



# Partnership Approach to Development

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The development of this policy was first facilitated by Sean Mc Gearty and later developed by Mary McKeown in consultation with the staff and board of Aidlink.

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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 General

Aidlink exists to improve the lives of those living in poverty in Africa. Aidlink's main objectives are inspired by a philosophy which recognises the dignity of the individual person and each person having the right, the duty and the means to self and community development.

Main objectives;

- a. to relieve poverty
- b. to fund long-term sustainable projects by ensuring the full participation of local communities
- c. to liaise with national and international agencies concerned with the relief of poverty in Africa and engage in development education by providing channels through which information, and opinions may be exchanged

Partnership building is a key element of the Paris and Accra agendas for effective aid<sup>1</sup>. Aidlink's partnership approach realises that a true partnership approach will;

- Increase value for money
- Works in all development situations where Aidlink is involved
- Deepens engagement with partners' constituencies
- Assist in delivery of services in fragile environments
- Can help in 'Managing for Results'<sup>2</sup>

This paper sets out how Aidlink works to achieve this mission and attempts to capture and articulate the principles which underpin its work. It elaborates on the core aims of the organisation and defines the key elements which shape its work

Aidlink acknowledges that success should not be measured according to the strength of its partnerships, but rather on the effect the work of those partnerships is having on the lives of poor people. Aidlink works towards development effectiveness, rather than aid effectiveness.

### 1.2 Aidlink's definition of Partnership

*Partnership involves a shared vision and a commitment to work together to bring real and sustainable benefits to the poor and marginalized. It requires a long term commitment, clearly defined expectations and shared responsibility for achievements. It values the unique contribution and strengths of all partners and is based on partners working in an open, accountable and transparent manner.*

<sup>1</sup>

<https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm#:~:text=The%20Paris%20Declaration%20was%20endorsed,for%20Results%20and%20Mutual%20Accountability>.

<sup>2</sup> *Managing for Results* is a broad management strategy aimed at achieving important changes in the way agencies operate, with achieving better results as the central orientation. It is concerned with the production *or supply* of performance information, and is focused on technical aspects of clarifying objectives, developing indicators, collecting and analyzing data on results.

Aidlink partnership policy will be implemented through;

- Working closely with a select number of strategic partners in the priority countries (Kenya, Uganda and Ghana).
- Working with these partners to address the key priority themes (Gender Equality, Education, Water, Livelihoods and targeted emergency response) to meet the basic needs of those most affected by poverty in the target communities.
- Building a long term relationship with the partner organizations through sustained capacity building support
- Building relationships with the wider constituency in the target communities
- Acting as an agent for development partners in Ireland
- Working as a partner with funders
- Partnering with NGO's<sup>3</sup> working in development education and Schools for work on immersion programmes.

Aidlink values all its partners both those in Ireland and those it works with in Africa, and it recognises the need for all these partners to work together to address the numerous challenges faced by its target communities in Africa. The relationship between Aidlink and its existing and future partners in Africa is at the heart of its work and it is these relationships which must be nurtured and managed if Aidlink's contribution and work is to be sustainable. This is the primary aim behind its twin track approach of building capacity through partnership.

Aidlink acknowledges that success should not be measured according to the strength of its partnerships, but rather on the effect the work of those partnerships is having on the lives of poor people. Aidlink works towards development effectiveness, rather than aid effectiveness.

Aidlink recognises that the value and effectiveness of these policies is determined by their application to the overall task of combating poverty in Africa. Given the range of partners which Aidlink is working with and the challenges faced by these partners at different times, it is important to recognise both the value and the potential limitations of these policies. It is also important that the policies are seen as a platform for Aidlink's work which enables it to respond in a flexible manner to the real needs of these partners on the ground.

### 1.3 Aims and objectives of this policy.

The overall aim of this policy is to build a common understanding between Aidlink and its partners regarding Aidlink's approach to development and the central role of partnerships and capacity building in this work.

The policy will:

- Explore and elaborate on the underlying principles which will underpin Aidlink's development work
- Strengthen existing partnerships and ensure that all new partnerships are based on shared values and approaches
- Provide practical guidance to both Aidlink and its partners as to how to most effectively establish and manage partnerships and how to maximize the opportunities for capacity building at local level.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.developmenteducation.ie](http://www.developmenteducation.ie); <https://www.ideaonline.ie/>

- Outlines guidelines and criteria as to how these partnerships and the work of building local capacity can be monitored and evaluated

### 2.0 Context

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#### 2.1 Overview of Aidlink

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Aidlink exists to improve the lives of those living in poverty in Africa. . Since its establishment in 1982, Aidlink has placed local participation and locally designed and managed responses at the centre of its approach to development.

