



# Trade Unions & Development Co-operation

**Global  
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Irish Congress of Trade Unions  
Northern Ireland Committee



# Trade Unions and Development Co-operation

## Introduction

The trade union agenda has always been about advancing rights and welfare for members, whether they are poor people in rich countries or poor people in poor countries. Social justice and equality have always been our concern.

In recent years, particularly with the spread of media images of disease, disaster and destruction, it has come to seem as if poverty is more evident, more striking, in the countries of the Global South – in Africa, Asia and Latin America – than in our own backyard. International Solidarity is one of the core values in the worldwide trade union movement. For us solidarity is built on the understanding that we are all equals, and that we stand together to defend human rights and core labour standards wherever they are denied or threatened in the world. International development is therefore a major concern of the trade union movement in Ireland and the UK.

In the work for global equality and justice the most important task is to reform the world trade system. The developing world is in urgent need for fair international trade. In the recently collapsed world trade negotiations in Geneva, the developed world bears the main responsibility for the failure. Both the European Union and United States have to be criticized. The General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, Guy Ryder said: "developed country governments have to assume their responsibilities to contribute some fairness to the world trading system and not require huge sacrifices in return for minimal commitments on their side". The General Secretary of ITUC, which represents 168 million workers in 155 countries, also made it clear that, "An agreement that brings more hardship to workers in developing countries is simply not acceptable." But even if we are critical to how our governments and the EU acted in the world trade negotiations, we can also see another and positive side of the Irish and British governments' view on international development. And that positive aspect is their development policies expressed through Irish Aid and the Department for International Development.

This resource is designed to show how we can work in partnership with the official government aid agencies to support international development efforts, to work towards poverty reduction worldwide, and to promote progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – whilst always working towards our own priorities of decent work, social justice in the work place, and a fairer globalisation for all.

## International Development and the Trade Union Agenda

The priority for trade unions is Decent Work. With the worldwide support and co-ordination of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), trade unions across Ireland have been mobilised for a number of years around the theme of improving working conditions and pay across the globe. A major difference to past ways of promoting work place improvements lies in the wider global perspective that now informs much work place practice. Unions are fully aware of the interplay of markets around the world, as well as of non-economic factors such as demographics, politics, changing values, community movements, religious sentiment and many other factors. The pursuit of small-scale improvements in pay and conditions in specific work places is now conducted in a rapidly globalising world, and the trade union movement is keenly aware of the importance of the international context in which wage bargaining takes place.

At the same time, if people in any given poor country are to escape poverty and help their communities and their families to achieve better economic circumstances, there has to be a distribution of wealth throughout the country. The best means to do that is to ensure that most people have access to decent work that is properly remunerated. So Decent Work lies at the heart of the trade union movement throughout the world, in poorer countries as well as in richer countries.

Decent Work is also what most development projects and programmes seek to achieve, too. Nobody working in international development wants to oversee the distribution of charity forever; everyone wants to see individuals, families, communities and countries developing the capacity to create employment that offers dignified, decent conditions of work and proper, a living wage for employees. International development and trade unions are fighting the same fight for the same goals right across the world: social justice is the single common theme of both.



## Labour Standards and International Development

Employment section of the Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2005:

*“We strongly support fair globalization and resolve to make the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people, a central objective of our relevant national and international policies as well as our national development strategies, including poverty reduction strategies, as part of our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. These measures should also encompass the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, as defined in International Labour Organization Convention No. 182, and forced labour. We also resolve to ensure full respect for the fundamental principles and rights at work”.*

