

1. Introduction

Plan Ireland, World Vision Ireland, ChildFund Ireland, Children in Crossfire and UNICEF Ireland have come together as a coalition of children's rights focused international agencies to contribute to the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid. Each agency strongly believes that in its current format, the White Paper is not explicit enough in its commitment to the protection of children and their rights. Drawing from our experience as beneficiaries of Irish Aid funding and given our involvement in the implementation of Irish Aid development programmes, we decided to join together to create a submission that expresses our joint concerns, views and ideas.

Our vision is one of children as actors of change in their own lives and societies. In light of this, we urge Irish Aid to clarify its commitment to the realisation of children's rights and child development. This commitment should be clearly articulated in the revised White Paper.

The Government of Ireland has an obligation to play an active role in the realisation of children's rights worldwide. The legal foundation of this obligation comes primarily from two documents: **the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**¹ and **the Millennium Declaration**.² The CRC provides a framework of minimum standards on children's rights that State parties have committed to implement. In addition, the CRC calls for a shared responsibility for development: State parties must not only implement the CRC within their own jurisdiction, but must also promote and contribute to a global implementation³ through **international cooperation**.⁴ Ireland ratified the CRC in 2000. We believe that Ireland's policy and practices on development aid should reflect this responsibility.

The Irish government also signed the **Millennium Declaration** in 2000. Signatory States to this Declaration pledged to a shared responsibility for managing worldwide economic and social development and accepted a duty to uphold the principles of human dignity and equality to the most vulnerable, in particular children.

2. Progress Made

We acknowledge that through the funding of ODA programmes, including those run by members of this coalition, Irish Aid has played a very important role in supporting children in the developing world. For example, there has been an emphasis placed upon primary education, maternal and child health programming and the prevention of mother to child HIV transmission in the fight against AIDS. Despite this progress a lot more needs to be done to successfully achieve the commitments set by the 2006 White Paper as well as the overall promises and obligations that the Government of Ireland has pledged in relation to children's rights. For example, MDG4 on reducing child mortality and MDG5 on improving maternal health have made little progress.

A number of commitments within the 2006 White Paper relate to children directly.⁵ These primarily focus on education, health, HIV and AIDS and target vulnerable children. In line with these commitments, in 2010

¹ See the '*Convention on the Rights of the Child*', General Assembly Resolution 44/25, November 1989.

² See the '*United Nation Millennium Declaration*', A/55/L.2, 2000.

³ The obligation for global implementation is provided by articles 4; 7.2; 11.2; 17b, 21e, 22.2, 23.4, 24.4, 28.3, 34, 35, 45.

⁴ See "*Is there a Legal Obligation to Cooperate Internationally for Development?*", Prof. Dr. W. Vandenhoe, UNICEF Chair in Children's Rights, University of Antwerp; Centre for Transboundary Legal Development, Tilburg University.

⁵ See for example a commitment on education for girls at page 44, a commitment on the reduction of the risk of infection and disease among children at page 49 and a commitment on allocating up to 20% of the additional resources for HIV and other communicable diseases to support vulnerable children at page 50.

(when Ireland contributed 0.53% of GNP to ODA – total of €675.8 million) a total amount of 21% of total Bilateral ODA (or €95.4 million) was allocated to Health, HIV and AIDS programming, 11% (or €48.7 million) was allocated to Education programmes.⁶ We commend the positive and direct impact that Irish Aid funded interventions have had on children.

Examples of progress made from member agencies include:

Health

Through the 2010 1,000 Days initiative, Irish Aid focused on **addressing the under-nutrition of children** from pregnancy until their second birthday, with a specific focus on **Malawi, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Zambia**.

Secondary data from the district health authorities in a project area in **Zambia** shows that uptake of voluntary **counselling and testing for HIV increased** from 535 clients in 2007 to 2014 clients in 2011, and the number of mothers availing of treatment to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV rose from 77 to 2084 in the same period.

