

**BUSINESS
WOMEN IN
RWANDA
THRIVE AS
LEADERS
PAGE 5**



**SPORT
CHANGING
LIVES
THROUGH
FOOTBALL
PAGE 8**



THE WORLD'S BEST NEWS



Emanuel Kun, Nush Gunror and Kamba Lamie during their letters and numbers class at N.V. Massquoi School, West Point, Monrovia, Liberia. Photograph by Aubrey Wade

INSIDE

**GLOBAL
MALARIA
RATES HAVE
FALLEN BY 45%**

**IRISH AID MEDIA
PROGRAMME
HELPS PEOPLE
ACCESS RIGHTS
IN TANZANIA**

THANKS TO

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The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

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9 OUT OF 10 CHILDREN IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE NOW ENROLLED IN SCHOOL

In 2000 world leaders committed themselves to ensuring that all children attended primary school.

Today, 90% of children in developing countries are enrolled in primary school. In the year 2000, world leaders made a commitment to ensuring that all children were given the opportunity to go to school. Since then, the number of children not attending classes has almost halved and girls match boys in enrolment rates. One of the real successes stories has been Ethiopia.

In 1994, three years after emerging from a civil war 3 million pupils were enrolled in primary school across the country.

According to a report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in London, by 2008/2009 this figure had moved to 15.5 million. Key measures that lead to Ethiopia's success included the abolishment of school fees and the training of thousands of new teachers.

Another county that has made huge progress is Benin. In 1990 the country had one of the lowest

primary school enrolment rates in the world.

Today almost all children both boys and girls can access school. This was due to an increase in donor and government funding as well as a number of effective campaigns about the benefits of education. Though great progress has been made, more work needs to be done to ensure that all children across the globe have a chance to attend school.

1200 GIRLS STAY IN SCHOOL IN NORTH WEST KENYA



Packing Pads, Norah Sirma, John Sawe and Josline Chepkoech pack reusable sanitary pads for distribution to schools.

For many girls in the District of Londiani, North West Kenya, reaching puberty means missing a week of school every month. Why does this happen? Discussions with some of the communities involved reveal that it's simply because their schools don't have the right facilities, and the girls can't afford the sanitary towels they need. Many more young women around the world find themselves in the same situation, with some even giving up on education as a result. However, thanks to support from people in Ireland, they hopefully won't have to do that anymore. A new programme which offers hygiene education, access to sustainable sanitary products, improvements to school facilities, and training on becoming economically independent has benefited more than 1200 girls in 22 schools in Northwest Kenya to date. There is evidence that it is

delivering real change. Girls are not missing school during their monthly periods, as they know that they have alternatives, and the issue of girls' rights to sanitation has been highlighted in the community. School attendance rates are up because they are no longer embarrassed and have access to clean toilets and washrooms. The girls also have a better understanding of how to make money, spend money and save money, which will be of huge benefit to them in the long term. And, perhaps most importantly, each girl is getting an education that opens up her world, provides her with choices and gives her hope. These young women have come a long way since 2011, thanks to assistance from the people of Ireland. And, with greater access to education, they hope to develop new and innovative solutions to problems their communities are facing.

GLOBAL MALARIA RATES REDUCED BY 45%

Remarkable progress has been made in the fight against malaria in recent years. According to the World Health Organisation World Malaria Report, which was published in December 2013, global efforts have saved an estimated 3.3 million lives since 2000, reducing malaria mortality rates by 45% globally and by 49% in Africa. Ireland has played a role in the fight against malaria. According to the Irish Aid 2013 annual report which was published earlier this year. Ireland's support to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria helped to save about two million lives in 2013.

At a briefing on the report at the UN Headquarters, Dr Robert Newman, the Director of the WHO Global

Malaria Programme acknowledged the progress that has been made in the fight against malaria but warned against becoming complacent. "In the next 10-15 years, the world will need innovative tools and technologies, as well as new strategic approaches to sustain and accelerate progress." While UN Special Envoy for Financing the Health MDGs and for Malaria Mr Raymond G. Chambers pointed out that by combatting malaria the world not only saves innocent lives but helps countries flourish.

"Our collective efforts are not only ending the needless suffering of millions, but are helping families thrive and adding billions of dollars to economies that nations can use in other ways."

WHAT IS THE WORLDS BEST NEWS?

