

Irish ODA and the UN target – *a faltering commitment*

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This article suggests that there is an urgent need to re-invigorate Ireland's commitment to the United Nations target for ODA. Currently, lip service is paid to this commitment, but progress towards the target has been very slow. Continuation of the unsatisfactory performance of the last decade has now been enshrined as the objective for the next three years. How can this performance be improved? Mary Sutton of Trócaire argues that the climate of public opinion is favourable to an increased effort but that the political lead is not forthcoming from the Oireachtas.

The Evolution of Ireland's ODA Programme

In retrospect the years 1973–74 were the high point in terms of enthusiasm for and commitment to improving Ireland's Official Development Assistance programme.

Prior to that Ireland's minuscule ODA expenditure arose primarily out of mandatory commitments to contribute to multilateral aid agencies within the United Nations system. Payments began in 1951–2. They grew significantly in 1957–8 in the wake of Ireland's joining the World Bank and again in 1960–1 when the International Development Association — a soft-loan affiliate of the World Bank — was established.

In addition there were, from the mid-1960s small bilateral allocations to, for example, Gorta (the Freedom from Hunger Campaign), the Overseas Club/Irish Council for Overseas Students (to assist students from developing countries resident in Ireland) and the Overseas Trainee Fund (used to train Zambian students in central and local government administration), as well as some provision for disaster relief. These latter elements did not amount to a bilateral aid programme in the usual sense as there was no provision for funding development projects overseas. By 1972–3 the total ODA programme amounted to £802,000 of which £21,000 (less than 3%) was bilateral expenditure.

The idea of a target for ODA to apply to all industrialised countries had been mooted in 1958 by the World Council of Churches. It had subsequently been adopted by the United Nations in 1970. The agreed target specified that each rich country government should by 1975, or at the latest 1980, commit 0.7% of GNP, or 70p out of every £100 of GNP, each year as ODA. Ireland's 1972–3 allocation was equivalent to 0.036% of GNP or less than 4p in every £100 of GNP.

Ireland's response to the adoption of this international target had been to assert that it would increase its assistance to developing countries "as our resources permit".¹ Successive government statements emphasised the relative poverty of Ireland compared to other industrialised countries and highlighted the contribution being made in developing countries by Irish missionary orders and non-government organisations.

Two events in 1973 altered the tempo of Ireland's development cooperation activity. The first was EEC entry. As a member of this "rich man's club" Ireland would be obliged to contribute to the development cooperation programmes undertaken by the Community. From 10% of the total in 1973-4, the proportion of Ireland's ODA programme expended through the EEC grew to 40% by 1976 and has remained at roughly that level ever since. (See Table 1 for the breakdown of expenditure in 1984.) Apart from this direct impact, EEC membership may also have inspired improvement in the size of the total Irish programme by highlighting the very poor performance by comparison with our fellow EEC members. In 1974 six of the EEC members were more than half way to the UN target. Italy was at the bottom of the league table, with an ODA/GMP ratio of 0.14% which was roughly three times better than Ireland's. (Figures for Luxembourg are unavailable.)

The second major impetus in 1973 towards an improved ODA performance came from the change of government. The incoming National Coalition government clearly indicated its intention of shifting the Irish ODA programme into a higher gear. Now, rather than merely contributing to initiatives taken by multi-lateral donors, or responding to natural disasters, the Irish government intended to initiate activities and create a development cooperation programme. In practical terms this translated into commitments in the areas of resources, structures and philosophy.

Resources

In 1973 the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Garret FitzGerald announced the government's intention of increasing the resources committed to ODA "in a planned manner over a number of years".² The following year he elaborated on this commitment at a Special Session of the Council of Ministers of the EEC devoted to development cooperation. Arguing that Ireland could not hope to reach the UN target by the end of the decade given its comparatively poor economic situation within the industrialised world and also given the very small size of the ODA programme prior to 1973, he stated that the government was committed "to aiming at an annual increase in ODA of the order of 0.05 per cent of GNP, taking one year with another, over the next five years."³

Subsequently, there was considerable confusion about what precisely this target statement meant. Essentially, until autumn 1975 it was interpreted, both in official and non-official circles to mean that Ireland aimed to have reached half the UN target commitment, or 0.35% of GNP by 1979. This interpretation was later revised in official statements in such a way as to suggest that the objective was an end-decade level of commitment of the order of 0.25% of GNP.⁴

Whatever the ambiguity of the wording in respect of the end-decade objective, the notion of annual increases of 0.05% of GNP was adopted as a

and

realistic objective for a country with a commitment to reaching the UN target at Ireland's stage of development. This target level of increase was taken on board by the then opposition party Fianna Fail and on coming to office in 1977 the new Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr Michael O'Kennedy reiterated commitments made in opposition which also referred to annual increases of 0.05% of GNP as the objective.

Thus, by the time the National Coalition left office in 1977 the need to increase the level of resources for ODA "in a planned manner over a number of years" had won acceptance in the Dáil. The notion that an appropriate annual increase would be 0.05% of GNP had been accepted by all the main political parties and the concept of a quantified aid target had replaced the earlier vague statements of good intention.

