survey data show an improvement but the figures remain very high
Improvement in Ibrahim Index of African Governance score for Ethiopia and/or improvement in 'Voice and Accountability', and 'Government Effectiveness' in the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators for Ethiopia	Ibrahim Index shows a small deterioration between 2010 and 2011

Outcome objective: Increased utilisation of and satisfaction with basic services by the poor	
Indicators	Performance
Health utilisation rate (OPD attendance per capita)	A small improvement
Citizen reported improvement in health services over the previous 2 years (rural/urban)	No direct data. However other studies indicate an improvement
Citizen confidence in local government to address service quality concerns	No data

Outcome objective: Increased resilience to climate change and shocks with enhanced livelihood security for the poor	
Indicators	Performance
Percentage of PSNP households retaining assets	Target for 2012 reached in 2010
Improvement in value of productive assets (livestock) owned by chronically food insecure households	No increase in asset value but some increase in ownership
Reduction in prevalence of stunting nationally	Very small improvement
HH perception around benefits from the construction and maintenance of Soil & Water Conservation (SWC) infrastructure on communal and private lands	Small improvements

S16 The Protection of Basic Services programme has succeeded in enabling a major transfer of resources down to local level with documented benefits in health, education, water and sanitation, and agricultural extension - key services for rural communities. Support to the Protection of Basic Services not only gave Irish Aid a simple conduit to support social services, but in the absence of general or sector budget support, it was anticipated that the discourse between donors and government on the Protection of Basic Services programme would become *de facto* a major development forum for dialogue. This has not turned out to be the case. The PBS programme does serve as an important forum for discussion around PFM and to a more limited extent macro-economic issues but is one of a number of spaces used for such dialogue. The Development Assistance Group (DAG) of which Ireland is an active member remains the main development forum for dialogue. A recent study concludes that overall the Protection of

Basic Services programme is an operationally efficient means of supporting decentralised service delivery.

S17 The question of Irish Aid's specific contribution as a development partner, over and above financial support was examined by the evaluation team. Development partners confirmed a number of areas including Irish Aid contribution to expenditure control, providing advice to the auditor general and helping roll-out Integrated Budget and Expenditure (IBEX) accounting systems. Irish Aid also made a major contribution to Joint Review and Implementation Support visits and other pre-review field monitoring.

S18 The Social Accountability component of Protection of Basic Services uses local civil society organisations to survey citizens about the quality of public service delivery. The approach has been inclusive, raised awareness and provided a safe space for dialogue at woreda<sup>2</sup> level. The social accountability component of Protection of Basic Services has opened the door to demand-side interaction and negotiation on quality of services between government and citizens. Irish Aid's participation in this is in direct response to its strategy objectives to promote demand-side governance, lesson learning and policy dialogue.

S19 Projects supported in the health sector have contributed to improving health outcomes but investments are fragmented and there is little overall dialogue about sector policy, even with the regional government of SNNPR where Irish Aid is an active partner. Maternal mortality remains a major national challenge. Small projects dealing with nutrition are innovative and have potential to tackle both food security and nutrient deficiency problems if they are successful and taken to scale.

S20 The largest investment by Irish Aid under the Food, Nutrition and Livelihoods Security pillar has been the Productive Safety Net Programme which has been effective in providing a targeted safety net in food insecure woredas, with investments in public works and arrangements to help households graduate from food insecurity.

S21 Ireland had a particular interest in this programme because many aspects of the design built on its previous experience with Integrated Community Based Watershed Management schemes in Tigray. Irish Aid has been one of the more active Productive Safety Net Programme donors since the inception of the programme, as a financial contributor and participant with the Donor Working Group and several of the technical sub groups that report to it. Irish Aid provided the chair of the Donor Steering Group for a period, the only one of the 'smaller' donors to have played such an important role. Irish Aid staff members have made notable contributions to the implementation manual, drafting of Terms of Reference for specific studies and facilitating review missions.

