



The Irish Association of Non-Governmental  
Development Organisations

2013

ANNUAL REVIEW

President Michael D. Higgins  
Speech honouring the work of  
Development NGOs, July 2013

“Ireland’s official development aid programme, Irish Aid, and our NGO development agencies have earned a deserved international reputation for their transparency, their technical effectiveness and their human compassion.

It is a reputation of which I, as President of Ireland, am extremely proud and for which I wish to thank you all.”



Dóchas has signed the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages. Would you like to tell us how we are doing in relation to the Code? Send your feedback to [media@dochas.ie](mailto:media@dochas.ie), we’d be happy to hear from you.



Dóchas adheres to the Irish Development NGO Code of Corporate Governance

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# VISION

Our vision is of a world where poverty and inequality are unacceptable, and where every person has the right to live free from fear, free from want and able to fulfil their potential.

# PURPOSE

The purpose of Dóchas is to enhance Ireland’s contribution to world development. We achieve this by:

- leading the Development sector towards high standards of practice;
- being an independent representative voice of Ireland’s Development sector, in order to influence public debate and decision-making in Ireland and the European Union.

# MISSION

Dóchas is part of a movement working to build a society, in Ireland and in Europe, that actively seeks to eradicate global poverty, injustice and inequality.

## CHAIRPERSON'S LETTER



This is a challenging time for international development against a backdrop of continued cuts and also the impact of a crisis of confidence in the wider charity sector.

In January 2014, Dóchas welcomed the announcement that, after many years' delay, the Government was going to create the Charity Regulatory Authority. The members of Dóchas had been campaigning for such a decision since the early 1990s, as a key means towards maintaining public trust in charities. The Charities Regulatory Authority can help create much-needed clarity on which organisations really serve a "charitable purpose", where their funding comes from and who governs them. The Regulator will also help provide greater awareness of the professional standards that apply to non-profit organisations.

It is important to note that Dóchas members have chosen for many years to go well beyond the minimum legal requirements proposed in the

Charities Act. Our codes of conduct are recognised internationally as best practice tools to ensure quality in the sector and our members have strengthened other mechanisms to ensure their impact, through greater focus on research, needs assessments, evaluations and professional quality control.

We should take great pride in the work of Dóchas, and its work over the past few years. As Chairperson of Dóchas, I have been delighted to have the opportunity to lead our sector's efforts to improve its performance, in all areas of work.

During my years in the Dóchas Board, I have witnessed not only the massive challenges that we face when it comes to ensuring that every person on this planet gets a fair chance at living a life in dignity. I have also witnessed the many ways in which, day by day, and small step by small step, people around the world are making slow but steady progress towards a better world.

Development is not a linear process and the problems Irish development NGOs are trying to address are complex, tenacious and multi-faceted. Our efforts to support people in their struggle to take control over their own lives and assert their rights have known, and will know, many set-backs.

That is part of the process and it is also why our work is so important. The compelling vision of a world where everyone can realise their rights and potential despite the very complexity of the issues we are dealing with is what drives us and motivates us. And it is also the reason why we strive to improve our own performance.

The members of Dóchas are agreed that all of us who work to end global poverty have an obligation to be as effective as we possibly can. And we know that to be better, we need to be accountable. Accountability starts by listening to the views of people who are affected by our work and those that make it possible.

It gives me great pleasure to see that Dóchas' approach to accountability is now gaining momentum. As I prepare to step down from my role as Chairperson, I know that our members will continue to use the network to exchange experiences, share knowledge and set new standards for their work. That is Dóchas' mandate and what our members are committed to.

I would like to thank Irish Aid for the Government's continued support of the work of Dóchas. Their financial contribution is very important, and their openness to dialogue and collaboration

is invaluable. I also want to thank our growing number of corporate partners, as well as the European Commission for their support of our EU Presidency work.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow board members and of course the wonderful staff and volunteers of Dóchas and our member organisations who together ensure that we are delivering a stronger, more impactful and more accountable development sector here in Ireland which is helping to make a real difference to so many people around the world.

