

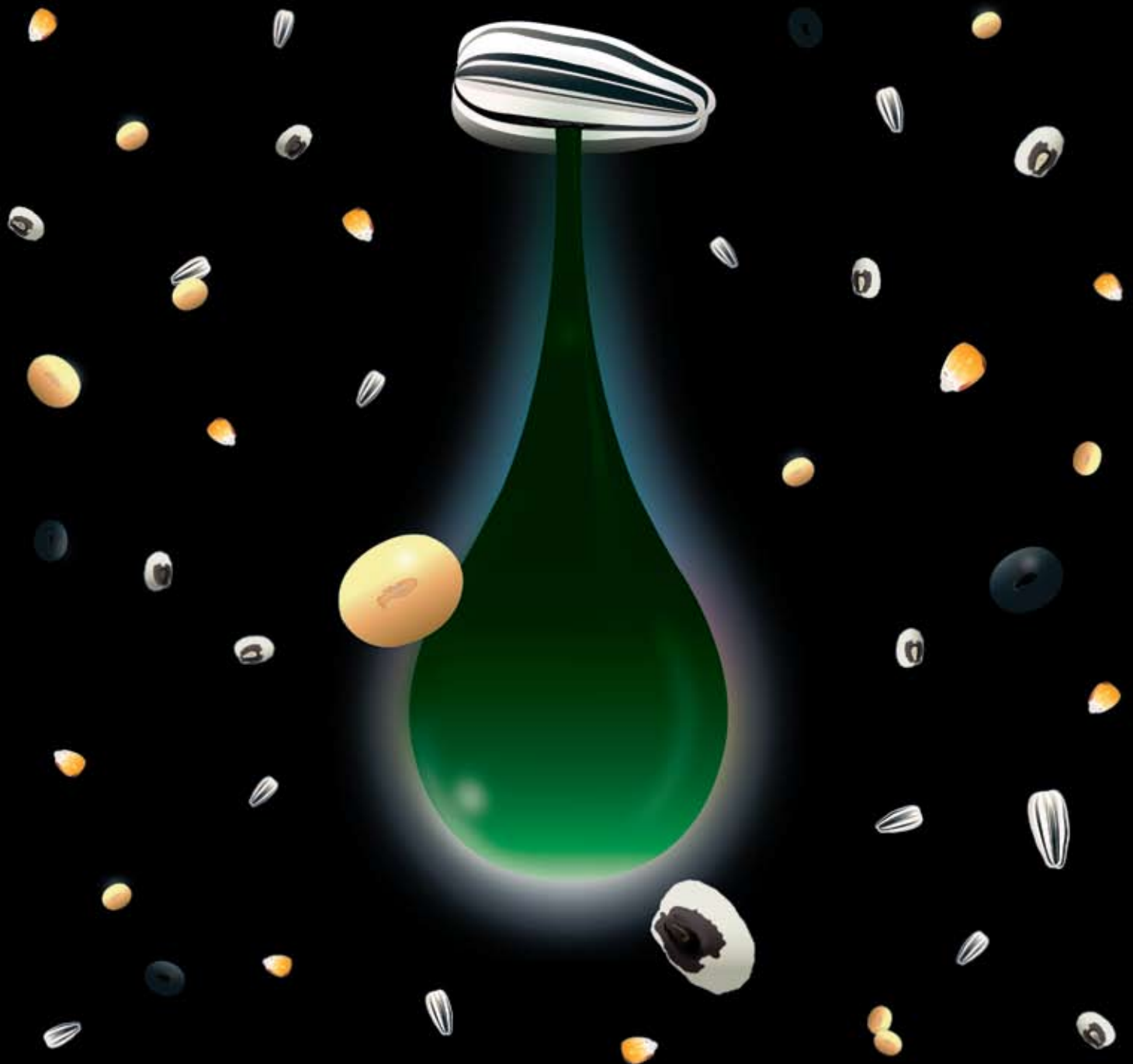
FOCUS

ACTION FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE



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INSIDE The MDGs - just another acronym? / Seeing Dublin through fresh eyes / Fuel, forests & food - the fight for power / Evading censorship in the blogosphere / The G8's broken promises



Credits & Contact details

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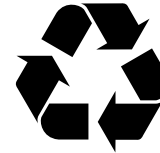
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Charity alone will never change the world



Join Comhlámh: take action for global justice

In a world that seems so unfair, don't you wish that Ireland would stand up for justice? Yet there have been moments to be proud of when Ireland helped make a difference:

- against **apartheid**
- for the freedom of **East Timor**
- for **debt cancellation**

But these breakthroughs only happen because people - like you - **demand change and make justice matter.**

For 30 years, Comhlámh (Irish for 'solidarity' and pronounced 'co-law-ve') has been **educating** and campaigning for global justice in **solidarity with the developing world.**

Our members **challenge the root causes** of injustice and inequality - **globally and locally.**

You can join in campaigns

- for **Trade Justice**
- against **racism**
- for **aid that makes a difference**

Comhlámh can also offer **advice on overseas volunteering.**

Sign up for membership at www.comhlamh.org

Join our activist network at www.myspace.com/comhlamh

Action: Demand an evaluation of the MDGs

Did you know that July 2007 marked the midway point towards the completion of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)?