Education

Irish Aid's support to **education programmes** increased access to education for the most vulnerable children in **Burkina Faso, Guinea and Guinea Bissau** with increased enrolment of up to 69% in target schools. Funding also led to increased student performance and increased participation of children and their parents in the management of their schools.

Policy

With the support of Irish Aid, achievements have also been made in the area of policy. For example in 2009, the **Tanzanian** parliament passed 'The Law of the Child', a piece of legislation that legally guaranteed and protected the rights of Tanzanian children for the first time in history. In 2012, the Government of Tanzania will pass a 'National Policy Framework for Integrated Early Childhood Development' and will create a specific budget allocation within the national budget for the implementation of the policy.

The inclusion of children in specific commitments within the 2006 White Paper, the choice of Irish Aid strategic priorities such as Hunger, HIV and AIDS, Education – all of which heavily impact on children - as well as achievements such as those included in the above examples are all evident signs that Irish Aid is dedicated to children. We commend Irish Aid for this and appreciate its continued support to our organisations and to other child-focused initiatives.

However, whilst we acknowledge that Irish Aid funding and programming has had an impact on the lives of children we do not feel the White Paper is explicit enough in its dedication to children and their rights.

There are two key concerns:

(1) **The 2006 White Paper failed to focus on children as a unique target group.** There is no defined goal or policy commitment dedicated to the realisation of the rights of the child or child development.

We believe that because of this, Irish Aid's commitment to children could be perceived as informal and may not be systematically reflected in practice. For instance, there is no specific allocation of human or financial resources towards the development of children's rights focused baselines, targets, outcomes and indicators.

⁶ See 'Irish Aid Annual Report 2010, Aid Works – Delivery on Results', Irish Aid, 2011.

There is no requirement for governmental or non-governmental organisations to demonstrate practical commitments, targets and reach to children. There is no systematic evaluation of the impact or outcomes that initiatives targeting girls and boys have achieved on children's rights.

(2) When it comes to children, we believe that **the 2006 White Paper adopts a service delivery approach.**

Children are perceived as mere beneficiaries of a service as opposed to dynamic individuals to be empowered to become actors of change in their own lives and in their societies. Children *receive* a service instead of being provided with the tools to demand and claim their rights and to actively participate in the decision making process relevant to the achievement of their rights. To demonstrate this, the primary answer to the question "Why give aid?" is expressed in terms of need. This approach to development, which primarily aims at delivering a service (i.e. building schools, training teachers), has the function to address an identified need (i.e. lack of quality education). This fosters a needs-based approach where beneficiaries (children) remain recipients of help and not individuals who drive their own development.

Drawing upon the above concerns, we believe the progress made towards achieving children's rights has not reached its full potential. **Efforts made to realise children's rights are not always adequately targeted, measured and documented.** Because of this, while Irish Aid funded interventions have been shown to positively address the immediate needs of beneficiaries, they have not systematically tackled the root causes of these needs such as poverty, corruption, power / gender imbalance, and lack of equity. This poses a question regarding the long-term sustainability of Irish Aid interventions.

In addition to the above, this Coalition would like to highlight that the respect and promotion of key child protection principles during the implementation of Irish Aid funded interventions is of paramount importance and should be a basic requirement while allocating funds to third parties. In 2011 Irish Aid commenced a process to develop a **Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy**. We welcome this initiative and we would like to commend Irish Aid for maintaining a participatory approach and incorporating the views of key child focused NGOs, including the members of this coalition, in this process. However, we strongly believe that Irish Aid should develop a protection policy that focuses on children alone instead of one for children as well as vulnerable adults. Children's needs are unique and very different to those of a vulnerable adult; therefore an exclusive child protection policy document is necessary. We also believe that clear and explicit differentiations should be made between child protection procedures for staff members working in Irish Aid programmes and child protection measures to be integrated into the programmes themselves.

3. Changing context

The context in which the 2006 White Paper was developed has changed both in Ireland and internationally.