Jim Clarken  
Dóchas Chairperson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Clarken'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

# 1. NGO Standards

A development sector that adheres to standards of excellence

## What are we trying to achieve?

Dóchas aims to ensure that its member organisations have a shared approach to quality and best practice in the sector. Our “Theory of Change” in this respect is that by helping NGOs articulate minimum standards of practice, we can use peer pressure and demands from donors and programme participants/“beneficiaries” to drive greater quality of performance.

## What did we do in 2013?

The two Dóchas codes of conduct, one in the area of corporate governance and the other in the area of public communications, have set clear standards against which Irish NGOs are willing to be measured. The assumption behind both codes is that members of the public and of the media will use the standards set out to determine an organisation’s performance.

In most instances this is not yet the case, and journalists may tend to focus on aspects not related to the organisation’s overall impact, like overhead ratios and fundraising costs. Dóchas will therefore continue to raise awareness of the key characteristics of “civil society” and “charity” organisations, to help

strengthen the enabling environment for our members and to fight the myth that ‘charity’ work somehow should be a matter of good intentions, rather than professional standards of impact and performance.

In 2013 Dóchas updated its Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, and published a series of guidelines and ‘lessons learned’ documents during the year, including Dóchas guidelines on financial reporting by NGOs, research into “Models of Agriculture” and a policy document on HIV and AIDS called “AIDS Is Not Over”. We also produced guidelines on a core aspect of our members’ work: partnerships with other civil society organisations.

“Dóchas has always shown it is serious about good governance. Since 2006, the Dóchas team have helped put international corruption on the development agenda and have been a source of sound advice and support to NGOs who take good governance seriously too. It was great to see them play an active role in the launch of the Open Government Partnership last year and we are looking forward to working with Dóchas in 2014.”

John Devitt, Chief Executive, Transparency International Ireland

## 2. Shifting Public Attitudes

### Public debate informed by NGO

### experience and expertise

#### What are we trying to achieve?

NGOs inform and educate the general public, not only to raise funds but also to foster deeper understanding of the challenges of development processes and of the links between Ireland and global inequality.

with only 32% feeling confident in their ability “to influence decisions affecting my local area.” Not surprisingly, this number is even lower when it comes to societal and global issues.

On a more positive note, the research also showed a clear relationship between the degree to which people have engaged with NGOs and the likelihood of them taking further action on poverty, suggesting that once NGOs have been able to engage people with the issues of global solidarity, people’s understanding and willingness to act increases.

#### What did we do in 2013?

During the year, Dóchas commissioned opinion polls to track changes in attitudes towards ODA (Overseas Development Assistance), which showed that public support for overseas aid remains very high (findings corroborated by research undertaken by the European Commission).

An MRBI poll published in July found that a very large majority of people – 77 percent – think that “even in an economic down-turn, we have an obligation to invest in overseas aid”.

Another, more detailed poll commissioned by Dóchas, showed a strong and abiding public interest in overseas development, but also a high level of public powerlessness,

### Telling the good news about global development

Surveys and opinion polls undertaken for Dóchas indicate that a significant majority of people in Ireland still support overseas aid – even if they are not entirely sure of its impact.

The surveys suggest that the positive news and the progress being made in the fight against extreme poverty are not being heard. The statistics and case studies contained in UN and NGO reports are not making headlines.

Through the World’s Best News initiative, Dóchas member NGOs and others are hoping to deepen understanding of how civil society programmes work and how people in Ireland can support the many instances of positive change already happening in developing countries.

During 2013, Dóchas promoted discussion among its members on the need for a new approach to public engagement. Through a project called “The World’s Best News”, Dóchas members aimed to showcase positive news about aid and development, and the progress being made towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The pilot in 2013 showed that there is an appetite for positive stories among members of the public, and it also showed that Dóchas members were able to generate those stories.

Dóchas’ “World We Want” project offered opportunities for domestic NGOs to engage with the MDGs and the “Post-2015” framework. The project highlighted the importance of EU decision-making and an external evaluation of the project confirmed that it achieved most of its objectives, despite relatively negative public attitudes towards the EU.

“The wheel has been working closely with Dóchas over the last two years to encourage and support dialogue between the international and domestic development sectors on the “world we want”. The work has played an important part in breaking down barriers that create artificial distinctions between what’s good for people in Ireland and what’s good for the people of the world - we have found the partnership with Dóchas to be most productive and energising. We are looking forward to continuing to work with them in leading deliberation and action to achieve a sustainable Ireland in a sustainable world.”