S22 The most recent review mission in November 2011 observed that the trend in year-on-year livelihood deterioration prior to the launch of the Productive Safety Net Programme in 2005 appears to have been reversed for participating households. This is a significant step forward in the country's fight against food insecurity and poverty. Perhaps the most visible manifestation is that the 2011 drought in the Horn of Africa did not become a crisis in Ethiopia and this has largely been attributed to the Productive Safety Net Programme enabling poor populations to withstand this significant shock, although there is no hard analysis to reinforce this claim.

S23 Graduation<sup>3</sup> is the higher level goal to which the Productive Safety Net Programme contributes, but for which other programmes and investments are required. The strategy to achieve graduation has focused on overlapping the Programme with other initiatives.

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<sup>2</sup> Woreda is the name for a district

<sup>3</sup> Graduation is the process by which households become food secure and are able to exit from the safety net and other food security programmes

S24 The Household Assets Building Programme is a large scale initiative intended to provide credit and technical support to farmers. Irish Aid is one of a number of donors that funds the capacity development component of this Government led programme. Irish Aid also supports a number of complementary small-scale interventions assisting and diversifying income generating activities.

S25 The portfolio of small, sometimes experimental projects, especially dealing with food security and nutrition, is innovative and plays to Ireland's strengths of flexibility, ability to work with both government and civil society partners, and familiarity with state systems at federal, regional and local levels. Continuing high levels of food insecurity, limited livelihood opportunities, and low productivity in agriculture provides strong justification for this work.

### **Findings for development processes**

S26 The mix of aid modalities reflects the recommendations of an Irish Aid policy paper dating back to 2005. The smaller, complementary projects all deal with issues that are relevant to achieving sustainable development from public services. In the case of health services, and the Protection of Basic Services more generally, they tackle quality of service provision, especially in areas where Civil Society Organisations can deal with issues more effectively than the state. For livelihoods, they tackle questions of alternative sources of income, both farm and off-farm, that could help farmers achieve food security. Working with civil society is central to Irish Aid's programme. In the aftermath of the Proclamation on Charities and Societies, which has restricted the work of some Civil Society Organisations, Irish Aid has taken a lead role among six donors in a new Civil Society Support Programme.

S27 Irish Aid has long been involved at the regional level, originally through area based programmes. Support has continued in SNNP and Tigray regions but to some extent the direction and purpose of this work has lost focus. Regional work is seen as providing a reality check and learning experience to help inform dialogue with development partners and the Federal Government. Informants recognise the historical role played by projects in Tigray, but examples of influence are now quite dated. Reviews of both the SNNP and Tigray regional programmes note that learning has not taken place systematically. The aid modalities used during the Country Strategy, a regional block grant plus small projects to Tigray region; sector programme support and small projects in SNNPR, all have some disadvantages and in SNNPR in particular, have been neither very coherent nor stimulated a close relationship with the regional government, an area of success in Tigray.

S28 Working in partnership is a cornerstone of the Irish Aid strategy. Development partners are overwhelmingly positive about the experience of working as a partner with Irish Aid and contrast it favourably with other donors.

S29 Irish Aid elected to mainstream gender, governance, HIV and environment as a positive attempt to move upstream and influence partners. Some success can be seen with gender, but a lack of mainstreaming strategies in the Ethiopia programme for governance, HIV and the environment has left the programme dealing with issues piecemeal as they arise in the relevant sectoral context.

### **Findings for development management**

S30 Irish Aid introduced a new approach to the Country Strategy incorporating results-based management following OECD/DAC principles. Part of that approach includes development of a logic model, which proved very effective. Support from Irish Aid headquarters was concentrated on developing the Country Strategy. There has been less guidance in some challenging technical areas such as developing indicators, risks and assumptions, and in the need to establish an organisational culture to manage for results.

S31 Annual reports provide a systematic narrative account of performance, structured along the lines of the logic model, and are valuable resources. Only since the Mid Term Review in 2010 has there been an attempt to report on indicators, with an annual update against the performance management framework, where data are available. Despite the advent of a results-approach, findings from the evaluations of support to the SNNPR and Tigray Region both indicate weaknesses in monitoring and the use of information for learning.

