Building Research Capacity for Poverty and Hunger Reduction

TIDI CONFERENCE
PERSPECTIVES FROM IRISH AID
Irish Aid's commitment to development (1)

- Official Aid programme, Irish Aid, in place since 1994
- Administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Substantial levels of public expenditure (.51% GNI) on ODA
- Significant growth up to 2007 with some contraction since
- Policy direction reflected in 2006 White Paper on Irish Aid
- Sharp poverty, geographic and sectoral focus
- Deepening engagement with Irish Institutions and groups
- Commitment to quality and effectiveness
Ireland's commitment to development (2)

**Review of White Paper 2012**

- **Rationale** – To ensure Ireland’s aid programme is responsive to a changing context
- **Process** - internal learning, independent assessment, public consultation
- **Oversight** – Ministerial, Advisory Group, Departmental
- **Status** – New draft policy forwarded for political consideration
- **Outcome of review process**
  - *Strong public support*
  - *Endorsement of many dimensions of Ireland’s approach*
  - *Need to respond to existing and emerging threats*
  - *Importance of targeting, rationalisation, value for money*
  - *Accountability and results*
  - *Recognise the changing role of aid*
  - *Importance of knowledge and innovation*
Research and development

Research is fundamental to effective development

- Our core business is about knowledge and learning - we need to know how best to contribute to poverty reduction and our priority areas of focus
- The accumulation of new knowledge and its communication are essential
- Our programmes need to be grounded in evidence
- We need to use this evidence to inform policy and practice and achieve results
- We need to understand the hiatus between evidence and policy change

More broadly

- Research is becoming more important globally
- Donors are strengthening their approaches
- Overall coordination remains weak
- Strengthening local capacity is key
Irish Aid Research Overview

- Long history of support to research

- Currently over 100 research partnerships across the programme

- Increase in spending - €25m in 2008, almost €30m in 2012

- Internal & external reviews pointed to the need for a more structured approach to research, for adequate research capacity, for strategic partnerships and for more effective use of research products

- Currently developing a research strategy but will be finalised after the publication of the new aid policy
Some characteristics of our approach

- Research is a significant aspect of the work of Irish Aid

- We support a wide and diverse portfolio

- There is a particular focus on Health, HIV/AIDS, Agriculture/nutrition

- There is a wide variation in research partnerships
  
  o 60% of funding to international partnerships
  o 22% of funding to partnerships in Ireland
  o 18% to partners working at country level

- There is an increase in the importance afforded to research in country programmes
What are we learning?

- There are good examples where Irish Aid funded research is making a difference
- Research focus closely linked to policy priorities
- Challenges include
  - Oversight and direction
  - Diversity of partnerships
  - Learning
  - Our capacity
  - Capturing and communicating results
  - Better linking research to programming
Programme of Strategic Cooperation (PSC)

PSC (instituted in 2007) has the following objectives:

- To facilitate the establishment of collaborative partnerships within and between HEI’s and research institutes in Ireland and in countries benefiting from Irish Aid support

- To support capacity building in HEIs and research institutions in Ireland and in countries benefiting from Irish Aid support

*Under Phase 1 of the programme, €12 million has been allocated to 8 full and 5 preliminary partnerships*
Results to date of the PSC

- A significant increase in the number and quality of partnerships within and between Irish and Southern Institutions

- Greater linkages within and between Irish third level institutions

- Strengthened systems, knowledge and networking

- Positive feedback from southern partners on the relevance, quality and innovation of the PhD and other training models and of their partnership with Irish HEI’s
Mid term review of PSC (2010)

Vision for PSC

Phase 1
- Focus on capacity building in Irish institutions

Transition
- Transition towards a more southern demand-led focus

Phase 2
- Programme reflects southern demand-led focus
The purpose of this is to support:

- The consolidation of achievements from Phase 1
- An incremental shift towards a more southern demand-led (partnership) focus
- Capacity building of southern institutions
- The commitment of Irish Government to Hunger
- A sharper thematic focus
- A stronger commitment to results.

**Outcome:**

- 20 proposals were submitted.
- 7 grants were approved, €4.8 million over the next three years
- Results frameworks for each proposal now being finalised
Partnership with DSAI

Commitment to work with the Development Studies Association, Ireland, to:

- Promote greater collaboration between individuals and institutions in Ireland engaged in development studies
- Provide a vehicle for the dissemination and communication of development research
- Present opportunities for sustained dialogue between the development studies constituency in Ireland, and Irish Aid

3 year initial programme

Benefits also in terms of synergies with Programme of Strategic Cooperation

Establishment of cooperation arrangements with Trinity’s International Development Initiative
Conference to-day is about reflecting on models of partnership for strengthening research capacity in partner countries.

I want to focus particularly on Irish Aid plans for addressing this through the elaboration of a new Research Strategy.

A central objective is to position research more centrally within the programme and make explicit its links to other streams of work.

Articulate Ireland’s particular contribution to development research nationally and internationally.

Guide priorities to build on Irish Aid’s experience over the next five years.
Goal: to be linked to overall goal of Irish Aid and our mission to reduce poverty and vulnerability

3 proposed objectives related to the following:

- Building evidence on priorities for poverty reduction
- Strengthening communication and policy uptake
- Building capacity at country level
Building evidence on priorities for poverty reduction

- Deepen an institutional appreciation for the value of investing in research

- Prioritise funding to key areas relevant to Irish Aid policy objectives – Hunger & Nutrition; Health/Education; Governance/Conflict; Climate Adaptation; Humanitarian Action

- Ensure research is context specific and responds to the needs of poor people and poor communities

- Work with our partners, current and new, to strengthen efforts on research quality with a particular emphasis on results
Strengthen Research Communication

- Understand and promote the links between research and policy making

- Plan for high quality credible research, responsive to pressing policy challenges and proposing practical solutions

- Deepen and build upon structured cooperation with Irish Institutions

- Deepen partnerships with global and country specific research networks

- Strengthen cross-institutional engagement with research and ensure strong links between research and programming
Building capacity of Institutions and Networks in partner countries

- Build partnerships for research where they are needed most, at country level

- Promote approaches that are more southern led, responsive to country identified priorities, with results evident at country level

- Work with government, research institutions and civil society to strengthen capacity for research at partner country level

- Incentivise stronger collaboration between Irish and partner country research institutions (NUIM and Zambia/Malawi this week)
• Finalisation and communication of strategy

• Institutional leadership and supports

• Cross institutional research community

• Training and competencies

• Build on existing partnerships – global, PDPs, research/policy networks, Irish institutes, partner countries

• External oversight and support
Concluding remarks

- Research matters!
- Much progress made in Ireland in recent years. Some excellent structured partnerships in Ireland and with southern institutions
- Research as mainstream, rather than add on, to our work as development practitioners
- Anticipating complexities and time frames needed to support strengthening of southern institutions
- Importance of events such as this and of critiques of approaches to doctoral training and capacity building