



New Voices in Development
CONFERENCE

Dóchas Conference: New Voices in Development

The Dóchas 2010 Conference, held on Friday 23 April 2010, provided a space for practitioners, newcomers and academics to discuss '**New Voices in Development**'.

The aim of the conference was to provide a forum for discussion between these groups to encourage cooperation and to improve the collective understanding of what works in the global fight against poverty. As a very dedicated and focused sector asking tough questions, reaching out to new partners and responding to new challenges can be difficult. Conscious continuous communication with New Voices is necessary to improve understanding of what works to ensure "development effectiveness".

The keynote speech was delivered by **Lawrence Haddad**, Director of the Institute of Development Studies and President of the UK and Ireland's Development Studies Association. Mr. Haddad leads 'Reimagining Development', an initiative bringing together 34 research projects from around the world to identify new thoughts and ideas on international development. In 2008/9, a developmental "perfect storm" occurred with global food, fuel and financial crises all playing a part in a series of severe shocks and disruptions in addition to climate change uncertainty that impacted developed and developing countries alike, but especially to the lives of poor people. In some ways this has been a wake up call for development practitioners and politicians. It prompted a re-examination of what "development" is, what and who we should be listening to, and on a deeper level, what truly motivates us as a development community.

Too often "development" is equated with economic development and gross domestic product (GDP). But as countries like India illustrate, growing GDP does not necessarily lead to less poverty. The OECD experience is that high GDP does not automatically lead to greater happiness. A more holistic 3D model of development and human wellbeing is necessary.

We need to listen to other sectors if we are serious about addressing the challenges we face. Engagement with the business and security sectors is crucial. Development cannot happen without the presence of private business in conflict and post conflict situations. Security forces define the development pathways that can be followed in subsequent stages. We must encourage feedback from the people we are working, fundraising, designing and advocating for. The farmers, health care users, students and teachers we work for have voices. Extending a sense of ownership of the projects and the co-creation of knowledge has an important positive impact on success rates. Getting this feedback isn't integral to our definition of a successful project, but research often shows that involving community based monitoring has a positive impact on improving the eventual outcomes of the projects.

Development needs diagnostics that combine political, technical and capacity considerations. We need co-construction of knowledge for easier use of global best practices, to develop more diverse global knowledge pool and to better imagine what issue-by-issue global

governance looks like. The geography of knowledge is a very important concept. European and US thinkers dominate by contributing 95 percent of the global pool of knowledge, which is completely unreflective of the world in which we live. Practical application of knowledge is only possible if people from everywhere are contributing to the knowledge pool. We need to communicate the need for international development differently, moving away from a sense of charity, obligation or self-interest to an understanding of shared global common interest.

Sara Kinsbergen is a PhD researcher in the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands, where she studies Private Development Initiatives (PDIs) and their emergence in the Dutch development sector. The first study on this area was published in 2005 – with 35 subsequent small-scale studies since. PDIs were defined as a group of people who provide structural and direct support to people and organisations in a developing country, based on direct personal relationships with people there. They are sometimes derided as MONGO's – “My Own NGO”. By and large, these initiatives receive no direct funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but by 2007, the Dutch public had donated over €52 million to these initiatives.

According to research, people start PDIs due in part to the retraction of the welfare state, a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the established procedures of traditional NGOs and the impact of globalization and tourism. The small scale, the personal contacts in developing countries, the direct personal relationship with the sponsor and the speed with which results are achieved also impress donors. The PDIs tend to concentrate on bricks and mortar projects, like building schools and supporting orphanages and health clinics, and the the top three countries where the initiatives are based are Kenya, India and Ghana - popular Dutch tourism destinations.

Sara's research found that local participation in the projects tends to be limited and the selection of cooperation partners is often restricted to people who have had chance personal relationships with the initial founders. Context analysis is limited; embeddedness, duplication, relevance, and root causes tend not to be examined. Actions happen very much in the immediate 'here and now' and the projects prioritise speed and passion, often at the expense of planning and targeting. The experience is generally a highly emotional experience and there is limited reflection on the sustainability and long-term prospects of the endeavour.

For all these reasons, mentoring and guidance from other actors could be of enormous benefit.

But such mentoring rarely takes place. **Andy Sweeney** presented the Save Children Out Of Poverty “SCOOP” Foundation and welcomed the chance to introduce the organisation. The SCOOP Foundation is just shy of its 1st birthday and Andy elaborated on how his experience travelling around the world led to a harrowing but life changing experience in Cambodia. The 'Save Children in Asia Orphanage', set up by a Cambodian man who looked after street children outside of Phnom Penh had a deep impact on him. Upon his return Andy became immediately involved with fundraising for this and other projects.

In its first 11 months, the SCOOP Foundation raised €30,000 which it has used to support the orphanage in Phnom Penh; a primary school in Varanasi called the 'School of Life; a football academy in Uganda and a dance workshop in Clondalkin in Dublin to keep children off the streets.

Andy indicated that SCOOP had had to learn the hard way, and had received no support from more established NGOs.

Philip Lee, Co-Founder and Chairman, Connect Ethiopia and **Aidan Magner**, Supply Chain Manager, M/A COM Tech on Private Sector approaches to development.