DfID has incorporated into its website a policy paper on 'Labour Standards and Poverty Reduction' which, whilst written by its own researchers, draws heavily from work and representations from the trade union movement. Even a brief glance at it shows the obvious overlap between what we are trying to do and some of the mechanisms by which DfID is seeking to achieve improvements in poor peoples' conditions worldwide.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has defined Core Labour Standards (CLS) as binding on all member states. These basic standards are: freedom of association and right to collective bargaining; elimination of all forms of coerced or compulsory labour;

effective abolition of child labour; and elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Socially, the case for labour standards is integral to a human rights and freedoms perspective. Ending discrimination would improve quality of life for all women - more than half the world's population. It would also be a vital positive change for disadvantaged groups, such as people with disabilities and ethnic minorities. A robust system of labour rights and standards can also contribute to social and political development. Freedom of association is a fundamental political right, and labour organisations can play a key role in the development of a responsive and democratic politics. The implementation of substantive labour standards also has a role in public policy for poverty reduction. Effective occupational health and safety regulations, for example, protect households from being plunged into poverty through injury or loss of working family members.

The economic case for CLS as a means of reducing poverty overlaps with the social case. Social and political stability, to which labour standards can contribute, increase private investment, including foreign investment. Freedom of association can enhance market effectiveness by increasing freedom of choice, equality of bargaining power and availability of information. Freedom from discrimination reduces the risks of skills and capabilities being wasted. Elimination of exploitative child labour improves economic prospects by getting more children educated.



A corollary to the flows of labour around the worlds has been the recent growth of relocation of manufacturing – firms being closed in one part of the world only to be opened in another part where labour costs (or other important costs components) are much lower than in the country losing the factory or firm.

Ireland has experienced the closure of many textile firms as employers and shareholders consider the profitability that can be had from moving the factory to a low labour cost country such as Sri Lanka, Mauritius or Turkey. As competition has become ever more brutal, even those three countries have seen manufacturers closing down factories that are barely 20 years old, as they eye the prospects in countries – such as Vietnam and China – where labour laws are weaker, where the workers are subject to ever more difficult conditions.

### ITUC and development cooperation

The creation of the ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) in November 2006, has given new impetus for the work on trade union development cooperation. The ITUC, born from

the unification of the two previous existing international bodies – International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and World Confederation of Labour (WCL) and a group of independent unions, has set specific objectives both for the development of cooperation programmes, as well as, for elaborating a common trade union policy on development issues. Congress has recently joined a network which will respond to the specific needs that have been gathered throughout a consultation process amongst the national organizations in the North and regional partners in the South.

### The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development



## The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – indicators

**Goal 1** Reduce by a half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day  
Reduce by half the number of people who suffer from hunger

**Goal 2** Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary education

**Goal 3** Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels by 2015

**Goal 4** Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five

**Goal 5** Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio

**Goal 6** Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS  
Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

**Goal 7** Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources

Reduce by half the proportion of people living without sustainable access to safe drinking water  
Achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020

**Goal 8** Develop further an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory, includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction— nationally and internationally

Address the least developed countries' special needs. This includes tariff- and quota-free access for their exports; enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries; cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction

Address the special needs of landlocked and small island developing States

Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems through national and international measures to make debt sustainable in the long term

In cooperation with the developing countries, develop decent and productive work for youth

In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries

In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies— especially information and communications technologies



## The Millennium Development Goals as a major aid focus

The Irish and UK Governments have both put all their weight behind the Millennium Development Goals as a major focus of attention for awareness-raising among the general public. They also see them as a series of quantifiable targets that are realistic and achievable, so their success is likely to help citizens view development as a feasible and worthwhile venture. The fact that there are now more poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa than there were in 1990 has been a stimulus to DfID which recognises that the MDGs have a crucial part to play in reducing poverty and encouraging progress in those poor countries. The Department argues that “where countries are committed to working together, making the necessary changes and providing adequate resources, a great deal can be achieved in a short space of time”.

