

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Irish Forum for Global Health (IFGH), established in 2004, is an independent network of individuals based in Ireland and overseas, who are concerned with the health and development of populations at a global level, with a particular commitment to low-income countries. Whilst the structure and staffing of the Forum has undergone significant changes since its inception, its overarching aim continues to focus on the promotion of global health related knowledge, education and collaboration, both locally and globally. This external evaluation was commissioned by the IFGH to review the Forum's achievements in relation to its current strategic plan (2015-17) and its role in supporting ESTHER Ireland; and based on these findings to outline future options in regard to the Forum's strategic focus, partnership and funding. A full evaluation of the work of ESTHER Ireland was outside the scope of this evaluation.

The framework for this rapid, mixed-methods evaluation was designed around the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria. The consultant team collected data using document review, existing programme M&E data, face to face and skype interviews, review of the forum's website and social marketing and a short e-survey to members and the ESTHER Ireland mail list. Seventeen key informants were interviewed, two email interviews conducted and 57 responses received from the e-survey (7% response rate). The key findings of this evaluation are presented around the OECD/DAC Criteria. Limitations were the low response rate to the survey, most informants were those who were fully engaged with the Forum, the difficulty of evaluating information sharing networks and extracting consistent data from multiple sources.

**Relevance:** The Forum represents a unique space in Ireland for global health and their work broadly aligns with the sustainable development goals and Ireland's policy for international development. A real strength of the network is its ability to access Ireland's global health community and to provide an enabling environment for collaboration; both of which are highly valued by Irish Aid. However, the Forum's current strategy is relatively complex for its size and its future strategy would benefit from developing a theory of change on how the Forum can focus its influence on the quantity, quality and visibility of Ireland's global health work. Aligning the Forum's strategy and metrics with Irish Aid's policies and priorities will also assist IFGH in demonstrating its added value.

**Monitoring and evaluation** of the effectiveness and impact of the IFGH has been challenging due to the nature of its work as an information sharing and collaboration promoting network and the development of a new monitoring and evaluation framework part way through the period of review. IFGH have worked to improve their monitoring and narrative reporting. However, the structure of the strategy, which predates the 2016 framework, does not translate easily into measurable indicators without overlap. As there were no targets against either the 2016 monitoring framework or the strategy it was not possible to use the quantitative indicators to evaluate whether the Forum has delivered its strategy. Reporting to the Board does not use either the monitoring framework or the strategic plan objectives. Irish Aid acknowledged the work done by IFGH in its reporting but still felt there was room for improvement.

**Effectiveness** was evaluated against the Forum's four strategic goals.

**GOAL 1: Build capacity to engage in global health.** The Forum has developed or participated in three new courses which were run an average of 3 times per annum with a total of 208 people trained. There were at its height six active Student Outreach Groups in HE institutions around Ireland. The IFGH focus has shifted to **training from global health education**; the latter having become embedded in under graduate and post graduate teaching after active work by IFGH members. Whilst the potential role for engagement in **capacity building** has

yet to be fully realised, the Forum has the potential to further strengthen its role in developing and promoting training that supports global health thinking and in particular focus on entry-level training for which there seems to be demand.

**GOAL 2: Provide a platform for increased knowledge, dialogue and networking.** The Forum hosted or co-hosted 15 learning events; in 2017 507 people attended learning events. The Forum distributed 220 mailshots by email and averaged three tweets per day between 2015-2017. It was widely stated that the Forum's most successful work related to the high quality **e-newsletter, website, workshops, learning events and conferences** which were valued not only as providing a platform for influencing agendas and highlighting new knowledge but also as the primary route by which networking occurs. The scope to improve continuity between events thus building on knowledge and learning, providing focus for advocacy activities and widening participation through having an annual theme presents exciting future opportunities for the Forum. This should not, however, be at the expense of leaving room for opportunistic events in response to members/partners priorities and emerging issues.

**GOAL3: Support engagement in global health through facilitation of high quality partnerships.** €184k has been disbursed in ESTHER Ireland small grants, with 27 grantees and 112 participants attending events. The IFGH has continued to promote and be open to **new partnerships** with organisations seeking to promote global health in Ireland. However, much of IFGH's partnership work in this period has focused on ESTHER Ireland with the HSE sector. IFGH has done an excellent job in establishing, hosting and managing the **ESTHER Ireland Secretariat**. Demand for small grants highlights a thirst among HSE staff to engage in global health and there is increasing evidence that the IHP model is an effective form of development cooperation. However there are capacity implications of IFGH's role within the ESTHER Secretariat and opportunity costs of this should be carefully weighed as the governance and management arrangements of ESTHER Ireland are reviewed in 2018.

**GOAL 4: Influence global health policy both in Ireland and internationally.** 47 articles have been produced through the Global Health Writes training, three advocacy statements produced, eight World Day email campaigns and six campus World Day events held by the Student Outreach Groups. Whilst all of IFGH's work could be defined as advocacy; specific activities against the strategic objectives under this goal have been least prioritised by the Forum and advocacy has been largely through relatively passive channels targeted at their members. Barriers to a more targeted approach to advocacy work include capacity, lack of a shared platform and different perspectives of IFGH's role in terms of advocacy work. A more coordinated, realistic and strategic set of actions will be needed in the future, if the forum aims to influence policy in Ireland. We recommend reducing the ambition as currently articulated within the strategy and linking advocacy activities to one annual theme allowing more focus and structure. In addition, the target audience for advocacy work should not just include internal membership and may require lobbying activities with politicians and media..

**Efficiency.** The evaluation found that the IFGH offers good **value for money** offering an impressive quantity and quality of services given its size. Key enablers are significant benefits in kind, relationship building, access to a unique community and reputation for quality delivery. The changes to IFGH **governance structures** are working well and the new chair has been widely appreciated by Board members and the Secretariat. The excellent work of the **Secretariat** facilitated by their wide-ranging skills set and their commitment to the Forum was widely appreciated. They are complemented by an ethical **internship scheme** offering career development opportunities to entry-level professionals. Key **risks** faced by the Forum are staff turnover, late payment of funds and reliance on one donor.

**Impact and Sustainability.** The nature of IFGH's work to improve capacity and knowledge and provide networking opportunities in global health make **measurement of impact** difficult, however this must be a priority for the Forum in moving forward so that IFGH can truly demonstrate the added value it provided to the Irish and global health community. There were differences of opinion in how important it was for IFGH to diversify its income in the future, however, it was widely acknowledged that there were only narrow opportunities for the Forum to do so. The IFGH also highlighted the opportunity cost in lost capacity often far outweighed any potential income gain. The evaluation found that the services provided by IFGH are a public good for Ireland and continued funding by Irish Aid was hence desirable.

**Next phase: Widening and Deepening Engagement.** For Irish Aid, realistic strategies and increased reporting on outcomes and impact were most important. For the Board/Secretariat building on what has already been achieved particularly in relation to training, communications and learning events but to deepen and widen engagement was a priority. However, IFGH has limited resources and therefore it is extremely important to be strategic about the choices of where to engage, who to engage with and on what to engage.

### Summary Key Recommendations

1. **Irish Aid should continue to fund the Irish Forum for Global Health**
2. Develop theory of change thinking about the different groups IFGH wants to engage with or influence
3. Improve M&E and reporting
4. Balance strategic engagement around one annual theme, with opportunistic and responsive action
5. Focus aspirations in relation to advocacy and wider partnership building (outside ESTHER Ireland)
6. Build on the advances made in training
7. Continue to offer a programme of high quality learning events
8. Explore IFGH's potential role in terms of visibility of Irish work in global health