In 2000, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, all 189 member states of the United Nations ratified eight goals aimed at halving world poverty by 2015. These goals were meant to be an expression of real political leadership and determination to tackle the complex challenge of poverty. They were meant to offer some hope that extreme poverty, disease, environmental degradation, wars and inequality would not remain with us as we entered the twenty-first century.

So are the MDGs being achieved? The UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2006 shows that some progress has been made. However, there is still a very, very long way to go if rich countries are to keep their promises to the world's poor.

So what can we do?

Ireland also signed the millennium declaration, so we should hold our own government responsible. EU regulations require the government to carry out a mid-term evaluation of the National Development Plan 2007-13.

Let's demand that the new government carries out a similar mid-term evaluation of its programme for ensuring the MDGs are implemented. We need to know what progress has been made since 2000 and whether we are on track towards meeting our commitments to impoverished countries by 2015.

What are the Millennium Development Goals?

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

Over to you:

Write to our ministers calling for a mid-term evaluation of the MDGs

Michael Kitt T.D.

Minister for Overseas Development,
Irish Aid,
Department of Foreign Affairs,
Bishop's Square,
Redmond Hill,
Dublin 2

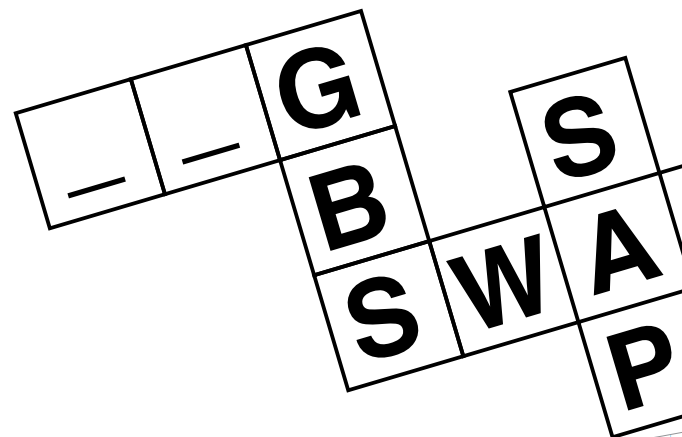
Email: michael.kitt@dfa.ie

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is brought to
you by**



Just another acronym?

The Millennium Development Goals were heralded as a concrete and achievable set of commitments for ending poverty. Half-way through, **Focus Action** asks, are the MDGs in danger of becoming just another meaningless acronym?



Focus Action

If you want to get involved in our action on the MDGs, turn back to [Page 3](#)

The progress has been slow and the figures have been disappointing – that’s the unfortunate reality as we approach the midway point on the Millennium Development Goals. The story was similar with the last few anti-poverty acronyms, like Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). So, will the MDGs be just another acronym?

The progress so far

The United Nations has released a progress report this year which maintains that the goals are still achievable. However, to meet even the first goal, halving the extent of extreme poverty by 2015, the current pace of progress will have to nearly double. Currently one third of deaths - some 18 million people a year or 50,000 per day - are due to poverty-related causes. Every year more than 10 million children die of hunger and preventable diseases. Over 1 billion people live on less than \$1 a day and over 600 million children live in absolute poverty.

There’s been some improvement on the second goal, achieving universal primary education. The statistics on education hold some hope for success and all regions, including sub-Saharan Africa, are on track to achieving full primary enrolment. Enrolment increased from 57% in 1999 to 70% in 2005.

Unfortunately, increased enrolment has not translated into completion rates. Overall, a mere 55% of the children on the continent of Africa are able to complete a full course of primary education, compared to 57% a decade ago.

The third goal, to promote gender equality, has seen women gain ground politically, but ultimately men still wield control.

Similarly, child survival rates show slow improvement, with under-five mortality rates dropping from 185 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 166 per 1,000 in 2005. But this is far from reaching the fourth goal objective of a two-third reduction by 2015. And no progress has been made on reducing the number of underweight children.

The statistics surrounding the progress of the fifth goal, improving

“On a global scale the goals represent the general crises that plague the world. But at the local level there are many issues that only local bodies can address.”

maternal health, do not look encouraging. Half a million women continue to die each year during pregnancy or child-birth, almost all of them in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. HIV prevalence has levelled off in the developing world, but deaths from AIDS continue to rise in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Prevention measures are not keeping up with the spread of the disease.

The seventh goal is to ensure environmental sustainability, yet half the population of the whole of the developing world still has no access to sanitation. Furthermore deforestation continues and tree plantations increase while old growth forest ecosystems continue to be lost.

The eighth and final goal of developing a global partnership for development has also had very little success. Development aid has fallen despite renewed commitments by donor countries. Trade rules continue to fundamentally favour rich countries at the expense of producers in the Global South. And illegitimate loans given to impoverished countries by rich lenders have yet to be cancelled.

