

# Strategic Plan

2009

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2012

Cómhlámh Strategic Plan 2009 - 2012



Comhlámh would like to thank the contribution of staff, the Board and its constituent membership in contributing to the formulation of this Strategic Plan.

Honorary Patron, Mary Robinson.

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**Irish Aid**

Department of Foreign Affairs  
An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
Core competencies	
Strategic development of Comhlámh	
<b>Comhlámh – action and education for globaljustice</b>	<b>6</b>
Comhlámh’s mission	
Comhlámh’s vision	
Comhlámh commits to a range of values	
<b>Strategic area one: Development workers, volunteers and activists</b>	<b>8</b>
The volunteering continuum	
<b>Strategic area two: Development education</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Strategic area three: Policy, advocacy, research and public engagement</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Getting better at what we do and how we do it</b>	<b>18</b>

## Acronyms

<b>CGE</b>	Centre for Global Education
<b>CHWs</b>	Coming Home Weekends
<b>CoP</b>	Code of Good Practice
<b>DCU</b>	Dublin City University
<b>Dev Ed</b>	Development Education
<b>DICE</b>	Development and Intercultural Education
<b>DWs</b>	Development Workers
<b>ENAR</b>	European Network Against Racism
<b>HR</b>	Human Resources
<b>IDEA</b>	Irish Development Education Association
<b>LASC</b>	Latin American Solidarity Centre
<b>NGO</b>	Non Governmental Organisation
<b>PRSI</b>	Pay Related Social Insurance
<b>RDWs</b>	Returned Development Workers
<b>Vol Ops</b>	Volunteering Options
<b>VOWG</b>	Volunteering Options Working Group

# Introduction

Following a long process of consultation and discussion Comhlámh introduced a Strategic Plan from 2005 to 2007. This was then extended to 2008 to allow for adequate time to review the plan and to develop the follow-on strategy to take the organisation up to 2012. The evaluation comprised a comprehensive desk study of relevant documentation, consultations with staff, the board, stakeholders and members.

The review found “that Comhlámh is a credible, authoritative voice on issues relating to development and is playing its part within the sector”<sup>1</sup>. The report went on to make a series of recommendations that dealt with core competencies on the one hand and the strategic development of the organisation on the other.

## Core competencies

Comhlámh is committed to **development education**; raising awareness around development issues drawing on the experience, knowledge and commitment of development workers, volunteers and activists. This energy and enthusiasm should be channelled into **public engagement** in order to promote and advocate for a more just and equitable world. In order to achieve these objectives, Comhlámh will provide and be a leader in training with regard to development education.

Comhlámh has a very clear and distinct role in **volunteering and in supporting returned development workers and volunteers**. Comhlámh is recognised as the voice for good practice in volunteering and will further develop this leadership position around volunteering and good practice. Comhlámh is committed to responding to and further developing its already comprehensive support services to both development workers and volunteers and returned development workers/volunteers according to their particular needs.

## Strategic development of Comhlámh

Staff and board members have built on the outcome of the review in order to develop and reflect the niche skills and expertise that the organisation has to offer. This Strategic Plan will enable Comhlámh to maximise on its potential into the future.

<sup>1</sup>Foley, S. *Review of Comhlámh's Strategic Plan, July 2008, p 39*

# Comhlámh – action and education for global justice

Comhlámh is a dynamic, independent membership organisation working together with development workers, volunteers and activists. We are committed to advocating for a just and equitable world, setting standards and promoting good practice.

Ours is the belief that people acting in solidarity can change the structures of global injustice and poverty. Through awareness raising, research, education and training we empower individuals to take effective action to address global inequality.

As the Irish Association of Development Workers, we protect the interests of people working in development and for human rights. Our work is informed by their experiences.

## **Comhlámh's mission**

Comhlámh's mission is to challenge our society on the root causes of global poverty and inequality and empower people to demand equity in global relations.

## **Comhlámh's vision**

Comhlámh's vision is of a just, equitable and sustainable world.

