



The Irish Association of Non-Governmental  
Development Organisations

Dóchas

The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

## 2012 Annual Report

*"We are very happy with the information available and I must say that the Dóchas website has been a constant point of reference."*

- TV production company

*"I am impressed by the ability of Dóchas, with its many and varied members, to come together and produce an agreed document that addresses so many issues in a way that should be acceptable to the Expert Group who are conducting the Review."*

- Brendan Riordan on the Dóchas White Paper submission.

*"It was an excellent event, and reflected well on our sector – professional, coordinated, collaborative."*

- NGO CEO on the Dóchas TD briefing.

*"Many thanks to you and the Dóchas team for arranging such an excellent AGM and post AGM meeting. It is a credit to Dóchas that so much has been achieved in the last year and that plans are in place to ensure greater things in the forthcoming years."*

- NGO CEO.

*@Dochasnetwork is probably the most worthwhile, perhaps essential, Tweeter to follow if your in the charity sector in Ireland."*

- @TotalFR

## **Introduction**

The year 2012 was another difficult year for Ireland. The Government's programme of austerity and the crushing debt resulting from the bank crisis meant that the Irish economy continues to languish and there was still little sign of our national confidence returning. Across the country, many households are struggling with their expenses and resentment is growing about the "unfairness" of ordinary people having to make sacrifices to redress the problems caused by a very small elite group. The national mood in 2012 was not a positive one, and the media did little to alleviate it.

Other EU countries also showed a marked worsening of public sentiment and the internal solidarity in the EU – the very foundation of "the European project" – was being tested on a number of occasions. This was most evident in discussions about how to solve the Euro crisis and the associated sovereign debt crises in countries such as Spain, Portugal and Ireland, with media and politicians in richer countries openly questioning why they should pay to solve the situation in other countries.

Against this background, it was significant that the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the European Union. The Nobel committee noted that internal solidarity within the EU is at risk, and chose to highlight what it called "the EU's most important result: the successful struggle for peace and reconciliation and for democracy and human rights". In doing so, the Committee provided the world with an important reminder that the EU is a unique project, built on the premise that states can learn to work together peacefully, through a transparent, rules-based system of decision-making and international co-operation.

### **1. Shifting attitudes to overseas aid.**

And this has its relevance for the work of Dóchas and its member organisations too. Amid a hardening of attitudes in Ireland, 2012 saw a marked increase in the number of times in which commentators publicly criticised the fact that Ireland continues to dedicate a portion of its GNI to development cooperation. There still is no massive shift in attitudes in this regard – with opinion polls continuing to show a vast majority of people in Ireland considering overseas aid "important" or "very important" – but it is clearly no longer unthinkable that journalists and politicians can criticise the level of funding dedicated to this area.

During the year, Dóchas commissioned opinion polls to track changes in attitudes towards ODA, which showed that public support for overseas aid remains very high (findings corroborated by research undertaken by the European Commission). This high level of public support also translates in consistently high levels of political support for overseas aid, as evidenced by responses to Dóchas' work and by the fact that the Government decided to maintain the ODA budget at current levels, when measured in terms of percent of Gross National Income (GNI).

However, our research also showed that people in Ireland are not entirely convinced that aid actually works. When asked if they thought Africa was better off now compared to twenty years ago, just under half (49%) said no. A survey undertaken by SUAS also showed that students in Ireland continue to feel strongly about global justice, but only about half the respondents believed standards of living in developing countries have improved over the past ten years. And perhaps most worryingly, very few respondents felt that they themselves can make a difference: Only 20% of students are confident in their ability to influence decisions affecting other parts of the world – with only 35% of students confident to influence decisions affecting their own local area.

## 2. Informing public debate.

Dóchas has set itself the goal of improving its members' public communications on development, in order to deepen the public's understanding of development processes. During the year, we hosted a number of events, including our AGM conference, focusing on NGO communications, and the sector's relative weakness in presenting instances of transformational change.

