

**A submission to the Review by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
of
Ireland's Foreign Policy and External Relations**

Submission from 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World

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Note: the views expressed in this submission do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the individual member organisations.

About 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World

80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World is an Irish-based registered charity founded in 1996 promoting popular education on human development and human rights.

80:20 is also a member of the online consortium-based partnership project **www.DevelopmentEducation.ie** for development education in Ireland concerning global issues in human development, human rights and development cooperation.

1. Promoting our values and interests

Ireland's foreign policy should uphold the principles Ireland has been known for historically - peace, justice and human security - we should avoid policies and practices that undermine these principles – references to the need to live in the 'real world' and to being realistic etc. should not become an excuse for giving primacy to commercial or economic interests.

The principle of 'do no harm' should animate all our actions - we need to recognise that the world is hugely unjust and divided and our model of development is not sustainable even now let alone in the future of our children and grandchildren - limited self-interest and self-promotion should not be the basis of our foreign policy be it in commerce and trade, diplomacy and security, development and aid. Whatever we do, we must do no further harm to people (especially those that are poorest and most vulnerable) or to the planet and through our foreign policy we should try to ensure that others act likewise.

At its core, Irish foreign policy should challenge the models of economic and political development internationally that undermine human security and human development, threaten the planet, ignore human rights and place short-term sectional interests above longer-term majority interests.

While the consultation mentions that Ireland has a long tradition of supporting human rights standards and institutions it does not mention this again within the context of objectives of the policy review. Human rights have a vital role to play in peace, international justice and multilateral initiatives in both ideas and practice. In tandem with principals to 'do no harm' and promote sustainable development, human rights should be a central value through which Irish foreign policy is guided and shaped.

Irish people are increasingly excluded from debate and discussion on Ireland's foreign policy - it has become the preserve of an elite made up of civil servants, diplomats, academics, a limited group of journalists and politicians - this must change. People have a right to have a say as this policy affects them in many ways. Active citizenship and education opportunities around foreign policy and aid are vital to our democracy and to ensuring that appropriate principles and interests animate that policy. Greatly increased opportunities for public engagement, debate and stimulation on foreign policy is long overdue and within a new framework for foreign policy there should be a clear commitment to enhanced public engagement at a variety of levels. How Ireland acts internationally, what the consequences of its actions are and how we are seen internationally affects all Irish people. Ensuring adequate discussion, stimulation and debate on foreign policy is the right and the responsibility of every citizen – it must not be allowed become the exclusive preserve of an elite.

1.1 As a small state with limited resources and influence, on which international issues should Ireland focus?

- Sustainable development
- Women's rights
- Human Development
- Human Rights

1.2 Our foreign policy promotes a clear image of Ireland abroad. How can we build on this to pursue a broad range of political, economic and cultural objectives?

By ensuring that everything we do builds and promotes that image – of a small country focused on ensuring the values and principles of equality, justice and fairness – and by avoiding becoming embroiled in the rush for 'spoils' commercially and by avoiding copying the actions of the big powers in this regard. In short, by ensuring that everything we do is fair and reasonable.

2. EU external relations

2.1 How can we contribute to ensuring that the European Union successfully defends and promotes our global interests?

As a peripheral European country, Irish foreign policy should be more reflective and understanding of the impact that large economic centres such as Europe can have on other parts of the world, especially those that are poorer. While political and economic regionalism is essential Ireland should not simply promote 'growth, investment and development' through the EU at the expense of development in the poorest regions and countries in the world.

The average rate at which people consume resources like oil and metals and produce wastes such as plastics and greenhouse gases is about 32 times higher in Western Europe, than in the developing world.¹ The huge inequalities in lifestyles and living standards that the EU protects, promotes and maintains is hypocritical within the context of how Europe develops on a planet that cannot support the same for the rest of the world's population.

The EU should be leading by example and reduce its global footprint and Ireland should take a lead role in pursuing this within the context of climate change and sustainable development both domestically and internationally.

¹ More information about the ratio 32:1 can be found at www.developmenteducation.ie/consumption and from Jared Diamond [What's Your Consumption Factor?](#) New York Times, January 2nd, 2008.

3. Economic Diplomacy and Building Bilateral Relationships

3.1 How can our foreign policy and economic diplomacy support economic development and growth?

Irish foreign policy should support economic growth and development based on a set of core guiding principles and values that Irish citizens can historically identify with and are based on current concerns. The role and impact of market economics is not neutral; the recent financial and banking crises' have proven the social and economic damage on citizens and Irish institutions by placing blind faith in commercial growth and market economics. A stronger link to economic transparency and accountability of Ireland's commercial interests should be supported in the foreign policy outcome document.

At the end of 2012 there were some 185,000 companies in existence on the register in Ireland. The global footprint that these companies leave on the planet is no small measure of Ireland's presence on the global stage. Whether the footprint that Irish companies leave is developed sustainably, follows socially responsible practices (such as abiding by international standards like the Forestry Stewardship Council codes) or respects human rights principles and standards abroad to pay fair wages, treat workers respectfully and avoid damaging local industries in foreign countries, for example, is dependent on the kind of foreign policy Ireland has in place.

Economic growth supported for the sake of Irish employment and higher living standards in Ireland should not be pursued at the expense of those living in the poorest countries of the world. Ireland should not project foreign policies and external relations on the basis that endless economic growth at home is the key priority.

4. International Development

4.1 How best might Ireland deliver on the commitments in One World, One Future through a Whole of Government approach?

Government departments should work more coherently and effectively on the values and interests that foreign policy and external relations communicate; pursuing one policy via one Department while pursuing a different and contradictory policy via another Department must be avoided (for example, separating human rights objectives from commercial objectives is incoherent). Supporting unsustainable models of development internationally while promoting education for sustainable development at home (via the strategy produced by the Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with the Department of Environment and Local Government in 2014²) is yet another example.

² For background information on the ESD consultation see the Department of Education and Skills website <http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Events/Education-for-Sustainable-Development>

Interdepartmental working groups should be further utilised to strengthen and deepen policy cohesion and practice between departments. Building supportive culture and visible structures across the civil service and between departments is vital in achieving this.

4.2 How can a commitment to international development be better reflected across Ireland's foreign policy?

Asking how our aid programme can assist Irish commercial interests is absolutely the wrong question to ask. Irish people support our aid programme because they want it to serve the needs and interests of the poor not because it serves the narrow interests of Irish business - if we let commercial interests come to dominate our aid programme then we will have undermined what we have laboured hard to achieve in previous decades. Our aid programme must continue to serve the interests and agendas of the world's poor regardless of what other aid programmes get up to.

5. Northern Ireland

5.1 We have a unique experience of building and sustaining peace on this island. How can this experience be drawn upon in our foreign policy?

Ireland's commitment to sustainable peace and human rights standards and institutions is commendable and should be more clearly communicated in its foreign policy values and interests and not only in its international development work. Irish foreign policy should be proactively seeking to enrich peace and reconciliation processes more actively based on the experience of the peace process in Northern Ireland. Supporting public education opportunities to learn from Northern Ireland are essential for building support toward this aspect of foreign policy in the medium to long term – particularly within the context of nationalist narratives and the anniversary of the Irish insurrection in 1916.

6. Promoting a positive image of Ireland

6.1 How can our foreign policy contribute to a clear and identifiable image of Ireland abroad?

Ireland's image abroad should not be defined by the largest number of commercial opportunities it can maximise in the world. Within the context of widening natural resources grabs in developing countries in recent years Ireland should be promoting strong human rights and sustainable development standards and values of in its trade, tourism and investment practices.