The World's Best News highlights the remarkable progress in the fight against extreme poverty. It is a news service that unlike other media; does not only focus on the dramatic and the sudden, but that tells the bigger stories of hope and change that normally remain hidden. The World's Best News is about telling the stories of the historic and unprecedented revolution that is slowly unfolding behind the headlines: the unreported reality of steady and unrelenting improvement in human lives right across the world. We live in an Information Age. But in the midst of the incessant flow of information it is sometimes difficult to know if we are in fact better informed. Are the many items of 'news' actually contributing to our increased understanding of the world around us? Research shows that the vast majority of people in Ireland think that they are receiving enough information about the developing world, yet only 19% say that they feel well informed about developing countries. And despite the many reports about progress in the fight

against global poverty, about half of the people in Ireland don't think that Africa is any better off now than it was 20 years ago.

And this is at least in part because the media are not telling us the good news stories media coverage of "aid" issues usually focus on crises and disasters. The news gives the impression that Africa is a mess: poor and dependant on aid. In the busy mainstream news agenda, there is little scope for other stories in this paper we will show you the other reality. In this paper, we can find space for stories that other newspapers don't cover. Stories that can help us make sense of the world and help us make better decisions. Globalisation means that our lives are interwoven with those of everyone on this planet. Our prosperity in Ireland depends on the prosperity of the rest of the world. So if that world is changing, our media should report on it. Particularly, if those changes are too slow to make headlines.

In this paper we find space for the important, not merely the urgent, stories.

Visit www.dochas.ie



Solar panels in Kenya

KENYA EMBRACES GREEN TECHNOLOGY

Kenya aims to generate half of its electricity through solar power by 2016. Nine sites have been identified to build solar plants and construction is expected to begin soon. The project is expected to cost \$1.2 billion 50% of which will be funded by the state while the remaining 50% will be funded by a number of private companies. The project will not only benefit the environment but hopefully bring down local energy costs.

However Kenya is not only embracing solar energy. The country also hopes to build sub-Saharan Africa's largest wind farm, the Turkana Wind project (LTWP). The project is being funded by

the African Development Bank and is the largest single private investment in Kenya's history.

By investing in both wind and solar energy the government should be able to unburden itself from its reliance on hydroelectric power, which provides around 60% of Kenya's electricity needs. Unfortunately hydroelectricity is not always suited to the Kenyan climate and often leads to blackouts and power shortages due to irregular rainfall.

By diversify their sources of power the government should be able to provide more of its citizens with access to electricity and help improve the country's economy.

Half of Kenya's electricity needs should be generated by solar power by 2016

THE OASIS OF PEACE

THE COMMUNITY THAT PRACTICE COOPERATION AND COEXISTENCE IN TIMES OF CONFLICT



“Doumia-Sakinah”, also known as the The Pluralistic Spiritual Centre, is located in the village and provides a framework for spiritual reflection on issues at the core of the middle east conflict and the search for its resolution. The photo is from the Oasis of Peace website. No changes were made to this photo and it complies with the terms set out in their creative commons license

Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salaam, which translates to Oasis of Peace, is the name of an international community located between Jerusalem and Tel- Aviv- Jaffa. It is home to 30 Israeli Jewish and 30 Palestinian families. The cooperative village was formed in the late 1970s and was founded on the principles of coexistence and cooperation.

Major decisions are decided democratically as a group, all residence receive training in conflict resolution and their education system provides the youth of Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salaam, as well as children from the surrounding area, with a bilingual and multicultural education. The village is also home to the pioneering School for Peace (SFP)

which was established in 1979. It is the first educational institution in Israel promoting broad scale change towards peace and more humane, egalitarian and just relations between Palestinians and Jews. Despite the growing hostilities and the tragic loss of human life, residents remain committed to the village’s founding principles. In an interview with the United Nation

Regional Information Centre for Western Europe (UNRIC) Bob Mark a resident and retired primary school who worked in the Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salaam primary school for 23 years explained that even in times of conflict the village remains unified. “While the residents have differing views on the solution to the country’s woes they all agree that the killing must stop.”

THREE YEARS POLIO FREE

The World Health Organisation declares that the entire South East Asia region is polio free

The 11th of February 2014 marked a momentous occasion in Indian and global health history as the country was declared polio free. This victory led to World Health Organisation declaring that the entire South East Asia region, which is home to a quarter of the world’s population, to be entirely polio-free.

What makes this victory particular momentous is that public health experts predicted that India would be the last country to free itself from polio, as historically parts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were among the most difficult places in the world for polio eradication. Up until 2009 more than half the global polio cases occurred in India.