Dóchas knows that it cannot achieve its objective of building a society that actively seeks to eradicate global poverty, injustice and inequality, without addressing the way people in Ireland think and speak about "development" and "poverty". The Dóchas Code of Conduct has alerted NGOs to their responsibility in this regard, but more is needed to change assumptions and attitudes. Dóchas will prioritise issues of public communications and public engagement in the years to come, focusing on promoting change in the communications practice of its member organisations and of Irish Aid.



Dóchas has contributed to greater coherence in the sector, by the development of 'shared messages' documents and the clarification of the sector's core views and policy positions. The "Making Poverty History Together" briefing sheets and our more detailed background papers on issues such as Corruption, ODA levels and EU development policy have played an important role in informing NGOs and policy makers, and shaping the content in members' public communications.

### Results achieved in 2012:

- Dóchas' annual assessment of signatories' adherence with the Code of Conduct showed steadily increasing levels of compliance with the Code. In addition, signatories have expressed a clear desire to strengthen the Code through the development of new minimum criteria and clearer guidelines.

- The Dóchas EU Presidency project provided a platform for Development NGOs to engage with domestic NGOs, and is an attempt to bring out broader “development” messages about the role of the EU.
- Thanks to the “Seán 2012” campaign, we managed to generate a great number of emails to TDs about the ODA budget. Supporters sent 4,459 emails to TDs in the months before Budget 2012 and the Sean 2012 campaign video was viewed over 4,700 times on Youtube. During the year, 68 TDs asked parliamentary questions about development, including 15 TDs who asked questions about the 0.7% target.
- MRBI polls confirm continued broad public support for development aid.

### 3. Facilitating effective NGO cooperation

Dóchas’ key role is to help NGOs improve their impact, by learning from each other. To this end, the Dóchas network provides Working Groups on thematic issues, commissions research and hosts ad hoc seminars and learning events on topical issues.

Dóchas relies entirely on the willingness of its member organisations to invest in this work. As a network, Dóchas does not order or compel its members to work together; its success depends on the extent to which its members consider it in their strategic interest to participate.



NGO networks such as Dóchas represent ‘communities of ideas’: “a space for like-minded people to interact on the basis of not only common interests but of conflicting ones too, building mutual trust and learning to accommodate each other’s needs...”. The success of Dóchas, then, depends on the extent to which it enables the creation of that mutual trust, and whether it manages to establish relationships between the participating (staff of) member organisations. And it depends on the quality of the services provided and the extent to which the organisation is transparent and accountable to its members.

The difficulty for Dóchas is that the diversity of its membership means that there is a great variety of expectations and demands made of the network, and that many members do not have clearly articulated reasons for engaging with Dóchas and its Working Groups. The absence of

clearly formulated learning needs on the part of our member organisations, or of their representatives in each Dóchas Working Group, inhibits the formulation of clear learning strategies for all Working Groups. And the absence of clear 'networking' objectives in individuals' job descriptions means that some members consider Dóchas work as additional to their core functions.

One of the important roles Dóchas can play is that as port of call for those inside and outside the sector. Dóchas position papers on key, overarching Development debates serve as a guide for the wider Development sector in Ireland. Our TD briefing sheets, policy papers and media statements serve to collate the sector's views on a wide range of Development issues, and thus have a value in themselves, even if not acted upon by their prime audiences (eg. TDs, journalists).

#### **Results achieved in 2012:**

- Each Dóchas Working Group went through a planning exercise to set its overall strategy, and to refresh its Terms of Reference.
- Each Dóchas Working Group made an explicit attempt to capture the group's learning in the past year.
- Dóchas groups contributed to shared learning in areas as diverse as financial reporting and mapping members work on HIV and AIDS, models of pro-poor agriculture and CSO partnerships.
- Dóchas Programme Officer appointed, focusing the support provided by the Dóchas office to the Working Groups on the functioning of the groups (as opposed to the policy themes pursued by the groups).
- An extensive survey of Dóchas members provided strong evidence of positive change in the sector, in particular in relation to organisational focus and governance.