## **Comhlámh commits to a range of values**

Comhlámh commits to a range of values that impact on those that we work with. We believe in partnership and solidarity with the Global South; in justice, equality and empowerment. We advocate for active citizenship and critical engagement, challenging perspectives in a spirit of partnership that respects and promotes diversity and interculturalism. Underlying principles in achieving these are to invest in people, to be accountable and to promote sustainable development and respect for human rights.

As an organisation, Comhlámh's role is to be a critical voice on development and global justice by articulating the case for global equality through challenging public understanding on the root causes of poverty and inequality. Ultimately Comhlámh strives to build the will to change the structures that cause global injustice.

Comhlámh aims to achieve these by communicating and educating on global development issues and by supporting and engaging returning development workers, volunteers and human rights activists towards action in Ireland. We will draw on the development experience of our members and supplement this by carrying out research, promoting education, building skills and understanding with regard to issues. Comhlámh will develop stronger external communications and heighten its public profile through raising public awareness, lobbying, campaigning and networking. Comhlámh will also ensure on-going engagement with Southern and Northern grassroots movements, to inform our work. Comhlámh will be action orientated, focused on achieving our goals in the most effective manner. We will be leaders in education on development issues through national campaign actions. Comhlámh will continue to be the key provider of informed advice with regard to pre decision and preparation training in relation to overseas volunteering. We will increase our participation within the international development and justice movement; be a critical voice on development cooperation, rhetoric and reality and continue to root our action in on-going reflection.

*This will be achieved by working in three key areas:*



## Strategic area one: development workers, volunteers and activists

“Comhlámh channels the angst and passion of returned development workers and links them into a route to continue working around development issues”.<sup>2</sup>

“The Code of Practice is the gold standard – there is nothing standing up to this across Europe”.<sup>3</sup>

**Strategic objective:** Promoting good practice to those engaged in the volunteering continuum; protecting, supporting and empowering Development Workers, Volunteers, and Activists through a range of services thereby enabling them to actively engage with development issues both in Ireland and overseas.

### We are addressing the need to:

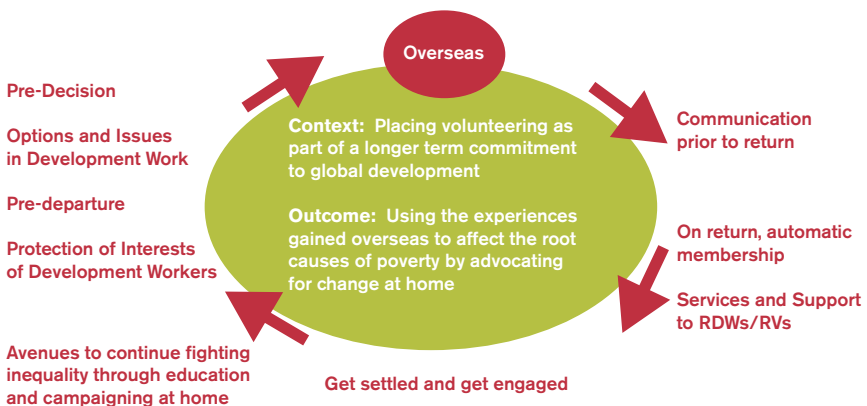
- Respond to the growing interest among the Irish public in volunteering and development work (e.g. Options and Issues course) in developing countries and promote responsible, responsive international volunteering;
- Provide impartial information and advice to volunteers, development workers, activists, and those interested in development;
- Ensure relevant training opportunities are available for short-term volunteers pre-decision, pre-departure and upon return;
- Encourage volunteers and development workers to place their experience within the global context and to support volunteers in a longer term commitment to development;
- Develop and promote adherence to an agreed set of common standards among volunteer sending organisations;
- Highlight host project and community perspectives on international volunteering;
- Promote the work being done in Ireland on good practice in volunteering at an international level;
- Provide a meeting space, for networking and critical debate, for people in Ireland who are eager to act on global justice issues;