Missing the target

It is not an easy task to match global needs with the local. On a global scale the goals represent the general crises that plague the world. But at the local level there are many issues that only local bodies can address. Continuously taking context into account is a complex task best suited to those at the ground. There is a general consensus that without the inclusion of civil society organisations the MDGs will not be met.

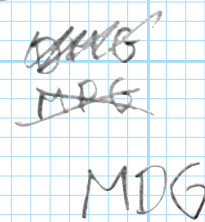
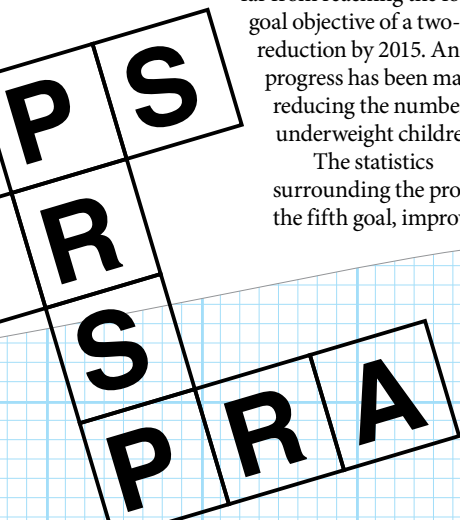
Measures to meet most of the MDGs must have strong local components if they are to serve communities. And meeting the MDGs requires active support of the local civil societies. These organizations are more likely to serve the needs

of local communities as they have more influence on service providers, and more voice in local governments. International bodies must provide more support for priorities identified by local organizations, in which poorer groups have an influence and a voice.

Currently the emphasis is on national and global monitoring by governments and international agencies, whereas it should be on local monitoring where the realities can best be captured. Essentially this will allow progress to be monitored in each locality that informs action on the ground and puts pressure on local governments and other service providers to improve their performance and execution of programmes.

Lack of political will is another reason for failure. The current General Secretary of the UN, Ban Ki-Moon, himself said, “The world’s shared goals for fighting poverty and other economic and social ills remain achievable in most countries, but only if political leaders in rich and poor nations take urgent and concerted action.” Without adequate financing from a strengthened global partnership for development the goals are simply not viable.

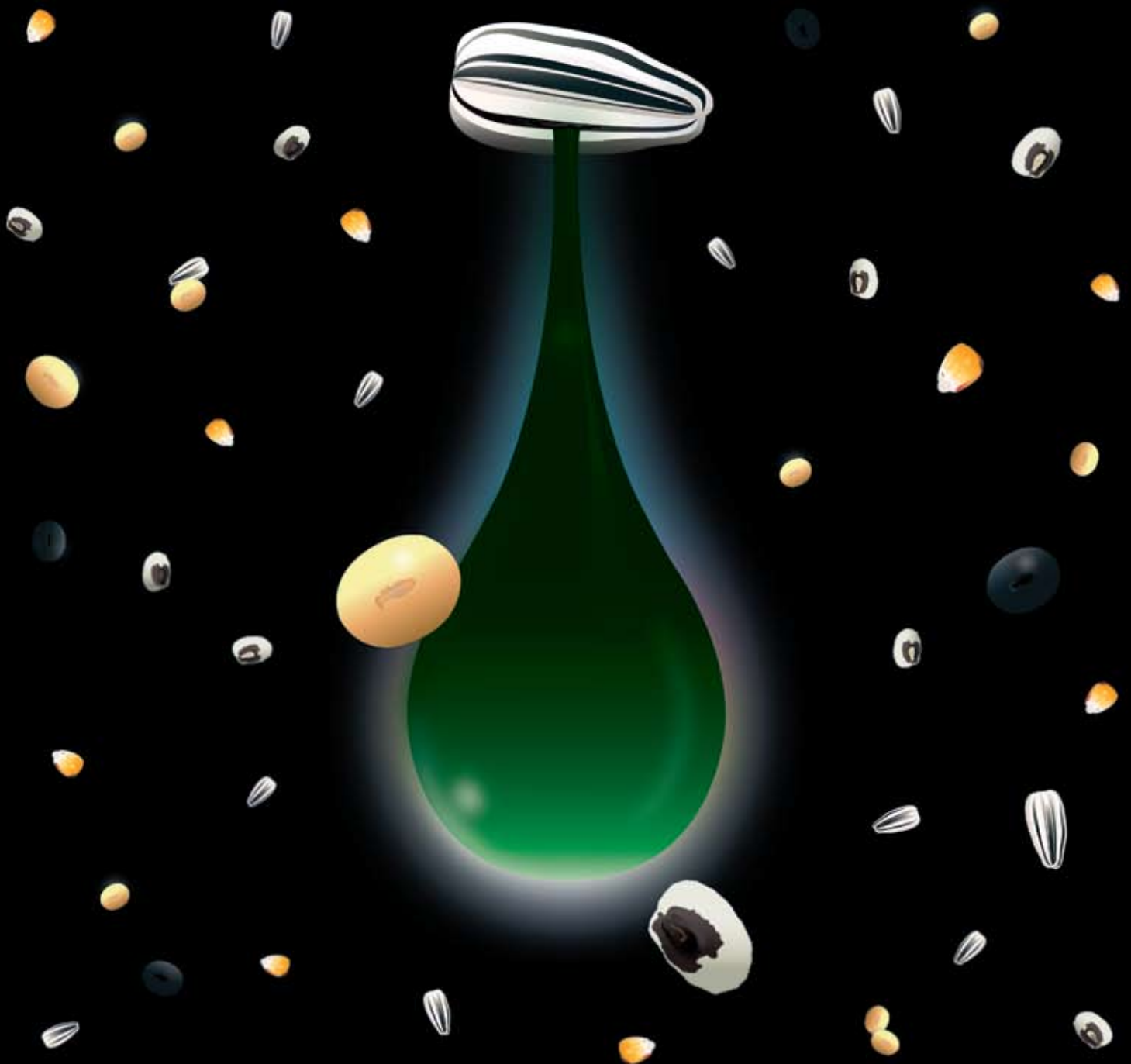
Rich countries must live up to their anti-poverty rhetoric, and go further than the current agreements in the MDGs. That is especially important for meeting goal number eight, which will require rich countries to actively redistribute some of their wealth and power rather than prioritising their own economic development at the expense of the world’s poor. This is what we must continue to fight for, as activists living in the rich world, if justice is to be achieved in this unequal world.