Structures and Philosophy

It was recognised in 1974 that if Ireland's development cooperation programme was to expand in a coherent and planned manner in the future it would be essential to set out the underlying philosophy of the programme and to design appropriate structures for its execution. Late that year the then Minister Dr Garret FitzGerald announced his intention of publishing a White Paper outlining the structures and policies that would underpin the programme.

To date no such statement of policy has appeared.

In the meantime the Bilateral Aid Programme initiated in 1973 has grown to account for roughly one-third of total ODA expenditure. It is hoped to increase this proportion to one-half by 1987. The programme was initially targetted on five priority countries (India, Lesotho, Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia). This was later reduced to four with India being dropped from the list. The programme is administered by a special section (the Official Development Assistance division) of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

In 1973 also, the National Coalition government established the Agency for Personal Service Overseas (APSO). Funded by a grant-in-aid from the Department of Foreign Affairs, APSO is responsible for promoting service by Irish citizens in developing countries. In its first ten years it sponsored approximately 1,000 such assignments on voluntary, semi-professional and professional terms.

In 1975, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr FitzGerald requested submissions on appropriate structures for the new Irish development cooperation programme. Many of the submissions from the non-governmental organisations, missionary bodies and semi-state agencies argued for a semi-state Development Aid Agency outside the civil service to execute the bilateral aid programme, and for a national Council for Development Cooperation as a vehicle for broadly-based sectoral and community involvement in the development cooperation programme. The notion of such a Development Aid Agency was rejected and responsibility for administering the Bilateral Aid Programme remained with the Department of Foreign Affairs. The second proposal ultimately resulted in the creation of the Advisory Council on Development Cooperation (ACDC) in 1979. The ACDC has twenty members, appointed for a three year term, representing non-governmental organisations, industrialists, trade unionists, farmers' organizations and state-sponsored bodies, whose func-

tion is to advise the Minister for Foreign Affairs on development co-operation policy.

Finally, in 1974 the Minister for Foreign Affairs announced his intention of seeking membership for Ireland of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD. The DAC is the principal forum in which industrialised country donors discuss their aid programmes, compare performance, exchange experiences and seek to improve the quality of their assistance. Membership would undoubtedly sharpen both the philosophy and execution of Ireland's programme by subjecting it to rigorous annual reviews. Over a decade later in February 1985 it was announced that Ireland was applying for membership.

Performance in Relation to the Aid Target

Although the concept of an annual target increase of 0.05% of GNP was widely accepted from the mid-1970s, actual performance was very poor. As Table 2 illustrates, in only one year was an increase of 0.05% of GNP (or an extra 5p in every £100) achieved. That was in 1979, under a Fianna Fail government when ODA increased from 0.13% of GNP in 1978 to 0.18%. The following year however, ODA as a percentage of GNP actually fell (to 0.17%). Over the decade from 1974 to 1984, ODA as a percentage of GNP only increased from 0.05% to 0.23%. This was far short of even the revised target adopted in the mid-1970s which aimed at an ODA commitment equivalent to 0.25% of GNP *by 1979*. In 1980 the National Coalition government made a commitment to reaching the UN target by 1990.

The provisions of the current "National Plan"

The national plan, *Building on Reality 1985-87*, published in October 1984 contained the following comments on the UN target:

While the Government are committed to achieving this target within an appropriate time-frame and as economic circumstances permit, and had set themselves the ambitious objective of progressing towards it at an annual rate of 0.05 per cent of GNP per annum, actual growth in Irish ODA since 1974 has averaged about 0.015% of GNP per annum. Despite the present climate of exceptional budgetary restraint, the Government will, during the period of the plan, maintain the rate of increase in ODA already achieved ... The possibility of implementing the higher rate of increase previously envisaged will be reviewed in the light of future economic circumstances.⁵

These comments are noteworthy for a number of reasons. The most significant feature is the retreat from the 0.05% annual increase as the target, and its replacement by the much more modest 0.015% target increase. The 0.05% target is now described as "ambitious". However, this level of increase was first adopted in 1974 and repeatedly re-affirmed as an appropriate and realistic target for a country at Ireland's stage of development.

This target revision could be seen as an attempt to recognise what has proved to be attainable in the past and to enshrine that as a realistic target for the future.

However, in terms of Ireland's commitment to reaching the UN target the performance during the last decade was inadequate. The commitment in the

Plan to maintaining a level of increase less than one-third of the increase previously striven for is an acknowledgement of past failure.

If the Plan commitments materialise Ireland's ODA is likely to be 0.275% of GNP by 1987.⁶ It seems highly unlikely that Ireland will even reach half the UN target by 1990. In fact, if the 0.015% annual increase were to become the norm the target would not be achieved until the year 2016.

In absolute terms, if the 0.015% increase is achieved over the Plan period Ireland's ODA will be £50m in 1987. Had the 0.05% increase been met over these years the programme would have been closer to £70m in 1987 (See Table 3).

The Plan talks of progressing towards the UN target "as economic circumstances permit". Undeniably the current climate is one of "exceptional budgetary restraint". However, this phraseology and sentiment harks back to the pre-1974 situation when successive governments committed themselves to increasing ODA "as our resources permitted". The concept of a target was adopted in 1974 precisely to ensure improvement in our ODA performance irrespective of budgetary constraints. ODA was to have a higher priority in government spending and was to be shielded from budgetary pressures until such time as the UN target was reached.

