

What Next?

A practical guide to
continuing development
work in Ireland



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Foreword

“What Next?” is a valuable and useful resource.

It is valuable in recognising that a commitment to social justice is not just for a period in our lives but must be part and parcel of how we live our lives. It is valuable in recognising that a commitment to social justice is not just a matter for ‘over there’ in the so-called developing world, but is also an urgent necessity ‘back here’ in Ireland. It is useful because all too often without a bit of help and encouragement one’s commitment to social justice can face so many barriers that it just wanes and disappears without further expression.

It is no easy task for returned development workers to find the space to give practical expression to solidarity with those experiencing inequality, discrimination, poverty and exclusion in Ireland. It is no easy task to work out how to continue one’s solidarity with the peoples of the developing world.

New contacts need to be made. Often new skills are required and further training is necessary. Sometimes a

new type of job needs to be secured, new ideas developed and new lifestyles created. The level of personal change and challenge that drove me when I went to Mozambique was waiting for me on my return, to ensure I sought ways to continue to work for social justice and equality. Help is welcome and necessary to meet the challenge and achieve this personal change.

I returned from Mozambique over thirty years ago. It is a source of amazement and admiration that Comhlámh was there then too offering this help and encouragement. It is a tribute to all involved that this tradition is being continued.

I hope ‘What Next’ is widely disseminated and secures a wide readership. It communicates an important message and offers valuable assistance.

Niall Crowley
Chief Executive Officer
Equality Authority

4th November, 2008

Introduction

If you're a recently returned development worker or volunteer (RDW), and have decided to stay in Ireland, but aren't sure what to do with your experiences, then this is the booklet for you!

'What Next?' is a companion to Comhlámh's 'Coming Home Book', which supports RDWs in settling back into life in Ireland. This booklet is about the next stage: how you can stay engaged in global development work at home, whatever choices you make about your future in Ireland.

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT WORK DOES NOT END WHEN YOU STEP OFF THE PLANE!

Through your work and experiences abroad as an RDW, you will have developed a unique perspective on the effects and causes of global poverty and social injustice that many others will not have.

Having seen the effects of globalisation on the communities they have worked with, many RDWs say that it is only when they return home that they can really start making a difference.

The good news is: the motivation and passion that drove you 'over there' can drive change 'back here', too. The positive changes we can make here, together, will improve lives of people in developing countries.

As an RDW, you can bring a critical, global perspective into your work and daily life, and the lives of others. This could mean, for example, as a community worker dealing with the consequences of community

drug problems and introducing opportunities to learn about the global drugs trade, or as a teacher linking the clothes students wear to the issue of child labour.

Global development work is about taking actions, big or small, that contribute towards achieving social justice and promoting sustainable development in the spirit of solidarity with the world's poor and disadvantaged. This could mean something as simple as remembering to switch off light bulbs to save energy or joining in a campaign.

There are so many ways to get involved, you just need to decide when and where to start!

People-Power

Whether you believe globalisation is a force for good or not, there is no doubt that the world is becoming more interconnected.

For example, computer break downs may be dealt with by people in call-centres in India, and we can now enjoy exotic fruits and vegetables from all over the globe all year round.

Some would have us believe that everyone is benefiting from globalisation.

In reality, while 80% of the world's people live in developing countries, the richest 20% (who

live in the developed world) owns more than 80% of the world's wealth¹. If you imagine a world

without borders, our world is as unequal as South Africa. Some say that we are living in a world of 'global Apartheid'².

The underlying cause of such global injustice is the abuse of power. Global poverty and social injustice are not 'natural', nor are they the result of the 'invisible hand' of the global market. They are the result of 'structures' of power created by people.

At the highest level, globalisation is dominated by networks of powerful interests – politicians, civil-servants, business-people, and the institutions they control. They have worked together to create 'structures' that free up business and protect it from interference by the public. The result has been increasing inequality, poverty and

DID YOU KNOW?

Of the world's top 100 economies, 51 are transnational corporations (TNCs), with the top 10 TNCs earning a total income greater than the poorest 100 countries. With this power, TNCs influence the creation of a world that benefits their interests over the majority of the world's people³.

vulnerability across the globe.

Structures that marginalise and oppress people are also

rooted at the local level. Every society has its share of prejudice and discrimination – racism, gender inequality, ageism. These barriers limit peoples’ opportunities, and it is usually the vulnerable who are affected most. The social barriers that prevent people’s full participation in society are much less visible, but are just as important to change.

But because these global and local structures are made by people, they can also be changed by people.

Millions of people across the world, rich and poor, are united by the belief that ‘another world is possible’.

Globalisation now links the world together in ways never before achieved, and today wherever we are, we can recognise that poverty and social injustice have a common face.

By remaining engaged in global solidarity toward a common vision of a just and sustainable future, a new kind of people-power spanning the globe can challenge abuses of power and bring about a better future for all.

By continuing your engagement in global development work in Ireland, you can continue to work towards this vision.

COMHLÁMH AND PEOPLE-POWER

Comhlámh, established in 1975 by RDWs, seeks to challenge Irish society on the root causes of global poverty and inequality by empowering people to demand justice in global relations.

Comhlámh believes that people acting together can change the world.

As part of the global justice movement, Comhlámh educates and campaigns on global justice issues in Ireland and Europe, and is part of a growing network of activists worldwide, north and south.

Through acting in solidarity with people in developing countries, Comhlámh amplifies the voices of those excluded from global development and their calls for social justice.

¹ Colm Regan (ed.), *80:20 – Development in an Unequal World* (2007), 5th edition.

² Hardt, M., and Negri, A., (2004) *Multitude*, Penguin Press.

³ Colm Regan (ed.), *80:20 – Development in an Unequal World* (2007), 5th edition.