1. Laudable goals, far from being achieved (3 letters)

Fuel, Forests and Food: The Fight for Power

*Sadhbh Goggins investigates the truth
behind the global drive for biofuels.*



In Indonesia, the slash and burn technique has resulted in 1,400 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per annum.

The latest news, according to most government administrations, is that biofuel is going to be the resource that saves the world. It's going to alleviate hunger through creating a new market for farmers, especially those in developing countries. It's going to solve the problem of global warming through cutting our carbon emissions and let's not forget it will divert our huge guzzling fossil fuel economy away from oil.

The UN predicts that 98% of the rainforests of Indonesia and Malaysia will be gone by 2022.

So why are environmentalists raising their voices in opposition? The truth is that biofuels may kill the patient, not cure her.

Biofuels are plant-based fuels, usually derived from maize, sugar cane, oil palms, sunflowers or soya beans. They are considered carbon neutral because the amount of carbon they release when they are burned as fuel is the same as the amount of carbon stored during the plant's lifetime, which means no extra carbon is released to the atmosphere as CO₂.

However, recent studies have shown that biofuels may not be able to provide the hoped for reductions in carbon dioxide emissions. Taking into account that biofuel crops are produced through intensive agricultural methods which require large amounts of fuel to power machinery, the actual savings become less and less. Indeed, where virgin rainforest is cleared to make way for biofuel plantations, the savings head towards the negative. Not only is there less rainforest to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, but any carbon held in trees is released when they are chopped down.

The EU requires 10% of all fuels to come from biofuels by 2020 in order to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Meanwhile,

the US has set its sights on replacing 15% of its petrol needs with biofuel. But this global rush to cash in on the green energy market has serious consequences.

Widespread deforestation to make way for crops like palm oil and sugar cane is causing a loss of habitat and biodiversity, endangering wildlife and threatening to replace the last of our dwindling rainforests with commercial plantations. Not only is the rainforest being cut down to make way for palm oil, but the trees are being burned to get rid of them quickly.

In Indonesia, this slash and burn technique has resulted in 1,400 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per annum, bringing it to third place as a global emitter of CO₂ after the US and China. The UN predicts that 98% of the rainforests of Indonesia and Malaysia will be gone by 2022. The Borneo Orang-Utan Survival Foundation has fears the creature's entire lowland habitat is essentially gone already. Animals such as the Asian elephant and Sumatran tiger are also at extreme risk due to loss of habitat.

Willie Smits, the founder of SarVision, a satellite mapping service that charts rainforest decline, told the Guardian: "when you look closely, the areas where companies are getting permission for palm oil plantations are those of high conservation forest. What they're really doing is stealing the timber because they get to clear it before they plant. But the timber is all they want; hit and run with no intention of ever planting."

Another side effect of switching a large proportion of the world's grain supply to biofuels is that the world price of grain is rising. Corn prices have doubled over the last year, resulting in serious food riots in Mexico. The tortilla, which is the staple food for most Mexicans, has seen regional price increases of between 50% and 400%, bringing 75,000 Mexicans to the streets in protest and forcing the Mexican

government to implement price controls. And of course, if world grain prices rise, this also has an effect on food aid.

Because biofuels grown in tropical conditions are five times as productive as those in temperate climates, southern countries are far more economical and efficient producers than northern ones. Despite that, the US have imposed significant tariffs on all biofuel imports and subsidies on its own less efficient biofuel exports. This makes no sense from an environmental point of view, as it just requires more and more land to be set aside for biofuel production in order to get the financial returns.