<sup>2</sup> Foley, S, *Review of Comhlámh's Strategic Plan, July 2008, p 33*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid, p 24*

- Provide training, information and resources to relevant educators, activists and development workers to enable them to advocate for a more equitable world;
- Provide pathways for volunteers, activists and development workers to be continuously engaged with and active on development and global justice issues;
- Encourage active citizenship and public engagement;
- To support the needs of development workers/volunteers and returned development workers (RDWs) and advocate for the Protection of Interests of Development Workers at all stages of the volunteer continuum;
- To support RDWs in particular and sending agencies in general on all needs related to returning to Ireland (practical, emotional and professional needs);
- To educate development workers/volunteers on the importance of social insurance and retirement planning;
- To develop existing and new partnerships to deliver all services to volunteers before, during and after their placements overseas;
- To collaborate with operations and development education teams on all relevant aspects of supporting volunteers, sending agencies and host organisations.

### *The Volunteering Continuum*



What we want to achieve	How we are going to do it	Action outcomes
<p>The interest of the Irish public in volunteering for development is harnessed towards positive action; impartial advice and information on volunteering and working in developing countries; training opportunities are available.</p>	<p>Enhance public understanding of development issues through the provision of balanced information and advice on ways to engage in development.</p> <p>Continue to provide information on responsible volunteering and development work.</p> <p>Promote training by sending organisation and offer tailor made programmes as appropriate.</p>	<p>The public are more aware of the issues around volunteering overseas and know where to access further information and/or training on development issues.</p> <p>Information on all aspects of volunteering is readily available online and in book format.</p> <p>Volunteers have access to relevant training and support pre-decision, pre-departure and upon return from placement.</p>
<p>Clear bridges and pathways for volunteers and development workers to engage in the volunteering continuum.</p>	<p>Training courses for volunteers with regard to the development context and their role; engaging RDWs in Dev Ed activities; encourage DWs and volunteers to avail of Comhlámh membership actively promoting involvement in Comhlámh's campaigns and Dev Ed activities.</p>	<p>Research and recommendations on how to better engage returned development workers are available.</p> <p>A pool of committed facilitators is available to support the delivery of Comhlámh training courses</p>

<b>What we want to achieve</b>	<b>How we are going to do it</b>	<b>Action outcomes</b>
<p>Volunteers and DWs are aware of the comprehensive set of supports and protection available to them through Comhlámh and other agencies, and are accessing them before, during and after their placements.</p>	<p>Information events for volunteer and development agencies to promote the services Comhlámh provides.</p> <p>Deliver a range of support services in a professional manner.</p> <p>Conduct research on types of supports required/provided to volunteers and development workers, and document good practice.</p>	<p>Volunteer and development agencies are familiar with and avail of the support services Comhlámh provides.</p> <p>RDWs aware of social insurance and pension protection available under legislation.</p> <p>Research papers.</p>
<p>Volunteer sending organisations have signed up to an agreed set of common standards developed by Comhlámh and are committed to implementing them in their organisations.</p>	<p>Promote the Code of Good Practice (CoP) among Irish Sending Organisations and raise awareness among volunteers of issues to consider in selecting a sending organisation; committed to reviewing the progress of the CoP to ensure it remains relevant and useful for sending organisations.</p>	<p>The CoP is a living document – subject to on-going review and adaptation; the future of the CoP is determined and steps are being taken towards the recommended route.</p> <p>Organisations are implementing the principles of the CoP internally and this is externally verifiable.</p>

<b>What we want to achieve</b>	<b>How we are going to do it</b>	<b>Action outcomes</b>
<p>Host project and community perspectives are high on the agenda in discussions on international volunteering.</p>	<p>Explore the need for developing a CoP for host projects.</p> <p>Conduct further research on the impact of volunteering on host projects and communities.</p>	<p>Research and recommendations on the impact of volunteering on host communities is available.</p> <p>Fora for sharing of experiences and expertise are created.</p>
<p>Vol Ops is recognised internationally for its work on setting good practice standards in volunteering.</p>	<p>International networking with volunteer sending organisations and networks.</p> <p>Vol Ops publications widely available on the internet.</p>	<p>Awareness of good practice standards is developed internationally.</p>
<p>Provide a meeting space for networking and critical debate, for people in Ireland who are eager to act on global justice issues.</p>	<p>Continue to be a connecting organisation which refers people on to other organisations depending on their area of interest.</p> <p>Develop and support public engagement.</p>	

