

» The Link

Irish Aid Fellowship
Alumni Newsletter

Issue 1 - Winter 2010

Fellowship enters its 5th decade...



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Welcome



Peter Power T.D.
Minister of State
for Overseas
Development

It gives me great pleasure to contribute to the first issue of this newsletter marking the establishment of the Irish Aid Fellowship Alumni network. Earlier this year I had the privilege of meeting with some of the fellows who came on a visit to the Irish Aid's offices in Limerick. I listened to some very interesting presentations on their experience of living and studying in Ireland. I was struck by their commitment to development and their strong desire to contribute to the future of their countries on return.

The Alumni Network, by forging strong personal and professional contacts, will hopefully ensure these experiences can be shared more widely and will resonate for many years beyond the period of study. Not only for current and future fellows but for the many hundreds of fellows who have already completed their studies. I am always surprised on my visits overseas as the Minister for Overseas Development by the number of people who tell me that they have studied in Ireland and how much they benefitted from the experience.

As many of you are aware, the Fellowship Training Programme has been central to Irish Aid's support for capacity building

since it began back in 1974. Many hundreds have studied in universities in Ireland and in Africa, gaining skills and knowledge that contribute to the development of their countries.

We hope that through the Alumni Network, fellows will be able to keep in touch not only with one another but also with the Irish Aid programme. Our colleagues in the Irish embassies are willing to support the country networks in any way they can and look forward to working closely with you.

Exchange and learning is, of course, at the heart of what we are trying to achieve through the Fellowship Training Programme. It is your ideas as Fellows, your creativity and your leadership that will help shape the Alumni's future.

I hope that all of you will benefit greatly from participation in the Alumni Network and I also hope that it helps build a bond with Ireland and the Irish Aid programme that lasts a lifetime.



Sheila Power
ICOS Director

Welcome to the first edition of "The Link".

ICOS is delighted to be involved with the launch of the Irish Aid Fellowship Alumni Association and hopes the newsletter will be used as an important vehicle for communication with and between former IA Study Fellows.

In this first issue are some inspiring stories from former Study Fellows. We hope you, too, will consider writing about your experience and sharing it with others in future editions. We also

encourage you to think about what you can do to set up a local alumni chapter. Further advice is available online at the ICOS website.

This is just the beginning and we welcome your suggestions as to how we can create a vibrant and useful network for all.

Meet the 2010-11 Irish Aid Study Fellows

Women make up majority of awardees for first time



For the first time in the 35 year history of the Irish Aid Fellowship Training Programme, women make up the majority of the 45 fellows commencing programmes in 2010-11.

At an orientation day on 25th September, Irish Aid and ICOS welcomed a total of 26 new fellows to



Austin Gormley extends a warm welcome to new study fellows on behalf of Irish Aid

Ireland, 14 of them female. Six different partner countries were represented amongst these awards - Ethiopia (3), Malawi (4), Palestine (1), Uganda (7), Vietnam (2) and Zambia (9).

In addition, 18 fellows will be studying in-region at universities in Africa and Asia - 2 from Ethiopia, 1 from Lesotho, 1 from Malawi, 4 from Mozambique, 1 from Tanzania, 1 from Timor Leste and 8 from Uganda. One further student from Lesotho is undertaking a specialist programme in Britain.

The range of courses being studied by fellows includes law, health and nutrition, education, environmental science, economics, gender studies and development. Subject areas have been aligned with established development priorities for each country in keeping with the programmatic approach favoured by Irish Aid.

Why an Irish Aid Alumni Network?

Some of the key benefits from an alumni network might include:

- Opportunities to reconnect and socialise with former Fellows after returning home
- Sharing information and promoting events
- An improved profile for the achievements of former Study Fellows
- A means to stay in contact with Irish Aid and to maintain links with Irish institutions, academic staff and ICOS
- Offering a way for new Fellows to ask returned Fellows practical questions

The network will also provide the Irish Government with a resource for strategic networking and to evaluate the longer term impact of the programme on Irish Aid's partner countries.

Ethiopia and Uganda will be the two pilot countries for the development of local chapters. In fact, an alumni network is already operating in Uganda and you can read more about it below.

As well as country-based chapters, we also hope to support other forms of linkages, e.g. by academic field and around

Irish Aid's cross-cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS, environment and health.

Similarly, we're keen to see female Study Fellows networking and helping encourage higher participation of women in the Fellowship in future years.

Your contribution is crucial

The higher the number of participants, the more successful the Network will be.

We particularly encourage you to consider playing a leadership role in starting and developing a new chapter.

