

Effective Aid

Peer Review: A cutting-edge aid programme

Ireland is 'a champion in making aid more effective', according to a review conducted during 2008 by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee, which conducts regular 'peer reviews' of the development assistance programmes of its members.

The peer review was published in May 2009 and can be read online: www.oecd.org/dac/peerreviews/ireland

The peer review reached the following conclusions:

- Irish Aid is a strong, cutting-edge, development co-operation programme, highly regarded both nationally and internationally.
- Poverty reduction is the overarching goal of Irish Aid. Its programme is well concentrated on a limited number of very poor African countries.
- Irish Aid is a reliable and flexible donor. Its attention to local priorities is appreciated by its programme country partners.
- Irish Aid's approach to Irish non-governmental organisations and to multilateral partners is strategic and targeted. Irish Aid is a champion in making aid more effective.
- The decentralisation of the Irish Aid headquarters from Dublin to Limerick poses challenges. It will take time before the long-term impact of decentralisation on the aid programme can be assessed.
- Irish Aid should enhance its efforts to measure the impact of its aid programme and to communicate development results to the public, to maintain popular support for its work.

Foreign aid as a share of national income is the most common means of comparing the contribution of OECD countries to African development. But developed countries are connected to Africa in other ways also, such as trade, investment, migration, the environment, military cooperation and technology. The Centre for Global Development, in Washington, DC, ranks 21 rich countries in terms of the overall positive impact of their policies on Africa in its annual 'Commitment to Development Index for Africa'. In 2008, Ireland was ranked second in the index, with Sweden in first position.

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MAKING AID MORE EFFECTIVE

IN SEPTEMBER 2008, PETER POWER, MINISTER OF STATE FOR OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT, LED AN IRISH DELEGATION TO THE THIRD HIGH LEVEL FORUM ON AID EFFECTIVENESS IN ACCRA, GHANA. THE FORUM WAS A FOLLOW-UP TO THE 2005 PARIS DECLARATION ON AID EFFECTIVENESS AND INVOLVED MINISTERS FROM OVER 100 COUNTRIES AS WELL AS CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES.

ENSURING COHERENCE ACROSS GOVERNMENT

THE INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE ON DEVELOPMENT WAS ESTABLISHED IN APRIL 2007 TO HELP TO ENSURE THAT THE APPROACH OF ALL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS TO DEVELOPMENT ISSUES WAS COHERENT AND THAT IRISH AID WAS MAKING BEST USE OF THE EXPERTISE AVAILABLE ACROSS THE PUBLIC SERVICE. THE COMMITTEE MET FOUR TIMES IN 2008 AND PRESENTED ITS FIRST ANNUAL REPORT TO THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN JUNE, WHICH INCLUDED RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROMOTE INCREASED POLICY COHERENCE. THE JOINT OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND ITS SUB-COMMITTEE ON OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT WERE BRIEFED ON THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE. THE COMMITTEE ALSO RAN DEVELOPMENT AWARENESS-RAISING SEMINARS IN FIVE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS IN 2008.



Minister of State Peter Power and Karen Jorgensen of the OECD at the Dublin launch of the Peer Review of Ireland. Photo: Maxwells.

Evaluation and Audit: Learning from experience

The Timor Leste evaluation found that Irish Aid's programmes were well aligned with the priorities of the Timor government and the White Paper on Irish Aid

The OECD Peer Review found that 'Irish Aid follows a rigorous process of internal checks and controls, including by the internal auditor within each embassy'

Evaluation

The Evaluation and Audit Unit conducts evaluations of primary strategic importance to Irish Aid such as reviews of the strategies in our programme countries. These are crucial to ensuring accountability, organisational learning and evidence-based decision-making in Irish Aid. Amongst the evaluations carried out in 2008 were the following:

Timor Leste Country Programme Evaluation

Ireland has supported the development of Timor Leste since its independence in 2002. This evaluation covered two Strategic Plan cycles. It found that the programmes were well aligned with the priorities of the Government of Timor Leste and the White Paper on Irish Aid. There was success in supporting local government and in human rights and gender equality mainstreaming. However, political instability and loss of life adversely affected progress relating to macro-economic support and public sector management.

Review of the Strategic Partnerships Environment Programme

Irish Aid's strategic partnerships environment programme supports six international partner organisations and has four overarching policy objectives. These are: to inform development policy by raising awareness of links between environmental sustainability and poverty reduction; to integrate principles of sustainable development into Irish Aid policies and programmes; to assist developing countries to prepare for and adapt to changing conditions, while taking action to reduce negative impacts on the most vulnerable members of society; and to engage with key multilateral environmental agreements and with agencies to demonstrate commitment to resolving global environmental problems.

The evaluation found that, overall, the work of the programme's partners is highly relevant and consistent with Irish Aid's objectives for poverty reduction policies, international best practice and current conditions. The programme's partners have been largely effective in achieving their objectives. The larger partners play a significant role in shaping international and national policies

in bio-diversity and conservation, thereby influencing actions which directly affect the livelihoods of the rural poor.

Audit

The Evaluation and Audit Unit has responsibility for internal audit and reports to the Secretary General of the Department of Foreign Affairs, who is the Accounting Officer for the overseas aid budget. The work of the Unit is also overseen by an independent Audit Committee. The role of audit is to independently report on whether funds have been utilised for the purposes intended and in accordance with proper procedures. Audit focuses on areas of more significant risk and, with regard to the aid programme, takes into account recent developments in the overall aid agenda. The work of the Evaluation and Audit Unit combines audit work conducted by the unit itself, work commissioned by Irish Aid and carried out by internationally recognised audit firms and work carried out in programme countries by national audit institutions.

Ongoing evaluation of the programme of Irish Aid and partners is crucial to ensuring the most effective aid programme possible.