



The Irish Association of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations

Dóchas Education in International Development and Emergencies Working Group (EWG)

Presentation to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs & Trade & Defence

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Speakers:

- **Paul O'Brien, CEO Plan International Ireland**
- **Brigid Tunney, Loreto Sisters - Member of Mísean Cara**
- **Anne O'Mahony, Head of International Programmes**
- **Triona Pender, Head of Programmes, Action Aid**

Paul O'Brien, CEO Plan International Ireland – Introduction

Good morning,

Can I first of all thank you Chair and the Committee for the invitation to meet with you today. It is privilege and opportunity to present on the issue of Education and answer any question you may have. My name is Paul O'Brien and I am the CEO of Plan International Ireland and member of Dóchas Board.

Inequality is reaching new extremes. Significant increases in inequality of both income and wealth are leading to larger gaps between rich and poor, men and women. This is creating serious obstacles to overcoming poverty and exclusion, and stopping us creating a more equal, peaceful and sustainable world.

With women and girls over-represented in the rank of the poorest, this is also reinforcing gender inequality, blocking progress for women and human rights.

In most countries children born into rich families will go to the best possible schools, very often being privately educated. They will have small class sizes, well-trained teachers and get good results in State Exams. These students will have multiple opportunities to grow their inherited opportunities.

Girls and boys born into poverty, suffering from ill health and malnutrition, arrive at the school gates already disadvantaged – if they arrive there at all. They will then struggle with overcrowded facilities that lack trained and qualified teachers, textbooks and toilets.

Inequalities of income are compounded with other inequalities of gender, ethnicity, disability and geography – therefore exacerbating exclusion.

Pulled out of schools before their brothers, millions more of the world's poorest girls will continue to have their life chances hindered by an education that is all too brief.

The barriers to girls participating in and completing education are wide-ranging and intersectional. They include high rates of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), early pregnancy and lack of information and access to Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services, school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) and harmful gender norms which result in discriminatory curricula, textbooks, pedagogy and educational policies. This has significant impact on girls' ability to complete their basic education (primary and secondary), be able to participate in the Labour Force, have their views heard and access positions of power.

On the other hand, good quality public education for all can be a powerful engine for greater equality. Beyond boosting incomes, good education is an engine for equality in other important ways:

- **Reducing poverty.** A good education makes the likelihood of higher incomes and lower poverty much greater.
- **Boosting opportunity for all.** i.e., the possibility for children from poor families to end up better off than their parents.
- **Bringing society together.** Schools can be places where the barriers of inequality are broken down. This will give young people the tools to go into the world and build more equitable societies.
- **Supporting democratic societies.** Education offers individuals the tools to exercise their right to an equal say over the structures and policies that govern their lives, which boost democracy.
- **Promoting stability and peace in time of crisis.** Education in emergency and protracted crisis breaks the cycle of hopelessness, frustration and anger, offers protections and provides a visible sign of normality for children.

Good education has considerable power to increase equality between women and men. Education can help tackle gender disparities in wages, poverty, reproductive autonomy and political power. It can dramatically improve outcomes for women and their children.

The more educated girls are, the more power they have over their lives, particularly over when they marry and how many children they have. If all girls in Sub-Saharan Africa and South West Asia completed secondary education, there would be a 64% drop in child marriages. ¹

The more educated mothers are, the healthier they and their children are. It has been estimated that if all girls had completed primary education, there would be a 66% reduction in maternal deaths, and a 15% reduction in child deaths. ²

Good quality education has the power to challenge traditional social attitudes and ensure that girls and boys know that they are equal.

Plan International Ireland fully endorses the submission from Dóchas with whom we are actively working to promote the right to free, public and high quality education for all.

¹ http://www.unesco.org/new/en/brasilgia/about-this-office/single-view/news/womens_education_helps_avert_child_marriage/

² <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/girls-factsheet-en.pdf>

After a number of years in which education was not prioritised in Ireland's overseas aid policy, the commitment to spend at least €250 million over the next five years, as noted in the new Policy for International Development *A better world*, and the recent pledge at United Nation General Assembly (UNGA) to support Education in Emergencies (EiE) with €6.5m for the organisation Education Cannot Wait (ECW) in 2019 is a positive sign that education is back as Ireland's priority.