Eradication would not have been possible without the dedication of countless health workers, international partners and the innovative public health campaigns which focused on immunizing children and the migrant population. Regional Director for the WHO South-East Asia Region Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh said “This is a momentous victory for the millions of health workers who have worked with governments, nongovernmental organizations, civil society and international partners to eradicate polio from the Region. It is a sign of what we can bequeath our children when we work together.” Today four of the six WHO Regions have achieved polio free status

meaning that 80% of the world’s population now lives in certified polio-free regions. This is one of the many public health victories that has occurred in recent years. In 2000 world leaders committed themselves to eight Millennium Development goals to rid the world of poverty by 2015. One of those was to combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

Efforts to control and eliminate malaria have saved an estimated 3.3 million lives since 2000 while the global HIV infection rate is down by 20% in the last 15 years. The number of people accessing effective drug treatment in the developing world has risen from half a million to 8 million people in the last 10 years.

IRISH AID MEDIA PROGRAMME HELPS PEOPLE ACCESS RIGHTS

Knowing and understanding your rights is very important to ensuring that those rights are met. Irish Aid supports local media and press, through the Tanzania Media Fund, to investigate areas of public interest to increase accountability and help people access their rights.

When journalists at regional radio station Mbeya Highlands FM realised that many of the concerns of their listeners related to a lack of access to safe water and sanitation, they decided to act and investigate the situation. With a grant from Tanzania Media Fund, an organisation supported by Irish Aid to provide grants to the media in support of investigative journalism for public interest, a team of young and dedicated journalists travelled around three districts in the region to see the challenges for themselves and investigate the causes. Speaking with the rural



Journalists from Mbeya Highlands FM

communities, the journalists realised that citizens' knowledge of their right to water and the responsibilities of local government was limited. To better inform citizens and to raise awareness about the

responsibilities of local government and the role that communities can play in holding their government accountable, the journalists broadcasted live shows featuring debates between community

members and local authorities and sharing information from their investigations on local water plans and budgets. These live debates contributed to greater demand from citizens and greater response from local authorities. Water pumps were fixed, pipes were replaced, new wells were built and new governing boards for water were installed. Mbeya Highlands FM believes that raising awareness on responsibilities and bringing together citizens and local government were the motivating factors in creating change and now plan to extend their live debate format throughout the Region. Irish Aid has been supporting Tanzania Media Fund since 2008 to increase domestic accountability through its support to public interest and investigative journalism. This is done through provision of grants combined with training and mentoring.

ECO TOURISM SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS TO WORK SUSTAINABLY



Where you go on your holiday probably isn't a decision you would think has any impact on global development issues. But in reality, choosing activities which support local economies and have minimal impact on environmental degradation can have a very positive impact on local development.

That is why Irish Aid supports eco-tourism projects in Vietnam such as the Green Living club which supports people like Mr Day and his neighbours to run basket boat tours in the central province of Quang Nam.

BASKET BOAT TOURS

Cam Thanh is a village just four kilometres from the historic town of Hoi An. The wharf in Cam Thanh is a lively place for business for Mr. Day and his neighbours, as they prepare for another day of ferrying

tourists through the nipa palm forest along the Thu Bon River. Dressed in his uniform of an orange t-shirt, the 52-year-old hurriedly loaded paddles, life jackets and water bottles aboard his boat, which today was carrying three foreign visitors.

ECO-ACTIVITIES WITH PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

The river and the traditional basket boats were primarily used for fishing, but Mr. Day explained how the locals branched out into the boat tours: "We started with a few boats in 2010, working as individual households, but there were only a small number of visitors, which made it very difficult to earn money". He acknowledges that initially they lacked the professional skills to properly greet and take care of foreign visitors. They also

charged different rates, based on negotiations, which often saw potential customers walk away after feeling they were being cheated.

To improve the customer service, the price for each boat trip and its duration are now publicly displayed on a notice board and there are no hidden charges. "We know what our customers expect, our prices are fixed and we provide our services with a smile," Mr. Day explained. "I think the most important thing is that customers are now going away happy and will recommend others come to Cam Thanh." The trips, printed materials and information are produced as part of a project being carried out by Action for the City via its Green Living Club. The club, which receives financial support from Irish Aid, promotes local awareness about green living and environmental protection.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Since the introduction of the boat club, the number of tourists visiting Cam Thanh has increased with tourists enjoying the beautiful natural surroundings and the unique experience being offered. Protecting and supporting the local environment is also important to sustaining the business in the region. The increase in the number of tours makes the boat trips a valuable source of additional income. Mr. Day now earns VND1 million on average each month in addition to the VND3 million he earns from fishing. As well as being an additional source of income for Mr. Day, the business is helping him improve his English skills and, more importantly, his awareness about green living for the community.

SWEET SUCCESS

SAVVY WOMEN CREATE SUCCESSFUL PINEAPPLE BUSINESS



Merciana Uwamwezi has had amazing success since starting to grow and sell pineapple 'suckers.'