The Plan refers to reviewing "the possibility of implementing the higher rate of increase previously envisaged ... in the light of future economic circumstances." In fact expressing the UN target as a percentage of GNP takes economic circumstances into account, as if GNP is rising only slowly then the absolute increase in the aid allocation will be smaller than if GNP were rising rapidly. For instance, had we reached the target and aspired to maintain this level from one year to the next, at times when GNP was not rising in real terms the increase in the absolute allocation from year to year would be merely sufficient to compensate for any fall in the value of money due to inflation.

Contrasted with the needs of developing countries or compared to the size of other donors' aid programmes the absolute size of Ireland's allocation is very small, and would be even if our previous targets had been met. Why then does the failure to reach these targets matter? A nation's ODA/GNP ratio is the single most tangible index of its commitment to development cooperation. The size of this financial commitment tends to reflect the level of awareness of Third World issues and the priority attached to them by industrialised countries' governments. These issues are much broader than aid. As well as policy issues internal to developing countries, they include the structures of international trade and finance. It is unlikely that a country with a poor ODA/GNP ratio will have the interest or the moral authority to take a lead in working for reform of these structures.

How can Ireland's commitment to the UN aid target be revitalised?

As we have seen 1973-74 were years of promise for the Irish development cooperation effort. A stocktaking of performance over the last decade suggests that the promise was fulfilled only patchily and that the commitment to meeting

the UN target — or indeed half the target — within a specified period, has flagged.

The next major landmark in the evolution of Ireland's development cooperation activity is likely to be the publication of the government's long-awaited policy paper. Hopefully, this will set out the rationale for Ireland's involvement in development cooperation and the objectives being pursued and will help to provide a basis for evaluating the quality of the programme. The retreat from the aid target described above and the poor prospects for significant resource increases in the coming years place obvious constraints on what can be achieved.

Reasons for Failure

Why has the commitment to reaching the UN target within a reasonable period faltered? One reason is the ^①altered international climate for aid. In 1973-74 in the wake of the first oil crisis the international environment bolstered the new enthusiasm in Ireland for ODA. The actions of the OPEC countries had jolted the industrialised countries into a heightened awareness of their dependence on developing countries for supplies of raw materials and primary products. The developing countries were able to capitalise on this in stepping up their demands for a New International Economic Order more favourable to them. The reverberations of the oil shock were felt in every forum where North-South issues were discussed. Significant reforms in the areas of trade, finance, institutions and development assistance were under serious discussion as development issues were accorded a higher priority than heretofore in international negotiations.

This phase proved to be short-lived. By the time of the second oil shock in 1978-79 the industrialised countries had by and large adjusted to higher priced oil through conservation measures, development of alternative energy sources and by passing on much of the burden of adjustment to developing countries by means of higher prices for manufactured exports. The "North-South dialogue" had ground to a halt. The OECD countries were preoccupied with recession and unemployment in their own countries and coping with the international debt crisis which was a legacy of massive borrowing by oil-importing developing countries in the mid-1970s. The Reagan administration in the United States and the Thatcher government in the United Kingdom were negatively disposed towards the concept of aid and unashamedly sought to maximise the commercial spin-off and strategic value of existing programmes. For the OECD countries as a group the ODA/GNP ratio remained fairly constant throughout the 1970s. In recent years there has been little external pressure on Ireland to improve its performance, particularly since failure to join the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD saved the Irish programme from annual scrutiny by this specialist body.

② Currently, of much greater significance than the international climate, is the domestic climate of "exceptional budgetary restraint". External indebtedness has grown at a very rapid rate in recent years, and servicing this debt now places a severe burden on the economy. Curtailing expenditure in order to limit further recourse to foreign borrowing has become the government's priority. Documents such as the National Plan aver that Ireland is giving as much aid as it can

afford in present economic circumstances. This deserves consideration.

Can Ireland afford more aid?

Whether or not Ireland can afford to give more aid depends on the framework within which the issue is viewed.

If one looks at aid in isolation in the context of a donor/recipient type relationship and assumes the motivation for aid-giving is altruism and the benefits accrue only to the developing countries, one could conclude that in its present economic circumstances Ireland cannot afford any more than it is giving. Even this must be seen in perspective: planned ODA in 1985 amounts to only roughly one and a half per cent of planned social welfare spending and about half of one per cent of total current government spending.

However, if aid is seen as only one part of our total relations with developing countries, the spin-off benefits to Ireland from the aid programme become apparent as does the importance of our trade with developing countries.

For example, during the 1970s many Irish semi-state companies that had spare capacity due to the recession found lucrative use for it in contract and consultancy work in developing countries, often funded by the bilateral aid programme, the European Development Fund, the World Bank, or by the governments of developing countries. In 1984, twenty-four Irish semi-state bodies carried out consultancy assignments involving eighty-eight developing countries. The gross turnover was £62m. In the same year the aid programme amounted to £34m.⁷

Ireland's exports to developing countries were worth £658m in 1983 and the balance of trade was strongly in Ireland's favour.⁸ Growth in developing countries increases the demand for our exports and in general an open trading system favours a small open economy like Ireland's.

