



The Irish Association of Non-Governmental  
Development Organisations

Dear Delegates,

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Our conference today comes at a precious moment of opportunity for Dóchas members.

With the Government poised to commit to a roadmap to reach 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) on overseas aid, will significant new funding offer that step change that will ensure that we deliver and lead on the transformative goals laid out in Agenda 2030? We know that money alone is not the answer to transforming behaviours, policies and investments to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but it is certainly an indicator of the political will and ambition to do so.

We also know what is at stake if we do not build greater momentum and support among the public for the Goals. It will mean a lost opportunity to deliver on SDG targets that will get children into schools, eradicate absolute poverty, and address growing inequality. It will mean a lost opportunity to reaffirm the relevance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as we mark its 70<sup>th</sup> year, and that underpins the framework of the Goals. It will mean a lost opportunity to create a sustainable future for the next generation, where both people and the environment can grow and coexist in harmony. It will mean a lost opportunity to counter the growing cynicism and apathy within our communities against multilateralism, elites and globalisation.

So the theme of our conference today – **how to engage the public to mobilise their ideas, support and activism** – should come as no surprise. It has always been a critical issue for Dóchas members, but now it has become an urgent one. We have heard the refrain from politicians and donors that we need to bring the public along with us. We all need the public's votes. We have also been watching the levels of distrust and disengagement towards Official Development Assistance (ODA), or at least the shifts in perceptions as attitudes change, and reference points shift with history and new generations.

But what can you expect to hear today from our inspiring line up of speakers, panellists, artists and innovators? One thing is for certain, there is a need for a critical debate about how we engage the public in the work that we do. Brace yourself, this conversation may be uncomfortable at times, but that is surely where creativity and energy emerge. In shaping the conference today, above all, I hope we can start a critical debate about how we understand, embrace and talk about the complexity of the work that we do. Our narrative needs to include honesty about the slow pace of change, and the difficulties of tackling root causes, rather than applying Band-Aids. It needs to offer a space to own up when things go wrong, and to strengthen our accountability to the people that we serve. And we need to find ways to speak truth to power at times when we are also trying to deliver life-saving assistance.

But we also need to be clear, relevant and real to communities in Ireland who may be struggling themselves to cope with the pace of change, or who are coming to terms with lived histories of conflict, poverty and injustice. Many of these ideas have already been captured in the responses written as part of our Conference blog series. Make sure to read them.

I know we cannot offer a silver bullet to some of these challenges. But what we can provide today is a safe environment to discuss and engage; to challenge and be challenged. I hope also that you will leave this conference knowing that we are stronger if we decide to meet these challenges together.

Thanks to all our amazing contributors and sponsors for making today happen. I sincerely hope we will find more opportunities to work together to bring alive to the public the transformative power - and the privilege - of what we do, in order to bring about change, to challenge power, and ultimately to transform the lives of all of us, to ensure that no-one is left behind.

Enjoy the day.

**Suzanne Keatinge**

Dóchas CEO