Structure of this booklet

In this booklet, you will find out ways of staying engaged in global development work in Ireland focusing on three main areas of action:

- 1. Changing lifestyles**
- 2. Building relationships for change**
- 3. Further education and working in development**

Every section is arranged in ascending levels of engagement, starting off with easier actions to get you back into the swing of things, building up to more involved forms of action. Of course, where you take things is entirely up to you.

While reading this booklet, you might find it helpful to keep three questions in mind that will help you to focus on getting to where you want to go:

- What am I passionate about?

- What experiences and abilities can I contribute in Ireland?

- What change would I like to bring about?



CHAPTER 1: CHANGING LIFESTYLES

As a development worker, you will have seen how global poverty and social injustice are connected to how we lead our lives in the global north.

Through the lifestyles we live in Ireland, we may inadvertently be contributing to:

- Increasing the power of multinational corporations and financial institutions through goods and services we buy
- Causing drought and floods in developing countries by damaging the environment
- Fuelling conflict in developing countries through our demand for natural resources

This chapter suggests some of the many actions in your everyday life that you can take to challenge global poverty and social injustice.

Together, we can make our lifestyles engines of change by making better choices about:

- ***What we buy***
- ***How we work***
- ***How we relax***

With the increased wealth and power brought to us through globalisation, our lifestyles are, more than ever, affecting people far away to whom we cannot put a face.

But affect lives we do.

And with the rise of consumer society, our shopping receipt is fast becoming a kind of ballot paper.

Making ethical choices about what we buy, invest in, or where we go on holidays are the first steps

in shifting the balance of power into the hands of people, forcing companies to sit up and listen.

As a RDW, you can lead by example. By putting a face to global injustice, you can inspire others to take greater steps in challenging the root causes of global poverty and injustice.

"When I returned, I found it difficult to cope with the level of materialism in Ireland, and the lack of concern for the environment. But I think you can do as much in Ireland to change things as you can abroad, it just depends how much you want to put into it."

Majella Darcy

⁴ www.fairtrade.ie

What we buy

Shop ethically

Buy Fair Trade and encourage others to do the same. Buying Fair Trade products such as coffee or bananas, or encouraging others to do the same, be it your friends or local shops, can help to double the incomes of farmers in developing countries. The Fair Trade mark is also a guarantee that our consumer choices

contribute to social and environmental sustainability in developing countries

Take your business somewhere else

Refuse to buy products from companies known to abuse human rights, damage the environment or simply push their weight as a major global corporations. Companies might eventually change their behaviour if consumers take their business somewhere else, particularly if it's part of an organised campaign. Boycott campaigns are often seen as effective ways to push for change, but some say it can also draw attention away from less visible offenders. For others, 'positive buying' – deciding to purchase ethically and environmentally sound products as much as possible – is the way to go as it can put power in the hands of shoppers to hold an entire market to account, not just individual companies.

DID YOU KNOW?

Irish sales in Fair Trade certified goods grew 75% in 2006, and the global market share of ethical consumer products has grown 40% in the past five years to the value of \$92 million⁴.

Buy locally, or buy ethically

More and more people are deciding to buy locally-sourced goods such as meat, fruit and vegetables at local farmers' markets across Ireland. These usually come without unnecessary packaging and polluting 'food miles' that damage the environment. But this can also affect farmers in developing countries who make their living selling their produce to us. There are often no easy choices in global development, but by making informed choices, you can try to ensure that your impact is not a negative one.

⁴ Colm Regan (ed.), *80:20 – Development in an Unequal World* (2007), 5th edition.

INVEST YOUR MONEY ETHICALLY

Invest in ethical funds

Many banks and building societies in Ireland are now offering ethical investment funds for the conscientious saver. Through these funds, you can be assured that your savings are not invested by banks in ways that undermine sustainable development and human rights. Though the financial returns from ethical funds may not be as high as other kinds of funds, ethical investment is a small price to pay for ease of mind!

ACTION WORKS

Ethical consumerism encouraged the phasing out of harmful greenhouse gases in home goods, fridges and freezers.

A Friends of the Earth campaign against the stocking of timber from unsustainable sources succeeded in getting major UK DIY chains to stop stocking mahogany.⁵

Move your money

If you already have your money invested in a fund, you could look into how ethical your investments may be. There are many actions you can take before ever having to move your savings elsewhere. As a starting point, why not ask your bank which companies your fund invests in - if there is reason for concern, you may be able to move your money to another fund within your bank.

STOP CLIMATE CHAOS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION

The world is now facing up to the fact that global climate chaos has been caused primarily by rich industrialised countries, but it is people in developing countries who will hit by global warming first, and worst.

But there are many things that you can do, in solidarity with developing countries that can stop the damage now.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ireland is the fifth most polluting country in per capita terms? On average, an Irish person throws out their own bodyweight in rubbish every month. We recycle only 5% of that waste, even though 80% could be recycled.⁵

Reduce, re-use, recycle

Cutting out waste and pollution is the simplest and best way you can make a real difference.

These three, simple ways to combat climate change and environmental destruction are: reduce, re-use, recycle.

Reduce pollution

Reduce your energy use by using energy-saving lightbulbs, unplugging all appliances when not in

⁵ www.foe.ie

use, or by wearing a jumper when it gets cold instead of turning up the heating

Reduce your rubbish by choosing products that don't come smothered in needless packaging, or by buying food from farmers' markets

Reduce the amount of destructive household chemicals by using natural alternatives such as vinegar, borax or environmentally friendly household detergents.

Re-use what you might throw out

Re-use old household appliances by getting them fixed instead of replacing them with the latest model. In a world of 'built-in obsolescence' it sometimes pays to spend more on appliances that are built to last – fashions move fast, but it is better for your pocket and the environment to buy out of need, not greed!

Recycle what's left over

Recycle whatever you can. Most councils in Ireland now recycle paper, glass and plastics. If you buy a new household appliance, such as a TV, you are entitled to have the old set disposed of free of charge.