These factors are acknowledged in the National Plan. It points out that "while the principal objective of Ireland's ODA is humanitarian in character, the Irish economy also benefits both directly and indirectly, in terms of the employment provided and the promotion of exports of goods and services."⁹ The Plan also recognises the interdependence of rich and poor countries and argues that "... as a small country critically dependent on exports of both goods and services, we have much to gain in the long term from higher living standards and greater economic activity in developing countries."¹⁰ It also contends that "we cannot plan for our own nation's prosperity except in the context of a stable international system, a stability which underdevelopment in other countries threatens to undermine."¹¹

These arguments on grounds of self-interest are particularly plausible in respect of relations with middle-income developing countries in general and the Middle Eastern oil exporters in particular. They apply with much less force to relations with the least developed countries who engage in trade to a much lesser extent and who are not in general strategically important. Three of Ireland's four priority countries are classified as least developed.

Even leaving aside that fact it is doubtful whether the emphasis on self-interest arguments is likely to be the most fruitful approach to re-invigorating our national commitment to development assistance. This essentially defensive posi-

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tion was enunciated most notably in recent years by the Brandt Commission in making the case for development cooperation on grounds of interdependence and enlightened self-interest.¹²

Experience in other donor countries

The evidence, both from Ireland and other OECD donors suggests that emphasis on moral and humanitarian motivation for giving aid is likely to be more persuasive in bolstering public support for increased resource allocations.

A recent analysis of the motives of OECD donors in giving aid suggests that they vary in line with factors such as: the industrial and military profile of the donor; traditional relations with developing countries, particularly whether the donor is an ex-colonial power; the priority assigned to cooperation in global or regional international organizations such as the United Nations and the EEC which concern themselves *inter alia* with development cooperation; and the relative power of different domestic interest groups.¹³

The performance of the different OECD donors in relations to the UN target does not always reflect their ranking in terms of wealth. "There seems not to be any consistent correlation between the ability to provide aid (in terms of GNP per capita) and the general level of the ODA (in terms of ODA/GNP ratio)."¹⁴ For example, in 1981 Switzerland ranked first in the OECD in terms of GNP per capita and fifteenth in terms of the ODA/GNP ratio; the US ranked fourth in GNP per capita and sixteenth in terms of the ODA/GNP ratio; while the Netherlands on the other hand ranked twelfth in terms of GNP per capita and first in terms of the ODA/GNP ratio. Positive correlations do exist for some countries such as Norway (second in terms of GNP per capita and third in ODA/GNP ratio), Sweden (third and second respectively) and Italy (seventeenth on both counts).

The "front runners" in reaching the UN target are the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) and the Netherlands (see Table 4). These are the countries where aid policy has had "a predominantly altruistic flavour".¹⁵ The commitment to development cooperation has grown out of a humanitarian tradition involving relief and a Christian tradition involving charity and missionary activity. At the political level this commitment is rooted in the ideology of the welfare state. Except that it had, in addition, a colonial background, the origin and motivation of the Dutch aid programme is similar to the Scandinavian, having a strong moral component. These countries initiated aid programmes principally because of participation in the UN. Beginning at a low level in 1960, the programmes grew steadily during the 1960s, reached and then exceeded the UN target in the 1970s.

The former colonial powers on the other hand started out with high net flows of official resources to developing countries. These declined during the 1960s but, although not reaching the UN target, the volume performance was relatively high during the 1960s and 1970s.

While all aid donors are motivated to some degree by self-interest and while the evidence suggests that one impact of the current recession has been to increase the emphasis on self-centred rather than recipient centred aid in virtually all countries, it remains the case that those countries where

moral/humanitarian motives are uppermost are the countries with the better ODA/GNP ratios.

How does Ireland compare?

With regard to the origin of its ODA programme, Ireland shares some of the characteristics of the Scandinavian donors. For instance, Ireland's ODA programme began with participation in the United Nations and the mandatory contributions to UN agencies that arose as a consequence of membership. Multi-lateral contributions through the UN still form a large part of Ireland's total ODA expenditure (22% in 1984) and while roughly half of this is mandatory there is now a large discretionary element (48% in 1984). Notwithstanding the government's intention to reduce proportionately the size of multilateral contributions — which means, in effect UN contributions as we have no discretion over payments through the EEC — the importance of UN contributions to date reflects Ireland's status as a small country without colonial ties. It shares this status with the Scandinavian countries.

Further, similar to Scandinavia, the missionary involvement of Irish people in developing countries is a major strand in the historical development of the ODA programme. Traditionally, the concern of the Irish people for the peoples of the developing world was expressed through the work of Irish priests and religious around the world but particularly in Africa. It is estimated that there were 5,517 Irish missionary personnel in the Third World in 1981.¹⁶ The notion of a governmental responsibility to assist developing countries is a much more recent phenomenon.