International context change:

First of all, a **progressive population growth** in developing countries has resulted in a lowering of the age structure and a higher population of children aged under 18. For example, in Tanzania and Ethiopia, two of Irish Aid's programme countries, children under 18 constitute 51.2% and 50.5% of the total population respectively.⁷ Given these statistics, the need to focus on children and youth is all the more urgent.

⁷ See 'The State of the World's Children 2012: Children in an Urban World', UNICEF, 2012.

The Case of early Childhood

UNICEF states that 'the early years of life are crucial. When well nurtured and cared for in their earliest years, children are more likely to survive, to grow in a healthy way, to have less disease and fewer illnesses, and to fully develop thinking, language, emotional and social skills and later in life, they have a greater chance of becoming creative and productive members of society'.

Yet, donors are not heavily investing in early childhood: in 2010 less than 2.1% of national budgets was spent on Early Childhood related initiatives in Sub Saharan Africa. The planning and financing of quality Early Childhood initiatives and the development of comprehensive early childhood policies should be a priority for donor governments. This is instrumental to address the holistic needs and rights of infants and young children.

Secondly, inequalities between richer and poorer strata of society within countries and regions are progressively widening.⁸ Richer strata of society have been favoured in the delivery, financing and use of basic services such as education, health care/nutrition and protection. There seems to be an unequal progress in the realisation of rights and the achievement of the MDGs. **Disparities and inequalities have an even greater impact on children** as they are usually ill-equipped to assert their rights and are generally not in a position or invited to participate in the decision-making processes that affect them.

Since 2009 UNICEF has argued that

development interventions need to be shaped according to an **equity-based approach**, one that reaches first and foremost the most deprived and vulnerable children. This approach is proven to reduce disparities within societies, lower out-of-pocket expenditures for the poor, and enhance the cost-effectiveness of international development investments. For example, an equity-focused approach to healthcare has the potential to avert around **60 per cent more under five deaths than current strategies**.⁹

Thirdly, **the pace of urbanisation**, particularly in Africa and Asia, reflects a rapidly changing world. By 2050, 7 out of 10 people will live in urban areas. For billions of people, this urban experience will be one of poverty and exclusion and **children will disproportionately suffer** from the negative effects of this deprivation. There is a misconception that services are within reach of all urban residents and, subsequently, less investment has been dedicated to those living in slums and informal settlements. For this to change, **a focus on equity is needed to prioritise the most disadvantaged children**, wherever they live.¹⁰

Finally, **climate change presents a great challenge to the achievement of children's rights**. Many of the killers of children such as under-nutrition, acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea, malaria and other vector-borne diseases are known to be highly sensitive to climatic conditions. Adapting to climate change can provide the opportunity for countries to revive their commitments to children through collaborative approaches with children as key partners. For example, in Sierra Leone, 15,000 young people are participating in a volunteer programme that trains them to better run their farms and plots, organise micro-enterprises and share good practices.¹¹

⁸ See 'Leading Edge 2020. A Critical Thinking on the Future of International Development', Trocaire, 2001 and 'Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the Goals', UNICEF, 2009.

⁹ See 'Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the Goals', UNICEF, 2009.

¹⁰ See 'The State of the World's Children 2012: Children in an Urban World', UNICEF, 2012.

¹¹ See 'The State of the World's Children; Special Edition Celebrating 20 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child', UNICEF, 2009.

Irish Context Change:

The context in which the 2006 White Paper was developed has changed significantly in Ireland. There is less money available to spend and Irish Aid is focusing on cost effective interventions. The Irish tax payer rightly demands that its money is spent wisely and effectively.