Pay to dispose of other waste such as household appliances, or sell unwanted items on to other people – it is now illegal to dump these items in a land-fill.

How we work

We spend roughly one-third of our lives at work, and it makes sense that how we get to work, and what we do in the workplace can contribute greatly to promoting a fairer world and protecting our environment, at home and abroad.

ACTION LINKS

Ethical investment

Among those offering ethical investment funds in Ireland are www.firstactive.ie www.friendsfirst.ie www.griequity.com - small, Irish investment firm offering ethical options www.ethicalfinancial.ie - Irish investment firm specialising in ethical finance www.knowmore.org - investigate companies your bank invests in

Fair Trade

www.fairtrade.ie - Fair Trade Ireland homepage www.maketradeair.com - See the book *Rigged Rules and Double Standards* for an exposé on unjust international trade

Ethical shopping

www.knowmore.org, www.ethiscore.org - Information on hundreds of companies' ethical track-records www.ethicalconsumer.org - information for the green ethical consumer www.ethicalshopper.org.uk - homepage of the popular ethical shopping magazine www.boycotts.org - information on currently active boycotts and how to organize them

Boycotting

www.boycott.org - USA-focused website on national and international boycott campaigns

Buying locally

www.irishfarmersmarkets.ie www.irelandmarkets.com www.dublinfoodcoop.com www.sustainable.ie - extensive directory of ethical products and where to buy them www.transitiontowns.org - information site on towns preparing the transition to a post-oil world

Protecting our environment

www.powerofone.ie - Government initiative to cut down on energy waste www.treehugger.com - great ideas about how to take action on climate change www.enfo.ie - public information on the environment and recycling www.foe.ie - Friends of the Earth Ireland www.feasta.ie - Irish Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability www.ecounesco.ie - Environmental action for young people

Back
in action
stories

Linking global to local

MAJELLA DARCY

I initially trained as a nurse because I had always wanted to go to Africa, probably because I read a book about Africa when I was twelve! When I did go, I travelled to Rwanda just after the genocide, working as a media co-ordinator at a refugee camp. I came back to Ireland to pursue nursing because I didn't know what else to do. I just couldn't settle back into life here – I was in culture shock, and my outlook had also changed irreversibly. So after a year at home, I went to Sudan where I worked with a displaced population outside of Khartoum.

While I knew what I was doing medically, in terms of development I had no idea about the politics of the situation. The experience wasn't what I had expected.

When I finally returned to Ireland, I enrolled in a development studies course because I felt the need to understand the issues I confronted in more detail. The course really helped me to formalise these questions I had which, at the time, I hadn't the language to describe or examine.

That brought me into Comhlámh where I worked firstly as a volunteer in various action groups, and then for over five years as a Development Education Project Officer. It was a very interesting time because I was able to marry the two areas of my work: nursing and global development work, especially

development education. It also helped me keep a link with the Global South, which is so important for people coming home.

From there, I went to Access Ireland where I set up refugee integration training courses. During this time, I applied for a job in the Health Board, which appealed to me because I would be working with homeless people. But I worried that having overseas experience might be a negative thing in the eyes of employers, and that I had no experience working with homeless people. The career guidance counselor provided by Comhlámh helped me realise that I did: I had worked with 310,000 homeless people in Rwanda and Sudan! I finally saw how I could transfer my skills and experiences to homelessness in Ireland. When I was asked in my interview if I had experience working with homeless people, I could point out to them that I did!

I think you can do as much in Ireland as you can abroad, it depends how much you want to put into it. I really do get a lot out of what I do in my job now; in challenging attitudes, managing teams of people, and really pushing out important services to homeless people in Ireland. But I also stay involved in global development work in a voluntary capacity, which I also feel is important.

Sometimes it's very difficult to work out what skills you have picked up while overseas, and it takes a little time to realize that there are many jobs out there that you can do. Just remember



how huge your overseas experience is, and feel confident about that!

Since coming home, I've met a lot of people including nurses who feel boxed in by their profession, but want to do more. I try to show them that by looking at things differently, you can take yourself out of that box and see how much more there is out there to do.

CHANGE HOW YOU GET TO WORK

Irish people travel more often by car than people in Germany, France and the USA⁶. Changing how you get to work can contribute greatly to a better environment and safer, more pleasant cities and towns. So why not cycle to work or take public transport. Of course, if you must take a car, 'park-and-ride' schemes operate around the country, or you could start a car pool.

DID YOU KNOW?

A half-full train produces a smaller eco-footprint than one trip over the same distance in a four-wheel drive car?⁷

⁶ Colm Regan (ed.), *80:20 – Development in an Unequal World* (2007), 5th edition.

⁷ www.foe.ie

ACTION LINKS

Work discussion groups

See the following chapter on development education.

Opposing injustice

www.citizensinformation.ie - public information relating to citizen's rights and entitlements in Ireland

www.equality.ie - homepage of the Irish Equality Authority

www.labourcourt.ie - the Irish Labour Court

www.immigrantcouncil.ie - the Immigrant Council of Ireland

www.mrci.ie - Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland

Corporate social responsibility

www.bitc.ie - Business in the Community – Irish-based organisation promoting corporate social responsibility and community improvement

START A DISCUSSION GROUP AT WORK

Educating about development and encouraging others to make a change can start at work. There are many entertaining and engaging ways to do this through lunch-time or after-work discussion groups where you can discuss your experiences with colleagues. You could invite speakers from solidarity and education groups in Ireland, or show a movie with a development theme to get people talking. Starting regular discussion groups can help build momentum for change within companies themselves, such as their environmental or ethical behaviours.