Similarly, Irish Aid is focussed on the MDGs:

*“The overarching objective of Irish Aid is the reduction of poverty, inequality and exclusion in developing countries. All of Irish Aid’s policies and activities are measured against their contribution to the reduction of poverty and against the progress they achieve towards the development targets set by the international community.”*

*The eight Millennium Development Goals, agreed by the UN at a series of international summit meetings, identify some of the main causes of extreme poverty in today’s world and underpin the poverty reduction policies and activities of Irish Aid.”*

It is interesting to note that the Irish position states that the MDGs identify some of the main causes of extreme poverty – some, but not all. The trade union movement in Ireland, in common with a number of international development NGOs, has long been arguing for governments to address social injustice, inequality, discrimination, unfair trade rules, an uncontrolled arms trade, the race to the bottom, a skewed and unfair globalisation and many other issues that contribute to the unacceptable levels of poverty in the world. But the focus on clear and quantifiable goals is a great way to mobilise public opinion in favour of development initiatives.

In the 1980s, the British Government often gave the impression that international development was an example of “throwing good money after bad” whereas the improved distribution procedures of DfID, and the track record of accountability and good monitoring and evaluation introduced since then, have led to improved public perception of the usefulness of international development as a sector of government expenditure.





Ireland, too, has received nothing but praise for the quality of its aid: unlike many rich countries – who insist that much of its aid money is spent on ‘experts’ and consultants from their own country, or on the purchase of goods and services from the donor country – Ireland has a completely untied aid programme. It also channels a lot of its money into budget support to national governments as well as to NGO or charitable projects.

There is an Advisory Board for Irish Aid, which offers advice on the strategic direction as well as on operational details of aid projects and programmes. Congress is represented on this board by General Secretary, David Begg. Within the agency, there is an Evaluation and Audit Unit which attempts to embed ongoing review and assessment procedures within all sections of the agency’s work. Finally, of course, the Audit Committee is an Irish Government body that has the remit of investigating value for money in any area of activities involving the use of Irish taxpayers’ funds in Government-managed or Government-approved programmes.

Similarly, the UK Government has invested a lot of money not only in the poorest countries in the world as a part of its ongoing commitment to achieving the MDGs but has also spent heavily to ensure that the quality of its aid programmes is of the very highest.

## **Ireland and the UK – the official development agencies**

### ***Ireland***

International development aid in Ireland is spent in accordance with official government policy outlines in the latest White Paper on

International Development. As well as laying down the Government’s intentions in terms of spending, programme countries and priority themes, the White Paper specifically emphasises the role of Irish civil society in international development efforts, and mentions the trade union movement as one of the “vital components” of the coalition it is seeking to mobilise in favour of development. The White paper also speaks positively of the model of Social Partnership that Ireland is rightly proud of and suggests lessons from such partnerships can be applied in developing countries. So the movement is seen by the Government as a key player in efforts to convince the Irish public that spending tax revenues on international development is a valid form of public spending.

Ireland also sees trade unions as a player internationally: knowing that we have strong links across the globe with unions and civil society organisations seeking the same or similar visions of social justice as we do, the Government realises that aid money expended through our networks can be more effective in targetting development goals in poor countries than if spent through large international bureaucracies. So – again – Congress and its affiliates are seen as an important partner for the Government not only in promoting knowledge, understanding and commitment to international development as a ‘cause’ within Ireland, but also as partners in delivering effective development outcomes in poor countries.

In Ireland, the main arm of international development is that provided by Irish Aid – an agency within the Department of Foreign Affairs. It is currently headed by a Minister of State - Peter Power TD - who is responsible for



*Nelson Mandela addressed over 22,000 people in Trafalgar Square on behalf of the MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY coalition. He hands a group of school children his white band to be delivered with thousands of others to the leaders of the G8.*

Overseas Development, within the Department of Foreign Affairs. The Government of Ireland had earlier stated its commitment to meeting an internationally agreed target of 0.7% GNI (gross national income) as its contribution to international aid. After hesitations and budgeting difficulties in the years following the new millennium, the Government dropped any time frame for that target.

The worldwide publicity that attended the Make Poverty History campaign throughout 2005 - with the British Government using its presidencies of the G8 and of the EU that year to publicise the issue of international development, especially of Africa – made the advocacy efforts of tens of thousands of trade unionists and other campaigners in NGOs and churches across the country very effective indeed. The Government of Ireland reinstated its aim of giving 0.7% GNI to overseas development co-operation, and fixed a time

frame of 2012 for its achievement – with, for example, 0.5% being the target for 2007 and 0.6% in 2010.