During nearly thirty years of operations, Aidlink has partnered with many organisations. These partnerships were built on supporting specific development interventions. As successes accumulated, Aidlink continued in partnership with the organisations and groups it had worked with on specific projects. Some of these partnerships continue today. These relationships were based on trust and experience built up over years of working together. Aidlink's relationships with its key partners were built up over long periods of concentrated work on specific issues focussed on working towards eliminating poverty. Aidlink has formal agreements in place with all partners.

Aidlink's mission is realised by:

- Supporting the development of Aidlink's international partners; local NGOs, community groups and missionaries involved in sustainable development programmes.
- Accessing and distributing funds to programmes that are aimed at community development and are self-sufficient with long term impact.
- Empowering and building capacities to enable Aidlink's partners to operate, manage and control their own development programmes.
- Giving priority to projects that focus on Gender equality, primary education particularly focusing on barriers experienced by girls and children with disabilities when accessing a quality education. and livelihoods
- Fostering Development Education in Ireland by promoting an understanding of the causes of poverty and inequality in the world.

Aidlink promotes and supports efforts among its partners to ensure that the cross-cutting themes of education and gender are integrated into all projects. Aidlink has introduced two significant changes in its work in recent years;

1. Aidlink has moved towards a more strategic, partner focused approach.
2. Aidlink has made the strategic decision to concentrate its activities in Arid and Semi-Arid counties of Kenya , and Uganda

Aidlink maintains its focus on the most marginalised and furthest behind. Aidlink is committed to empowering local communities to directly implement and manage community development actions and to advocate for the relief of poverty and increased access to basic services. Central to Aidlink's modus operandi are the three cross-cutting principles of partnership, participation and capacity building.

Facilitating and strengthening the capacity of partners remains a priority for Aidlink in order to assist them to enhance their performance, effectiveness and sustainability, and to better serve their communities.

### 2.2 Aidlink's relationships

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Aidlink's work involves a broad range of relationships both in Ireland and in the developing world namely:

- Aidlink's relationship with its partners in the global south<sup>4</sup>
- The relationship between these organisations in the global south and their grass roots constituencies or local partners
- Aidlink's relationship with its partners in Ireland<sup>5</sup>

At a wider level there are a number of additional relationships;

- Relationships on the ground in the African countries ; among partners and between partners and other NGOs, development organisations and Government agencies.
- The relationship between Aidlink's partners in Ireland and Aidlink's partners in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana.
- The wider relationship between Irish society and the people of the developing world

As Aidlink's work develops and the number of partners potentially grow, this will increase the complexity of the relationships;

- Aidlink will be involved in a range of different partnerships simultaneously
- These partnerships will be at different stages of development and will not be static but will be constantly evolving.
- Aidlink will also be facilitating other partnerships among and between its partners e.g. relationships between its partner groups and the relationship between partners in Ireland and partners in the global south.

### 2.4 Impact and Benefits of Partnership

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- Promoting **Local ownership**: Partnership is about who owns the development process, enabling people to solve their own problems
- **Sustainability**: Sustainability is more likely to be achieved by local stakeholders and particularly through the development of local partners with long term vision
- **Poverty reach**: Local NGOs and CBOs are better placed to reach the poorest and most marginalized groups.
- **Mutual benefits and learning**: Partnership is much more than a donor/client relationship; it is about a dialogue, exchange, mutual learning, organizational development and strengthening.

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<sup>4</sup> Aidlink's Operational Partners currently include: The Girl Child Network: Kenya, The Diocese of Lodwar, Kenya, Voluntary Action for Development: Uganda, Caritas MADDO: Uganda, Spiritan Province: Ghana, ..

<sup>5</sup> this includes organisations where Aidlink assists in Immersion programmes, such as St. Mary's College, Rathmines, Loreto Beaufort, Rathfarnham and St. Josephs of Rush as well as Aidlink's main funding partner, Irish Aid.

- **Legitimacy** Partnership can enhance the legitimacy of Aidlink and its partners in their respective constituencies.
- **Cost-effectiveness** Partnership has the potential to achieve great cost-effectiveness by sharing resources and avoiding duplication of efforts.
- **Models of good practice and replication.** Aidlink's partners have the potential to become models of good practice for learning and replication among other local CBOs and NGOs.
- **Networking and alliance building:** Partnership can facilitate networking and the formation of strategic alliances among partners and between partners and other development agencies with the aim of promoting more coordinated and policy based approaches to anti poverty work

### 2.5 The challenges of working in Partnership

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Aidlink recognises that a partnership approach is a complex process which is impacted by a range of factors some internal to one or other of the partners and some external to the partners. There is also recognition that Aidlink's partners in Africa work in very challenging environments and situations can deteriorate quickly. These can be local, drought, flooding, conflict or global such as the Covid 19 pandemic 2020. There are inherent challenges and dilemmas in developing and maintaining partnerships and in building local capacity. The range and complexity of these challenges highlights the need for an ongoing commitment from all partners combined with suitable monitoring and evaluation processes.