OPPOSE INJUSTICE WHERE YOU WORK

Quite often, the places where we work do not provide the conditions workers are entitled to, such as adequate health and safety provisions. Much discrimination in Ireland happens in the workplace. If you witness injustice at work, such as unfair pay, discrimination or a company taking advantage of migrant workers, ask questions, engage management and contact relevant authorities, unions or support organisations if necessary. You could lead the way in encouraging your workplace to adopt anti-racist or equality policies and display them visibly. Alternatively, you could promote the adoption of a corporate social responsibility policy in your workplace,

which encourage companies to take responsibility for the negative impacts of business, and also to effect positive social and environmental change.

How we relax

Irish people are among the hardest-working in Europe. It's no wonder that we value our leisure time so highly. Changing the ways we choose to relax can also be of enormous benefit, not just to the wider world, but yourself, too!

FIND PLEASURE IN CREATIVE AND NON-COMMERCIAL PURSUITS

With all the advances Ireland has experienced in recent years, many are deciding to disengage from consumer life, pursuing more meaningful activities. Hill-walking and cycling, among other outdoor pursuits, are excellent ways to experience nature and enjoy others' company – and your own! There are also many new galleries, museums and activity groups up and down the country. Ireland has a buzzing performing arts scene, too, with music and performances happening everywhere there's space. There is also a growing range of exciting festivals in every part of the country and they are often looking for volunteers, it can be a great way to get involved. The arts are also a key form of expression by Ireland's new communities and an exciting way to promote cultural integration. Perhaps you may find performances and exhibitions related to where you worked overseas.

ETHICAL TOURISM

Where we go on holidays, and how we get there, can and does impact the planet. Cheap air travel has led to an increase in greenhouse gases, and

COMHLÁMH'S WORK IN SHORT-TERM VOLUNTEERING

Comhlámh's Volunteering Options programme aims to promote responsible, responsive volunteering in developing countries. Whether you are considering going on a short- or long-term volunteer placement, Volunteering Options can provide you with comprehensive information and advice on volunteering for development.

Visit www.volunteeringoptions.org or contact Comhlámh to learn more.

tourism can affect local communities in the global south in both positive and negative ways.

Organisations are now beginning to offer ethical travel and 'voluntourist' packages that seek to reduce the negative consequences of tourism, though you should research these before you go. If you do need to fly to your destination, you could decide to offset your carbon emissions by contributing to pollution-offsetting schemes. On the other hand, it's easy to enjoy the beauty of the Irish countryside by holidaying locally,

which can be just as enjoyable, if a little less exotic! But why not experience the pleasures of 'slow travel' – hop on a ferry, take a train, or drive (in a fuel-efficient car of course!) to your favourite place in Europe or beyond? It's also a good way to avoid metal detectors and long queues!

ACTION LINKS

Entertainment

www.entertainment.ie - nationwide entertainment links updated daily

www.artslistings.com - arts events across Ireland


www.vaireland.org - homepage of Volunteer Arts Ireland

www.walkingireland.ie - information hub for Irish ramblers

Ethical tourism

www.responsibletravel.com - screens and lists hundreds of responsible travel operators

www.vsi.ie - commercially-driven overseas volunteering for those interested in short-term placements



CHAPTER 2: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR CHANGE

People are the
heart of change.

Building strong relationships locally and globally, in the spirit of global partnership and solidarity, can create a critical mass to challenge global injustice, whether in Ireland or around the world.

This section provides a selection of the many things you can do to act in solidarity with people in the global south through:

- Getting involved in campaigning and advocacy
- E-volunteering
- Ethical entrepreneurship
- Further education and training
- Finding work in the NGO sector

Lasting change is achieved by strengthening people-power through educating, networking, and campaigning.

"There are so many different solidarity and campaign groups to get involved in. While living in Brazil, I learned people were poor for a whole set of reasons, and some of the causes related to us in Europe. So I wanted to do something about it. The best way to start is to ask, what issues am I most concerned about? What change would I like to bring about?"
Conall O'Caomh, activist

In the past, Irish actions have made a difference:

- In the mid-eighties, 12 Dunnes Stores workers went on strike for two and a half years for the right not to handle goods from Apartheid South Africa, leading the Irish government to boycott South African imports
- Jubilee debt relief campaign collected 85,000 signatures, pressing the Irish government to take a 100% debt relief position
- The anti-landmines campaign succeeded in Ireland becoming the first country to sign the international anti-landmines convention

SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

'How to be a good friend (when you're 4,000 miles away)'
www.fpif.org/fpif.txt/4571

The story behind how the Brazilian landless farmers' movement went global, and how we can do our part to build the global social justice movement.

As a RDW, you are a witness to global social injustice and are friends to those who live it. Through your experiences, you have the power to make people sit up, listen and demand change by telling your stories and by amplifying the voices of people in developing countries. This section shows how you can take action by

- Finding out more
- Educating about development
- Solidarity work and campaigning
- Ethical entrepreneurship

Finding out more

If knowledge is power, then sharing knowledge strengthens people-power. Information has never been so readily available as before – through TV, radio, newspapers and books. But it is the internet that has freed information and created new possibilities, making it easier than ever for people to communicate, debate and learn in today's 'global village'. The internet is serving to amplify the voices of the global south through e-mail, campaign websites, web-blogs, online discussion communities, video websites, and social networking sites.

Educating about development

Development education is about raising awareness and promoting understanding of development issues.

But it is also more than that – it is a form of activism that aims to empower people to take action by encouraging them to think critically about what connects the lives of people across the world, rich and poor. It is a growing area with enormous scope for engagement. Many people who have become involved find development education extremely enjoyable and very rewarding.

Organise discussion groups and debates

Discussion groups and debates can be held anywhere there is room! Local halls, community centres, schools, or spare rooms in colleges or offices are some of the places where you could hold events.

Comhlámh is just one organisation that offers opportunities to get involved in development education. Comhlámh members are engaged in a range of activities that need people to spread the word across Ireland, such as holding talks on trade justice, anti-racism or overseas volunteering. It's also a great way to meet new people.

