

Ireland's International Development Policy:

Implications for Health "A Better World" – Opportunities and Challenges

"A Better World"

In an event held in RCSI on the 14th of January, *Nicola Brennan*, Policy Director in the Development Cooperation and Africa Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, outlined the context, vision and priorities of the Ireland's International Development Policy, entitled "**A Better World**". The policy outlines the new aims and changes in approach adopted in order to deliver on Ireland's commitment of allocating 0.7% GNI to Overseas Development Aid by 2030.

Nearly 60 people participated in the event, which was moderated by *Nadine Ferris France*, Executive Director of the Irish Global Health Network. Four respondents each covered one of the four priorities highlighted by the Policy, outlining the opportunities and challenges for each sector. The discussion of the global health commitments within the policy, the main points of each of the respondents, and the points of interest raised during the Q&A session are summarised below.

"A Better World" is a whole Government policy, not just the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Though Irish Aid manages over 70% of the foreign aid funds, 30% are covered by other departments representative of a government-wide commitment and effort. – *Nicola Brennan, Irish Aid.*



Nicola Brennan - Policy Director in the Development Cooperation and Africa Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Global Health Commitments within ABW

1. Health System Strengthening (HSS)
2. Improvements in the quality and availability of health services with a strong focus on maternal and child health
3. Equitable access to basic health care services by working closely with global partners in support of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by 2030
4. Focusing on education, health and social protection in emergency settings as basic elements of a functioning system
5. Strengthening work on hunger and nutrition in development and humanitarian settings

New Global Health Commitments within ABW

1. Help to better fight the epidemics of HIV, TB and malaria by supporting global ambitions towards ending the epidemics by 2030
2. Develop a new initiative on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)
3. Improve health care access especially SRH, in humanitarian emergencies
4. Develop an integrated approach to health and nutrition

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Marie Hallssey is Global Health Advisor for GOAL. She is a public health specialist with over 30 years of experience in international development and humanitarian health and has worked for GOAL for more than 15 years.



1. Reducing Humanitarian Need

- Irish Aid’s global leadership and advocacy on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights issues is important, particularly in the **current global political** and social context which is seeing hard won gains threatened and funding streams reduced for programmes that impact the health and rights of women and girls.
- The explicit **commitment to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)** in emergency and fragile contexts is especially relevant in humanitarian crises, where comprehensive SRHR services are often inadequate and not prioritised, compounding extreme vulnerability due to gender inequality. **Adolescent SRH** represents a crucial area for focus given the youth demographic bulge. A plan to take this specific commitment forward is welcome to **ensure policy alignment and future funding**.
- The **commitment on strengthening crises responses and decreasing fragility compounded by climate change** is welcome particularly as agencies such as GOAL are increasingly required to **support emergency health responses** including: basic health services for displaced populations; responding to nutrition emergencies and disease outbreaks; conflict-related malnutrition.
- **Community engagement** and Social and Behaviour change in emergencies is often needs further focus and prioritisation. Successful outbreak containment cannot be achieved without community engagement and ownership. The need for **stronger emergency preparedness and resilience initiatives**; building resilience of health systems and communities to shocks and stresses are key priorities. Resilience and emergency preparedness are central to health systems strengthening and reducing humanitarian need.
- Aspirations towards **Universal Health Coverage** and continued support for **important global initiatives** on addressing HIV, TB and malaria to improve the health of the most vulnerable and hard to reach are appreciated. **Efforts on linking humanitarian response and long-term development funding** allow for a focus on **building safety nets** for populations over time, in addition to focusing on the ‘**triple nexus**’ of interactions; peace, humanitarian and development processes.

Niall Roche is an **Environmental Health Officer** by background and has been working within the realm of public health across Asia and sub-Saharan Africa for nearly 30 years principally within the field of **WaSH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene)** but also wider **Environmental Health**.