The 2007 Irish Aid Annual Report shows Ireland's Official Development Assistance (ODA) reached 870 million last year. In 1981, Ireland's aid budget was just €22 million, so the speed of growth of the aid budget has been among the most impressive of any country. Some of this money goes to support programmes and projects in Ireland's key partner countries - of which there are seven in Africa (Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi and Lesotho) and two in Asia (Vietnam and Timor Leste) – whilst the rest is channelled through multilateral agencies such as the European Commission, the United Nations family of agencies, the World Bank and its related agencies, and so on.

## Irish Aid Key Programme Countries

### **Africa**

Ethiopia  
Uganda  
Tanzania  
Mozambique  
Zambia  
Lesotho

### **Asia**

Timor Leste  
Vietnam

In 2006, Ireland granted €140 million to Irish-based NGOs to promote the work of international development, and this sum is expected to grow as the Government encourages organisations to include international development in their own activities or to deliver development benefits that the Government itself will not be able to offer.

Ireland channels about 50% of all its development funds to the poorest countries, which is a higher proportion than any other country in the 22 donor countries regularly monitored by the OECD (Organisation of European Co-operation and Development). Ireland also achieves a ranking of sixth in the world in terms of money given per head of population. Even in overall cash terms, Ireland is the fifth largest donor in the EU, even though its economic size is much smaller than many of the traditional rich countries of Western Europe.

## United Kingdom

In the UK, development efforts follow a similar structure. There is a Minister for International Development, Douglas Alexander MP, who is a

member of the Cabinet – the Department was an agency of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for many years under the previous administration. Like Irish Aid, DfID (the Department for International Development) has also agreed a time frame for achieving its commitment to 0.7% GNI – 2013, a year later than Ireland.

In 2007, the Government claimed to have invested more than £7, 5 billion in international development. In calendar year 2006, £6.770 billions were spent as Official Development Assistance (ODA). The Department claims that this makes Britain the world's second most generous donor – after the United States – in money terms. Large amounts of this gross public expenditure on development are debt write-offs – for Nigeria, for example, who £1.649 millions wiped off their debts in 2006/7. Without debt write-offs and other development actions funded by other branches of central government (mainly CDC [formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation] and Export Credit Guarantee Department [ECGD]), the DfID programme amounted to £4.778 millions, which was 87% of all non-debt relief expenditures.

This figure puts the UK at 0.51% GDP/GNI and places the UK at 7th in the list of aid donors by amount. This level of expenditure will require continuing increases in the aid budget of about 12% per year for the next three years at least, if the target of 0.7% is to be achieved by 2013. An autumn statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer (or Minister of Finance) indicated that the Department would be receiving a full 17% increase in resources for 2008, so there is some room for optimism in the future growth rate of the DfID budget.

The UK contribution has undergone some interesting changes in recent years. Bilateral expenditure rose only by 2%, whilst multilateral donations increased by 23% - to the EU, the World Bank group, and to the UN family of agencies. Sectorally, health was the most strongly supported area (£490 m), followed by the economic sector (£394m) and education (£372m.).

## Trade Unions and Government Aid Money

### United Kingdom

DfID is keen to offer funds to many different organisations based in the UK so that they can help raise awareness of development issues in the British public. Obviously there needs to be different channels for different kinds of organisation.

The main development charities (Oxfam, Save the Children, Action Aid, Christian Aid, etc) have their own funding arrangements with

DfID and have developed especially close links with the Department. Churches, community groups and trade unions can access other funds.

The main source of funding for trade unions looking for small-scale project funding for development education is **the Mini Grants scheme**. This is a relatively unbureaucratic fund, administered in Northern Ireland by the Centre for Global Education. It requires an application in no more than 6 pages, and offers up to £10,000 a year for 1, 2 or 3 years at a time. There are a number of criteria to be met, and each project should attempt to show that it meets at least some of the goals of DfID in its proposed activities. Applications need to be sent in to the CGE before 31st October in any given year.