ACTION LINKS

Development Research

www.eldis.org - the largest database of freely-available development research on a wide range of topics
www.fpiif.org - Foreign Policy in Focus online journal
www.globalpolicy.org - introductions to many global governance issues
www.developmentgateway.org - links to development researchers worldwide

News sites

www.alertnet.org - Reuters humanitarian news service
www.irinnews.org - UN humanitarian news service
www.allafrica.com - News from across sub-Saharan Africa
www.oneworld.net - development news and blog filter
news.bbc.co.uk - BBC's global news service
www.newint.org - New Internationalist homepage
www.socialwatch.org
www.connect-world.net - website promoting better coverage of global development in the Irish media
www.worldchanging.com - linking innovative ideas to change the world

Blogs

www.globalvoicesonline.org - daily filter of blogging from the developing world

Resource centres

www.ucd.ie/library - UCD Development Studies Library
www.dsckim.ie - Development Studies Centre, Kimmage

Development Education

www.developmenteducation.ie - information and resources about development education
www.8020.ie - excellent development education resource
www.kade.ie - Kerry Action for Development Education
www.ubuntu.ie - introducing development education into teachers' education
www.comhlamh.org/development-education.html - Action for Education and Global Justice

Campaigning for global justice

NESSA NÍ CHASAIDE
DIRECTOR, DEBT & DEVELOPMENT
COALITION IRELAND

During my undergraduate degree, I became very interested in social issues. Though my undergraduate degree was not directly related to development work, I learned a lot about global injustice through student activism on issues such as fair trade, and strongly felt I wanted to do more.

After graduating, I focused my attention on getting involved in the NGO sector because I saw it as a structured way for me to get directly involved in issues of global justice. I was lucky enough to get an internship with Trócaire, and within a short space of time, I was offered a field job in Kenya as a programme manager.

Though I went over viewing myself as a social justice activist, working with African activists, I ended up working in fundraising and project management, and found myself with a high degree of responsibility in a very complex and highly politicised environment.

Ultimately, I had the final call about who received money and who didn't. I felt extremely uncomfortable about this, and it led me to ask myself some serious questions about what my role was as a foreigner and an aid worker living in Kenya in this politicized environment.

I felt I had a duty to respond to those questions, so instead of

returning home after one year, I stayed for three-and-a-half years to get to know the country better, but those questions remained with me.

Part of my decision to return to Ireland was to take time out to think deeper about what my own political identity was, and what linked that identity with those of political organisations in the South. That was the most pressing issue for me to resolve.

I found that when I returned to Ireland I had a much more radical political identity than I had when I left – I was feeling a high level of anger about the situation in Kenya and in the Global South, that people in the North just didn't understand, and I felt a lack of a forum for me to channel that anger in Ireland in a constructive way.

An important thing I did was to look in my social life for individuals and groups to talk to, and I sought out people working in the NGO sector to have discussions with about politics and the relationship between ourselves and developing countries.

I also took a Master's course in International Relations at DCU. This helped me to vent a lot of the anger and confusion I was feeling at the time, but it also assisted me in coming to a clearer personal political identity, and to have the knowledge and skills to stand over it.

But when I started looking for work again, I found myself in a catch-22 situation: the skills that allowed



me to qualify for jobs were leading me into working the same jobs that encouraged me to change direction in the NGO sector in the first place!

I worked in Oxfam Ireland for a while, but also began to branch out into research work by taking on a few consultancies. From there, I worked as Policy Officer in Dóchas, the Irish NGO umbrella body. It was a great job because it meant getting a wide overview of the NGO sector in Ireland, but also a wide overview of important policy areas. Part of my role was to work on the Make Poverty History Campaign, and I quickly found that my campaigning instincts were coming back to the fore. After a while, however, I felt that I wanted to focus my attention on a smaller range of issues. I had always been interested

in the issue of debt, and when the opportunity came to apply for the role of Director of Debt and Development Coalition Ireland, I jumped at it.

I had always felt it to be an interesting organization, particularly because of how my personal politics, which had developed over the previous years, matched the organisation's. I feel that Debt and Development Coalition Ireland is a critical organization, and most importantly has those linkages with radical organizations in the global South. These were crucial issues for me in terms of matching my politics with where I felt comfortable working.

Of course, the role is still quite challenging, not least because it involves organisational management, which is a new learning curve!

Campaigning and Advocacy

You may instead wish to get involved in directly challenging the causes of poverty and injustice and building people-power through campaigning and advocacy in Ireland. This section is just a small selection of the many ways that you can take action.

MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH YOUR HOST ORGANISATION

Many RDWs feel it important to stay in contact with the host organisation they worked with upon returning to Ireland. Keeping that link alive is often very important during the often difficult transition phase back into life in Ireland. But it's also the essence of global solidarity, which is at the heart of the global justice movement. Making contact with your host organisation or community and asking them how you can support their issues from Ireland is often the first and most important step to getting engaged in campaigning and advocacy.

By joining a solidarity or campaign group in Ireland, you can join people across the world who are struggling for a fairer world.

JOIN WITH OTHERS

There are many people out there who think like you, who are concerned about the same

issues and want to bring about change. There is so much choice out there, you just need to decide when and where to start!

How do I know which voluntary group to join?

It's easy to feel a little daunted by all the choice out there and it is worth taking some time to consider who to approach. Asking yourself some simple questions will point you in the right direction:

- What are you interested in?
- What experience and skills do you possess?
- What organisation best matches your own personal goals?

When it comes to volunteering in a solidarity or campaign group, the most important thing is sharing common aims with friends and colleagues because it is these supportive relations that will sustain your motivation over time.

Joining groups as a volunteer is rarely 'formal'. Except for a few groups, qualifications are not a prerequisite and there is rarely a 'selection process'. In fact, most groups are always delighted to have a new member! The important thing is to start somewhere, and don't be afraid to try out different groups when deciding where you'd like to focus your energy – either way, you're building your experience, which may point you in a different direction.