S32 Irish Aid has given a high priority to monitoring and evaluation. An experimental monitoring approach in Tigray has generated lessons but it has not proven suitable for scaling up. Support to a national monitoring and evaluation pooled fund has been discontinued following unsatisfactory management arrangements but Irish Aid has more successfully contributed to development of practical indicators for the Government's Growth and Transformation Plan.

## **Conclusions**

S33 The evidence presented in the report shows a clear and convincing picture about the Irish Aid programme in Ethiopia. This is a successful aid programme, valued by development partners, that recognises challenges and has followed a mix of aid modalities in order to help meet its objectives.

### **Development Strategy: Strategic analysis and choice**

S34 The Country Strategy document helped improve clarity of presentation and structure of the programme. It was less successful in charting how Irish Aid would respond to the political and developmental context and in particular how the Embassy should staff and manage its activities.

### **Development Strategy: Understanding the theories of change**

S35 Logic models developed for the CSP present a coherent structure, have enabled a complex programme to be understood 'at a glance', and provide a basis for testing the fit of proposed activities. The results-based approach was not passed on to project partners and an intended emphasis on lesson learning did not fully materialise although the mid-term review in 2010 provided valuable reflection and adjustment to the programme.

### **Development Strategy: How did the CSP perform?**

S36 Decision-making during implementation followed the objectives of the planned strategy despite having to cope with a substantial cutback in financial resources early in the period. The realised strategy is coherent and consistent with the planned CSP. The scope and content of the strategy were highly relevant to context and policies.

### **Development Results: Contributions to objectives and outcomes**

S37 In terms of effectiveness, there is evidence of performance from nearly all the evaluated programmes. These show positive development results helping poorer and more vulnerable sections of society with access to basic services and improved livelihoods and food security. At a relatively modest financial scale, by working in partnership with other donors through large-scale programmes, Irish Aid has contributed positively to improving the lives and welfare of the Ethiopian people.

S38 In addition to improved development outcomes, Irish Aid has added value to the way in which programmes have been planned, implemented and evaluated. These efficiency gains are hard to quantify, but development partners are consistent in their praise for Ireland's contribution, which has helped make programmes more effective at improving the welfare of

poorer people through better financial management, attention to targeting, and feedback on quality.

### **Development Results: Sustainability of results**

S39 Irish Aid's approach to analysis and programming has created mechanisms which acknowledge and take into account risks to sustainability in several dimensions, especially concerning organisational, and social aspects and project results. There is concern about the long-term financial sustainability of governments' large-scale social programmes, but overall, Irish Aid's approach makes development results more likely to be sustained.

### **Development processes: Coherence and effectiveness of aid modalities**

S40 Irish Aid has followed a people-centred form of engagement. Despite being a small financial provider to the Protection of Basic Services and Productive Safety Net Programme, Irish Aid staff have been very active in donor coordination and implementation mechanisms. But the mix of aid modalities and decision to support two large-scale federal programmes, two regions and up to 20 smaller budget lines is a strain on resources, especially since the financial crisis in Ireland. Recent changes in staff have left the embassy under-resourced and development partners expressed concerns that Irish Aid will not be able to maintain its highly productive participation.

### **Development processes: Working in partnership**

S41 Working in partnership is a cornerstone of the Irish Aid strategy. The concept of partnership connotes shared goals, common responsibility for outcomes, distinct accountabilities and reciprocal obligations. Irish Aid's familiarity with the detail of projects, allows it to have sufficient knowledge to give technical advice and also to use findings in other settings. Irish Aid staff are comfortable in a field situation, local staff and CSO partners are empowered and listened to.

### **Developmental processes: Mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues**

S42 Irish Aid has successfully supported gender through mainstreaming. Less progress has been made with HIV, governance and environment, which lack a clear plan and resourcing under the CSP.

### **Developmental management: Usefulness of Irish Aid's corporate approach to RBM**

S43 The evaluation team found that overall the results-based structure of the Country Strategy provided a sound logic against which to plan how to cope with a reduction in the aid budget. However, the incorporation of results-based management has not enabled Irish Aid staff to meet the challenge set out in the Country Strategy to prioritise lesson learning and build policy messages based on evidence.