We warmly welcome the acknowledgement of education as priority in *A Better World* and the recommendation to increase funding for education, especially girls' education by the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs & Trade & Defence (JCFATD) as stated in the latest Review of the Irish Aid Programme.

But this should just be the beginning.

In the Post-*Brexit* scenario with the UK's departure from the EU leaving a leadership gap on education Ireland can seek to fill this leadership role, promoting the importance of investing in education for global development and stability, in line with our own experience.

Ireland is a clear example of the positive impact investment in universal education can have on a country's economic and social development.

As European leader on education Ireland could join with Canada in the push for education for all, especially girls, driving the promotion of gender transformative education as key in realising progress in fighting inequality.

Investing in gender transformative education, is vital to breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Gender transformative education seeks to explicitly challenge and eliminate gender bias and discrimination not only in the classroom, but in society more broadly.

Finally, we are here to seek the Committee's support for the Education sector in Overseas Aid, particularly the education of girls and the many benefits this will bring; encouraging a focus on those furthest behind that we reach them first and to ensure that Irish Government funding goes to public education services rather than the private sector. These points will be outlined in more detailed by my colleagues.

Again, thank you for the invitation today and we would be please to answer any questions members may have.

Video "We are the next" (1.08mins)

Girls' Education in South Sudan

**Sr. Brigid Tunney, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM) (member of
Misean Cara)**

“To educate girls is to reduce poverty. Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls and the empowerment of women.” **Kofi Annan April 2003**

South Sudan has been at war for 45 of the last 65 years. As a result, development in the country has been stifled. Infrastructure is very poor. Four million people are displaced and another six million depend on food aid in order to survive. According to UNESCO³, over 2.2 million children of school-going age were out of school in 2015. More than half of secondary school-aged children were out of school, with the rates reaching 75% for girls in rural areas.

As in many cultures in Africa, the payment of a dowry or bride-price is common practice in South Sudan. Daughters are thus seen as a source of wealth for the family. Upon getting married, however, girls leave their birth family and become part of their husband's family. Traditionally, then, investing in a girl's future is seen as a waste of resources. The thinking is that it's better to marry a girl off quickly to bring the dowry in to the family. As a result, child marriage is common. A girl of fifteen in South Sudan is more likely to be married with children than to be in school. Girls are taken from the classroom from as early as eleven years old to be married off. Keeping girls in school to complete their primary and secondary school education is a constant battle.

Following on a long tradition of Irish missionary education in developing countries, the Loreto Girls' Secondary School in Maker Kuei, Rumbek opened in 2008 with 35 girls and today has an enrolment of 291. It is a boarding school, providing a secure and safe environment for the girls to pursue their education. When the girls are within the compound, it reduces the risk of violence, rape and forced marriage.

But, as I have said, keeping the girls in school is the most significant challenge. In 2011, the drop-out rate from the school was a very discouraging 68%. We decided to exploit the power of male family members to achieve our goal of full retention in education for our students. After much discussion, planning and negotiation, we introduced what we call a Commitment Form. This document is signed by a male family member and commits the family to ensuring that the girl in question completes the four years of the secondary cycle. No girl is admitted to the school without a signed Commitment Form. And it's working – in 2018, the drop-out rate had fallen to 1.4%.

But, as I've already mentioned, it's a constant battle. At Christmas 2018, two of our students did not want to go home for the holidays because they were certain they would be kept at home and married off against their will. They opted to remain in the school compound instead. The heads of the two families were not happy with this, but we managed to use the signed Commitment Forms to plead the girls' cases. On the basis of the forms, the local Paramount

³ UNESCO, Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children: South Sudan Country Study, 2018, at <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/global-initiative-out-of-school-children-south-sudan-country-study.pdf>

Chief managed to secure a ministerial order from the State Ministry of Education, endorsing the girls' right to remain in school.

One of those girls was Mary, a first-year student. She had already been taken away twice by her family to be married off during the 2018 school year. She was tied up and beaten but managed to escape and returned to the school. At Christmas, we hid her in the convent until we had negotiated with her father that she can stay in school until she has completed her education. Mary will not leave the compound for another two years. She is happy to do that to get an education.