So what are the answers? Richard Douthwaite of Feasta, believes the benefit of biofuel production should be primarily of benefit to subsistence farmers who don't have access to mains electricity and only secondarily for the market. Groups such as the Earth Policy Institute point out that a 20% rise in auto fuel efficiency would save as much oil as converting the entire US grain harvest into ethanol.

One also has to wonder why governments aren't focusing more on wind and solar energy. Ireland for example, is a prime candidate for wind energy,

20%
A rise in engine fuel-efficiency would save as much as converting the entire US grain harvest into ethanol.

yet we do not make full use of this resource. And why does Ireland still have two peat-burning power stations? We can hardly criticise the Brazilian government for cutting down its rainforest when we are burning hundreds of years of stored carbon from our peat bogs.

There's definitely room for biofuels in our lives but the scale being proposed won't take our world off the critical list. Maybe its time we started preventing the problems instead of running up false cures.

Action links:
www.feasta.ie
www.stopclimatechaos.ie



River and Town Relationship

"I like how the colours build up the relationship between the city and the river flowing through it."

Abdul Ali

Seeing Dublin through fresh eyes

A new art project sheds some light on a rapidly changing Ireland from a little-heard perspective - young adults seeking asylum in Dublin.

Ireland is currently in the midst of an interesting and challenging time. The recent influx of asylum seekers and economic migrants into this newly wealthy state has caused excitement, consternation, change and challenge.

Begun in November 2006, "Súil Eile" (meaning 'Another View' in Irish), is a participatory photography project which aims to promote integration and to encourage awareness through photography

by bringing newly arrived asylum seekers together with young Dubliners to create and compare their own views of Dublin.

Young people seeking asylum in Ireland can find themselves in very difficult and confusing situations, with little or no power to shape their own futures. By giving them a means of expression which transcends language boundaries, these young people gain confidence in their voices and can begin to represent themselves and their views.

Súil Eile aims to promote awareness of the issues these young people face within the broader community, and to begin to break down the stereotypes that surround asylum seekers. The images give us a glimpse into the lives of young asylum seekers living in Dublin, and an opportunity to see them as individuals with great determination to create a new life in Ireland.

www.photovoice.org



Mr. Teddy taking a sunbath
 "This is my bedroom window. I took this photo to show an example of backlighting."
 Abdul Ali



Patience Pays
 "I waited 43 minutes to take this photo. It was early in the morning and very cold."
 Abdul Ali

Community
 Shane

The Yard
 Shane





Homeless Study 1 – Man with a Cup
Martin



Homeless Study 2 – Abandoned Clothes
Martin



**Self Portrait
with Goggles and
Fisherman Hat**
Martin

Stereohead
“He keeps my headphones in shape.”
Martin





My Beloved City
“I took this photo at about 8pm.”
Hussein Mohamed

Funny Boy
“This boy is my friend. He speaks the same language as me.”
Hussein Mohamed



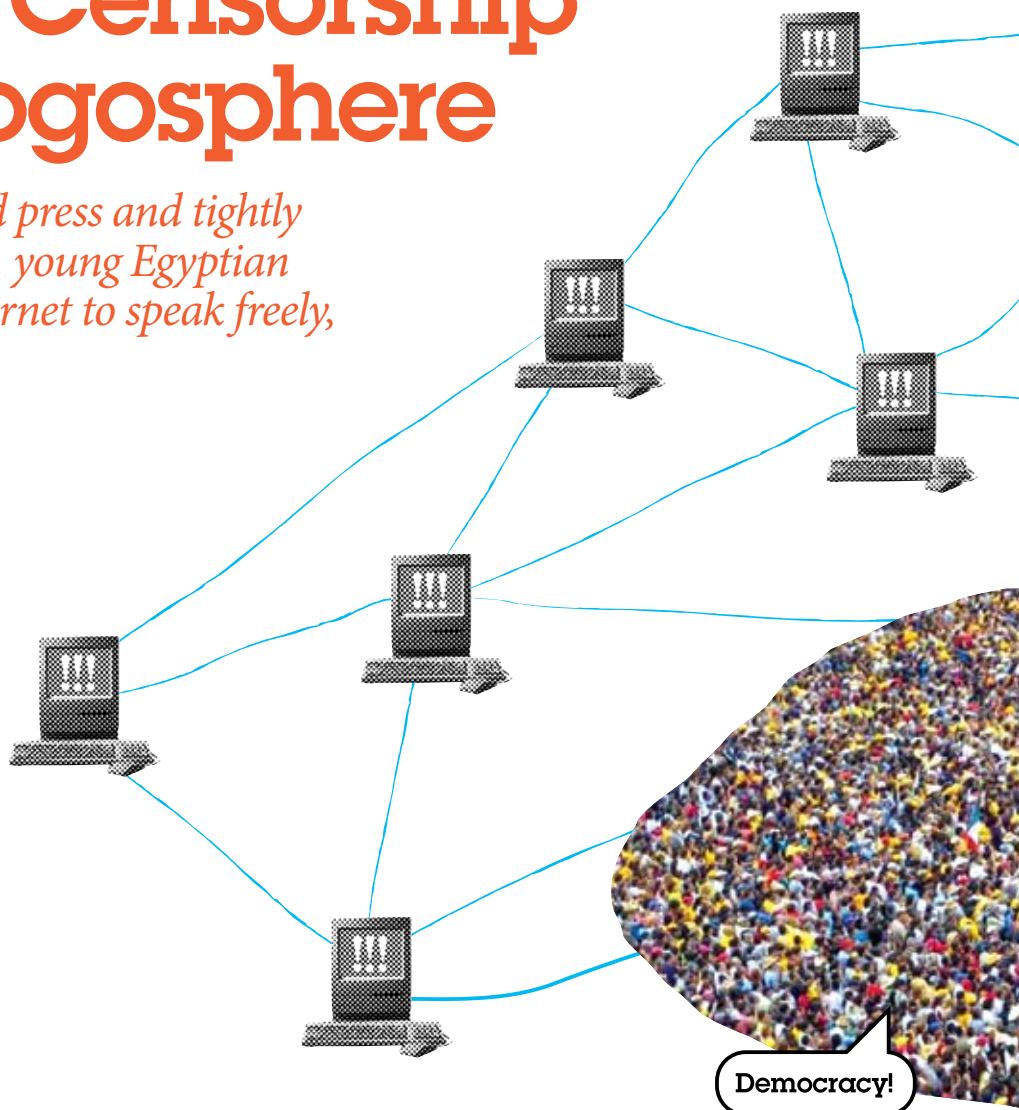
Major Building
“This building is an important bank. I heard that once it was a government building.”
Hussein Mohamed