In summary, if Irish Aid was to target the poorest, most marginalized children through interventions aimed at protecting and promoting children's rights, it could provide a number of strategic benefits:

- A higher % of community members will benefit directly from aid, proportionally expanding the potential of impact.
- An opportunity to break the generational cycle of poverty and affect sustainable change.
- An opportunity to develop the next generation of leaders, who will possess a greater understanding of how to protect and promote human rights more equitably.
- Targeting children provides a fast and cost effective opportunity to save lives, narrow disparities and move closer to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals for children.
- Focusing on children creates an opportunity for a large return on investment. For example, economic benefits of appropriate interventions in early childhood could give a seventeen-fold return on investment if a developing country were to increase pre-school enrolment to 50%.¹²

Best Practices on a Child-Centred Strategy

Vietnam has established an explicitly child-centred development strategy. Children's rights were integrated into the 2006-2010 national Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) for the first time and three National Programmes of Action for Children have been implemented since 1991. They establish time-bound objectives for children's health, nutrition, education, and access to clean water and hygiene. They also set out objectives for reductions in the numbers of children with specific vulnerabilities, such as street children and those affected by HIV or AIDS, sexual abuse and trafficking. The focus is on maximising synergies between various sectors to improve child well-being in a comprehensive and holistic manner. The country ranks in the top 10 worldwide in both absolute and relative progress toward achieving the MDGs (ODI, 2010), including those focusing on children. These achievements are due in part to this explicitly child-focused development strategy, developed with support from UNICEF.

4. Key Issues

As a coalition of child focused organisations, we urge Irish Aid to clarify its commitment to the realisation of the rights of the child. As detailed above, Ireland holds an international obligation to fulfil, protect and promote children's rights globally. Irish Aid should realise this obligation within its policies and practices; first and foremost within the White Paper.

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups worldwide. Children are the most at risk to suffer the effects of all the key issues identified by Irish Aid. In 2009 UNICEF stated that children from the poorest households throughout the developing world are **doubly at risk of dying before the age of five**. The numbers are similar for **stunting, underweight prevalence, birth registration, immunisations and primary education**. Societal disparities, **climate change** and the aging population are further threatening in the realisation of children's rights.

¹² See the Lancet Report Series, 'Child Development 1' and 'Child Development 2', DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60555-2, published online, 2011.

The degree to which children have been impacted by **violent conflict and fragile state situations** is evident by looking at the numbers: at least two million children have died in the past decade and six million have been injured or permanently disabled.¹³

With regard to **gender equality**, there is evidence that girls across the world are more likely to suffer from malnutrition; be forced into early marriage; be subjected to violence or intimidation; be trafficked, sold or coerced into the sex trade; or become infected with HIV.¹⁴

The revised White Paper should directly and explicitly focus on children. This is simultaneously an imperative and an opportunity:

1. Given the higher vulnerability children are subjected to in developing countries, focusing on children would match the overarching goal of the Irish government to **target the poorest of the poor** and would be in line with the Irish Aid's commitment to **target the most vulnerable in society** or those whose rights are most obviously being violated.
2. By directly focusing on children **Irish Aid will progress towards its strategic priorities** - hunger, fragility, climate change, basic needs, governance, human rights & gender inequality - as children are directly impacted by all of these issues.
3. By prioritising children, Irish Aid will not only have an **immediate positive impact** on the lives of the children themselves but will also **change the future for the generations that follow**, influencing the healthy development of future societies.
4. Finally, we believe that Irish Aid should capitalise upon the strategic return **on investment opportunities** that focusing on children creates.

5. Ways of Working

To conclude, the Child Rights Coalition is advocating for:

- **The inclusion within the forthcoming White Paper of a specific commitment to the achievement of the rights of the child**

This commitment will **strengthen the pledge the Irish government made to children's rights** when it ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and signed the Millennium Declaration. It will also contribute to the **achievement of Irish Aid overarching goal** of targeting the poorest of the poor and the most marginalised. Finally, a commitment to children will provide an **opportunity for a return on investment** and will support the implementation of cost-effective interventions.