Despite these common features the contrast in performance is very great. While the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands have exceeded the UN target the Irish ODA/GNP ratio languishes at roughly one-third of the target level. How is this difference explained? One factor is that Ireland is a latecomer in the sense that its ODA programme did not really take off until 1973-74, whereas the Scandinavian programmes have grown over the last twenty-five years. However, in each of the Scandinavian countries it took roughly a decade to raise the ODA/GNP ratio from around 0.18% to at least the UN target level. The dramatic growth in the Norwegian programme dates from 1967: ODA as a percentage of GNP grew from 0.17% in that year to exceed the UN target in 1976. It has continued to grow ever since reaching 1.13% of GNP in 1983. Similarly, in Sweden, the ODA/GNP ratio grew from 0.18% in 1964 to exceed the UN target ten years later. By 1983 the ratio had reached 1.18%. Denmark exceeded the UN target for the first time in 1977. Eleven years earlier, in 1966, its ODA/GNP ratio had been 0.19%. By 1983 it has reached 1.06%.

The pattern was somewhat different in the Netherlands where ODA was at a relatively higher level in 1960 owing to its colonial ties. The ratio declined in the mid-1960s before increasing steadily from 1965 to exceed the UN target ten years later. Ireland's ratio was 0.18% in 1979. On present plans it will be about 0.28% eight years later. Thus, the pace of growth achieved in the Scandinavian countries to reach the UN target is not being emulated in Ireland.

Even comparing Ireland's effort to that of another "late-starter" such as Finland, the performance is poor. Finnish ODA was equivalent to 0.15% of GNP

in 1978. Five years later the ratio had more than doubled to 0.33% of GNP. Finland is committed to reaching the UN target by 1990.

It might be argued that it is unfair to compare Ireland to the Scandinavian countries who are very much wealthier than Ireland in terms of GNP per capita. We have already seen that ODA performance does not correlate well with the level of GNP of the donor. Further, the target is expressed as a percentage of GNP precisely to get over the problem of differing levels of GNP. It might be contended that even if the UN target is the same proportion of GNP for all donors this places a greater burden on countries with lower absolute levels of GNP. Within the DAC group of donor countries should not Ireland's performance be compared with countries at the lower end of the GNP per capita league table?

Italy is the country closest to Ireland in terms of per capita GNP and until recently Ireland used to vie with Italy for bottom position on the ODA/GNP ratio league table. Since, in 1980 Italy adopted an interim target for ODA of raising the ODA/GNP ratio to the DAC average by 1983, ODA has grown rapidly from 0.23% of GNP in 1979 to 0.45% in 1983. The rapidity with which both Finland and Italy have been able to improve their ODA/GNP ratios in recent years puts the lie to the claim that the current recession is the bar to rapid progress in this area.

What is it that makes the difference in the countries that have achieved the UN target? The evidence suggests that "the prevailing norms and attitudes in society towards the development cooperation activities are probably the most decisive factors in most political systems...."¹⁷ The performance of the front-runners, the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands is partly explained by the existence of active and favorable public opinions and committed political leadership, with international targets having a pace-setting effect.

Positive Public Attitude

Commenting on the OECD Survey Stokke suggests that low ODA/GNP ratios of some other countries may be explained by their low GNPs, especially when this coincides with traditional relations with Third World at a low level and a rather uncommitted public opinion as far as development cooperation is concerned. Ireland clearly has a relatively low level of GNP. On the other two counts the fit is less obvious.

Traditional relations with developing countries, in particular through missionaries have been extensive. These have stimulated and complemented more recent officially-sponsored involvements in development activities.

The response of the Irish public to the recent appeals by the non-governmental agencies for assistance for the twenty-four famine-stricken countries in Africa suggests a very widespread commitment to assisting developing countries. Donations to non-governmental organisations for Africa in the latter half of 1984 totalled approximately £12m. Analysis of the source of the £7.5m in donations received by Trócaire alone shows that areas of the country suffering the greatest hardship in the current recession, such as Derry and Cork cities, were outstandingly generous.

It might be countered that responses to appeals such as these are misleading in that they reflect a deeply-felt but shortlived reaction to moving scenes on television.

Dail Deputy Nora Owen, Chairman of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Cooperation with Developing Countries, articulated this view recently when she commented that: "There has been a great upwelling of public emotion over the past six months because of the televising of pitiful pictures from Ethiopia. However, in recalling the history of previous such events — Biafra, Bangladesh, Ethiopia [in 1974], the boat people — one cannot help reflecting somewhat ruefully that the cycle on such occasions goes something as follows: unconcern, followed by shock and anger, followed by satisfaction with our own charity in response, and back to unconcern."¹⁸

This does not square with the experience of Irish non-governmental agencies. While special appeals do cause donations to peak, the level of contributions to the agencies is consistently high. For example the income of Trócaire since its foundation in 1973 has grown at an average annual rate of roughly 10% in real terms. To the extent that there is any validity in the transitory response argument, it places an onus on both the agencies and the official sector to nurture and sustain the impulse to respond and to draw out the links between immediate crisis and longer-term development problems.