Keeping the links alive: Building an Alumni Network in Uganda



Agnes Aloba completed an MA in Development Studies, UCD, supported by the Irish Aid Fellowship Training Programme. A former Juvenile Justice Programme Officer with Save The Children, Agnes now works as the National Technical Advisor on Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Uganda. She also chairs an Alumni group for Ugandans who studied in Ireland, which she founded in 2008. Here she outlines her experiences and explains more about the Alumni group.

Doing my masters degree at UCD enabled me to work with some of the best minds dedicated to development research. I gained a lot from this association – particularly the support I obtained from my lecturers.

My study in Ireland has helped me develop an appreciation of 'the big picture'. The research

work I did in Uganda in support of my thesis opened my eyes in a broader sense as I began to look at juvenile justice issues as a factor of poverty and generally inadequate social protection mechanisms for the disadvantaged children. In my role with Save The Children UK, I recommended a sector-wide and multi-sectoral approach to the problem.

"In my current job ... I have huge opportunities to ensure the recommendations of my research work feed into the development agenda."

Now, in my current job with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, I have huge opportunities to ensure the recommendations of my research work feed into the development agenda. As National Technical Advisor on Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children, I occupy a strategic position to steer policy revision and formulation.



Currently I am leading a process for revising the National Strategic Programme Plan of Interventions for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children. I am also engaged in capacity building for other sectors and Civil Society Organisations in pursuance of a multi-sectoral response. This is key in ensuring that it is holistic and addresses not only symptoms of vulnerability, but most importantly, ensuring interventions are cognizant of the causes of vulnerability of children.

Because of my position, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development has started to engage IrishAid in all important decisions regarding Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children.

Network Inspiration

While I was in Ireland I carried along with me an enthusiastic desire to learn all I could and take back home all I could. I benefited greatly from the support I received.

When I left UCD, it was with a network of strong and lasting relationships with my colleagues and all the people I encountered regardless of their religion, age, gender, race and other attributes. It is this that inspired me to establish an Alumni association in Uganda, a body through which we could maintain not only our

historical record with Ireland but also contacts with academic and other institutions as well as with individuals we have had contacts with while in Ireland.

“I convened the first meeting which was attended by 14 study fellows ... The association has since drawn 100 registered members, including those who studied in Ireland in the 1950s.”

The idea of getting together in the first place was conceived in October 2008 when I paid a visit to the Irish Embassy in Uganda. The first to support me in this plan were Donal Cronin, a former Development Attaché at the Embassy of Ireland in Uganda and Philip Okin, a former Study Fellow.

With their support and also with the support of the Irish Embassy in Uganda, I convened the first meeting, which was attended by 14 Study Fellows.

The meeting was intended to bring together Study Fellows sponsored by the Irish Government and to get to know

who is who and what we are in Uganda.

My major intention was that, at the end of the day, I would introduce the idea of forming the Ugandan Irish Alumni Association. Members unanimously declared that by that meeting, an alumni association had been formed and immediately put in place an interim committee where I am the chairperson.

The association has since drawn 100 registered members, including those who studied in Ireland in the 1950s.

Many more are expected to join as we make the association public.

MORE INFORMATION

If you would like to find out more about the **Ugandan Irish Alumni Association** please contact Agnes via atoagnesalobo@yahoo.com

GET ALUMNI HINTS AND TIPS

For ideas and advice on setting up an alumni chapter visit the **ICOS Fellowship Alumni** page



Heritage management in Ethiopia benefits from fellow's Irish experience

Getu Assefa Wondimu graduated with an MSc in World Heritage Management from University College Dublin in 2007. After returning to his native Ethiopia, he established a new office to protect the country's heritage sites and develop sustainable tourism initiatives.



Prior to my fellowship, I was a team leader for the National Inventory of Cultural Heritages and for a programme on Heritage Training and Education.

From my studies in UCD and my stay in Ireland, I got international experience and knowledge in World Heritage Management. I became more confident that Ethiopia can use its rich heritage resources for socio-economic development. I came to know international conventions which can be used on a regular basis at my workplace and got the chance to learn how Ireland has prospered and achieved economic progress in a relatively short time.

After returning back to Ethiopia, I spoke with the director of my institution and came to an understanding to establish an office which is exclusively dedicated to the eight World Heritage Sites of Ethiopia. We called it the World Heritage Sites Management Co-ordinating Office and I became the first head of this Office. It is working closely with international organisations such as UNESCO.

The system I established is appreciated and taken as a valuable gesture by UNESCO and the Government of Ethiopia, and what began as a one-man office has since been restructured to be staffed by twenty-five employees.

“From my studies and my stay in Ireland, I got international experience and knowledge ... I became more confident that Ethiopia can use its rich heritage resources for socio-economic development.”

The Office has been engaged in a series of capacity building activities for Ethiopian professionals in the field of heritage protection. It also organises community support programs for people living in World Heritage Sites and their



Getu conducting an inventory of heritage in the Tigray Region of northern Ethiopia.

environs and has made a great contribution in the effort to bring sustainable development to the country through developing responsible tourism and heritage protection. There is a plan to open offices in all the eight World Heritage Sites in Ethiopia.