There is the option of starting your own group, particularly if they see a need for activism on a particular issue.

The rest of this section suggests just some of the ways you can take action, whether acting on your own, or as part of a solidarity or campaign organisation.

Sign a petition

Petitions are powerful tools to raise public awareness about an issue and to show politicians the level of demand for change. Helping out with a petition is often the easiest way to start campaigning for change.

TYPES OF GROUPS TO JOIN

There are many different types of solidarity and campaign groups active in Ireland. Among those currently active are:

- Country-focused solidarity groups
- Issue-based solidarity groups
- Human rights groups
- Minority ethnic community groups
- Anti-racism groups
- Refugee and asylum-seeker support groups

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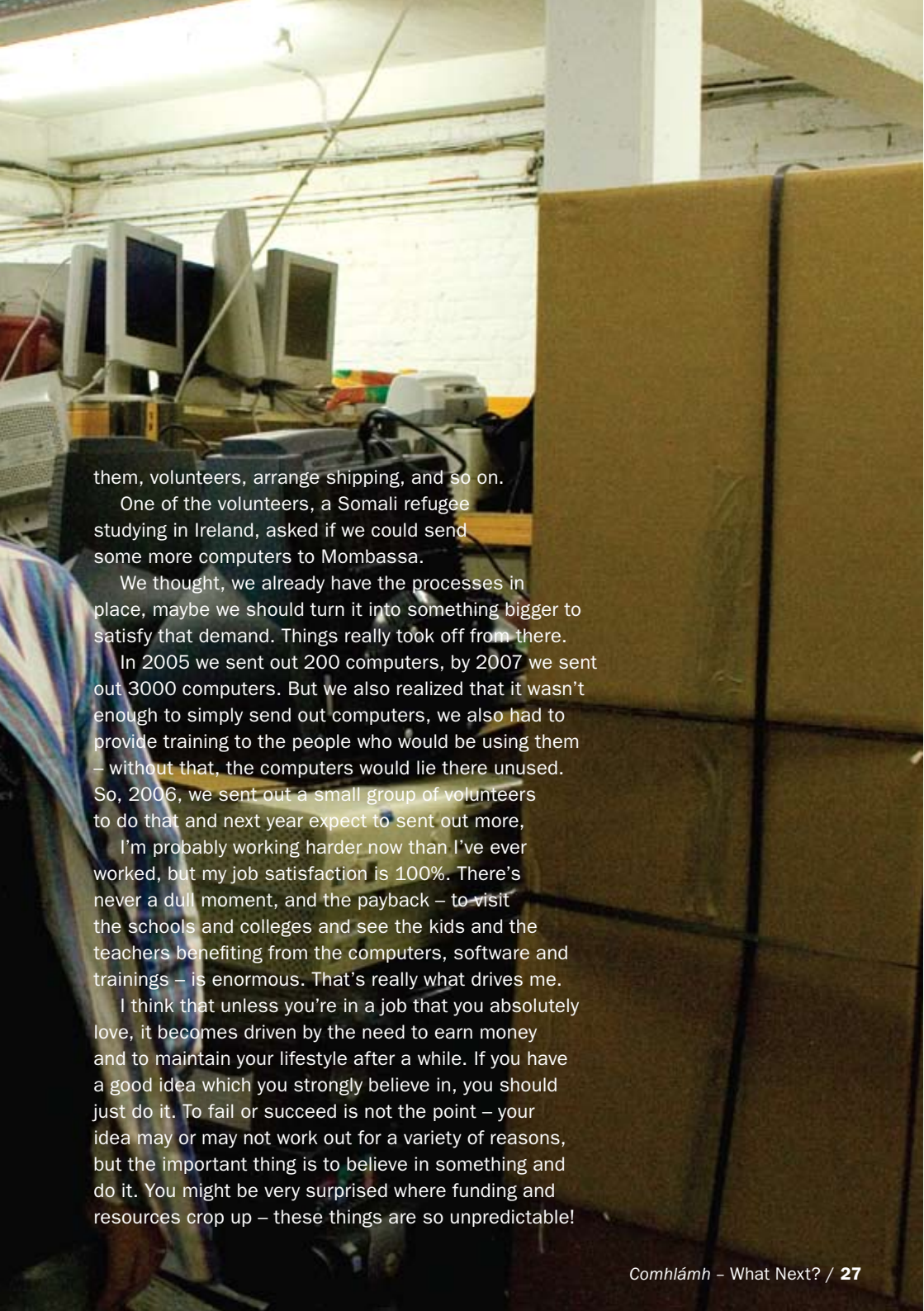
Ethical entrepreneurship

CORMAC LYNCH
CAMARA PROJECT

I left Ireland to work overseas in 1983, not in development work, but in the engineering and banking industries in London, New York, Moscow, and traveled extensively in other countries.

I had been working in Moscow for two years when I returned to Ireland in 2003 – twenty years later. I had had enough of banking and always wanted to do something for Africa, but I found that I couldn't get any development-related job to do with Africa, so I decided to do the Masters degree in Development Studies at UCD. While conducting field research for my thesis in Ethiopia, I came into contact with student teachers who had no access to computers or information technology. There and then, I made the rash promise that I would get them a few computers from Ireland! That was really the start of the Camara Project.

I thought getting these second-hand computers to the Teacher Training Colleges I visited would be easy. But first I had to find the computers, then a place to process them, people who could test and refurbish



them, volunteers, arrange shipping, and so on.

One of the volunteers, a Somali refugee studying in Ireland, asked if we could send some more computers to Mombassa.

We thought, we already have the processes in place, maybe we should turn it into something bigger to satisfy that demand. Things really took off from there.