#### **4. NGO standards of excellence**

Dóchas aims to ensure that its member organisations have a shared approach to quality and best practice in the sector. The basis of our work in this area is set out in our paper on NGO accountability and in the Codes of Conduct derived from it. In addition, Dóchas members have signed up to the Istanbul Principles on CSO Effectiveness, and they are working through Dóchas towards the implementation of those principles.

Dóchas Codes of Conduct apply to areas that are difficult to monitor through measurable indicators. Peer meetings and feedback from members, however, show that the issues promoted by the two Codes have gained importance in the sector (as demonstrated by the annual survey into NGO compliance with the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages on the one hand and the 2012 Membership Survey on the other). At the same time, Dóchas is conscious that both Codes could be strengthened further. In this context, it is important to note that in 2012 Dóchas members engaged in a broad-based discussion on how to strengthen the Code on Images and Messages, and that Irish Aid have insisted that NGOs applying for funding from the Government should demonstrate application of the Codes.

Dóchas does not intend to develop new Codes of Conducts. Rather, we intend to invest more resources in the support of members towards the application of the existing codes, and support members by the production of guidelines and examples of best practice in other areas.

### **Research shows a more focused, more professional sector.**

An extensive survey of Dóchas members, undertaken in 2011 but finalised in 2012, showed that the sector has matured and professionalised further.

Some of the more significant findings of the survey were:

- In Ireland alone, Dóchas member organisations employ 845 staff, up 17% from 720 staff reported in 2006. Dóchas members employ a total of 4,246 staff. There are 464 volunteers working with member organisations, a significant increase from 145 volunteers in 2006.
- The combined overall income for all Dóchas members is €328 million, an increase of €47 million from 2006.
- There are a total of 766,912 individual supporters making a financial contribution to Dóchas members in 2012. This is a decline of 10% since 2006.
- There has been a significant reduction in the number of programme sectors and the number of countries in which organisations are operating. In 2012, the average number of programme sectors in which each organisation worked was four (compared to eight in 2006) and the average number of countries in which each organisation worked was six, compared to 13 in 2006.
- The overall number of countries, in which Dóchas members are working, has reduced from 118 in 2006 to 70 in 2012.
- The most significant change in the past five years as reported by many NGOs is the greater focus on NGO governance and board performance. The Dóchas Code on Corporate Governance has had a demonstrable effect on our members.
- Dóchas members are now more linked into other NGOs, through networks and alliances. 92% of Dóchas members are members of other networks, compared to 70% ten years earlier.
- All Dóchas member organisations report having their annual accounts on their website, up significantly from 34% in 2006. But only 30% of organisations indicate that they publish programme evaluations on their website.

### **Results achieved in 2012:**

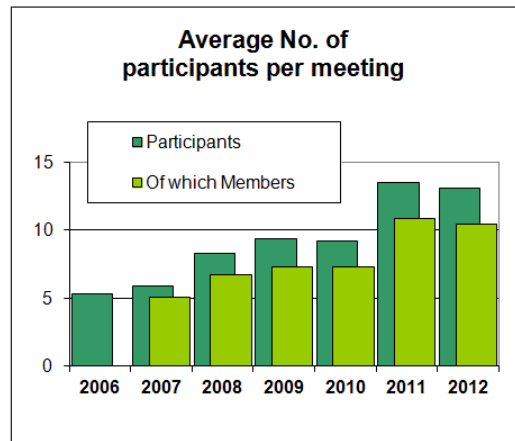
- The Wheel launched a Governance Code based explicitly on the Dóchas code. The Dóchas Code has also received positive mentions in EU-wide research into examples of NGO self-regulation, and is on the curriculum in courses offered by institutions such as the IPA in Dublin.
- In 2010, Dóchas developed templates for financial reporting. An assessment by independent consultant Ray McElroy shows widespread and dramatic improvements in the quality of financial reporting by our member organisations, and members credit the Dóchas research as the driver for this change.
- A broad consultation among members shows that a joint mechanism for fundraising in emergencies is not feasible at present.
- A Dóchas training on Managing for Results was well attended and prompted calls for further joint work in this area.
- A Dóchas briefing paper on Effective NGOs prompted a Seanad debate on Charities Regulation, which led to a re-start of the implementation of the Charities Act.