In the Western world, the notion of a boarding school is generally associated with wealth and privilege, but the Loreto boarding school in Rumbek creates a safe place for vulnerable girls to complete their education (heavily subsidised by donations, I must add). I want to mention another benefit of the school – the promotion of peace. Peace is fragile in South Sudan. When disagreements occur, violence is often the first rather than the last resort. Revenge killing is common, and the violence often breaks down along ethnic lines. But, coming from different states and various ethnic groups, the girls in the boarding school are learning that they can live together in peace. The school's Peace Club and Culture Club play a part in this. They learn about one another's cultures and the need for all to live in harmony if the people of South Sudan are to have a future.

Misean Cara's members warmly welcomed this Committee's February 2018 Report on its review of the Irish Aid Programme. We welcomed in particular two recommendations: that the Government examine opportunities to increase funding to missionary bodies, and that it review and consider an increase in support to education, placing a particular emphasis on quality education and girls' education. The experience of the girls attending the Loreto School in Rumbek is a testimony to the power and impact of education on the individual and on society.

90% of our graduates have gone on to third level education. They are training in nursing and teaching, are employed with NGOs and in local radio etc. In a social media post for Women's Day 2017, one of those graduates, acknowledging the education received in Loreto Rumbek, wrote, "*I promise you that South Sudan will have great women because of you. We are the source of strength and agents of change in our society.*"

These are words of hope for the fragile nation of South Sudan and particularly for the women of South Sudan. These words confirm the importance of girls' education in forwarding women's rights and in developing a new emerging independent nation.

Thank you for your support to our work, and long may that support continue and grow.

School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV): Global and Sierra Leone Programme

Anne O'Mahony, Head of International Programmes, Concern

School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) affects millions of children, families, and communities and occurs in all countries across the world. While research on the extent and scope of SRGBV is limited, data compiled by UNICEF on violence against children shows the disturbing extent of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, much of it occurring within schools.

- Around 120 million girls (one in 10) under the age of 20 worldwide have experienced sexual violence. Although this data is not disaggregated according to where the violence took place, high rates of sexual harassment in schools have been reported in many countries.
- Millions of children live in fear of physical abuse under the guise of discipline: more than 80 per cent of students in some countries suffer corporal punishment at school. Half of all children worldwide live in countries where they have no legal protection from corporal punishment.
- Marginalized groups are at increased risk – research in Uganda shows, 24 per cent of 11 to 14-year-old girls with disabilities reported sexual violence at school, compared to 12 per cent of non-disabled girls.

A 2006 UN Report⁴ identified violence against children – including in school settings – as a global phenomenon. Yet almost a decade later, significant gaps in knowledge still exist regarding the nature and extent of the impact of SRGBV on children's participation in education.

Focusing on one of the countries where Concern works, Sierra Leone ranks among the lowest on the Human Development Index⁵ with a literacy rate of 67% among the population aged 15-24 years. Since the civil war ended the Education sector has made great strides with improving access to Primary Education, with a current gross Enrolment Rate of 113%. However, the 2014 Ministry of Education, Science and Technology nationwide Early Grades Reading Assessment (EGRA) indicated that school pupils were not learning. Research undertaken by Concern, Plan, CRS and Ibis⁶ showed that part of the challenge is that SRGBV and inequality are major barriers to the education of marginalized children in Sierra Leone, with children, especially girls, exposed to significant violence within schools, families and communities.

In order to address these issues, Concern Worldwide introduced the Safe Learning Model (SLM) in Tonkolili District (2017-2021) with the support of Irish Aid. The working assumption behind this is that children's educational progress will be enhanced when they live in communities where there is more support for gender equality and children's well-being. The

⁴ 2006 UN World Report on Violence Against Children (Pinheiro, 2006) available at <https://www.unicef.org/violencestudy/reports.html>

⁵ http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2018_human_development_statistical_update.pdf the page with the literacy rate figures is p57

⁶ <https://www.concern.net/insights/school-related-gender-based-violence-sierra-leone-2010>

SLM includes such components as teacher training and development, child literacy, social and emotional learning, adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH), community decision-making and planning sessions and work with school management committees. This should enable improvements in the children's immediate environment in terms of attitudes to gender equality, gender-based violence, children's learning and children's well-being. With these improvements in the environment, we expect children's literacy and well-being to improve over the course of the three-year intervention delivery period, and that children will also experience greater gender equality and reduced gender-based violence in their schools and communities.