Aidlink is a small organisation with finite resources and there are limits to the number of partners it can support in a meaningful manner. Over the past three years Aidlink has tightened but deepened its reach, working with key partners to scale up activities. A strategic decision was made to work in this way for the foreseeable future Aidlink will exit partnerships if resources are not available to continue. Exit strategies are built in to all partnership arrangements.

There is an inevitable tension in a Partnership arrangement between the need for a close working relationship and the need for partners to maintain their own independence and values. As relationships develop and strengthen, there is a danger that this will lead to increased demands by Aidlink on local partners with a resulting erosion of independence.

The concept of consultation and shared decision making between the partners is central to an effective partnership, Aidlink respects this two way dialogue. As part of its partnership approach Aidlink builds and develops opportunities for shared decision making across its partnerships. This strengthens mutual accountability between Aidlink and its Partners. Increased investment in infrastructure and technological advancements have improved communications reducing many practical issues between Aidlink and its partners due to geographical location<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Demonstrated throughout the Covid 19 pandemic.

### 3.0 Partnership Values and principles

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Aidlink exists to improve the lives of those living in poverty in Africa . Aidlink firmly believes that there are fundamental underlying values and principles on which its overall work is based. These values have been central to Aidlink’s work to date and form the cornerstones of its relationship with its partners, both in the developing world and in Ireland.

These values and principles underpin all of Aidlink’s work and go to the core of what Aidlink is about, why it exists and what it hopes to achieve.

*Aidlink’s **Partnership Approach** is based on accountability between partners. Inevitably there are power imbalances in these relationships, especially when one partner has access to resources that another partner needs. Aidlink is aware of these imbalances. Aidlink strives to ensure that the needs of partners are given as much attention as Aidlink’s requirements regarding capacity building and reporting.*

### 3.1 Values

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Aidlink’s core values are Trust, Equality, Honesty, Respect for difference and Solidarity.

#### **Trust**

Aidlink’s approach is firmly based on trust and trust is at the heart of its all its work with its partners. Building trust involves respect for the values of the other partner and for the dignity of the person/community you are working with. Trust also enables partners to take responsibility for their own decisions, and the creation of space for people to decide on their own priorities.

As the level of trust grows there is increasing scope for mutual learning and genuine sharing. There is also scope for risk taking and for learning from mistakes.

Trust does not exist in a vacuum, and Aidlink has in place checks and balances to protect the partners’ interests, as well as Aidlink’s in its Monitoring and Evaluation policy and practices.

#### **Equality**

Aidlink’s approach is based on the core principle of equality i.e. that its partners (both in the developing world and in Ireland) are active and equal partners in defining their vision for their communities and in determining their development priorities. Aidlink and its partners work together to achieve mutually beneficial goals recognising each other’s resource and capacity constraints.

### **Honesty**

A key element in any partnership is honesty between partners and an acknowledgment and understanding that partners can be open and frank with each other in all their dealings. This provides a solid platform for the partnership to mature and creates space for partners to provide constructive criticism to each other, admit to mistakes when they occur and to work through any difficulties which may arise.

This value is strongly linked to 'trust' and checks are mutually agreed to help ensure honesty and protect the reputations of both organisations in any partnership.

### **Respect for difference/diversity**

Aidlink works with partners from different cultural and religious backgrounds and this factor is acknowledged in partnership arrangements. There may be potential for differences to emerge with regard to communications, how issues are dealt with, ways of working etc. There is richness in this diversity and opportunities for both partners to learn and to develop through these encounters. Aidlink and its partners explore these issues during their partnership negotiations and during the project cycle, and recognise and appreciate differences in cultural background and the potential challenges in the implementation of the partnership.

### **Solidarity**

Aidlink's strategic partners are located in some of the poorest regions of Africa which are prone to a range of problems including violent conflict, political instability and natural disasters. As a result the environment in which they operate is subject to continuous and unpredictable change which can affect the implementation of the programmes. Aidlink acknowledges these challenges and is committed to working with and supporting its partners.. Aidlink will strive to respond in a flexible and supportive manner and to work with partners to overcome any barriers.

## 3.2 Key principles of Aidlink's partnership approach

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The approach is grounded in the following principles which are fundamental to Aidlink's work in promoting sustainable development:

- Partner Centred
- Mutual benefits
- Promoting participation
- Joint ownership
- Sensitivity and flexibility
- Accountability and transparency
- Providing synergy and added value

### **Partner centred**

This critical element of Aidlink's approach is that the local communities and the partners are placed at the centre of the development process and enabled and supported by Aidlink to determine their own development objectives based on their understanding of their own situation and reality. This principle is central to Aidlink's development work and informs and shapes its work programmes, structures and systems.