Self Portrait
Hussein Mohamed



Evading Censorship in the Blogosphere

Despite a heavily censored press and tightly controlled political sphere, young Egyptian bloggers are using the internet to speak freely, writes Colette Kinsella.



I arranged to meet Abdel Moneim Mahmoud in a downtown Cairo café in mid-April to talk about political activism in Egypt. We never had that conversation because he didn't turn up. Mahmoud is an Egyptian journalist who has done much to highlight human rights abuses by police and government agents in Egypt; he'd been arrested some days earlier and was held in custody until June.

Mahmoud is a blogger as well as a journalist for the London-based Al-Hiwar satellite channel. But he is also a member of the banned Muslim Brotherhood, running its English-language website. The last time he was arrested and tortured, in 2003, it was on the grounds that he was a member of a banned organisation. This time around, human rights and political activists point to Mahmoud's criticism of the use of torture in police stations during routine investigations as the real reason for his arrest.

Mahmoud is just one of an increasing number of technologically savvy young Egyptians who are using the internet to express their desire for political reform and to criticise government policy. The internet is a powerful tool for communication, and in Egypt it has changed the face of political activism. As internet access increases, young people all across the country are using blogs to spread news and organise demonstrations and campaigns.

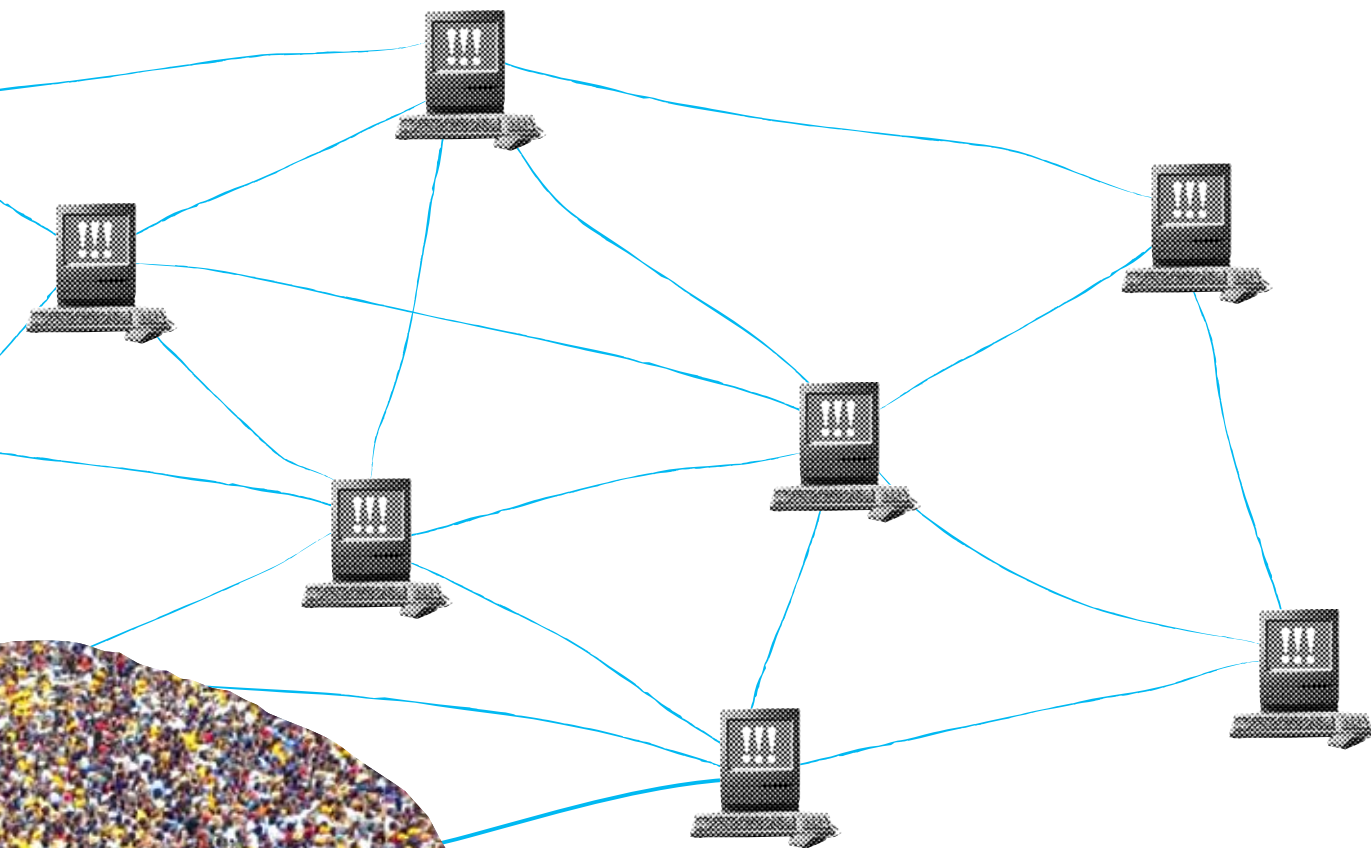
One of the first and best-known of these campaigns was mobilised in support of Alaa Abdel Fattah, who was arrested in May 2006 during a peaceful demonstration for political reform. He and his wife, Manal Hassan, were some of the first to use their blog, "Manal and Alaa's bit bucket – free speech from the bitches" for political activism. Their site is an aggregator of other blog sites in Egypt and they offer "free aid in developing a website for any cause we find worthy or interesting and for any speech that is censored or prosecuted in Egypt".