## 5. Member organisations working together

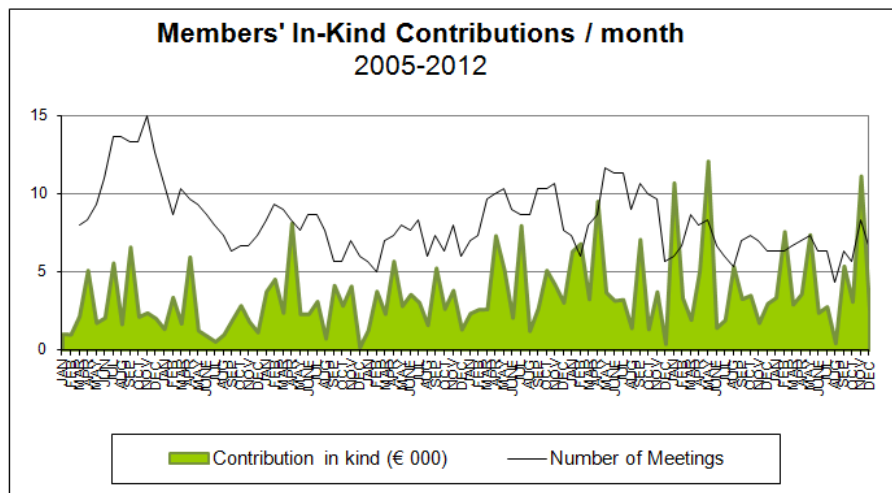
During the year, the Dóchas Working Groups continued to form the centre of activities of the network. The groups constitute the main platform through which member organisations share experiences and through which they meet and learn from each other. Currently there are Working Groups on:

- Development Education
- Disability and Development
- Food, Nutrition and Livelihoods Security
- HIV and AIDS
- Humanitarian Aid

In addition, we have more informal Task Groups on the “Act Now on 2015” campaign, the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid, the EU Presidency, Human Resources and Gender. Dóchas hosted a series of once-off topical seminars to stimulate NGO exchange and shared learning. Themes addressed at these seminars ranged from Development Effectiveness, Ireland’s EU Presidency and Irish Aid funding mechanisms for NGOs.



In the past year, we organised and hosted 78 meetings (compared to 86 in 2011), attended by 1,021 people from across the Development sector in Ireland (compared to 1,146 in 2011).



Assuming a cost of €30 per hour in staff time, this means that our member organisations invested some 53,378 in Dóchas meetings last year, in addition to the membership fees and other financial contributions to our work (comparable figure for 2011 was 53,000).

## 6. Influencing government policies

For Dóchas and its member organisations to achieve their aims and objectives, they need Government policies that support their work. Some of those policies relate to the space NGOs need to function (legislative and funding environments) but most of the policies that impact on our members relate to the issues that they are working on. In short, NGOs cannot eradicate global poverty without Government policies that address the causes of poverty. As a result, Dóchas members dedicate some resources to policy dialogue with the Irish Government and the European Union, to ensure that NGO values, experiences and expertise are taken into account in policy processes.



To be effective, Irish NGOs have had to increase their understanding of how to engage constructively in such national and international policy processes. A large part of Dóchas' work, therefore, relates to the internal dialogue within the network, to determine NGO priorities and develop effective advocacy strategies with recommendations for change in practice and policy. This role is expressly recognised in the Irish Aid civil society policy and in the Partnership Agreement between Dóchas and Irish Aid.

In recent years, Dóchas has made great progress in improving the impact of its policy recommendations and campaigns work, by building up strategic relations with Irish Aid staff, academics and members of the Oireachtas, and by ensuring NGO positions are developed well before major decision moments arise. Dóchas members have increased their cooperation in the development of policy position, and in devising strategic ways to frame their policy messages in ways that can generate maximum impact.