### **Mutual benefits**

For a partnership be real and effective, there must be benefits for all partners in the relationship. Aidlink works in partnership on the basis that there are clear and identifiable benefits for all concerned, that the partnership will generate synergy and contribute to sustainable development. Aidlink's partnership approach is based on the core idea that the approach will have clear benefits particularly for the poorest people in the communities its partners support.

### **Promoting participation**

One of Aidlink's key objectives is to engage people in the development of their own communities and building capacities so that that people can manage and control their own development programmes. The key to this is encouraging and facilitating participation by communities and all partnerships do this. Aidlink encourages and promotes this approach at all stages of the partnership process and in all aspects of project implementation.

The principle of participation also applies to partners in Ireland and Aidlink works with them to ensure they can actively participate in the work of the organisation.

### **Joint ownership**

The development of strong partnership will enable Aidlink and its partners to develop a joint approach to the development process. This involves the partners working together to identify and plan development programmes, managing them jointly and taking responsibility for all aspects of the programme including the inevitable problems that arise and the potential failures which may occur.

### **Investing in innovative local solutions**

Aidlink recognises the challenges faced by its partners and firmly believes that local solutions are key to the development process being sustainable. Therefore Aidlink encourages a culture of innovation among its partners and is willing to take risks in order to support imaginative locally designed projects. Aidlink works with its partners to ensure that best practice is followed in the research, design and testing of these projects.

### **Sensitivity and flexibility**

Aidlink's strategic partners and the personnel involved may face a range of challenges both internal and external which can impact planned projects. One of Aidlink's unique strengths is that it is a small NGO which will be working with a relatively small number of partners at any given time. Therefore, it has developed relationships with its partners and agree conditions where they can be adaptive and responsive to change.

Being flexible and able to respond to the needs of its partners is something which Aidlink is keen to maintain. This includes promoting aid harmonisation, working with partners' partners. The application of these policies in a rigid manner could reduce the ability of Aidlink to respond effectively to the needs of partners. Therefore the policy and any processes linked to it need to be applied in an inclusive,

transparent and flexible manner. Thus Aidlink fosters local ownership and strives to ensure that this is addressed in all dealings with its partners. Truly mutually accountable relationships lead to improved development interventions. The approach outlined below and in particular the emphasis on being partner centred helps to address this issue.

Aidlink's practice is to develop open, flexible relationships with its partners. These relationships work well because communication is regular and honest.

### **Accountability and transparency**

Accountability and transparency are principles which relate to all aspects of the partnership and cover partner selection processes, monitoring and evaluation, decisions regarding the termination of the partnership, communications and financial reporting. Accountability and transparency also apply at different levels of the partnership, between Aidlink and its partners, between the partners and their constituency and between Aidlink and its donors. In most of its strategic partnerships Aidlink sources and manages funds to support the partner's development activities. Aidlink and its partners have legal obligations to operate in an accountable and transparent fashion. These are set out in the Programme or Project documents agreed between Aidlink and its partners for each development intervention or programme supported.

### **Providing synergy and added value**

The concept of partnership is based on the idea that the two partners can bring unique insights, assets and approaches to the development process and that together they can achieve considerably more than can be achieved individually. Aidlink also acknowledges the role of other partners, particularly partners' donors, in the development process. For a partnership to be effective there must be evidence that all partners are contributing and bringing added value to the work. Aidlink brings added value to the partnerships, and to the funds it accesses for its partners' work, by providing capacity building support to partners, and by promoting aid harmonisation.

## **4.0 Capacity building through Partnership: Aidlink's approach**

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Aidlink's work with its key partners includes capacity building through partnership. In order for the partnerships to be meaningful Aidlink recognises that there is often a need to strengthen the capacity of its partners both to contribute to the partnership itself, but more importantly to carry out the programme agreement and provide development support to the communities where the partners work.

Aidlink recognises that it is constantly learning from partners. This learning is formalised through the Monitoring and Evaluation system which puts the mutual sharing at the centre of Aidlink's M&E policy.

### **4.1 Aidlink's Partners**

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Aidlink works with a range of different organizations from small CBOs in Africa to government departments both in Ireland and in Africa. Building and maintaining relationships across this spectrum is a core element of its work. This is a key element in the overall goal of supporting those experiencing

poverty in Africa. Aidlink values all partners and continues to develop new relationships at all levels and where feasible to deepen the relationship with these current partners.