A source of funding for more ambitious projects is the Development Awareness Fund (DAF). This requires a more complex process of application but offers up to £100,000 a year for up to 3 years. It does not require co-funding, so can be used to pay the entire costs of a development education project.





The scheme is administered on behalf of DfID throughout the UK by Tripleline Consulting Ltd, to whom a Concept Note – in no more than 3 pages – should be sent by 30th September in any given year. If they feel the proposal has merit, they advise DfID accordingly.

If DfID concurs with this preliminary assessment, the applicant is then invited to submit a more elaborate funding proposal by November 30th, with a view to awarding grants for disbursement starting in April the following year.

A third source of DfID funding for trade unions – if they are registered in the UK – is in the TUC-administered **Strategic Framework Planning Agreement (SFPA)**, which is a fund of £700,000 over a three year period to help individual trade unions fund activities in development education, and in support of the British Government's mobilisation of support for action on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Again, there are specific criteria and procedures to follow but the DfID-funded Project Officer in the TUC is there to steer the unions through the application process and give support and advice.

Currently, the main forms of support to trade unions from DfID centre on development education – awareness-raising, information, communication, mobilisation and more structured forms of education and training. Where unions wish to seek financial and other forms of support for other activities related to development – for example, volunteering, exchange schemes, direct financial support to community groups and partners in poor countries, etc – there may be other sources of funds: contact DfID directly or let the Global Solidarity project team in Congress help you out.

## Ireland

Irish Aid has recently rationalised the many different types of funding that were available to different types of organisation, working in different fields and on different priorities. Now, there is essentially one central funding mechanism which is the **Civil Society Fund**. This is a fund to which trade unions can apply for funding of up to €200,000 per year in any one funding round – and there are three rounds per year. Unions and other civil society organisations can make a maximum of five submissions each year and Irish Aid will fund up to 75% of all project costs in each successful application.

The object of the Civil Society Fund is to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by improving the livelihoods of disadvantaged communities in developing countries. The fund interprets this in regard to specific goals and objectives, which are listed in the background documents for interested organisations. So – unlike most of the DfID funding streams – the applicant has to show an impact of their development education work in the developing countries themselves, and not just in Irish society.

The fund also has a number of principles that guide its administration and these include an emphasis on gender equality, environmental sustainability, governance (and especially the promotion of human rights) and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

## Congress and Lesotho: a case study of trade unions in development cooperation

In 2008 Irish Aid granted support for a Congress' application for a Trade Union capacity building project in Lesotho. We had earlier met colleagues from LECODU (the Lesotho Confederation of Democratic trade Unions) and discussed with them the severity of the problems they faced as trade unionists and as citizens in a country ravaged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Lesotho also faces serious difficulties in a rapidly globalising world economy and is seeing its relatively well-developed textile sector suffer from protectionist trends and other harmful trade rules, especially in Europe.

The proposal aims at strengthening the trade union movement in Lesotho, at helping the Confederation build internal capacity through skills training, and at helping trade union officers and members to prepare themselves better for the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Trade unionists in Lesotho do not generally have much training in the traditional union issues of collective bargaining and other areas but this project aims to help them effect such training – and to include HIV/AIDS awareness training, as well as caring strategies, into basic trade union training. That way, trade union representatives can ask employers, within their Collective Bargaining Agreements, what steps they are taking to help employees cope with the health, employment and social issue that is HIV/AIDS.

Irish Government funding of this project reflects the importance that the Irish Government places on choosing partners with expertise and access to social strata that a government programme alone could never have. Congress is pleased to be working with Irish Aid to help Ireland contribute meaningfully to the Millennium Development Goals whilst also showing solidarity with the trade union movement in Lesotho.