In 2005 we sent out 200 computers, by 2007 we sent out 3000 computers. But we also realized that it wasn't enough to simply send out computers, we also had to provide training to the people who would be using them – without that, the computers would lie there unused. So, 2006, we sent out a small group of volunteers to do that and next year expect to sent out more,

I'm probably working harder now than I've ever worked, but my job satisfaction is 100%. There's never a dull moment, and the payback – to visit the schools and colleges and see the kids and the teachers benefiting from the computers, software and trainings – is enormous. That's really what drives me.

I think that unless you're in a job that you absolutely love, it becomes driven by the need to earn money and to maintain your lifestyle after a while. If you have a good idea which you strongly believe in, you should just do it. To fail or succeed is not the point – your idea may or may not work out for a variety of reasons, but the important thing is to believe in something and do it. You might be very surprised where funding and resources crop up – these things are so unpredictable!

In 2005, the Make Poverty History Coalition in Ireland – which included Comhlámh - delivered 14,000 campaign postcards to the Taoiseach's doorstep calling for an end to unfair trade rules.

Join a protest

Protests have always been a key form of popular political expression – an opportunity to be heard as one voice. Perhaps a protest against the World Bank, or human rights abuses abroad has been organized in your area that you can take part in. Or if you feel strongly about an issue and want your voice to be heard, why not approach a campaign organisation to help organise one?

Lobby your TD

Lobbying involves directly engaging your elected representatives and convincing them of the need to push for change. Armed with some key information, a compelling case, and a little charm, meeting with your TD yourself or as part of a wider group can be effective in bringing about concerted government action on local or global issues. Not only that, it's the essence of democratic politics!

Check the Comhlámh website for news on Comhlámh's campaigning and lobbying skills courses held each year

Fundraise

Raising funds is one way to give something back to the community you lived with before your return to Ireland. Fundraisers are also needed across Ireland by organisations to sustain their work. There are many ways to raise funds, from holding and participating in quizzes and raffles to concerts, to fun runs. Small organizations are also grateful for assistance from people with experience developing funding applications.

GET THE MEDIA INVOLVED

The media has enormous power to shape our views of world. Today, Irish people get most of their information about development issues through the media, rather than from NGOs and the government. Whether the views expressed in the media are right or wrong, there

is no question that the media it is a powerful tool for change, and it is often the most effective – and least expensive – way to get our messages across. There are many things you can do.

Write a letter to the editor

Letters pages are among the most read pages in national and local newspapers. Writing a letter to an editor is an excellent way to promote awareness of development issues – politicians write them all the time!

Try your hand at journalism

There has been an explosion of printed newspapers, magazines, websites and radio stations across the country. If you are a keen or aspiring writer or broadcaster, or just want to tell your story, why not see if you can get published or participate in one of Ireland's many local, regional or national newspapers or radio outlets.

Create your own media

With the telecommunications revolution, desktop publishing and cheaper printing, starting up small-scale publications and producing audio and video media has never been so easy. The arrival of broadband has made the internet the cheapest way to reach mass audiences with homemade audio and video content that have a truly global reach. More and more people are going to blogs for news content and alternative perspectives than ever before.

Help with publicity events

NGOs often hold publicity events to raise awareness about their work. Perhaps you are good at coming up with headline-grabbing ideas, at writing press-releases or organising media events that involve an exciting, inventive photo opportunity for journalists.

E-VOLUNTEERING

A number of online volunteering websites now

ACTION LINKS

Comhlámh's [Careers & Courses in Development booklet](#) is your indispensable guide to development courses on offer across the country.

Pick up your copy by contacting Comhlámh at 01-478 3490 or email info@comhlamh.org.

You can also find out more about educational opportunities and entitlements at www.comhlamh.org.

"It is important as returned development workers to challenge perceptions of people in the global south as passive suffering victims of poverty. Through journalism, I have aimed to show readers the potential they have as citizens and consumers to lobby for change, to promote fair trade and to carry out international human rights advocacy."

Fionuala Cregan - journalist.

ACTION LINKS

www.nabuur.com - volunteer in a developing country at home or work
www.onlinevolunteering.org - UN website for online volunteering

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Media activism

FIONUALA CREGAN
FREELANCE JOURNALIST

While studying my Masters in Gender, Anthropology and Development it became clear that my involvement in development work should be one of supporting local knowledge and existing spaces for action.

After a one year internship with Irish NGO Front Line which focuses on the protection of human rights defenders at risk, I went to Guatemala with Peace Brigades International (PBI). Working



in a team of eight, we accompanied human rights defenders whose lives were in danger as a result of their work. These included trade unionists in a sweat shop producing clothes for GAP who were under serious threat from factory owners to stop their union action and environmental activists leading campaigns against open cast mining projects by North American companies. Our work involved writing reports on the human rights situation in Guatemala for the international community and also holding meetings with local authorities to inform them of our work.

Following this I went to work in Timor Leste as an Irish funded UN Volunteers with the United Nations Development Programme. I was responsible for the development of a project to support civil society organisations which after decades of repression were only beginning to emerge as a force in Timorese society. Being in Timor Leste where there is one of the highest concentrations of development workers in the world and yet where, only six years after independence a serious crisis broke out and international peacekeepers returned, made me question the kind of aid packages being delivered by international donors.

During both of my years overseas, I carried out work with the media on completion of my contracts. As returned development workers with real life stories to tell from the field, we are

in a unique position not only to raise awareness of development issues but also to tell our stories in such a way as to inspire people to become involved.

While the contexts in Guatemala and Timor Leste are very different, I have been able to illustrate how in many ways the roots of poverty and conflicts are the same: current global economic policies. Through print and online articles, radio interviews and public talks focused on the global policies behind poverty - unfair trade negotiations, illegitimate debt and “aid” programmes enforced by international financial institutions - I have aimed to show readers and listeners the potential they have as citizens and consumers to lobby for change, to promote fair trade and carrying out international human rights advocacy.