The 2012 membership survey showed a modest increase in NGO staff dedicated to policy and advocacy work, from 2% of the total sector in 2006 to 4% in 2012. The same survey, however, showed a decrease in the relative focus on advocacy in members' programmes: In 2001, 29%



of Dóchas members indicated that they worked in “Policy influencing and advocacy”, compared to 50% in 2006 and 20% in 2012.

During 2012, Dóchas played a strong coordinating role in three key policy areas: the White Paper consultation process, the Rio+20 summit and preparations for the Irish EU Presidency. For each of these processes, Dóchas facilitated NGO coordination resulting in a shared set of priorities and key messages, and Dóchas organised policy dialogue meetings with Irish Aid. Feedback from Irish Aid, from the Irish Aid Expert Advisory Group, from the Department of the Environment and from environmental NGOs shows that this coordination role was highly appreciated. Dóchas’ role in representing its members’ interests in their dealings with Irish Aid about the new Programme Funding and Civil Society funding rounds was less widely appreciated, with some members expressing concern that Dóchas was too close to Irish Aid to be critical enough.

#### **Results achieved in 2012:**

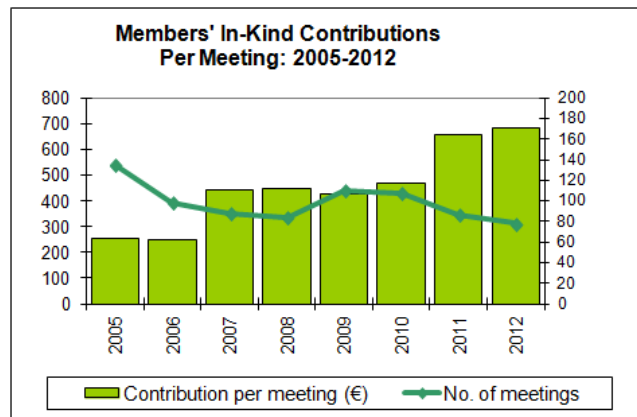
- A briefing sheet for members of the Oireachtas focused political attention on Dóchas members’ standards of practice and the need for charity regulation. It prompted a debate in the Seanad, which led to a commitment by Government to start implementation of the Charities Act.
- Dóchas was able to mobilise its members on the issue of the Post 2015 Development Framework, because key members took the lead on the issue early on and actively sought the involvement of the wider network.
- Early preparation led to a strong NGO input in preparation for the Rio+20 summit.
- Dóchas members also made high quality inputs into the White Paper consultation process, as well as the annual AidWatch report and the European Commission’s consultations on Post-2015 and the role of civil society in development cooperation.
- Dóchas research showed that the use of certain Development related key words in the Oireachtas has been steadily increasing in recent years. This is a proxy indicator for greater political interest in, and involvement with, development cooperation issues.
- Dóchas facilitated effective meetings with policy makers, including a TD briefing meeting in Leinster House and a presentation to the Oireachtas Foreign Affairs and EU Affairs Committees, and meetings with Government Ministers and representatives from the European Commission, World Bank and UN organisations. Dóchas also played a strong role in preparations for the 2013 meeting of the World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty.
- Following a coordinated effort, all available Irish MEPs signed up to an NGO initiative to obtain an EP Declaration on Development Education.

#### **7. A vibrant and representative network.**

Dóchas knows that to be able to achieve its objectives, it needs to ensure that it has the diversity and legitimacy of a broad and active membership, and that it needs to be sufficiently independent and financially viable. Furthermore, having set itself the goal of leading the Development NGO sector to ever higher standards of practice, Dóchas itself needs to be a model of good practice in all areas of its work.

And during 2012, there were many instances in which it was made clear that our members appreciate Dóchas’ approach in this regard. Members have demonstrably put more emphasis

on issues to do with quality, accountability and impact, and during the year there were many new initiatives developed to explore collaborative ways of working.