We believe that this commitment should be followed by a **strategy or action plan**, a **monitoring framework** and a **budget**. These documents should clearly set out key targets, indicators and outcomes regarding children rights; include an expected timeframe to reach these; identify who is responsible and declare the resources that will be allocated to the realisation of the commitment. It should be a **systematic requirement** that the impact on children is included in the planning, implementation and evaluation of all Irish Aid funded interventions.

- **The establishment of a position of Child Rights Advisor within the framework of Irish Aid**

In order to effectively realise the rights of the child in Irish Aid funded programmes, we believe that it is essential that Irish Aid has access to expertise in the area of children's rights and child development. The

¹³ See 'Children in crisis: Education rights for children in conflict affected and fragile states', Save the Children UK, 2007.

¹⁴ See UN General Assembly Resolution 'The Girl Child', 2011.

appointment of a **Child Rights Advisor** would provide the necessary expertise. This Advisor would have clear terms of reference, responsibilities and targets and would ensure that children's rights are mainstreamed throughout all programming. S/he would provide strategic advice to Irish Aid in all relevant matters and ensure that consideration is given to the impact of policy decisions upon the children affected by them.

If, due to budget restrictions, Irish Aid were unable to create the new position of a Child Rights Advisor, this coalition suggests two alternatives:

- i. Expand the role of a **current Irish Aid employee** to incorporate child rights expertise.
- ii. Establish an **advisory group**, comprised of experts from the NGO sector who could be called upon by Irish Aid to advise on issues pertaining to children's rights.

➤ **The creation of an exclusive Child Protection Policy**

In order to ensure sustainable development in the fight against poverty it is imperative that child protection structures are in place. For this reason **Irish Aid must create a Child Protection Policy**. For this policy to be meaningful and truly effective, it should exclusively focus on the protection of children as a vulnerable group. The policy should also make clear and explicit differentiations between child protection procedures for staff members working on Irish Aid Programmes and child protection measures to be integrated into the programmes themselves.

The updated White paper review should make a clear commitment to the creation of a Child Protection Policy and we suggest that Irish Aid commit to the completion of the Child Protection Policy by the end of 2013.

➤ **The forthcoming White Paper should have an increased focus on rights**

In the development of the forthcoming White Paper we urge Irish Aid to move away from the needs-based approach to child development and move towards a child-rights based approach. By outlining a **rights based approach** from the outset, it would be possible to shift from the notion of charity, or a needs based approach, to one where our international obligations and duty to uphold and protect rights, as enshrined in international law, are clearly outlined. The focus would be on enabling targeted individuals to drive their own development. This approach would clarify the relationship between rights-holders (those entitled to rights) and duty bearers (those in charge to protect, fulfil and respect rights) and would support targeted individuals in claiming / demanding their rights and holding their duty bearers accountable.

We believe that a child rights based approach to development leads to **more sustainable outcomes** as it focuses on the inequalities, discriminatory practices and unjust power relations which are often at the heart of development problems. It places international human right entitlements, claims of the people, and the corresponding obligations of the state, at the centre of the national development debate. By focusing on children's rights, Irish Aid will encourage development partners to recognise their responsibility in meeting children's needs.

Conclusion

This submission is the result of a highly collaborative work among five agencies. This process provided us with a great opportunity to harness our commitment to children's rights and child development, to learn from each other and to share experiences and best practices. We intend to strengthen our cooperation for future joint initiatives in the field of children's rights.

We hope that this submission will positively contribute to the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid and play a role in supporting the Government's commitment towards the rights of the child. The Children's Rights Coalition is available to cooperate further with Irish Aid should they require clarification on this submission or support in realising its recommendations.

On behalf of:



David Dalton
Chief Executive Officer

Handwritten signature of David Dalton in blue ink.



Helen Keogh
Chief Executive

Handwritten signature of Helen Keogh in blue ink.



Michael Kiely
Chief Executive Officer

Handwritten signature of Michael Kiely in blue ink.



Richard Moore
Chief Executive Officer

Handwritten signature of Richard Moore in red ink.



Peter Power
Executive Director

Handwritten signature of Peter Power in blue ink.