Aidlink's primary emphasis and the focus of this policy are on its key partners in Africa i.e. those partners it works directly with in its efforts to alleviate poverty in the target communities. Key partners are in receipt of direct support from Aidlink (financial and/or capacity building support). These partnerships are formalised by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding.

### 4.3 Identification of partnership opportunities

The key to the effectiveness of Aidlink's work is to build and sustain a network of strong partner organizations. Aidlink's emphasis is on building partner capacity by enabling a strong partnership to function both through the relationship between the two organisations, and in supporting the partners' development work. When resources are available, Aidlink will identify new opportunities for partnership via three main routes:

1. Referral from existing partners. Aidlink will work with its key partners to identify potential new partners. This approach will support the development of local and thematic clusters and networking among partners.
2. Direct applications/requests for funding by organizations. Aidlink will continue to provide project support to appropriate and good quality projects coming from new groups. This may lead to the development of a partnership with this group following the delivery of the project.
3. Through proactive work by Aidlink. Aidlink will look for opportunities to support new groups and initiatives which fit with its overall aims.

When potential partnership opportunities are identified Aidlink will conduct an initial assessment of the potential partner focusing on the following

- The fit with the values and ethos of Aidlink
- The fit between the organization and the overall aims and priorities of Aidlink (Geographic focus, theme, scale of project, for example)
- The fit between the work of the organization and priority areas identified by Aidlink (Gender Equality, Education, and livelihoods)
- An assessment of the readiness of the organization to engage in long term capacity building work and partnership arrangements.

Aidlink seeks to work with the most marginalised and to support smaller local NGOs where possible. It is not possible to support all applicants, and groups with particularly low capacity are excluded on this basis. Aidlink recognizes the dangers of raising expectations among prospective partners and the need for a timely decision in this regard.

### 4.4 Partnership phases

While each partnership differs considerably there are some broad stages which feature in all partnership and which determine the nature and extent of support provided by Aidlink. The full process can comprise

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five stages although not all partners will go through each stage. The duration of this process and the timeframe for each phase can vary considerably.

Phase	Objective
Partner identification phase	To identify appropriate organisations which fit with Aidlink's overall aim and objectives and have the potential to become key partners
Partnership development phase	To build a partnership ethos between Aidlink and the prospective partner and to start the process of building the partners capacity in key areas
Project planning phase	To develop a quality project based on a comprehensive situation analysis and baseline research.
Partnership management & implementation phase	To maintain and strengthen the partnership and to ensure the effective delivery of the project
Exit Strategy	To agree and implement a gradual scaling down of Aidlink's support to partners who have made progress towards sustainability or have outgrown Aidlink's capacity to support them

At the time of writing Aidlink's key partnerships are in the 'Partnership management and implementation' phase. The aims are to support the ongoing work of the Aidlink's partners through

- A well-defined strategy and variety of activities to promote the sustainability of Aidlink's partners is incorporated into project design.
- As these groups strengthen their services and systems and build their reputations they access other resources to support their work.

This involves

- Strengthening and working through existing organisations and systems
- Developing and utilising improved tools and systems for monitoring and evaluation
- Building capacity in project proposal and report writing, administration and finance among partners

Aidlink's commitment is to the poorest. Therefore it supports partners on a long term basis as development is only achieved over a considerable time. Thus, Aidlink's partnerships are mature and ongoing. They will remain in the management and implementation phase for a considerable period of time.

#### 4.5 Aidlink's definition of Capacity Building

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The Partnership approach will be supported by an increased and strengthened focus on capacity building. The focus of this approach will be the development of strong independent and sustainable local partner organisations.

*Capacity Building involves a range of support with the aim of strengthening the skills, abilities and confidence of partner organisations to build strong organisations capable of taking a leadership role in the development of their communities.*

While Aidlink acknowledges the need for its own capacity building, Aidlink strives to provide organisations with the necessary capacity to enable them to determine their own priorities, to develop appropriate responses to their community's needs and to effectively implement their programmes of work.

Aidlink recognizes that partner needs will change over time and that capacity building cannot be delivered in a linear fashion. Rather it is an incremental and organic process which needs to be provided in a flexible and responsive manner. The core elements of this approach are;

- Supporting partners to acquire the skills and approaches so they are capable of responding to community needs and with the ability to plan implement and monitor their own work programmes.
- Providing core support to partners to enable them to realise their goals/mission
- Promote good governance and best practice among partners through training, networking, advice and other appropriate support
- Developing leadership at local level and ensure that partners have the necessary management and technical capacity to effectively utilise resources and achieve their objectives
- Flexibility and responsive to local needs

There are a range of factors which will impact on the capacity building needs of Aidlink's partners including;

- The age and maturity of the partner organisation
- Leadership within the organisation
- The resource base of the organisation
- The type of project(s) which the organisations is undertaking
- The external environment

Aidlink uses Dóchas' Aid Effectiveness Checklist to help monitor its own effectiveness. Aidlink recognises that in order to add value and deliver its capacity building promises to its partners, Aidlink first needs to monitor and strengthen its own capacity. The Dochas checklist is also an element in Aidlink's work with its partners to monitor and evaluate progress in the development interventions Aidlink supports.