"As Internet access increases, young people all across Egypt are using blogs to spread news and organise demonstrations and campaigns."

Alaa was imprisoned for 46 days in an overcrowded and unsanitary cell with 40 other detainees. The "Free Alaa" campaign attracted huge international attention and kept him firmly in the public eye. This, he says, is probably the reason he wasn't tortured.

His friend and fellow blogger, Mohamed Sharqawy, wasn't so lucky. He was arrested at the same time as Alaa and tortured for eight hours in a police station before being transferred to prison, where he was kept for more than 60 days. While in the police station he was systematically beaten and raped using a cardboard tube. Lawyers and human rights organisations say this form of torture is common throughout Egypt, though never openly acknowledged by victims or their families. There is no recourse, and the perpetrators generally go unpunished.

Except, that is, when video footage of a torture scene in a Cairo police station was posted on YouTube in November 2006.



Freedom of speech!

A minibus driver, arrested after a street scuffle, was beaten and sexually assaulted in a Giza police station. A police officer recorded the footage on his mobile phone and passed it on to other minibus drivers as a warning. But the video found its way to a blogger who posted it on the internet. The officers involved are being prosecuted in the wake of local and international outcry.

Bloggers have broken stories which would otherwise have been ignored by the tightly controlled local media.

50 million
The number of people blogging in the world

Sandmonkey, a well-known Egyptian blogger with an international readership, says: "you know your country through the media, and

the media in Egypt doesn't give an accurate description of what goes on here." He loves the fact that the average Egyptian can go online and find out what's really happening behind the façade of formulaic official press.

And by reporting in cyberspace, the bloggers are circumventing local censorship laws. This makes them interesting to local and international journalists, some of whom read blogs regularly to gauge the mood of the country and as a possible source for stories.

Unfortunately, bloggers are also of interest to the Egyptian government, which has been clamping down on outspoken critics this year. Abdel Kareem Soliman (22) was sentenced to 4 years' imprisonment for insulting Islam and the president of Egypt in his blog.

Many of the young bloggers I met (most of them are under 25) said they will remain active despite the obvious danger. Torture victim Mohamed Sharqawy, who continues to suffer physically and psychologically, runs an anti-torture campaign. Alaa and Manal remain politically active and vocal on the site www.manalaa.net. Others, such as Sandmonkey, have stopped blogging due to increased harassment and a fear for their safety. "The heat is on," is how he describes his predicament. But none of them knows what the future will hold in Egypt's increasingly restrictive environment.

Get active: Get blogging!

Blogging has truly exploded worldwide, and is promoting greater understanding about the world, and its injustices. Many people in the global south are turning to it as an alternative to journalism in difficult political circumstances. Here is just some information about how to get started!

Global Voices Online is a truly global roundup of blogging from the developing world.
www.globalvoicesonline.org

Blogging websites & software
www.blogger.com - by far, the fastest and easiest way to start blogging
www.wordpress.com - fully customisable free blogging software (for more advanced users)

You can also enrich the content of your blog with photos, audio and video files by linking to other online services such as
www.flickr.com
www.youtube.com

To find out more, *Reporters without Borders* has produced a one-stop-shop for information on how to get blogging, the Handbook for Bloggers & Cyber-Dissidents. Download it at
http://www.rsf.org/rubrique.php?id_rubrique=542

The G8 take a break from development

The scene for this year's G8 summit was Heiligendamm, a holiday resort in northern Germany.