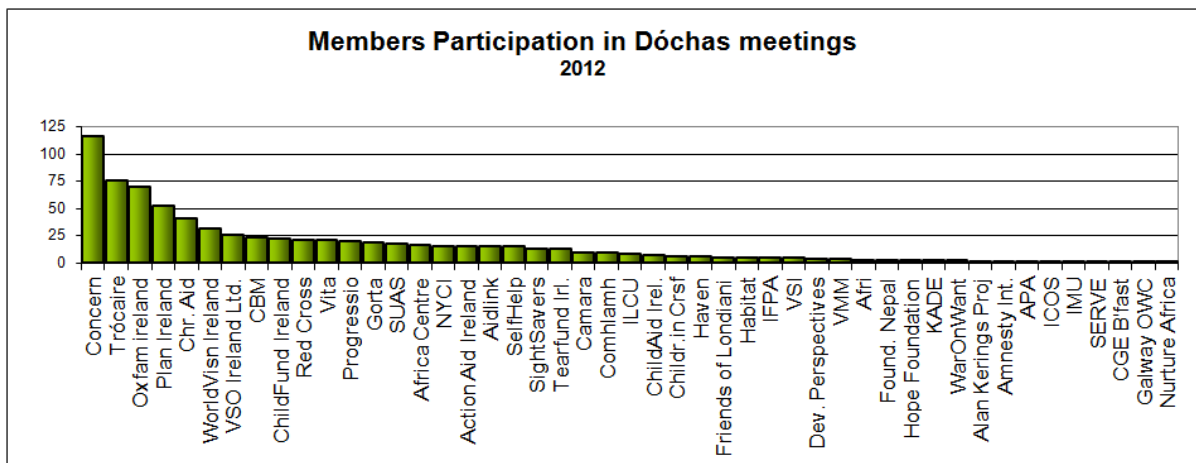
The Dóchas member survey showed that the sector has professionalised and made great progress in terms of developing and documenting its professional standards in many areas of work. Furthermore, Dóchas membership has continued to grow, even if joining the network has become more difficult as it commits organisations to higher standards and greater disclosure.

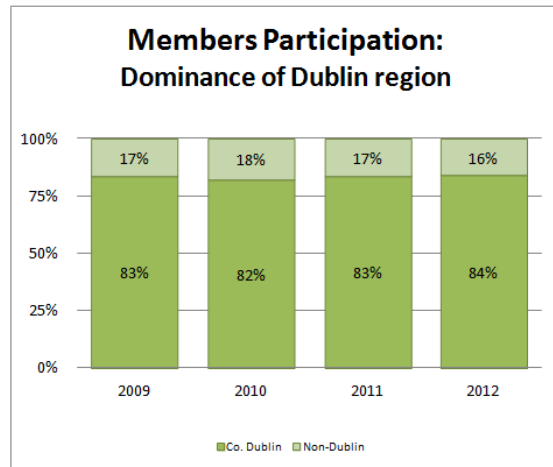
**Results achieved in 2012:**

- Seven new member organisations joined the Dóchas network in 2012.
- A well-attended EGM passed changes to the Dóchas memorandum and articles of association, opening the way for new associate members.
- Analysis by an outside consultant shows that Dóchas' annual report complies with the highest standards applicable to the sector.
- The Dóchas Board met for a strategic reflection day, to explore the continued relevance of the Dóchas strategy and the risks facing the network.

**8. Dóchas membership**

In 2012, the Dóchas AGM admitted seven new members: Action Lesotho, AIDS Partnership with Africa, Child Aid Ireland – India, Development Perspectives, Foundation Nepal, SERVE in Solidarity Ireland and The Haven Community Foundation. Total membership now stands at 49 organisations.





## 9. Plans for 2013

The Dóchas Work Plan for 2013 builds on the achievements from 2012 and the Partnership Agreement with Irish Aid. Our priorities for the coming year are laid down in a Results Framework and in a separate paper presented to the 2013 AGM.

### Further information

More information on Dóchas activities for 2012 is available on our website, or from the Dóchas office.