Connect Ethiopia aims to connect the efforts of the Irish business community with developing countries in order to build capacity to help stimulate economic growth. This approach is a practical one based on knowledge and connections with people.

Ethiopia was selected as the initial focus country for the partnership as a politically stable dynamic country with huge potential, low levels of corruption and a strong sense of nationhood. Tourism has the potential to be a powerful industry but it is massively hindered by the image that charities present of the country, with sensationalised pictures intended to stimulate charity donations, not tourist visas.

Connect Ethiopia uses sectoral twinning, linking business to business and aims to address the causes - not just the symptoms - of poverty. Key projects included providing 'rule of law' training for the judiciary and gender based awareness programs. Others proved less popular, including sessions on the structure and stability of society. Lectures on public procurement and other technical material had a great response rate.

Aiden Magner represented his Cork-based company M/A Con Tech and his role in the outsourcing to Ethiopia of the production of hand-wound sub-miniature transformers his company needs. He spoke of the relationship that Connect Ethiopia was able to provide to M/A Con Tech so they hit the ground running in their new partnership with an Ethiopian company, Lava Business Solutions. This is a business-to-business solution based on using local knowledge.

Panel discussion and Q&A session:

Paul Collier: The power of NGOs lies in the ability to build small and innovative organisations that are close to the ground, able to raise funds and are small enough to change when necessary. This flexibility is not present in big public aid agencies. Learning from the best practice in the sector is vital, and mechanisms to promote the sharing of that learning need to be established. We need to build common metrics to assess the impact of various methods and then learn from the best. Information technology has enabled us to receive deep and regular feedback from our partner organisations on the ground. This will play to our strength as organisations small enough to innovate and close enough to the ground to get meaningful feedback.

Justin Kilcullen of Trócaire: People, power and participation are essential for successfully designed and implemented programmes. Development is not simply a technical affair – it must be based on ownership and access to power. Programmes that are not based on the needs of the people they intend to serve, are destined to fail.

In many ways, aid is a compensation for the injustices of past and present, as rich countries continue to extract more from developing countries than they give - through unfair trade rules and subsidies. Africa is a wealthy continent full of poor people, where everyone bar Africans benefit from the material wealth available. Aid is the exchange and as part of the aid system we need to recognise this. The solutions to the problems we face are political and economic. The developed world continues to shirk their responsibilities. No amount of work from NGOs will change this reality.

Niall Mellon Township Trust was established in 2002 and **Dominic Loughran** illustrated that behind the image of planeloads of workers heading off to build houses, there is a holistic and community based framework. All construction that takes place has been through a consultative facilitative method, working with the local community training and employing workers. In the last 18 months, many South Africans have joined in building works in the

townships, something that was never thought possible before. It a success based on partnership, engaging and communicating with people in the situations that they are in.

Applying the economist's calculus to Irish Aid programmes has been an interesting experience for **Moore McDowell**, where it seemed that "everyone knew the value of everything, but the price of nothing." With the additional pressure on funding, the introduction of metrics to evaluate the bang-per-buck is important. Many well-intentioned people are working in an area they believe to be very important, who will fight tooth and nail to preserve the funding they receive, despite sometimes not being able to demonstrate its effectiveness, using analytical tools, such as cost benefit analysis.

Jim Corbett of Bewley's outlined the commercial relationship maintained with farmers in developing countries, illustrating how a private company can have development impact if it addresses the core way in which it operates, going beyond basic corporate social responsibility.

H.E Ambassador Zerihun Retta noted that development agencies are filling gaps providing assistance to countries in need. But countries have their own national plans and the situation needs to be considered holistically. The private sector and global markets can provide an opportunity for developing human power available, providing training, employment and skills development. In turn each of these workers supports their family and wider community. There is a positive environment and an opportunity to provide harmonised, high-quality value-added products. Legislation to register NGOs operating in Ethiopia is being introduced to hold all NGOs to account.

Comments from the floor:

The emergence of **New Voices** is an opportunity for the larger, older, established organisations to reflect on where a link with other smaller NGOs could help mentor and assist them. Principles from private enterprise like efficiency, innovation, creativity and engagement with customers should be applied across the board in the aid sector. Too often, aid efforts seem to be based on good intentions, rather than concerns for long-term impact.

The importance of communication, and of networks like Dóchas, comes to the fore in this context. The development sector is characterised by a great deal of energy and dynamism, which needs to be harnessed, and combined with clear professional standards of practice.

Development NGOs need to recognise their limitations, and to find ways to work in alliances with others that can help bring about lasting change, be they governments, civil society groups or private sector companies.

Concluding remarks, Paddy Magguinness, Managing Director, Traidlinks

Paddy Magguinness summarised the conference as a call for greater and genuine engagement with donors, the people who are joining the sector, and the people that the sector works with. New partnerships have the potential to bring new light and approaches to old problems. The high-quality, high-impact organisations of today were fledgling organisations once, and encouraging the start-ups of today, sharing wisdom and experience can only be of benefit to the sector. Enhanced communication between established and "New Voices" in the sector, will benefit the quality of investment in partners and programmes, and promote sector-wide adherence to the highest possible standards accountability, and therefore impact.