It might be further argued that donations to non-governmental organisations, being voluntary, are of a different kind to ODA allocations funded through taxation. One can only speculate about the likelihood of resistance to substantially increased official tax-financed contributions. The evidence from Irish public opinion surveys quoted elsewhere in this publication suggests widespread approval for government aid to developing countries.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Cooperation with Developing Countries in its Report for 1984 recognised the difficulties in inferring widespread public support for increased ODA on the basis of the level of public support for voluntary agencies' activities given that "... there are also competing demands for other public services and for reduced or restricted taxation". It went on to state however that "it was the Committee's assessment ... that support would be forthcoming for significantly higher priority for ODA".¹⁹

Lack of Political Leadership

But as the Joint Oireachtas Committee also pointed out "there is an obligation on public representatives to inform and lead public opinion as well as merely to follow it".²⁰ In the front-runner countries it is the combination of favourable public opinion and "committed political leadership", that produces the remarkable ODA performance with each presumably reinforcing the other.

Development cooperation is a minority interest within the Oireachtas. As is the case with foreign affairs in general, it is debated infrequently and it is often only covered as one aspect of a wider debate. During 1984, for example, development cooperation was debated in Dail Eireann on eight occasions. Out of a total of 166 Dail Deputies, only 34 spoke on development cooperation. The visit of President Reagan gave rise to the liveliest debate, drawing contributions from 20 deputies. The famine in Africa was debated twice. Development cooperation

was covered in two debates on developments in the European Communities and in the debate on the Foreign Affairs vote. There was an adjournment debate on the detention of Father Niall O'Brien in the Philippines, and there were 20 Parliamentary Questions.

The most substantive debates on development cooperation in the Oireachtas during 1984, took place in the Seanad. A motion put down by Senator Michael D. Higgins on "aid for developing countries" produced a major debate on the underlying values, aims and philosophy of Ireland's development cooperation programme. There was also a major debate on disarmament and development and development cooperation was covered in a debate on developments in the European Community. In all 17 senators out of a total of 61 spoke on development cooperation issues.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Development Cooperation provides a forum wherein members of the Dáil and Seanad representing the main political parties can consider "(a) Ireland's relations with developing countries in the field of development cooperation and (b) the Government's Official Development Assistance to developing countries." However, development cooperation is an integral part of foreign policy. In the absence of a Foreign Affairs Committee dealing with areas that impinge on development cooperation but are outside the remit of the Development Cooperation Committee e.g. the policies of international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, or aspects of EEC policy, there is a danger that the effect of the Committee's existence is to consign development cooperation to a marginal role unrelated to mainstream foreign affairs issues.

The low priority attached to development cooperation and foreign affairs generally in the Oireachtas is mirrored in the roles adopted by Irish members of the European Parliament. The first directly elected parliament (1979-1984) had 19 specialist committees. The 15 Irish members concentrated their attention on the Committees dealing with topics of direct, narrowly defined national self-interest, i.e. agriculture, (3 Irish members), social affairs and employment (3), regional policy and regional planning (2), environment, public health and consumer protection (2), budgetary control (2). In addition there was one Irish member on committees dealing with each of political affairs; budgets; energy, research and technology; transport; and the situation of women in Europe.

While the Parliament was making a significant impact on Community development cooperation policy Irish members were uninvolved. There was no Irish member of the Committee on Development Cooperation (although there were two substitute members). Neither was there an Irish member of the Committee on External Economic Relations. No Irish MEP spoke in the major debate in the Parliament on world hunger in 1982, which was influential in shifting the emphasis in community development policy towards agriculture and food strategies.

In the current Parliament there is an Irish member (Niall Andrews) on the Development Cooperation Committee. There is still no Irish member on the External Economic Relations Committee.

Even some of the few politicians who are actively involved in development cooperation issues question the existence of a public constituency for increased

ODA, and stress the need to educate the public to “an increasingly sophisticated view”²¹ of development. Is it not more pertinent to question the existence of a constituency within the Oireachtas?

As Stokke points out, “a favourable public opinion towards development cooperation is not something that appears out of thin air ... Governments — and political parties ... that have been most active in ... supporting education and information work ... are also those which have been most successful in creating a favourable public opinion.... These are also the governments that have succeeded in increasing the ODA volumes of their countries — even under the strains of recession.”²² For example, the Scandinavian and Dutch governments have been very active in combining official information programmes with support for NGO development education activities.

The Irish government has been funding development education activities since 1978. Expenditure under this heading accounted for under 1% of bilateral ODA expenditure in 1984.

Is the implication then that the Irish government should allocate greater resources to development education? Undoubtedly, the range and effectiveness of development education programmes — both officially sponsored and NGO programmes — could be expanded and improved. However, an increased allocation of resources to development education is not a substitute for the kind of impetus that is needed.

There is evidence of a strong humanitarian commitment to aid on the part of the public. However, except perhaps for the years 1973–75 the political leadership needed to mould and focus this goodwill into increased support for the official programme has been absent. There is a need to specify the values and principles underlying the programme and to convince the public that the programme has clear, attainable and carefully considered objectives and that the projects and programmes undertaken are selected with these objectives in mind.

