

Submission to the mid-term review of Irish Aid's Development Education Strategy 2011-2013

Introduction

This is a brief input, conceived by the Development Education Group (DEG) of Dóchas, for the mid-term review of Irish Aid's Development Education Strategy 2007-2011. Dóchas is glad to have the opportunity to contribute and trusts that this input will help inform the deliberations and hopefully enhance the revised strategy.

Development Education is an important component of Ireland's development cooperation, helping to raise awareness and understanding among Irish citizens of development issues, and the underlying causes of poverty and inequality in the world. As noted in the *White Paper on Irish Aid*, Dev Ed highlights Ireland's many interactions with the rest of the world, raises awareness and understanding of global challenges and people's rights and responsibilities as global citizens, and enables people to "effect change for a more just and equal world".

Within the lifetime of the current Irish Aid strategy, Dóchas and the DEG, have sought to contribute to the strategy's goals, especially through the development, promotion (including through CONCORD) and implementation of the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages; as well as through training; through learning and sharing good practice through the CONCORD working group and the DEEEP project; and linking Dev Ed with formal education structures – through relationships with in-service training providers, for example.

Dóchas proposes that the midpoint review of the strategy can lead to improvements in baseline information for monitoring and evaluation; addressing aspects of funding; and cooperation and coordination between and across actors involved in Dev Ed in Ireland, whether in the formal or informal education sectors, or in wider civil society.

In particular, Dóchas urges:

1. Research to establish clear baseline information about awareness of global development challenges, as well as Irish people's roles and responsibilities as world citizens, in order to establish an objective basis for monitoring the effectiveness of Dev Ed over time;
2. Collaborative work to prioritise and actively promote the inclusion of voices from the Global South in Irish Dev Ed practice;
3. Irish Aid to strengthen its cooperation with other Government departments on Dev Ed, particularly the Department of Education and Skills, but also Environment and Justice, and the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, for example;
4. Irish Aid to work with IDEA, Dóchas DEG and other stakeholders to ensure that the action dimension is clarified, understood and valued in Dev Ed work;
5. That the Dev Ed funding lines provided by Irish Aid are strategically aligned and differentiated, and that funding is provided in a clear, predictable manner, mostly on an multi-annual basis, so that Dev Ed programmes can be planned and delivered sustainably;
6. Irish Aid to support an advice service and provide security of match-funding for organisations applying for funding outside Ireland
7. That Irish Aid, in its multi-annual programme funding to NGDOs (such as MAPS or any successor scheme), ensure that Dev Ed is specified, valued and adequately resourced;
8. Continued support for capacity-building in the Irish Dev Ed and wider development sectors in Ireland, including around achieving and demonstrating lasting impact.

Context

A spate of global crises, from economic to climate change, as well as serious challenges to thinking on globalisation, regulation, aid and development effectiveness, continue to make the work of Dev Ed practitioners challenging – but arguably more relevant and important than ever. In Ireland, the context is also very much shaped by the devastating recent cuts to the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget, especially in 2009, and the very high proportional share of those taken by Irish Aid, which in turn is a vital Dev Ed funder.

There has also been growing pressure in recent years for Development Educators to show their results/impact and demonstrate their ‘value for money’. That the outcomes and impact of Dev Ed have not always been well captured – it is one of many notoriously difficult areas in which to demonstrate (not to mention attribute) lasting change – has not helped the sector in countering the pressure.

Irish development NGOs have cut back their provision for Dev Ed (with some NGOs discontinuing Dev Ed practice), and Dev Ed actors feel increasingly under pressure for reasons of: financing, value for money, and efficiency; questions (whether well placed or not) around results and lasting impact; a shift towards greater emphasis on public information and fundraising; as well as the understanding of their work, coupled with expectations of it and the value placed on it.

In addition, Dev Ed practitioners face greater difficulties accessing teachers, youth workers and target groups (students, youth groups, etc) because Budget cuts in community and voluntary sectors have meant they have less available funding, have consolidated or refocused activities, and/or that staff and volunteers are less available for training or engaging in Dev Ed provision. Practitioners are now seeking to use innovative ways to introduce a global justice perspective into separate programming areas (health, drug awareness, youth, arts, intercultural, anti-racism, etc).

A significant challenge that Irish Dev Ed organisations and practitioners highlight at the moment is the lack of clarity about the action element of Dev Ed. One of the four pillars of Dev Ed is that participants (through personal and shared experience that builds awareness, knowledge, understanding and engagement around human interdependence) can be inspired and empowered, to quote Irish Aid: to “take actions that are inspired by these ideas, values and skills and which contribute to the achievement of a more just and caring world.”

