

Introduction

As this report goes to print, over one billion people are unable to secure their right to basic nutrition. In 2008, 100 million additional people fell into poverty and hunger, mainly as a result of a global rise in food prices and the impact of climate change. This has happened despite the strong commitment by the international community to end poverty and hunger, as reflected in the first United Nations Millennium Development Goal. The world is witnessing a growing hunger crisis.

The Government has taken the clear decision to put the fight against hunger firmly at the heart of the Irish Aid programme. A Hunger Task Force was established by the Government in 2007 to identify the particular role that Ireland can play in international efforts to reduce hunger. The Task Force reported at the United Nations in September 2008. The key recommendations include stepped up assistance for smallholder farmers in Africa, a renewed focus on maternal and infant nutrition and the need for Ireland to take a leadership role on hunger internationally. They are being pursued actively by the Government's development cooperation programme, Irish Aid. The aim is to devote 20% of the Irish Aid budget to specific actions on hunger reduction. We are confident that this will be achieved, and that we will maintain the strong focus across all aspects of the aid programme on Ireland's contribution to the fight against hunger and poverty. A Special Envoy for Hunger has been appointed to ensure that the key recommendations of the Hunger Task Force are implemented and that Ireland takes an active leadership role internationally in ensuring the resources and the coordination which are needed to tackle the hunger crisis. The recent decision of the G8 to allocate \$20 billion to long-term agricultural and rural development initiatives is a key development in that respect.

Our renewed efforts will build on many successful agriculture, nutrition and livelihood programmes supported by Irish Aid in developing countries. These include the 'safety nets programme' in Ethiopia, which is directly addressing the threat of hunger for over 7 million people through food and welfare payments in exchange for work on community agriculture and environmental projects. Through this and many other initiatives, Irish Aid is ensuring that the world's poorest people can realise their basic human rights including a right to be free from hunger, to access to clean water and to basic health and education services.

The Irish Aid programme is integral to Ireland's foreign policy and has consistently focused on the needs of least developed countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. It is managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs to the highest international standards. A major review of the programme undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) over the past year concluded that Ireland is "a champion in making aid more effective". The review also reported that we have a "strong, cutting-edge" aid programme, sharply focused on the world's poorest people.

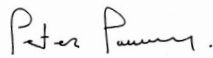


In the current economic climate, aid budgets internationally are under serious pressure, at a time when assistance is needed most in the poorest countries. The Government has had to make difficult decisions on the aid budget in recent months. More than ever it is essential that aid is delivered more effectively and that we focus on key priorities. In the case of Irish Aid, the key priority remains the fight against global poverty and hunger.

This report helps to tell the story of the challenges being faced. It demonstrates the effectiveness of Irish Aid in making real progress in the fight against poverty and hunger. We are determined that the aid programme will continue to make a substantial contribution, on behalf of the people of Ireland, to efforts to improve the lives of some of the poorest people and communities in the world.



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