In the 1984 Seanad debate on development policy mentioned above Senator Higgins called for a broad, integrated development policy whose objectives would be accorded prominence within foreign policy. He pointed out that an analysis of how the problems confronting developing countries had arisen was a necessary precursor to an improved policy response. He suggested some of the values that might be explicitly enshrined in Ireland’s aid policy. These included “a commitment to equity, a commitment to the freedom that is integrity and the right to self-determination of these nations to solve their own problems in their own way, a commitment to democracy and the rights of countries to define democracy in their own terms ... respect for the countries that are seeking to undo problems of different kinds, of imperialism and of dictatorship ... respect for cultural diversity ... recognition for environmental integrity.”²³ He outlined an agenda of issues that ought to be considered. These included re-negotiation of debts, restructuring of trade, re-examination of international aid agencies, a new set of procedures for the transfer of technical assistance and for the transfer of food aid.

Senator Higgins’ list of values and issues is unlikely to meet with universal agreement. But the topics raised by him and other senators in that debate provide a useful catalogue of the issues that must be addressed.

Conclusion

In the mid-1970s the Irish ODA programme appeared to be about to enter a period of very rapid growth. Membership of the EEC combined with a new level of commitment to ODA as an integral part of foreign policy to inject new life into the programme. There appeared to be a commitment by all the political parties to accelerating allocations at least until Ireland was at or around the DAC average in terms of the ratio of ODA to GNP (i.e. around half the UN target). While performance did improve, by the end of the decade the ODA/GNP ratio was still only 0.17%.

Despite the disappointing performance over these years, the Coalition's Programme for Government drawn up in 1980 gave a commitment to reaching the UN target by 1990. In the wake of the National Plan commitment to 1987 this appears to be abandoned.

Were one now to think in terms of doubling the ODA/GNP ratio from its 1985 level of 0.24% by the end of the decade, it would require the immediate restoration of the old 0.05% target annual increases and this target would have to be met. This would be an unprecedentedly good performance.

If this were achieved then the prospects for reaching the UN target by 1995 would be reasonable. This would mean Ireland reaching the target a full twenty years later than the latest date suggested by the UN for all industrialised countries, and five years later than the Coalition had pledged in 1980.

The spin-off benefits to Ireland from the official aid programme have become increasingly apparent as more and more semi-state and private companies engage in consultancy work in developing countries. However, it has been argued here that emphasising these benefits is not the road to revitalising the programme. Public interest in development issues is based on a humanitarian desire to alleviate poverty. It is this impulse that needs to be acknowledged and harnessed into support for an expanded official programme. This can only be achieved with the kind of political leadership evident in some other donor countries but lacking in Ireland to date.

Overall it would seem that the attempt to elevate development cooperation to a more prominent position on the agenda of the Oireachtas, or in the public consciousness is a struggle to broaden the world view of the society. The "prevailing norms and attitudes" in Irish society are not particularly hospitable to the kind of "one world" approach that interrelates issues such as disarmament, environmental protection, technological change and development cooperation into a holistic understanding of the major global issues.

In Ireland, more so than in other European countries, the preoccupations are predominantly local. (See the discussion of the findings of the European Value Systems Study in the following article: "Public Attitudes to ODA".) While there is a strong humanitarian motivation to help the Third World there is a dearth of analysis of what the Third World's problems are, how they arose, the possible avenues to solutions, the role of industrialised countries, etc. Without such a basis in analysis Ireland's development cooperation effort will be a well-meaning but overly responsive policy, rather than a coherent attempt to act in line with values, principles and choices consciously adopted.

The promised policy paper on development cooperation and the debate on it in the Dáil and Seanad will provide one opportunity to air these issues. Clarification of what we are trying to achieve in this area and why, could shift official development cooperation policy into a higher gear and as a by-product reinvigorate our commitment to achieving the UN aid target within a reasonable period.

FOOTNOTES.

¹The phrase was first used in the statement on behalf of Ireland at the 25th General Assembly of the United Nations in the debate on the Second Development Decade in 1970. Subsequent reiterations appear in e.g. a speech by Dr Patrick Hillery, Minister for External Affairs, entitled "The EEC Institutions, Development Aid and National Culture" delivered to Miltown Malbay Comhairle Cheanntair on 18/12/1970 (p. 5), and Parliamentary Debates, Dáil Eireann, Official Report, Vol. 253, p. 444-445, 1971, and Vol. 258, p. 29, 1971.

²Parliamentary Debates, Dáil Eireann, Official Report, Vol. 265, p. 767, 1973.

³Address to the Council of Ministers of the EEC, 30 April 1974, p. 1; text published by the Government Information Service

⁴For a full discussion of the varying interpretations of this target statement see Mary Sutton, *Irish Government Aid to the Third World - Review and Assessment*, Trócaire/Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, 1977, pp. 20-36.

⁵*Building on Reality 1985-87*, Stationery Office, Dublin, 1984, p. 116.

⁶Further, the plan commitments were made on the assumption that the outturn for 1983 was to be 0.23% of GNP. In the event it was 0.22%. Official statements still speak of a ratio of 0.27% by 1987. If the ratio increased to only 0.265% by 1987, the plan commitments would have been met.

⁷DEVCO — State Agencies Development Cooperation Organisation, 9th Annual Report 1984, p. 5.

⁸*Trade Statistics of Ireland*, December 1983, Stationery Office, Dublin

⁹*Building on Reality 1985-1987*, p. 116.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*North-South - A Programme for Survival*, The Report of the Independent Commission on International Development, issued under the chairmanship of Willy Brandt, Pan Books, London, 1980.