Ivan Cooper, Director of Advocacy, The Wheel

### 3. Facilitating effective NGO cooperation

#### Creating spaces to learn and share

##### What are we trying to achieve?

Dóchas is a network of organisations that have come together voluntarily to pool experiences and learning, and to apply that knowledge to try to improve each organisation's long-term impact. Our members want Dóchas to provide platforms for exchange, such as our thematic Working Groups and ad hoc task groups and seminars. As a network, Dóchas does not compel its members to work together; Dóchas' success depends on the extent to which our members consider it in their strategic interest to participate in our 'communities of ideas'.

Dóchas' success in this regard is not measured in terms of change in members' behaviour; rather, it must rely on proxy indicators of success, such as whether member organisations continue to participate in our events and whether members are able to document the lessons learned in the Dóchas context – or whether they have been able to apply that experience in their own work.

##### What did we do in 2013?

The Working Groups are core to what Dóchas is trying to do; share experience and learning across the sector, with an aim towards improving how effective we are in our work overall. Currently there are Working Groups on:

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

In addition, we had Task Groups on Finance, Results, NGO Communications, the "Act Now on 2015" campaign and the EU Presidency, and some of the Working Groups have formed sub-groups for specific purposes, such as sharing learning on Agriculture and the oversight of the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages.

Dóchas hosted a series of once-off topical seminars to stimulate NGO exchange and shared learning. Themes addressed at these seminars ranged from NGO collaboration/mergers, Ireland's EU Presidency and Irish Aid funding mechanisms for NGOs to NGO partnership guidelines. Dóchas Working Groups organised formal learning day events on Disability Mainstreaming and on Resilience. Both events prompted follow-up in the form of joint work.

One of the important roles Dóchas can play is that of 'port of call' for those inside and outside the sector. Dóchas position papers on key, overarching Development debates serve as a guide for the

“ We have been active members and participants of many of the Dóchas working groups. In addition to the technical merit of the groups, our team have found the networking and information sharing to be invaluable. The work we at Plan Ireland have put into Dóchas has been repaid in volumes. ”

David Dalton, CEO, Plan Ireland

wider Development sector in Ireland. Our EU Presidency manifesto, our TD and Senator briefing sheets and media statements serve to collate the sector's views on a wide range of Development issues. Inversely, through our involvement in CONCORD and various civil society initiatives in Ireland, we also serve as a sign post for our members looking to access services and trainings or participate in events.

“ Claiming Our Future worked with Dóchas during 2013 to strengthen links between the national anti-poverty and equality sector and the global justice sector. The highlight of this work was a national deliberation on the global development goals for post 2015. The agenda from this event and the relationships developed through this work will serve us all well in the coming years. ”

Niall Crowley, Convenor for "Claiming Our Future"



## 4. Influencing Government Policies

### Creating spaces to learn and share

#### What are we trying to achieve?

One of the benefits of the Dóchas network is that it allows member organisations to pool their analyses of trends in the sector and build their skills and knowledge through participation in Working Groups, meetings and training workshops. Dóchas membership also offers NGOs a

platform to engage with the Irish Government and the European Union on a wide range of policy areas, and to strengthen their own policy positions by aligning with other organisations.

Dóchas members know that to achieve

their aims they need Government policies that support their work. As a result, Dóchas members dedicate some resources to policy dialogue with the Irish Government and with the European Union, to ensure that NGO values, experiences and expertise are taken into account in policy processes. Dóchas members have increased their cooperation in the development of policy positions, and in devising strategic ways to frame their policy messages in ways that can generate maximum impact.

#### What did we do in 2013?

During 2013, Dóchas played a strong coordinating role in our members' engagement with the Government during the Irish EU Presidency. Our members developed a manifesto for the Presidency which formed the basis for our engagement with the Government and NGOs across Europe, on issues such as global hunger, humanitarian aid, taxation and the EU budget.