Another fellow student from UCD, Ms. Tsehay Eshete, has now replaced me as head of the Office. Since the 1st of January, 2010, I have been working as a National Culture Officer for the UNESCO Cluster Office in Addis Ababa. All these achievements are due to the confidence institutions have in UCD's academic excellence and the knowledge and skills I got during my time in Dublin.

I can't cite all the gains I achieved during my stay as a fellow student in Ireland. The impact is at personal, family, community, institutional and country level.

Staying Connected

I also maintained my relationship with my university, UCD, and we have already implemented one joint project to establish a site management plan for the World Heritage Site of Lalibela. For this project my lecturers and I prepared a proposal and secured a grant from the Irish Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. It has been a successful project and there is an understanding

that we shall continue with other projects.

Although Ethiopia is now on the right track of development and among the rapidly progressing countries, it remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

The Irish experience shows that education is the most important instrument in the fight against poverty and we fellow students educated in Ireland in different disciplines must prove that this works practically. For this I strongly propose that we need to establish an association for the Fellows who have returned back from Ireland.

Read profiles of more former study fellows at: www.icosirl.ie/irish_aid_fellowship

The Link would be delighted to receive news and photographs on how alumni are doing - send to alumni@icosirl.ie (and please feel free to share any photos of your time in Ireland, too).

New Malawian fellows get embassy invite

Six Malawians, drawn from across three government departments, were welcomed to a reception at the Irish Embassy in August after being awarded Irish Aid Fellowships for 2010-11.

The Irish Ambassador to Malawi, Liam Mac Gabhann, congratulated the six, who were chosen from an initial 35 applicants. They will follow in the footsteps of six awardees who became Malawi's first group of Irish Aid fellows in 2009-10.

Ambassador Mac Gabhann said that the fellowships formed part of Ireland's commitment to help develop the country's institutional capacity and urged

the awardees to use the skills they would gain to help take Malawi forward.

Four of the fellows - Sabstone Unyolo, Rex Baluwa and Jean Sauti Phiri from the Ministry of Agriculture, along with Linney Kachama from the Office of the President and Cabinet (Department of Nutrition) - are now studying Masters programmes in their respective areas at University College Dublin (UCD).

Twapashagha Twea, from the Ministry of Development Planning and Cooperation, is attending University College Cork to study for a Masters in



Social Policy, and Ethel Luhanga from the OPC (Department of Nutrition) is studying Nutrition Science in-region at the Malawi's Bunda College of Agriculture.

Interviewed by Malawi's *Daily Times*, both Ethel and Rex expressed gratitude to the Irish government for the scholarships, which they said would enhance their skills to work better in their respective departments.

Millennium Development Goals:

Ireland and US host '1,000 Days' event on reducing child undernutrition

On 21st September, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheál Martin hosted an international event aimed at pushing forward global efforts to reduce child undernutrition.

It placed the focus firmly on the '1,000 day window of opportunity' - the critical period between pregnancy and a child's second birthday, after which the physical and mental damage caused by undernutrition is largely irreversible.

While acknowledging the challenges, Minister Martin emphasised that undernutrition is largely preventable and that proven interventions can bring exceptionally high development returns. In particular, he gave his backing to the Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) roadmap and leadership from the UN Secretary-General in advancing it.

"Ireland will play its part," Minister Martin pledged. "We are determined to work with our partners to deliver this action plan. We will support plans and actions that are owned and led by our partner countries. We will encourage the scale up of national programmes. And we will review our own development programmes through the lens of nutrition." He also noted that



Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State, United States with Micheál Martin, TD., Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the 1000 Day UN event, New York City, September 21, 2010

the Irish Government had made a commitment to devote 20% of its overseas aid budget to hunger-reduction efforts.

The 1,000 Days initiative came against the backdrop of a review of progress toward the 2015 UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and calls for accelerating the pace.

Addressing the review, Minister of State for Overseas Development, Peter Power, said that "Ireland's own history of famine echoes through the generations and drives our commitment to fight global hunger."

He recalled that almost exactly two years earlier, the Irish Government's Hunger Task Force Report had recommended three key actions to combat global

hunger: boosting the productivity of small farmers in struggling areas, addressing mother-and-child malnutrition, and maintaining international political momentum.

"Increased hunger is one of the major constraints to accelerating progress across all the MDGs. Hunger transmits poverty to the next generation as the hungry child becomes in turn the irregular and underachieving pupil and the vulnerable and impoverished adult."

Report on the Millennium Development Goals

Irish Aid, September 2010

» **The Link** is published by ICOS on behalf of Irish Aid.

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