#### 4.6 Types of capacity building support to be provided

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Aidlink strives to provide organizations with the necessary capacity to enable them to determine their own priorities, develop appropriate responses effectively implement their programmes of work. Partners may require some or all of the following types of support. The overall approach is based on Aidlink working with its partners to identify capacity building needs. Aidlink aims to support the organisation’s own capacity building priorities and where necessary enables them to prioritise and be strategic in planning for their organisation’s capacity building.

Adaptive capacity	The ability to monitor, assess, respond to, and stimulate internal and external changes
Leadership capacity	The ability of all organizational leaders to inspire, prioritize, make decisions, provide direction, and innovate
Technical capacity	The ability to implement all of the key organizational functions and deliver programmes and services
Management capacity	The ability to ensure the effective and efficient use of organizational resources
Financial and administrative capacity	The ability to implement tools and best practices in finance and administration departments from the local partner organizations

Aidlink provides capacity building support in a number of ways;

- Provision of funding towards core organisational costs
- Provision of training, advice and support through field visits by Aidlink personnel
- Provision of ongoing “distance” advice and support
- Development and funding of networking opportunities for Partners both in Africa and in Ireland
- Provision of support and funding for partners to source capacity building support in country.

Aidlink’s primary capacity building work is with its partners with the aim of building a strong sustainable organization capable of implementing an agreed project. While the main work is with the partner organizations the overall goal is that stronger partners will be more effective in delivering project and programme objectives.

#### 4.7 Assessing capacity

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The process of assessing capacity building needs and developing a capacity building programme is a participative process where the partner is actively involved at all times. In line with Aidlink’s overall approach the assessment of capacity is a positive and reinforcing experience for the partner. It focuses on opportunities for capacity building as well as assessment of past performance.

#### 4.8 Sustainability

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Aidlink recognizes the challenges faced by the local NGOs and CBOs that it works with, and the need to be realistic in setting long term objectives. This is particularly true in relation to sustainability. Aidlink acknowledges that the majority of its partners will not become fully financially self sustaining even in the

medium to long term. In light of this Aidlink defines sustainability of its partners in a practical and realistic manner. Sustainability is thus defined as stage where the partner has developed its capacity and programme of work and diversified its funding sources so that it can continue to operate and deliver appropriate programmes over the medium to long term.

This involves the partner being engaged in four inter-related areas:

- To carry out **meaningful work**: responding to real needs and engaging in building the capacity of groups and communities according to measurable criteria.
- To have **contacts, agreements** and **good relations** with key players such as the target group, local government, other NGOs and community leaders.
- To have **diversified funding sources**: not relying on one foreign donor, but developing a mix of foreign and local sources.
- To have a sound financial and accounting system in place, be **organized** and **managed well**.

### 4.9 M&E for Capacity Building

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Capacity building is focussed on bringing about change within an organisation itself. It aims to improve the performance of the organisation and its staff. M&E for Capacity building involves a wide range of stakeholders and encourages reflection and analysis within the target organisation. Capacity building programmes need baseline information as do all development interventions. For capacity building, this is usually in the form of an organisation assessment. An organisation assessment can focus on the following:

- Governance
- Management and Organisation
- Programme Development
- Management including Financial Management

A capacity building programme should focus on only a few of these areas so that it is realistic. No one intervention can solve all of the capacity constraints of any organisation. Capacity building issues are less visible than ordinary development issues. They may even be denied by some actors for fear of being undermined. Sometimes it is easier to focus on issues which are likely to see results rather than those that pose the greatest problems for an organisation. Therefore, defining the aims and objectives of capacity building may be difficult and require thought and time to define.

Specific capacity building interventions supported by AIDLINK will be evaluated as part of Aidlink's strategy for evaluation of partnerships which takes place every three to five years during the life of the partnership. Monitoring of the capacity building support will be addressed through regular monitoring exercises, and will be detailed in the terms of reference which will govern the delivery of the capacity building support.

### 5.0 Value added – donor harmonisation

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The idea of Donor Harmonisation was described in the Paris Agenda. The Paris Agenda is an international agreement to which over one hundred Ministers, Heads of Agencies and other Senior Officials adhered and committed their countries and organisations to continue to increase efforts in harmonisation, alignment and managing aid for results with a set of measurable actions and indicators. , Aidlink (and other NGOs) have adopted its approach which promotes best current practice for development organisations and thus assists in poverty alleviation. Donor (or agency) harmonisation promotes the practices of simplifying procedures and sharing information to avoid duplication.