It is important too as returned development workers to challenge perceptions of people in the Third World as passive suffering victims of poverty. With our stories of the dynamic social movements throughout the South and their projects for just and sustainable change, we can inspire solidarity. By telling, for example, the real life stories of a group of women and their fight to form a trade union in a GAP sweat shop, we can lead our audience to look at ways they can support the women’s struggle and confront the system of North – South oppression embodied by sweat shops.

give returned development workers an opportunity to work overseas, from home via the internet. Through such websites, you can assist developing countries in a range of areas including translation or assisting with business plans. The 'global village' has never seemed closer to reality.

Start an ethical business or NGO

Joining an activist group or gaining employment in an NGO is not the only way to make a change. Money makes the world go 'round, as they say, and leading the way in transforming how business is done – 'ethical entrepreneurship' – is another way to take action.

Ethical entrepreneurship is about changing the fundamentals of globalisation.

Businesses strive to be successful, and an ethical business is one that generates profit, but also reinvests in society and the environment.

RDWs have also started their own NGOs, some of which constructively engage business to convince them to change their ways.

Starting an NGO or ethical business presents more of a challenge than setting up a conventional company. Not only does it involve launching a new business, but also building a radical social and ethical dimension into your organisation's development. But who ever said changing the world was easy?

There are more and more ethical businesses out there, and more and more demand for them. New labels such as 'No Sweat Apparel' and 'EcoMall' show what demand there is for ethically sound consumer goods.

FURTHER STUDY

After settling back in, you may decide to do further study, pursue or continue a career in development work. There are many ways to go about this, and this section offers just a small slice of what is on offer.

For reasons of career change, self-development or simply curiosity, many returned development workers find it beneficial to pursue further studies on their return to Ireland. For some, it offers a comfortable way to settle back into life at home while, for others,

DID YOU KNOW?

Sales of Fair Trade products in Ireland have risen 40% in the last seven years⁸.

⁸ www.fairtrade.ie

it is a doorway to a new, successful future.

There are many postgraduate, degree, diploma and informal courses on offer across the country for those interested in learning more about development or specialising in a particular work area. Some courses are academic while some places offer short, practical courses on particular topics, such as project management or media skills.

There are also many part-time, full-time, distance-learning and night courses on offer across Ireland to suit everyone's circumstances.

Finding work in the social and not-for-profit sectors

Having returned home, you may decide to continue your engagement in global development work with an international development organisation or in local development in Ireland. In considering what to do, some find it beneficial to consider questions such as:

- Do I want to work abroad, or at home?
- Do I prefer working in an office or in the field?
- What kind of work do I want to be involved in? (Direct service, research, campaigning, community organising)
- Do I want to work for a small organisation where things may be more hands-on or a large one with more stability?

Whatever you decide, it is important that you learn about the sector and its requirements. The best way to do this is by making contacts and networking. If you are looking for work, let people know – don't be afraid to call into the organisations you might like to work for – face-to-face meetings are often more valuable than simply sending out CVs by post or email.

Another great way to go about finding employment is to start volunteering with an organisation that appeals

to you – not only will you gain a better understanding of the sector you are entering into, but you will make friends and meet potential employers along the way.

There is space to successfully find work in development and not-for-profit sectors, but it does take planning, patience and passion!

RESOURCES

There are many resources with information on the voluntary and development sectors which you may find useful in your search for meaningful work. Keep an eye out for workshops, meetings and short courses.

ADVICE ON GETTING YOUR DREAM JOB

Completing an assignment overseas and returning home is the next stage of your own personal development. After taking time to settle back in and to get an idea of where you want to go, set yourself achievable targets, the main one being to establish your independence through income generation – in other words, employment. While your goal may be to work in an NGO, you may have to widen your goalposts and look for opportunities to transfer the skills you have built on to other, related areas.

It is strange that some RDWs become complacent about the job hunt. Complacency is your worst enemy! The Irish jobs market has become quite sophisticated in recent years. There are very good organisations and companies in Ireland and excellent companies continue to locate here. Professional recruiting is now the order of the day. Your task then is to draw up a good curriculum vitae which markets you. Your CV must be clear, concise, and express a clear message of your competencies and employable skills. Here you are identifying what you are good at, what your strengths are and what

you can bring to an employer. If you want the very best job, you have to market yourself. You need to look on yourself as a product, and structure your CV to emphasise how you meet the needs of a prospective employer.

You have now drawn up an excellent CV - now for the job application and interview. Work out the critical requirements of each position you apply for. In preparation, if the job description says “must be a team player”, jot down the three best team work projects you have worked on. Do this for each critical requirement.

Do remember - an interview is not an examination, nor an interrogation! Think of it as a good communication process. You won't get the job on qualifications and experience alone. You have to be as good as you say you are. Companies will employ people who will fit in with their plans, their culture, and their vision.

Be passionate about your role and where you are taking your career.

Bon chance!

Sheila Cullen

Careers guidance counsellor

So now it's over to you!

In the beginning of this booklet, we asked you to keep the following three questions in mind with the hope that it would inspire you to stay engaged in global development work upon return to Ireland:

- 1. What are you passionate about?**
- 2. What experiences and abilities can you contribute in Ireland**
- 3. What change would you like to bring about?**

We hope that this booklet has given you greater insight into the level of engagement you are ready for now or at a future date.

Many returned development workers tell us that the most important part of their going overseas is what they do upon returning home and this

thought is echoed by Niall Crowley, CEO, Equality Authority when he said that “the level of personal change and challenge that drove me (overseas) was waiting for me on my return, to ensure I sought ways to continue to work for social justice and equality.”

Throughout this booklet, we have suggested ways you might consider being engaged and provided links to additional information.

Regardless what you choose to do, and we hope that you will choose to stay engaged on global development issues; we trust that it will be in the spirit of making our world more equal and in the absolute belief that people can make a difference.