¹³Stokke, Olav, (ed.), *European Development Assistance, Vol. 1. Policies and Performance*, the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes, Tilburg, and The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Oslo, 1984.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 23

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 16

¹⁶*Irish Missionary Union*, Irish Missionary Personnel Overseas and their contribution in Educational, Medical and Social Fields, Dublin, 1982

¹⁷Stokke, op. cit., p. 25

¹⁸Nora Owen, TD, "Irish Assistance to Developing Countries"; notes for an address to a Fine Gael function in Limerick on 4 February, 1985, p. 10

¹⁹Joint Oireachtas Committee on Co-operation with Developing Countries, *Report for 1984*, p. 4

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Owen, op. cit., p. 10

²²Stokke, op. cit., p. 25

Table 1: **Ireland's Assistance to Developing Countries 1984**

| | | £m |
|----|--|---------------|
| A. | 1 Departmental Administration | <u>0.485</u> |
| | Sub-total | 0.485 |
| B. | European Community | |
| | 2 EEC Budget for Development Cooperation | 8.400 |
| | 3 European Development Fund | 3.136 |
| | 4 Conference on International Economic Cooperation | <u>0.025</u> |
| | Sub-total | 11.561 |
| C. | United Nations and World Bank | |
| | 5 International Development Association | 2.254 |
| | 6 World Bank | 1.400 |
| | 7 United Nations Agencies | 1.815 |
| | 8 World Food Programme | 0.697 |
| | 9 Food and Agriculture Organisation | 0.400 |
| | 10 Miscellaneous Voted Expenditure | <u>0.454</u> |
| | Sub-total | 7.020 |
| D. | Bilateral Assistance | |
| | 11 Bilateral Aid Programme | 9.710 |
| | 12 APSO | 1.800 |
| | 13 Disaster Relief | 1.150 |
| | 14 Gorta | 0.066 |
| | 15 Advisory Council on Development Cooperation | <u>0.073</u> |
| | Sub-total | <u>12.799</u> |
| | Total ODA in 1984 | 31.865 |

SOURCE: Department of Foreign Affairs, *Ireland - Assistance to Developing Countries*, 1984, p. 8.

Table 2: **Ireland's ODA 1974-1984 (actual) and 1985-87 (planned), £m and as a proportion of GNP.**

| | ODA | Pence out of every £100 of GNP |
|----------------------|------|--------------------------------|
| National Coalition | 1974 | 5 |
| | 1975 | 8 |
| | 1976 | 10 |
| | 1977 | 12 |
| | 1978 | 13 |
| Fianna Fail | 1979 | 18 |
| | 1980 | 17 |
| | 1981 | 18 |
| National Coalition | 1981 | 18 |
| | 1982 | 20 |
| Fianna Fail | 1982 | 20 |
| | 1983 | 22 |
| National Coalition | 1983 | 22 |
| | 1984 | 22 |
| | 1985 | 24 |
| <i>National Plan</i> | 1986 | 26 |
| | 1987 | 27 |

Memo Item

UN target = 0.7% of GNP or 70p in every £100 of GNP.

Table 3: National Plan — Implications of ODA Revisions

| Year | (1) G.N.P. (£m) | (2) ODA (£m) | (2) as % of (1) |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| New Target (annual increases of 0.015% of GNP) | | | |
| 1984 | 14650 | 34.0m | 0.23 |
| 1985 | 15650 | 38.3m | 0.245 |
| 1986 | 17000 | 44.2m | 0.26 |
| 1987 | 18500 | 50.9m | 0.275 |
| Old Target (annual increases of 0.05% of GNP) | | | |
| 1984 | 14650 | 34.0m | 0.23 |
| 1985 | 15650 | 43.8m | 0.28 |
| 1986 | 17000 | 56.1m | 0.33 |
| 1987 | 18500 | 70.3m | 0.38 |

Memo Item**Shortfall** in ODA assuming achievement of targets

| | |
|--------------|----------------------|
| 1985 | 5.5m |
| 1986 | 11.9m |
| 1987 | <u>19.4m</u> |
| Total | £36.8 million |

Table 4: Net Official Development Assistance from DAC Countries to Developing Countries and Multilateral Agencies, 1983

| Country | \$ million | % GNP |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Australia | 753 | 0.49 |
| Austria | 158 | 0.23 |
| Belgium | 480 | 0.59 |
| Canada | 1429 | 0.45 |
| Denmark | 395 | 0.73 |
| Finland | 153 | 0.33 |
| France | 3815 | 0.74 |
| Germany | 3176 | 0.49 |
| Italy | 827 | 0.24 |
| Japan | 3761 | 0.33 |
| Netherlands | 1195 | 0.91 |
| New Zealand | 61 | 0.28 |
| Norway | 584 | 1.06 |
| Sweden | 754 | 0.85 |
| Switzerland | 320 | 0.32 |
| United Kingdom | 1605 | 0.35 |
| United States | 7992 | 0.24 |
| Total DAC Countries | 27458 | 0.36 |

SOURCE: Development Co-operation 1984 Review, OECD, Paris, 1984, Table 11. B.6.