Aidlink aligns itself with the international aid harmonisation agenda. This means that Aidlink is committed to Aid Harmonisation, supporting the networking of all relevant actors in a particular area or working on a particular theme. Aidlink assists partners to minimise reporting burdens, and actively promotes the production of 'one report' to fill the all reporting requirements of a partner. Aid harmonisation also includes delivering support according to a partner's priorities, building on local best practice and providing support for analytical work and research locally in ways that strengthen a partner's ability to assume greater leadership role and take ownership of results. Aidlink aims to collaborate to improve the relevance, quality, delivery of all development interventions supported by any partnership it is a member of.

### 6.0 Partnership formalisation

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The process of establishing and formalising a partnership is a two stage process

1. Negotiating a Partnership Agreement
2. Finalising a Project Agreement

Aidlink works towards a programme approach with its partners. Aidlink is open to working with an organisation on a project basis, without formulating a proper partnership agreement, but this is not the norm.

The process of negotiating and agreeing a Partnership Agreement establishes a clear marker for the working of the partnership. This involves Aidlink and the partner exploring all elements of the work and the proposed partnership.

It is critical that all partners have a shared understanding of what the principles behind the partnership are, and how they are applied over the course of the partnership. This provides a solid foundation for the partnership and forms a core element of the negotiation of the Partnership Agreement. The objective is to develop common and culturally appropriate definitions and understandings of these terms.

The process of negotiating the formal Partnership Agreement is carried out directly between key personnel in Aidlink and key personnel in the partner organisation.

The **Partnership Agreement** establishes the Partnership and the agreement to work together. It defines the terms of working together and outlines the values of each organisation.

The **Project Agreement** document forms the basis of a working programme. It defines the project or programme that the partnership will work on. It defines the roles and duties of each partner within the programme or project agreed. It gives details of the agreed budget for the activities, details the activities and describes the benchmarks and indicators to be used to monitor the intervention. This document provides the basis for ongoing monitoring of the activities the partnership supports and acts as a key management tool both for the partner and for Aidlink.

### 7.0 Monitoring and Evaluation

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#### 7.1 General

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In line with the Paris and Accra agendas for aid effectiveness, Aidlink views Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)<sup>7</sup> as being necessary primarily to ensure quality programming and service delivery to the vulnerable communities. M&E also contributes directly to lesson learning, as well to accountability. Aidlink endeavours to manage for results, while at the same time ensuring that the technical exercises of monitoring and evaluating do not obscure the real substance of 'doing development'. Aidlink acknowledges that success should not be measured according to the strength of its partnerships, but rather on the effect the work of those partnerships is having on vulnerable communities.. Aidlink works towards development effectiveness, rather than aid effectiveness.

The monitoring and evaluation system reflects Aidlink's partnership approach and incorporates key indicators for financial management and project or programme success. The system is detailed in Aidlink's Monitoring and Evaluation Policy.

#### 7.2 Evaluation of Projects / Programmes

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The process of developing an appropriate M&E system with partners is based on identifying agreed and verifiable indicators. Appropriate indicators and information collection systems are identified early on by the partners in planning their development interventions. These are used by Aidlink in their M&E system. Progress is measured against these agreed indicators regularly (usually annually).

#### 7.3 Partners' roles in M&E

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Partners' roles in Monitoring and Evaluation are agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding, and detailed in the project agreements (terms and conditions note). Generally, the partner will collect any data agreed for monitoring purposes. For final evaluations, Aidlink may be involved either by participating directly in mid term and / or final evaluations, or nominating another to represent them during these exercises.

Partners will monitor activities as part of the regular management and coordination of ongoing projects. This information will be shared through regular reporting to Aidlink as agreed in the project agreements. Partners will also participate in evaluation exercises, helping to facilitate the involvement of project participants or beneficiaries. They will also assist Aidlink in aid harmonisation by sharing information about other partners and those partners' roles in ongoing and planned activities.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://aidlink.ie/file/2021/01/Aidlink-ME-Policy-2020-Update.pdf>

As mentioned above, Aidlink promotes aid harmonisation. Thus, Aidlink will endeavour to participate in joint monitoring exercises and where these do not exist, Aidlink will assist in their adoption by the partner organisation.

### 7.3 Evaluation of Partnership

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The evaluation of the partnership element is based on key areas. Each area focuses on elements of the partnership approach and links with criteria in Dóchas' Aid Effectiveness Checklist (attached at Annex X). The areas Aidlink will focus on for partnership effectiveness include

- Project effectiveness – where the impact of the project is measured against the agreed indicators
- Partner's local relationships – the relationships which are important include relationships with other NGOs working in the area, relationships with local authorities and community members and leaders
- Governance – each partner organisation has a proper organisation structure where decision making processes are clearly defined, and responsibilities are also clear.
- Communication - partners are encouraged to communicate regularly with Aidlink, both formally and informally. Aidlink does not evaluate the partnership solely on formal exchanges. Part of Aidlink's approach to partnership is to develop open, informal, friendly relationships with all its partners.