## Strategic area two: development education

“Courses are very good; objective workshops with critical thinking; putting information in an objective way”.<sup>4</sup>

**Strategic objective:** To create linkages and pathways for critical and informed engagement in effective active global citizenship, on local and global development issues.

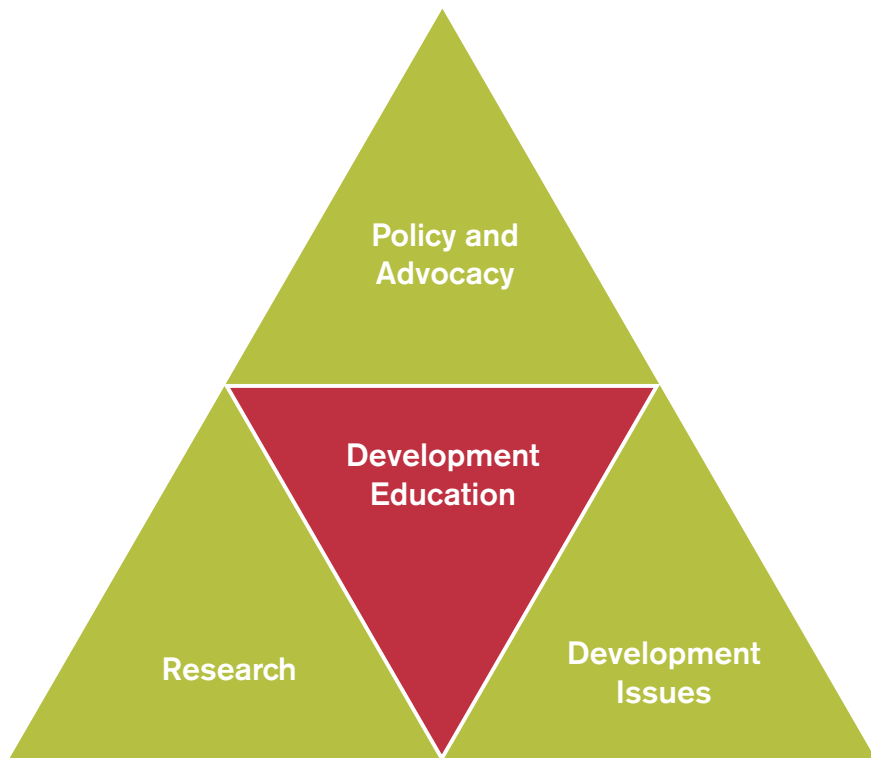
### **We are addressing the need to:**

- Create pathways for development workers, volunteers and activists to engage with local and global development issues;
- Invest in new creative, innovative, dynamic approaches to enhance understanding of development education in Ireland;
- Enhance capacity and information provision in development education in the formal and informal sectors;
- Provide training, resources and support for volunteers, development workers, educators and activists to educate themselves and others on development education;
- Provide high quality resources on development education to sector and non-sectoral audiences – to be available in hard copy as well as in online and new technology fora;
- Provide a critical voice in the Development Education sector;
- Strengthen the DE sector e.g. through work in networks – such as CGE, IDEA, Africa Centre, Dóchas;
- Encourage active citizenship and public engagement.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*, p 32