S44 As staff in the Irish Aid office in Addis Ababa prepare for the next Country Strategy, decisions will need to be made to find an appropriate balance of support across the federal projects, regions and complementary interventions. A set of lessons is summarised here and given fuller treatment in Chapter 8. They are followed by a summary of the recommendations.

## **Lessons**

- A country strategy should build on analysis of context to identify how the programme will respond and what skills mix of staff is necessary.
- Constructive engagement is as important as size of budget to make aid effective.

- Historical comparative advantage either needs to be maintained through judicious recruitment of staff and choice of programmes or the new strategy should identify future actions on the basis of need and actual staff capacity.
- Financial cutbacks might be better managed by doing something different rather than less of the same.
- Clarity of purpose rather than historical relationships should guide regional support.
- Small complementary projects are a valuable part of the programme but should be planned to address gaps and opportunities, and build-in lesson learning and communication.
- Mainstreaming would benefit from better planning.
- The RBM approach has been a positive influence on the CSP plan, but not brought guidance or tools to help partners with indicators and managing for results.

## **Recommendations**

S45 We do not see any requirement for a major change of direction to the programme, more an adjustment of interventions and ways of working.

S46 Planning the CSP: The results based management approach to the Country Strategy should continue with improved guidelines that give support for development of indicators, devote more attention to managing assumptions and risks, and help formalise the use of information in reporting, lesson learning and communication. Relationships with partners should be used to develop a closer link to the results framework. Analysis of context can help identify entry points and strategy to interact with the Government of Ethiopia over economic and social policies as well as how to continue to support civil society.

S47 Mixture of aid modalities: Difficult choices need to be made about the future mix of modalities and interventions under the likely aid envelope of finance. If Irish Aid could associate its funding of federal programmes with specific regions, that would enable continued involvement in federal schemes with an operational focus. This would allow Irish Aid to build on its existing regional experience and continue with complementary investments.

S48 Working in the regions: The rationale behind regional engagement remains valid. There is a small danger of Irish Aid suffering a reputational risk of being too closely associated with Tigray. If offsetting is unavoidable, this should not deter Irish Aid from allocating a part of its funds to support for regional government, as long as it provides a mechanism for constructive dialogue. This may be facilitated by working through an intermediary agent, or continuing with a field office presence. Irish Aid should consider targeting within regions selecting the poorer woredas based on sound analysis. The work should include arrangements for a lesson learning and communication strategy.

S49 Managing the portfolio: Analysis of risks was well presented in the CSP and should be continued in the next strategy period. The programme needs to link regular analysis of risks to ways of working through implementation of programmes or dialogue with partners and government. Adoption of a subjective rating assessment of project performance could enhance the results focus of the strategy and provide a guide on how well interventions are doing. By using a common rating scale, performance can be assessed across all projects under each pillar, for a rapid assessment of where problems exist and more support is needed.

S50 People-centred approach: A people-centred approach builds on Irish Aid strengths. As part of preparations for the next Country Strategy, the Embassy should commission an analysis

of human resources to make a case for future staffing and look at ways of working in light of the current constraints of the Irish public sector.

S51 **Mainstreaming:** Mainstreaming is a potentially powerful approach that builds core principles into all work. However, to be effective it needs planning and management. The next Country Strategy would benefit from a background assessment and strategy for each of the four areas that would allow prioritisation.

S52 **Governance and civil society:** Irish Aid should continue to support civil society through a variety of means. This may mean adjustments to areas of emphasis. Governance is a sensitive issue in Ethiopia and it is difficult to make recommendations on how Irish Aid should be engaged. More political analysis could be done to better understand the situation and identify areas of effective engagement. Several points are put forward for consideration.

S53 **Given the constraints around limited political space, effective partnership is essential for successful implementation and influence. This has largely been recognised by Irish Aid staff and opportunities for linkage across projects and programmes should be maximised. CSOs remain essential to Irish Aid for implementation and learning at the sub-woreda level, in reaching vulnerable people and in allowing the piloting of areas of innovation**

If you would like a copy of the full evaluation report please email your request to [eau.queries@dfat.ie](mailto:eau.queries@dfat.ie)