Organisations that have already received funding from Irish Aid will have established a track record and may be invited to apply for **Multi-Annual Block Grant** funds. Amounts on offer from this source of funding range up to a maximum of €1.5 million per year, though Development Education is specifically excluded from the activities that this fund can support. A trade union would have to envisage a partnership with a union or other group from a poor country, rather than conduct awareness-raising or advocacy work purely in Ireland.

Irish Aid has been a long term supporter of our **development education** work – Global Solidarity. For many years now Congress has developed a good working relationship with the development education unit of Irish Aid who have been a co-funder of our development education work. Congress looks forward to developing this relationship into the future and to facilitate the development of links between some of our affiliate unions and Irish Aid.

Irish Aid has recently opened a new Volunteering and Information Centre on O'Connell Street in Dublin where all are welcome to come and explore more about Irish Aid and the issues they address in their work – [www.irishaid.gov.ie/centre](http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/centre)

## Irish Aid and Decent Work

Irish Aid has a partnership agreement with the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Consistent with its philosophy of Social Partnership, the Government of Ireland is keen to support not only the freedom of employers to build business and its associated infrastructure but also to support workers in their desire to see not only jobs available to

those who want them, but the creation of *good* jobs, with adequate wages, good conditions of employment, and a recognition that a proper work-life balance is of great social value in its own right. Decent Work is thus not only a trade union priority but also a goal of the Irish Government.

Since the first major agreement was signed between Ireland and the ILO in June 2001, successive agreements have replaced it but the priorities and key themes have remained broadly consistent. Wishing to support the ILO's goal of creating decent work opportunities for women and men, the Agreement supports the creation of quality jobs through women's entrepreneurship training, and the enhanced employability of people with disabilities. Two other components of the earlier phases of the Agreement concentrated on 'Core Support for the Special Action Programme to combat Forced Labour (SAP/FL)' and 'Employment and Vocational Training Opportunities and Migration Policy Measures to Prevent and Reduce Trafficking of Women in Moldavia, Albania and the Ukraine.' A 'Youth Employment Network' was included in a subsequent Agreement, which concentrated much more on African states – especially Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zambia.

Over the first six years of the Agreements, Ireland provided close to €10 million for ILO programmes in these agreed areas. Congress has consistently urged Irish Aid to extend its support to the ILO, particularly focussing on Child Labour and support to the IPEC (International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour) initiative.

This entire area of cooperation shows clearly the many topics and targets which are key





objectives of both the Irish Government and the trade union movement in Ireland. There is huge potential for collaborative work between the two partners, and Congress intends to use the Global Solidarity project to encourage affiliated unions to engage more robustly with Irish Aid to agree common goals and achieve a common purpose in many different areas within the Decent Work campaign.

## The Quality of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA)

Both Ireland and the UK have established a strong reputation for offering aid that is as unbureaucratic and as unconditional as possible. Even better, both countries have invested considerably in learning the lessons

from development aid – what works and what doesn't. This is in marked contrast to the numerous countries that see aid as a branch of foreign policy, as a means of exerting influence, or as a tool for promoting business and other opportunities for the donor country. Working through the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), both countries have shown a pragmatism and a flexibility in channelling their funds to those sectors which most effectively achieve their targets. And both countries have recently restated their global aims in development aid in light of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as being the reduction of poverty.



## Other Ways of Contributing to Development Efforts

Both Irish Aid and DfID actively encourage citizens to become involved in as many aspects of development as possible. As well as informing people about the major international programmes of aid and development, they support and promote initiatives such as linking with organisations in the Global South (for example, trade unions in Ireland linking with trade unions in poor countries), or volunteering (encouraging employers to allow an employee to take time out of their work and to come back to a guaranteed job after a placement overseas as a volunteer), or joining the Rapid Response Initiative [RRI] to offer skills and experience for emergency deployment in situations of stress and crisis overseas, or through mission work (through its support of, for example, the Irish Missionary Resource Service [IMRS]).

