

Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence submission to the review of Irish Aid programme by the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence

Introduction:

The Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence (ICGBV) is a unique collaboration between a diverse group of human rights, humanitarian and development organisations as well as academic institutions, Irish Aid and the Irish Defence Forces that have come together to work towards the end of all forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV).

Gender-based violence is a universal problem rooted in the underlying inequality between men and women and rooted in deeper societal norms of gender inequality, driven by factors such as traditional patriarchal and religious norms, conflict, insecurity and poverty. Data shows that GBV is also a driver of insecurity and poverty, which is why it is such a critical aspect of both development and humanitarian programming. Though some progress has been made in advancing the struggle for equality between men and women, GBV is prevalent in all corners of the world in both the public and private sphere, and frequently with alarming levels of acceptance and impunity. Some of the most pernicious forms of GBV are particularly prevalent in situations of humanitarian crisis whether natural disaster or man-made as in the case of armed conflict. As the drivers of GBV are so varied and often deeply rooted, effective responses to GBV must be similarly holistic.

Though GBV remains prevalent worldwide, the development of policy frameworks and guidelines has accelerated the drive towards eliminating GBV and serves to frame the context in which the Consortium works. Major developments in this regard include: the 1978 Convention on the Elimination of Violence against Women (CEDAW), the 1996 Beijing Platform for Action, Women, Peace and Security Agenda, and the Sustainable Development Goals agreed in 2015, in particular SDG 5 which is aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

- 1) The Consortium recommends that Ireland maintains its strong commitment to addressing gender equality and GBV through its policy focus and funding commitments. This is an important recommendation for any future review of the One World One Future policy document.**

Irish Foreign Policy is informed by the recognition that gender equality is an essential component of sustainable human development and that GBV, a violation of human rights, is an unacceptable outcome of its absence. This understanding is reflected in Ireland's Policy for International Development, One World One Future in which Ireland articulates its commitment to devoting more resources to efforts to promote gender equality, and furthermore, to ensuring gender equality is mainstreamed across all other thematic areas of the policy e.g. food security, climate change, resilience, governance, trade and human rights

This was strongly recognised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) Peer Review of Ireland's Development Cooperation Programme in 2014. OECD DAC noted that Ireland is notably recognised by stakeholders at all levels for the effective agenda-setting role it plays in gender equality and women's empowerment and equally praised Ireland's strong policy on integrating gender in all its programmes.

OECD DAC also praised Ireland's spend on gender equality and women's empowerment. From 2011 -2015 Ireland has steadily increased its spending commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. The Consortium welcomes this and urges Ireland, through Irish Aid to coordinate with other donors in meeting new and emerging funding deficits in particular those that threaten access to health services.

2) The Consortium recommends that Ireland's Gender Policy is updated and its implementation regularly monitored.

OECD DAC praised Ireland's annual monitoring of implementation of the Gender Policy as an excellent example of identifying good practice. The Consortium notes that the Gender Policy was reviewed in 2010. However it has not been formally updated. We welcome a comprehensive review of the Policy and an updated Policy to be developed, with a comprehensive implementation plan. A coherent Department-wide Gender Policy would be an important tool for assessing the impact Ireland is making on gender equality in its development programme.

3) The Consortium stresses the importance of working with and supporting civil society, including local NGOs and in particular women's organisations.

Membership of the Consortium has provided opportunities to share learning between Irish Aid, the Defence Forces, and civil society organisations engaged in humanitarian and development work internationally. We encourage an all-of-Government approach that maximises opportunity for engagement with civil society in efforts to address gender equality.

We also encourage the Government of Ireland and Irish Aid to more consistently engage with civil society members on the broader issues as they relate to gender equality and provide a space to continue that engagement.

4) The Consortium welcomes Ireland's commitment to increasing funding to protection and GBV prevention and response in humanitarian contexts. We would like to see this commitment being met and encourages Ireland to work with and encourage other donors to meet funding gaps in protection and GBV prevention and response programming in emergencies.

We welcome Ireland becoming a partner of the Call to Action, *on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies in 2013*. The Call to Action aims to fundamentally transform the way GBV is addressed in humanitarian emergencies. We encourage Ireland and Irish Aid to fully realise the six commitments made. These include prioritising the protection of women and girls in its development and humanitarian policy commitments, allocating specific human resource capacity and technical specialist expertise in order to support effective humanitarian response to GBV in emergency contexts and to ensure that protection of women and girls is part of the appraisal criteria for all recipients of Irish Aid humanitarian funding. Ireland also committed to progressively increasing funding to the protection of women and girls in emergency and recovery contexts.

Ireland shows its commitment to addressing GBV in emergencies in its Humanitarian Assistance Policy. It states that "Ireland affirms that the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls is in itself a life-saving action which needs to be an essential part of every humanitarian operation".

Considering the significant funding gap to protection and GBV prevention and response in humanitarian contexts globally, the Consortium commends Ireland and Irish Aid's commitment to increasing funds for work in the area of protection, gender mainstreaming, and sexual and gender based violence prevention and response in emergency contexts. It further commends Irish Aid's move to a multi-year funding model for the Humanitarian Programme Plan and encourages the next phase to be a three-year plan, as responses to GBV need longer-term investment.

5) The Consortium urges Ireland to use its important position as member of the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) and Chair of the Bureau of the CSW to ensure that governments focus their efforts on eliminating the structural barriers to achieving gender equality as a key approach to eliminating GBV.

Ireland is active on the international stage in promoting efforts to advance social justice, including gender equality and women's empowerment. Ireland advocated strongly for the prioritisation of gender equality in Agenda 2030 in its role as co-facilitator of the process to convene the SDGs. Currently Ireland serves as a member of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (principal intergovernmental body focussed on addressing gender equality) for the period 2017 to 2021 and will chair the Bureau of the Commission for the annual sessions in 2018 and 2019.

This provides Ireland with the opportunity to advance an agenda which promotes the empowerment of women and girls and challenges deeply rooted gender based discrimination. Transforming social norms, practices and attitudes and instilling gender equitable attitudes and behaviours in men, women, boys and girls is essential to eliminating all forms of violence against women. Engaging men and boys in promoting gender equality is also critical to challenging these social norms. This can be done in a way that is guided by the voice of women and girls and promotes women and girls' leadership and empowerment. The Consortium is willing to support Ireland in advancing this agenda at the CSW.

6) The Consortium commends Ireland's National Action Plan's consultative and multi-sectoral monitoring mechanism and encourages its full implementation.

In 2015, the Government of Ireland launched its second National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security and pledged continued commitment at the highest level to increasing women's role in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, and governance. It recognises that equitable, durable and sustainable peace and reconciliation cannot be built without women at the table.

The Consortium welcomes the multi-sectoral and consultative nature of the Oversight Committee of the NAP and that the perspectives of women and girls affected by conflict are incorporated at all levels of implementation of the NAP.

Conclusion

Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence welcomes the review of the Irish Aid programme by the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this review. We are available to cooperate further with the Joint Committee should they need clarification on the submission or additional assistance over the review process.