### 7.4 M&E in Agency Relationships

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Aidlink has relationships with organisations where it acts as that organisation's Agent. These relationships are monitored and evaluated using slightly different criteria. The working relationship is the subject of a direct business transaction. These relationships are monitored in an ongoing fashion through regular updates of progress against agreed workplans.

The relationships are also subject to an in depth evaluation periodically, usually every three to five years. During this evaluation the progress of the partnership is assessed according to success in the business arrangements between the two organisations, financial dealings, cost recovery and continuing availability of funding. The evaluation will use the OECD DAC criteria of the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the partnership and the activities of the partnership<sup>8</sup>. The evaluation will be facilitated by an external evaluator.

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<sup>8</sup> Annex 2 in M&E Guidelines

## 8.0 Policy implementation and management

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### 8.1 Board of Management

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The Board of Management of Aidlink has discussed, amended and approved this policy. The formulation and adoption of this policy has arisen from the Board's Governance project which is an ongoing activity of the Board, ensuring the Board works in a transparent and efficient manner, overseeing the work of Aidlink and ensuring it complies with this and other policies.

The Board is closely involved with the quality of Aidlink's programme, and oversees all its partnerships.

The Board receives regular updates from staff on the progress of Aidlink's partnerships, as well as on the progress of the development interventions the partners implement. The policy will be reviewed as necessary by the Board, but no later than five years after its adoption.

### 8.2 Staff

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Aidlink staff interface directly with Aidlink's partners. The staff are charged with the day to day management of the relationships between Aidlink and its partners. Aidlink staff were closely involved with the development of this policy.

Aidlink staff advise the Board on any risks involved in current partnerships. They also advise on changing situations and possible impacts on the partnerships and the work of the partners. This is a key role as to the quality of the programme and is recognised as such by both the staff and the Board.

### 8.3 Partners

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Aidlink's partners have also adopted the policy as part of their relationship with Aidlink, and as agreed in all partnership agreements implemented after January 2010. Aidlink's experience of partnership has informed the development of this policy. Some partners submitted comments on the draft policy and these have been incorporated into the final version.

As outlined above Aidlink's partnerships are based on a number of values and principles including, trust, accountability and respect for the other partner. Aidlink recognizes that there are inherent risks in this approach and that these need to be identified and monitored on an ongoing basis. Aidlink is committed to working with its partners and to taking some risks to ensure that development assistance get to those most affected by poverty. Partners with whom Aidlink has an agency relationship are the Spiritan congregation in Ireland. Aidlink is open to having a similar agreement with other organisations.

### 8.4 Risk Analysis

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In accordance with best practice, a risk analysis is carried out on each partnership and separately on each project or programme intervention, in conjunction with the partner. The risk analysis helps Aidlink to identify potential risks and to decide whether satisfactory controls or precautions are in place or need to be developed in order to minimize the effects of these risks on the work of Aidlink and its partners. Where necessary appropriate risk management processes will be put in place and in cases where the risk are considered too great or unmanageable Aidlink will terminate the partnership.

Risk management involves continuous monitoring and assessment particularly if there are any significant changes which may introduce additional risks. Aidlink has established risk assessment and management systems for use with its projects and partnerships as part of its Monitoring and Evaluation system. Details are contained in the Monitoring and Evaluation Policy.

Aidlink promotes the use of Risk Analysis whenever appropriate<sup>9</sup>. A Risk Analysis looks at the following in terms of Aidlink, but also supports looking at risks from the point of view of the partner and the intervention being supported:

- Reputational risk
- Financial risk
- Global risks
- Economic, Political and Social risks

### 9.0 Conclusion

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Aidlink has formulated this Partnership and Development Approach document in order to facilitate its work with the countries in which it works in Africa. Its mission is inspired by a philosophy which recognises the dignity of the individual person and each person having the right, the duty and the means of self and community development. Aidlink's approach to development is based on the interlocking and complementary concepts of building indigenous capacity and working in partnership.

This Partnership and Development Approach is supported by a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and Guidelines. It is also underpinned by commitment of the Board, Management and Staff of Aidlink to continue to work to best practice.

The continuing relevance of the practices outlined in this document will be monitored by Aidlink and the document will be revisited regularly and amended as necessary.

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<sup>9</sup> Details of the Aidlink Risk Analysis Framework are in the M&E Guidelines