Dóchas used the EU Presidency to highlight the importance of the process to develop new global "sustainable development" goals, to replace the Millennium Development Goals. We stressed the expected 'universality' of the new framework and tried to mobilise Irish CSOs (Civil Society Organisations), to encourage their input into the debate on the required priorities. In this context, Dóchas hosted several CSO events in Ireland and in Brussels and we documented the outcomes in a set of five key priorities, shared by a large group of Irish NGOs.

“The role that Dóchas played - in the run up to and during Ireland's Presidency of the EU last year - was invaluable and very much appreciated by its members. Dóchas ensured we had a clear agenda, a coherent voice and that we engaged individually and collectively on those issues under debate during Ireland's term as President. The role Dóchas played in facilitating a public debate on the post-2015 framework was particularly important and enabled us to engage wider civil society and gain an appreciation and understanding of the aspirations of Irish civil society and the world we all want.”

Olive Towey, Head of Advocacy – Ireland and Europe,  
Concern Worldwide

Dóchas welcomed the publication of the Government's new policy on international development, "One World One Future", which reflected many of the priorities put forward by Dóchas members in the consultation process leading up to the publication of the policy. However, Dóchas members have also expressed concern about the lack of clear plans to deliver on both the 0.7% ODA/GNI target and the policy's ambitions for a "whole of government approach" to development.

Dóchas facilitated a range of meetings with policy makers, including the Oireachtas Foreign Affairs Committee and meetings with Government Ministers and representatives from the European Commission and UN organisations. During the year we also played a strong and visible role in the Department of Justice's consultation with the charity sector, ahead of the announcement of the Charities Regulatory Authority.

## 5. A vibrant and representative network

Dóchas is a network of independent organisations, but it is also an organisation in its own right. As an entity, Dóchas depends on the active involvement of its member organisations and the legitimacy of the mandate it receives from those members. The Board is keen to build on that mandate and to ensure that the organisation remains as responsive and accountable as possible.

The Dóchas Board undertook a thorough review of the organisation's internal governance, leading to the adoption of an action plan to further strengthen Board procedures and performance. This plan includes the recruitment of an independent Board member not elected from within the membership. Furthermore, a conflict of interest policy was adopted, a register of Board members' interests was created and a Fundraising Sub-committee was formed.

Dóchas used the network to significantly reduce the cost of mobile phone use by our members.

Dóchas has also been working on a similar scheme for members' insurance policies. We also recruited a Business Development Advisor tasked with growing the number of Associate Members and building relationships with corporates and academic institutions.

Two new member organisations joined the Dóchas network in 2013, and one member ceased operations in November 2013.

### Governance codes

In June 2012, "The Governance Code for the Community, Voluntary and Charitable Sector in Ireland" (the Code) was launched by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to promote high standards of governance and transparency in the charity sector.

The Code was developed on the basis of consultations among community and voluntary organisations, and its core

principles reflect those on which the Irish Development NGO Code of Corporate Governance is based. Both codes set out explicit standards and principles for internal oversight and external accountability and they are fully complementary.

Any organisation wishing to health check its internal governance can adopt either of the Codes, depending on its area of activity – The Dóchas Code is mandatory (on a 'comply or explain' basis) for all Dóchas members, and is linked to the funding requirements of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

# DÓCHAS FINANCES

Details of how Dóchas is governed are contained in our "Report and Financial Statements" for the year ended 31 December 2013, which is available on the Dóchas website, [www.dochas.ie](http://www.dochas.ie).

The above report also contains details on how Dóchas is funded, and how our income was spent.

Our total expenditure for the year was € 497,461, made up as follows:

- **Charitable expenditure:**  
€ 476,979
- **Fundraising:**  
€ 4,773
- **Governance:**  
€ 15,709

The organisation's total income in 2013 amounted to € 477,325. This represents a slight increase compared to 2012, mainly due to a grant received from the European Commission, for our EU Presidency project.

Details of Dóchas' reserves policy, and our risk mitigation policy, are also contained in our "Report and Financial Statements" for the year ended 31 December 2013.

Dóchas acknowledges with gratitude the work of all our members' staff and volunteers that participated in Dóchas meetings and programmes during 2013. The major achievements during the year are due to the dedication and belief of all of these people as well as of the Dóchas staff and volunteers.



Dóchas

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