DfID offers an equally impressive range of services to encourage people to become more involved and engaged with development issues wherever they are. The Department offers support specifically to faith groups, to local communities, to the formal education sector, to the media, to research institutes and consultancies, to public opinion firms, to co-operatives and the trade unions, in a number of innovative and imaginative ways. Very few people are “against” development but a considerable number of people feel that taxpayers should only be giving money to overseas governments and communities when problems and inequalities here at home are fully resolved. So the task of convincing people that international development is in the long-term interests of us all is a huge one, and a major part of DfID’s work in the UK.

## Trade Unions and Overseas Development Co-operation: what can we do?

Let us repeat: the agenda of trade unionism for two hundred years or so has been to combat discrimination, exploitation and injustice, by means of collective action in defence of collective rights. In that regard, the work of trade unions embraces the work of international development because it is in the poorest countries of the world that we see some of the most egregious examples of injustice and poverty that we are bound to fight wherever we can with whatever tools we can bring to bear.

Trade unions in Ireland bring together some 800,000 affiliated members in a movement of solidarity. Our dues and fees pay for the priorities that we collectively decide are the most important: organising, recruiting, lobbying, research, health and safety, equality, disability, learning and training, and so on. As we have moved in recent years towards the recognition of our international responsibilities and capabilities, so we have become aware of the need to mobilise resources to address some of the issues on our international agenda.

The Irish and British Governments have worked very effectively to help build a consensus that international aid and development must be seen as priorities, even when rising oil prices, rising interest rates, stagnant or falling house prices, and other worries push citizens to an ever narrower concentration on personal preoccupations. The use of the G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, in July 2005, and the UK Presidency of the EU during the first half of that year, were essential tools – well handled – for raising the profile of issues that are an

integral part of the trade unionist's agenda: the elimination of poverty, the promotion of democracy and human rights, and the fight against discrimination and exploitation.

Trade unionists prefer to campaign for Decent Work - the modern version of "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work" – but our concerns about solidarity are very little different from the concerns of Irish Aid or DfID and the governments behind them in their pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals as a mechanism to help lift millions of people out of extreme poverty.

By establishing strategic partnerships with development agencies such as Irish Aid and DfID, the trade union movement in Ireland can improve its own effectiveness as a campaigning body. If poor people in Lesotho, for example, can be helped to improve their material circumstances, they may well be much more favourably disposed to join a trade union because they would be no longer so desperately preoccupied with questions of basic survival. Similarly, the more we can engage with trade unions in other countries, the more we can make a reality of the solidarity that we believe is the hallmark of our movement. For far too long, we have remained ignorant of the situations and circumstances of trade unionists in – for example – Iran, Vietnam, Bolivia, Romania or Lesotho. In a globalising world, we need to be aware of what is happening across the globe, why it is happening, and what we can do to ensure that people are in control rather than big transnational corporations.

When we work in partnership with the aid agencies of our respective governments, we

forge a synergy, a 'value added', that can make us much more effective. Not only are they able to offer us more financial resources – always in great need within the trade union movement! – but they also have the ability and capacity to generate political will and commitment to the goals that we both agree are essential. To have a partner in government – another partner, along with existing links with Departments of Employment, or Education, or Health, and so on – can only add to our stature, to the public's perception of our movement, to the realisation by members of our effectiveness, and to our ability to influence the political programmes of those who govern us.

In a rapidly globalising world, the trade union movement in Ireland cannot afford to ignore a partner that is capable of enhancing our stature and of equipping us more ably for the campaigning work we are committed to do. Overseas Development Co-operation is the label that governments give to their work on international support to poorer countries and it is important that trade unionists get behind the difference in labels between what we call campaigning for social justice and what the Government calls its own work on development.

If we can make that transition from seeing Irish Aid or DfID as 'mere' branches of Government and see them, instead, as partners in a worldwide struggle for a fairer globalisation, we can become a much more effective movement, at home and abroad. More importantly, untold millions of our sisters and brothers would be helped to live a life at least a little better than they otherwise would.





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