



**Aidlink Pre-Budget Submission 2018**  
**To**  
**Department of Finance and Department of Foreign Affairs**

*September 2017*

Aidlink is a small, Irish-owned international development organisation that was established in 1982 to improve the lives of people living in poverty in Africa. We do this by strengthening local organisations, enabling healthy and fulfilling lives, and developing sustainable communities with the capacity, skills and knowledge to drive change.

We work exclusively through a partnership approach, providing direct and indirect support to local organisations in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana. Having worked with our current partners for between 10 and 15 years, we have developed a strong and open relationship based on our shared values, vision and commitment to the poor. Together, we have been able to deliver sustainable improvements in WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), Education, Health and Agriculture for some of the world's poorest<sup>1</sup> people. We have also been able to build the capacity of our partners as well-governed, effective, and sustainable organisations, thus supporting African Civil Society to become leaders in their own development.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Irish Aid have supported Aidlink's work in Africa since our foundation 35 years ago. In recent years, this has taken the form of multi-annual, funding grants, firstly through the *Block Grant (2008 – 2011)* and the *Programme Grant (2012 – 2016)*. Over the last 5 years, Aidlink have registered a number of achievements amongst target communities<sup>2</sup> which, in turn, have contributed to Ireland's overseas development programme and positive global reputation. These include:

---

<sup>1</sup> For Aidlink, 'poor' denotes a condition that is characterised by social, economic and political disenfranchisement. In practice, this means we target subsistence farmers and nomadic pastoralists living in rural Kenya, Uganda and Ghana. A particular focus is placed on the most vulnerable members of the community including women and girls, the elderly, the disabled, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

<sup>2</sup> Aidlink's programme was externally evaluated in 2015. The report is available online here: [End of Programme Evaluation](#).

- Over 175,000 men, women and children with improved access to cleaner, safer water and hygiene and sanitation knowledge in Uganda;
- 60,000 children attending a child-friendly and gender-sensitive school that is safe, healthy and conducive to their education and wider development in Kenya and Uganda;
- Increased access to mother-and-child healthcare services for approximately 300,000 nomadic pastoralists in Turkana, Northern Kenya;
- Enhanced food and income security for almost 5,000 rural families in Uganda;
- 15,000 people in East Africa and 5,000 Irish secondary school students walking together in solidarity as part of the global *Walk for Water* advocacy campaign;
- 259 Irish secondary school students accompanied and supported on a schools-based Immersion Programme in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana;
- The Kenyan government supporting the provision of sanitary towels to schools across Kenya based on learning from our programme;
- All 5 programme partners reaching recognised standards around good governance, strategy and financial management.

Nevertheless, in late 2016 Aidlink was informed by Irish Aid that its application under the *Programme Grant II (2017 – 2021)* funding stream had been unsuccessful and our budget was cut by 20%. This decision has been deeply disappointing to the staff, partners and Directors of Aidlink. In particular, the Directors are concerned that while controls and procedures that are appropriate for an organisation of our size are in place and are operational, the company was judged against large organisations on a like for like basis, despite those organisations being of a scale, both in terms of resources and state funding, which dwarfs that of Aidlink. Aidlink was not the only organisation excluded from PG II as a number of similar sized organisations were also excluded.

By excluding smaller Irish organisations from *Programme Grant II*, we are concerned that Ireland could, in time, lose its place at the international development table, both globally and in the eyes of the Irish public. Given our rich heritage and renowned leadership in the development arena, this would be a significant loss.

Aidlink continues to believe that Irish civil society, and in particular small organisations including ourselves, have an important role to play in the fight against “poverty, hunger and the violation of human rights”, as set out in *One World, One Future*, Ireland’s Policy for International Development.

We welcome the recent commitment from Taoiseach Leo Varadkar’s to increasing Ireland’s Overseas Development Aid (ODA)<sup>3</sup>. We are asking the Irish government to:

- 1. Support Dóchas’ Pre-Budget Submission**
- 2. Invest in Irish NGOs as a vital component of Irish Civil Society**
- 3. Invest in small NGOs and their capacity to have a positive impact overseas**

## **1. Support Dóchas’ Pre-Budget Submission**

As a member of Dóchas, the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations, we echo the call made in their Pre-Budget Submission<sup>4</sup> to:

- Fully implement the commitment to reach 0.7% by 2025 to ensure the surest path to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.finegael.ie/speech-taoiseach-leader-fine-gael-leo-varadkar-t-d-fine-gael-think/>

<sup>4</sup> [Dóchas Pre-Budget Submission 2018](#)

- Establish a multi-annual plan to ensure 0.7% can be reached by 2025.
- For Budget 2018, increase the ODA spend by 0.05% to reach a total of 0.38% of GNI.
- Protect the poverty-focused definition of ODA, ensure that ODA remains untied to trade and that ODA is not used for any other purpose than to alleviate poverty and promote respect for human rights, dignity and equality.