Here, the leaders of the world's richest countries took some well-deserved R&R and forgot all about the promises they made at the Gleneagles summit in 2005.

Focus Action has left them a few reminders for their next visit!

FIGHTING HIV/AIDS

A vague commitment to increase financing to US\$ 60 bn "over the coming years" was reached. This money will include considerable amounts from existing spending levels and will still be even less money than was promised in Gleneagles.

PROPERTY RIGHTS

The promised US\$ 60 bn won't go far because on the same day they agreed to push the protection of their Patenting Rights. In the case of HIV/AIDS this means supporting monopolies for drugs, effectively blocking access to cheaper generics.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Finally the G8 agreed that the rise in global temperatures must be capped at 2°C or less. They also agreed that a Post-Kyoto treaty is necessary (Kyoto expires in 2012). However, this does not mean that the 2° cap has to be part of the treaty.

DEBT

Claiming to have solved the debt problem already in 2005, they decided there was no need to discuss it. This despite evidence that vulture funds are undermining the scant benefits of the 2005 agreement.

TRADE

Once again they agreed to encourage their trade ministers to finish the current WTO round by the end of the year. A week later talks with India and Brazil collapsed. Social movements around the world celebrated – no deal is better than a deal that only benefits western multinationals companies.

David fights Goliath in your coffee cup

Two years ago, Comhlámh showed the documentary Black Gold as part of the Dun Laoghaire festival to highlight the importance not only of achieving fair-trade but of realizing global trade justice.

Black Gold starkly shows the injustices that exist within the global coffee trade since the collapse of world market regulation in 1989 and the devastating impact fluctuating world commodity prices have on entire communities and their livelihoods.

The film was since used in an Oxfam campaign to demand Starbucks trademark three of its Ethiopian coffees - Harar, Sidamo and Yirgacheffe. The Ethiopian coffee growers' demands were eventually met by Starbucks and, although much work remains to make the Ethiopian initiative a success, this holds the opportunity to give farmers around the world a fairer share of the retail profits that come from their products.

www.blackgoldthemovie.com

Get involved in Comhlámh's trade justice campaign by visiting www.comhlamh.org



Pictured at the launch of Black Gold the movie at the Kino Cinema, Cork (left to right): Alan Clayton, member of the Kinsale Fairtrade Town Committee, Colin Roche from Oxfam Ireland and Peter Gaynor from Fairtrade Mark Ireland. (Photograph: Larry Cummins)

Comhlámh is now on myspace.com

Become our 'Friend' in cyberspace! Get news, make comments and suggestions, meet like-minded people in Ireland and internationally through our new internet platform.

MySpace is a virtual community site that allows users to network, meet people, browse their profiles, and make friends from Ireland and all around the world. It works when people (and, hopefully, you!) create their own free MySpace pages and then become a 'Friend' of Comhlámh.

When you become a Friend of Comhlámh, other people see our logo on your page - and your photo or image on the Comhlámh page. Then, usually,

other like-minded people will become your Friends and you become Friends with them - and it expands outwards from there over time.

Our MySpace presence will be very useful for announcing events. There is also a Comments Board, where Friends can make comments, offer suggestions, etc. It also has a Blog where updates and issues can be relayed.

Join us online at www.myspace.com/comhlamh



Refugee awards honour Comhlámh activists

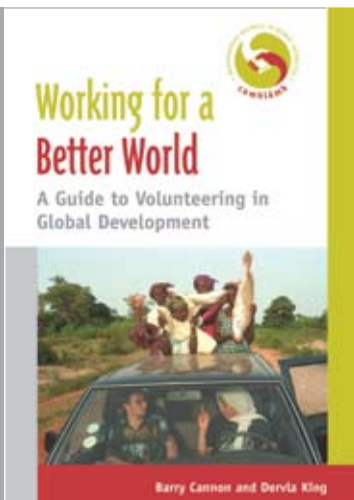
Active Comhlámh member Nchedo Obi was nominated at this year's World Refugee Day Awards for the Education and Youth Award, which went to Yemisi Ojo from the Integration of African Children in Ireland (IACI). Since arriving in Ireland, Nchedo has worked tirelessly as a Comhlámh activist. Over the years, he has worked with Comhlámh's Diversity Through the Arts project, and is a participant in Comhlámh's trade justice campaign group.

Another winner, Juliet Amamure (Health Award), is linked with our Development Education work. Juliet attended this year's Skills in Development Education course and has facilitated many of our educational workshops. She currently works with AkiDwa, a national network working towards equality for African women living in Ireland.

Interested in volunteering in a developing country?



Working for a Better World: a Guide to Volunteering in Overseas Development



Available in shops now!

You can also order copies
from the Volunteering
Options website

www.volunteeringoptions.org