2. Climate Action

- **Influencing others:** A whole of government approach to addressing climate change requires the rest of government, not only the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to meet our obligations reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. We are increasing Overseas Development to protect those vulnerable to climate change, while we in Ireland also need to do more to halt, prevent or slow down the rise in global temperatures.
- **Mitigation, not solely adaptation, is a global health opportunity.** Enabling access to clean and affordable energy technologies provides a perfect opportunity to mitigate green house gas emissions while simultaneously positively impacting health. Poor air quality kills over 7 million people per year (4.3 of whom die from household air pollution).
- **Resilience for Prevention:** As a development community we must further develop a culture of prevention which, in the context of Universal Health Coverage, is linked to Health Promotion and Prevention. During extreme weather events we have risks such as floods, windstorms and heatwaves. Our humanitarian response would benefit from increased programme components dedicated to Build Back Better in recovery in addition to programmes on prevention, mitigation and preparedness of the emergency cycle.
- **Breaking down silos - a multi-disciplined approach to International Development:** A 'one health' approach would allow for monitoring of rising rates of zoonotic infections. Non-Communicable diseases account for approximately 73% of the global burden of disease disproportionately affecting low and middle income countries.

Breda Gahan is a **Registered General Nurse and Midwife** based in Ireland, with a **MPH from Liverpool University** and over 30 years of experience in Health and HIV work in Ireland and overseas with **Concern Worldwide**.



3. Gender Equality

- **Ireland has an opportunity to lead by example on HIV:** Ten people were diagnosed with HIV every week in Ireland last year. Globally, there are still about 5000 new HIV infections (adults and children) transmitted every day (UNAIDS 2019) yet Irish DA overall Health, HIV and AIDS budget allocation is declining, from 16% in 2014 to 5% in 2018 as a percentage of total ODA.
- **Health programmes and the impact of Climate Change:** 60% of new infectious disease is zoonotic, therefore important to consider the 'One Health' approach—recognising the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment. It is very positive that the policy maintains an epidemic response commitment: the Ebola crisis in DRC is not over.
- **Empowering women, not just with financial resources but supporting human rights:** There is a reversal of women's rights in some northern countries, and hard-won gains towards women's equality globally is threatened. To prevent roll back on women's rights, ongoing collaborations for Concern Worldwide with donors including Irish Aid, other INGOs, IGHN-DSAI Child Health Network, AkiDWA, IFRAH Foundation, ICGBV, RCSI and Dochas are necessary.
- **Integrated approach to health and nutrition:** Welcomed in the policy by Concern Worldwide and all, that ongoing collaborative action with all key stakeholders and target populations is critical for strengthening integrated responses towards SDG 3 delivery.

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Dr David Weakliam, HSE Global Health Programme Lead is a leader and advocate on global health issues in Ireland. Trained as a medical specialist in General Practice and Public Health Medicine, he has worked in Global Health since 1988.



Governance

- **Weak Governance:** Too often due to political factors, health services and interventions – which are not necessarily complex or expensive – are not reaching those in need. This can be overcome by strong, effective institutions working locally and regionally and that are linked to a clear, shared agenda at global level.
- **SDGs and UHC - the basis for strengthening governance:** These serve as a road map for implementing appropriate governance. The SDGs are clear about improving health for development. We have strong political consensus on this approach, granting us the opportunity to follow through.
- **The UHC challenge:** Everyone, everywhere should receive the healthcare they need without experiencing financial hardship. In order to 'reach the furthest behind first', Irish Aid and other Irish organisations must support and build capacity of non-state organisations such as CSOs, NGOs, private providers, as well as government institutions.

Ensuring that different players and organisations can work effectively to lead and oversee interventions and services for health will be challenging; to better direct use of resources, better coordinate use of these resources for better effect, and better monitor and ensure accountability.

- **Instability and Conflict create the worst health situations:** Deepening engagement with WHO, particularly through UHC 2030 and the UHC Partnership will be crucial to Ireland's participation and impact. Through bilateral programmes in Africa, Ireland plays an important role with other development partners in HSS.
- **Health is global - "A Better World" includes Ireland:** We have many people left behind here. Migrants, ethnic minorities, homeless families, and so on. UHC is for Ireland. If this policy is to be coherent with domestic policies and implement a whole of government approach, then governance applies here too. There are opportunities in health through the IDC, under the HSE-IA MoU, the IGHN, and wider collaborations.

“In response to the global pushback on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights: “We must hold the space, and we can do that and we are doing it, our colleagues are doing it across the board.”

“We make sure ordinary people engage with the policy by holding sophisticated discussion. Public engagement is a large part of the policy.”