## **2. Invest in Irish NGOs as a vital component of Irish Civil Society**

Ireland has a long and proud history of development, with an international aid programme that is globally recognised and a source of national pride. Yet with a growing trend of support across the globe for “isolationism” and the rejection of globalisation (as illustrated by *Brexit* and the election of President Trump), the support of the Irish public cannot be taken for granted. At a time of serious political and social upheaval across the world, it is vital that Ireland maintains its outward focus and long-term commitment to creating a “sustainable and just world”<sup>5</sup>.

The Irish international development community is committed to deepening the public’s understanding of the importance, effectiveness and life-changing impact of Irish aid overseas. Through public engagement and development education, we aim to create a strong, active citizenship that supports ODA, and is prepared to take action for a more just and equal world.

Irish NGOs such as Aidlink are ideally placed to implement this agenda. It is our belief that a sense of ownership is key to ensuring public support for Ireland’s overseas development programme, that people believe that they are making a real and meaningful contribution to changing the lives of the poor in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond.

Irish NGOs are best placed to facilitate this connection because, having emerged from Irish society, we are embedded in it, reflective of it, and able to call upon a shared understanding of what it means to be Irish and our place on the global stage. In implementing our programmes, we reflect Irish society’s commitment to creating a better world. By sharing the impact of those programmes, we are able to create a sense of pride and understanding amongst the public of how Irish Aid is building a better future for some of the world’s poorest communities.

Investing in Irish NGOs would maintain and foster the connection between Irish civil society and the global south, enhancing the legitimacy of Ireland’s overseas development programme and lending support to our global reputation as a leader in the development arena.

## **3. Invest in small NGOs and their capacity to have a positive impact overseas**

As outlined above, Aidlink believes we, along with a number of other NGOs, were excluded from *Programme Grant II* based on the size of our organisation rather than the quality or impact of our work. To disregard the contribution that smaller organisations can make in terms of Ireland’s overseas aid programme would, in our opinion, be a mistake.

In its “*Doing Development Differently*” Paper<sup>6</sup>, the *Overseas Development Institute (ODI)* outlines a set of ideas about what really successful development interventions look like. For them, the key principles at the heart of this approach are:

---

<sup>5</sup> [www.irishaid.ie](http://www.irishaid.ie)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11199.pdf>

‘Organisations delivering change, producing real solutions to real problems that have real impact. It’s about building trust, empowering people and promoting sustainability’.

Small organisations are better able to engage in this approach. Our size enables us to be closer to the “action”, to build strong and trusting relationships with local partners and communities and to respond to their needs. With a streamlined operation, we can be agile, identifying and testing innovative new approaches with the flexibility to scale up on what works or make adjustments quickly where necessary. Small organisations represent an efficient use of public resources, providing Value-for-Money for the Irish taxpayer and ensuring that funds are directed to where they are most needed.

The UK government has recently recognised smaller organisations as a “crucial part of [their] offer on international development”, valued not only for the work they do overseas, but also their capacity to create “direct connections with the people we’re trying to help and those wanting to help them”<sup>7</sup>. *DFID*, the UK *Department for International Development*, has made a commitment to invest in smaller NGOs to support them in delivering even more effectively for the world’s poorest. We believe that the Irish Government should commit to small NGOs in the 2018 Budget and invest in our capacity to do development differently and even more effectively.

## Conclusion

Aidlink welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Finance ahead of Budget 2018. As a small Irish organisation, we believe that we have made a positive contribution to the lives of some of the poorest people in Africa and the capacity of African civil society. This has, in turn, contributed to Ireland’s overseas development programme and positive global reputation. We look forward to continuing our work to improve the lives of people living in poverty and building the capacity of African civil society.

For further information on Aidlink and our work, please see our [2016 Annual Report](#)<sup>8</sup> which is available on our website [www.aidlink.ie](http://www.aidlink.ie).

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/bond-annual-conference-2017>

<sup>8</sup> [Aidlink Annual Report 2016](#)