Dev Ed practitioners are feeling pressure over the action component, however, not least from Irish Aid, with real or perceived implications for programming and funding decisions,

As noted in Irish Aid publications, Dev Ed is an opportunity to link and compare development issues and challenges in Ireland with those elsewhere throughout the world, providing a chance for Irish people to reflect on our international roles and responsibilities with regard to issues of equality and justice in human development – and an opportunity to be active in writing a new story for human development.

The theoretical and practical links between raising awareness and understanding, enhancing opportunities for engagement and facilitating action for human rights, equality and justice are clear and important for practitioners. Yet some Development Educators have faced recent difficulty, both in relation to funding and the quality of relations with Irish Aid, when empowering “action for local and global citizenship” and “supporting people in understanding and acting to transform the social, cultural, political and economic structures which affect their lives at personal, community, national and international levels” – which Irish Aid has previously noted are important aspects of Dev Ed.

Dóchas considers it necessary and important for the Dev Ed sector in Ireland that an understanding is reached around the inherent action orientation of Dev Ed through an open and collaborative discourse involving the range of Dev Ed stakeholders, including Irish Aid, civil society and its sector bodies, as well as voices from the Global South (to the maximum extent possible).

Opportunities for Dev Ed

Within the current context, perhaps even more challenging for the Dev Ed sector than even the wider Irish development community, Dóchas members still see important opportunities and, indeed, requirements for Dev Ed arising from:

- The global economic crisis, and other crises (financial, hunger, climate change, among others) affecting the world's rich and poorer countries, the latter usually disproportionately. This provides an opportunity for Dev Ed practitioners to frame development cooperation in terms of justice rather than charity;
- The fast-approaching deadline set by world leaders for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. As the costs and benefits of not achieving, or achieving, particular MDGs and the overall package of Goals become more apparent closer to 2015, it will create opportunities for engaging Dev Ed's target groups;
- Dóchas and its members will continue to take a strong lead in promoting the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages in Ireland and in the rest of Europe in an effort to enhance NGO accountability and encourage more progressive messaging about Ireland, global development, and the role of NGOs;
- Changing ideas of international development and globalisation, from the MDGs and post-MDG framework for development, to policy coherence for development; from aid effectiveness to development effectiveness; and from the importance of rights-based approaches to reconsideration of the global regulatory systems in economics, finance, trade, climate change, etc;
- The evolving sense of how Ireland understands itself, including its global positioning, commitments and responsibilities -- and how Irish citizens can engage to challenge any feeling of despair or powerlessness they may currently feel. The crisis may have increased Dev Ed practitioners' target groups' interest in robust engagement linking the global with the local;
- The increased diversity of communities in Ireland, many from the Global South, enhancing dialogue and strengthening the scope, diversity and quality of Dev Ed practice;
- Building on past achievements that have proved Dev Ed is considered relevant and interesting if it is delivered in a way that meets the needs of the audience e.g. matching Dev Ed activities with curricular objectives, or providing more opportunities for progressive Dev Ed engagement from primary school through to Leaving Certificate levels.

Key challenges to Dev Ed in Ireland – 2010

As noted, the Dev Ed sector faces some strong challenges, not least in relation to sufficient funding for this work (especially given current constraints at Irish Aid, a vital funder for the whole sector), and increasing the scope and diversity of predictable Dev Ed funding for the range of Dev Ed actors. These include: Dev Ed organisations, development NGOs and CSOs with a Dev Ed remit, and especially other voluntary and community sector organisations doing elements of Dev Ed work, who are particularly struggling to fund that work, as well as state and semi-state actors who undertake or part-fund Dev Ed.

There also appears to be a challenge of commitment to Dev Ed, including within the development sector (Irish Aid and development NGOs), "in the current economic climate", as the phrase has it. This has resulted in Dev Ed programmes/activities being variously cut, curtailed, postponed or even abandoned, with some organisations reported to be diverting those resources that were spent on Dev Ed into more public information and/or fundraising – with some messaging which Dev Ed practitioners find challenging or problematic in itself.

A continuing struggle in Ireland is to ensure provision of Dev Ed across the different regions, with too much activity Dublin-based or Dublin-centric. There are still significant pockets of the country where there is little or no Dev Ed coverage. While national organisations do provide some support, there is a need for local or regional support in order for Dev Ed provision to grow across the country.