Our initial findings from our recently completed pilot phase have shown us that:

1. There are differences in expectations for schooling for girls and boys, with lower expectations for girls
2. 46% of Class 1 children had an EGRA score of zero, i.e., could not answer any of the questions correctly
3. Teenage pregnancies are widespread in Tonkolili district affecting girls enrolment
4. Approximately 70% of respondents are whipped or caned regularly by parents and teachers. These findings will help inform our work as we move into the next phase of the project.

While these are only preliminary results, Concern has developed a research partnership with University College Dublin to learn more about SRGBV and the impact it has on learning, and we look forward to being able to share our findings with the global community over the next five years.

Our asks to the Irish Government are:

1. Continue to invest in a holistic approach to education that focuses on access, quality and well-being, with particular attention being paid to girls' education.
2. Prioritise support to the education systems of the poorest and most vulnerable countries to make sure those further behind are reached first.
3. Invest in more comprehensive research and data collection so that we can further understand what needs to be done to address issues of school related gender based violence.

Privatisation of Education Speech

Triona Pender: Head of Programmes, ActionAid

Good morning everyone and thank you once again for this opportunity to share on the issue of privatisation of education in the Global South.

In recent decades neoliberal economic policies, championed by the IMF and World Bank, have constrained state funding for public services, often triggering crises in provision, quality and access, thereby undermining the realisation of rights, particularly in the Global South. Indeed, ActionAid's forthcoming research across 56 countries will show how IMF conditions and policy advice (especially on public sector wages) continue to undermine the investment in public services needed to achieve the SDGs. The crises in public financing, together with a belief that the private sector provides greater 'efficiency' and cost-effectiveness, have been used to justify dismantling universal public services, handing them over to private providers or supporting public-private partnerships (PPP). One consequence is often increasingly unequal provision, exacerbating the exclusion of women and girls (and other marginalised groups) given their vastly unequal responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work, especially where user fees are charged. Even under a PPP providing for services that are free at the point of use, the costs and risks to the public purse are often high, transparency and accountability are usually low, and human rights violations are often exacerbated. As NGOs committed to a human rights-based approach, we all recognise basic needs as basic rights and oppose all forms of exclusion and discrimination. We regard strengthening the accountable provision of quality, universal and gender-responsive public services, financed through systems of progressive taxation, as central to the equitable fulfilment of rights. We consider privatisation and PPPs as fundamental human rights issues.

We believe it is illogical to expect that the private sector, with a mandate to generate maximum profit and increase shareholder wealth, will take responsibility for delivering quality public services - and basic rights - to all people, including those living in poverty. Yet this perspective long held by international financial institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and the OECD, is also evident in many discussions around the financing and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is increasingly influential amongst some bilateral donors. For example, there is a situation currently in Ethiopia, of private schools expelling students who can no longer afford to pay fees and with-holding their examination papers making it impossible for them to continue their education elsewhere, at any point, until these fees are paid.

Our asks of Governments in the North are:

- Refrain from proposing, supporting, endorsing or financing privatisation processes or Public Private Partnerships in their home countries and abroad, including in their role as donors, trading partners, shareholders of multilateral development banks, and in international fora like the United Nations and the Global Partnership for Education.
- Be explicit in word and deed about how privatisation and PPPs undermine human rights and specifically further marginalise vulnerable excluded women and girls by increasing violence and unpaid care and domestic work, as well as reinforcing risky working conditions.

- Make an explicit, global commitment to supporting public services as the foundation for advancing progress on human rights and sustainable development, particularly to ensure no one is left behind. Encourage governments to abide by the newly developed Abidjan Principles on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education. ActionAid recently completed a study on the impact of privatisation on the right to education focusing on 7 countries: Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria and Uganda (I will leave a copy with you). This report, which used the Abidjan Principle as a framework for analysis, clearly states that the overall impact of privatisation has been negative and encourages donors to *support free, quality, public education for all and the development of a system-oriented approach to ensuring this is provided to the highest attainable quality for all children....* Thank you.