What we want to achieve	How we are going to do it	Action outcomes
To support and facilitate an engaged body of DWs, volunteers and activists involved in Dev Ed and public engagement enabling them to advocate for a more equitable world.	Through capacity building; networking; supporting activist groups.	Active public engagement; information and resource sharing; activist groups on specific issues.
Provide pathways for volunteers and DWs to be continuously engaged with and active on development and global justice issues.	Target Dev Ed and campaigning work towards DWs and volunteers using innovative and dynamic methodologies.	Target Dev Ed and campaigning work towards DWs and volunteers using innovative and dynamic methodologies.  Greater engagement by DWs and volunteers in our Dev Ed and campaigning activities.
Enhance capacity and information provision in the formal and informal sectors for Dev Ed.	Continue and develop formal and informal courses; maintain high calibre resource provision to the sector; disseminate research on development issues.	We provide, and are known for, high quality resources and capacity-building opportunities to sector and non-sector audiences.
Provide a critical nexus for Dev Ed practitioners, activists, DWs and volunteers through continued networking.	Organising and actively involved in networks and alliances; providing a space for public debate and discussion on Dev Ed issues.	We are active and considered to be a crucial player in the Dev Ed and development sector and Irish civil society.

*The Development Education work will inform and be informed by Comhlámh's policies, research areas and advocacy activities.*



## Strategic area three: policy, advocacy, research and public engagement

“Comhlámh has a good critical voice that is respected as it draws on real experiences”.<sup>5</sup>

**Strategic objective:** Ensure our work is informed by critical perspectives and underpinned by good practice approaches.

### We are addressing the need:

- To engage volunteers, development workers, activists and like-minded individuals to take action for change;
- To channel the experiences and analysis of volunteers, development workers and activists to draw attention to issues and mobilise for action to influence policy change on development issues, with a particular focus on European Trade Policy;
- To develop our capacity to carry out research and develop comprehensive policies;
- To influence policy so that it contributes to reducing global inequality and poverty;
- To generate more critical awareness of global justice issues;
- To ensure that our work is informed by, and in solidarity with, Southern and grassroots perspectives;

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid*, p 32

<b>What we want to achieve</b>	<b>How we are going to do it</b>	<b>Action outcomes</b>
A set of guiding principles for action/ vision.	Comhlámh formulates a vision for an alternative world we would like to see,	We have a clear mandate and guideline on which issues we work on and why; a position on the role of corporates in development is in place.
Develop and take policy positions with a strong media profile.	Set up a think tank made up of experts, development workers and others to determine research areas for the organisation; develop policy positions and contributions on current topics; public engagement on EU Trade issues; develop a strong media strategy.	Policy positions on a number of key areas; actively advocating on issues nationally and internationally.  Recognised as a credible commentator / analyst on issues by the media
Effective public engagement and advocacy on key issues; supporting multiplying activist groups; sustaining and developing networking, alliances and solidarity.	Devise strategies to further engage RDWs and build organisational capacity to engage with media; capacity building.	We are actively involved across the sector in key alliances and make important contributions by mobilising our activists for key moments and bringing our policy positions on board
Provide easily accessible and action-inspiring information; develop internal good practice guidelines.	Production of accessible publications.  Develop and implement organisational polices.	

## Getting better at what we do and how we do it

Comhlámh will look to address the organisational issues that were recommended in the evaluation.

We will strive to implement the objectives of the Strategic Plan. We will continue to develop our policies and implement good practices in the area of human resource management. We will explore committing to an organisational best practice code such as People in Aid's Code of Good Practice or Fas' Excellence Through People. Comhlámh also commits to developing a Rights Based Approach to its work.

We will address the capacity building needs of our staff. We will provide training for our Board in order to ensure good organisational governance. We will continue to implement high quality financial procedures; we will strive to diversify our funding base and move away from a high level of dependency on Irish Aid; this will be on a sliding scale as Comhlámh secures alternative donors and looks at marketing its services.

We will continue to work to challenge our society on the root causes of global poverty and inequality and empower people to demand equity in global relations through our focus on the strategic areas of Development Workers, Volunteers and Activists, Development Education, Policy, Advocacy, Research and Public Engagement.

Comhlámh commits to reviewing the Strategic Plan over the course of its life; maintaining and further developing the practice of monitoring and evaluating activities within the organisation; this in turn can feed back into the review process and assist in further strategic development.



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