Within the formal education system, the absence of mainstreaming continues to be a problem. While there are good opportunities to integrate Dev Ed in subject areas (within Religion, PE, English and Geography, for example), it is not mainstreamed in the curriculum, so approaches to Dev Ed can be ad hoc and piecemeal, not regarded and treated as 'core work'.

There are opportunities for teachers to receive training on Dev Ed at both pre-service and in-service levels, but it is seen as optional rather than a core part of their training and work. Integrating Dev Ed into the curriculum offers a better, more systematic approach, validating the interest of schools, teachers and students, building knowledge and skills over time, and holding out the promise of greater effectiveness.

Accredited training (through FETAC, for example) is still in high demand from youth leaders, and global justice forms part of the 3rd level training of youth workers in some institutes.

A growing challenge, in the context of the donor aid effectiveness agenda and the CSO development effectiveness initiative, is to demonstrate results and lasting impact – or at least a case for 'contribution to impact', as the CSO development effectiveness agenda suggests – as well as efficiencies and value for money.

The need to capture results/impact is being addressed within the sector, but would benefit from intensified collaborative work between all stakeholders. Particularly helpful would be the engaged input of Irish Aid in this area, since it is an active participant in aid effectiveness and 'managing for results' fora but also, and crucially, because it helps create the enabling environment for Dev Ed in Ireland.

Moving Forward

Given this quick snapshot of particular Dev Ed issues and opportunities in Ireland in 2010, within a very challenging environment for development more broadly (particularly in relation to ODA cuts, but also relating to theoretical debates about the interplay between aid, development and globalisation), Dóchas considers that the mid-term review of the Irish Aid Development Education Strategy might usefully consider the following points (summarised in the introduction above):

Monitoring and Evaluation, and questions around the impact of Dev Ed

- Dóchas encourages Irish Aid to invest in research, whether itself or through appropriate sector bodies, to establish clear baseline information about awareness of global development challenges, as well as Irish people's roles and responsibilities as world citizens. Such research should disaggregate 'the general public' into more useful population sub-groups, including specific 'target groups' for Dev Ed programmes, so establishing an objective basis for monitoring the effectiveness of Dev Ed and awareness raising over time;

Cooperation and collaboration

Dóchas encourages:

- Collaborative work between Irish Aid, other Government agencies and Department, and relevant civil society actors to devise and implement guidelines, approaches or other mechanisms that prioritise and actively promote the inclusion of voices from the Global South in Irish Dev Ed practice;
- Stronger cooperation between Irish Aid and other Government Departments, particularly the Department of Education and Skills, but also with Environment, Justice, and the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, for example. Such enhanced relationships would help cement the relevance, importance and place of Dev Ed across Government Departments, reducing any excessive burden of Dev Ed ownership or promotion on Irish Aid. Similarly, there is space, and a need, for more and closer cooperation with voluntary and community development organisations, many of which also engage in Dev Ed or related work;

- Close and sustained work between Irish Aid, Dóchas Development Education Group, IDEA and other stakeholders to address the added value of Dev Ed, including crucially differences of interpretation, understanding and activity around the inherent 'action dimension';
- Continued support for capacity-building in the Dev Ed and wider development sectors in Ireland, including around capturing, achieving and demonstrating lasting impact,

Funding

Dóchas encourages:

- That Dev Ed funding lines provided by Irish Aid are strategically aligned and differentiated, and that funding is provided in a clear, predictable manner, mostly on an multi-annual basis, so that Dev Ed programmes can be planned sustainability;
- Irish Aid should support an advice service and provide security of match-funding to promote more diverse funding opportunities for Dev Ed and enhance partnerships with other countries This would enhance the chances of Irish organisations working in Dev Ed being successful in accessing European Union or other funds, and encourage a wider and more diversified funding base for Dev Ed in Ireland;
- Irish Aid to show leadership by working with relevant stakeholders to clarify the Dev Ed requirements, funding arrangements and expectations under multi-annual funding arrangements for NGDOs (whether MAPS or a successor scheme), in order to ensure that Dev Ed is sufficiently valued, resourced and advanced under this mechanism.

Conclusions

Through the DEG and as a significant Dev Ed actor in its own right, Dóchas remains committed to Development Education and to constructive engagement with the different actors and stakeholders in the sector – including, of course, Irish Aid – with a view to continual improvement.

In making these suggestions, Dóchas hopes that the mid-term review of Irish Aid's Development Education Strategy 2007-2011 will lead to a stronger policy document and improved Irish Aid and sector support for Dev Ed, as a means to enhance citizens' understanding of, and active engagement, with global and development issues into the future.

October 2010

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