Twenty years after the genocide in Rwanda, female pineapple farmers are proving that women can be savvy businesspeople, breadwinners and community leaders.

Standing in green Rwandan fields lush with pineapple plants, it's hard to imagine that just 20 years ago a devastating genocide saw more than 1,000,000 people killed in 100 days. The people of this country lost everything. Today Rwanda has turned itself around, moving beyond its tragic past to try to build a peaceful future. Yet massive challenges remain, with nearly half the population living in poverty and needing support to create work in rural and urban areas. As the country tries to build a growing economy, it's equally important that all Rwandans, men and women, can take an active role in shaping the progress of their country. In a small community in the north of the country sits a beautiful

countryside farm. Here rural women have been empowered to start their own businesses and develop their own incomes, to work their way out of poverty and dependence. Mum of three and pineapple farmer Merciana Uwamwezi has had amazing success since starting to grow and sell pineapple 'suckers' – high quality planting material needed by pineapple farmers. With support from the people of Ireland, she began using solar driers to make and sell dried pineapple locally. Merciana quickly become one of the best sellers of pineapple suckers in her district. She later imported material from Uganda and used innovative ways to multiply seedlings, leading to more produce and a successful business. Today Merciana organises community groups to train other

“Women can be savvy businesspeople, breadwinners and community leaders”

women to develop small pineapple nurseries and to share her sales techniques. Neighbours travel to train with her and learn her agriculture and farming skills. “This project has encouraged us to get a good life by staying on the farm rather than staying in the town where there is no work”, she explains. “We don't fear living here because we have hope of a good life.” Merciana's husband, who was initially sceptical about her business, has also shown great trust in her leadership abilities. “My husband sees me as an equal contributor and can't take any decision without consulting me”, she says. And she's not alone either. Donations from people in Ireland continue to help more than 5,000 people in Rwanda improve their lives at home and in the community.

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TASTING QUALITY IN AFRICA

We all want to change the world for the better, but the common problem is that we tend to feel frustrated and powerless to change things. One simple way that we can make a difference is through the purchases we make. Many companies in Sub-Saharan Africa are exporting high quality processed products throughout the world. But fully “made in Africa” jams, sauces and chocolate aren't often bought in Ireland, for one very simple reason: Very few of these products actually reach Irish shelves. However there are some exceptions. Meru Herbs pasta sauces

from Kenya and Eswatini chilli sauces from Swaziland are currently on the shelves of Donnybrook Fair, The Food Centre and Fresh. While Madécasse Chocolate from Madagascar can be found at Fallon & Byrne and Morton's in Dublin. Tusker lager (grown and brewed in Kenya) and Star lager from Nigeria are also available in many quality off-licenses throughout Ireland. Each of these brands has its own unique African story. Many products can and should be sourced from Africa. One example is chocolate. Every year \$80 billion worth of chocolate is consumed in the world. While West Africa produces

approximately 73% of the world's cocoa, less than 1% of processed and finished chocolate bars are made in Africa. Almost all of this extremely valuable raw commodity is exported and processed in Europe and the US, meaning that high quality production jobs are leaving Africa and opportunities to develop important brand management and export skills are lost. Madécasse Chocolate from Madagascar is one of the exceptions to the rule. How we spend our money truly does impact people's lives. If we buy African, we support African businesses and individuals to work their way out of poverty.



Meru Herbs pasta sauce is fully processed in Kenya and is stocked in Donnybrook Fair, The Food Centre and Fresh



RWANDA COMMEMORATES 20 YEARS SINCE GENOCIDE WITH PERFORMANCE

2014 marked 20 years since the Rwandan genocide. This year's commemorations focused on remembrance. Hundreds of volunteer actors took part in a performance in the Amahoro Stadium, Kigali, Rwanda. The government organised event was held on the 8th of April 2014, the anniversary of when the genocide started.

Photo taken by ©Sally Hayden

THE ELDERLY ACTIVISTS OF TANZANIA OLDER PEOPLE ADVOCATE FOR THEIR RIGHTS IN TANZANIA



Activists gather in Mbarali, Tanzania

The senior citizens of Mbarali, Tanzania, are rather like their Irish peers: They're not afraid to make their voices heard and know how to fight for their rights. These older citizens are among the most vulnerable in their area, which is home to roughly the same population as Meath and Louth combined. The poverty rate in households containing an older person in Mbarali is 21% higher than the national average. However, with the help of the Irish people, Mbarali's senior citizens were able to lobby their local councillors to provide them

with a reliable income. They set up district engagement meetings, which allowed them to engage with representatives from local councils, the Tanzania Social Action Fund and community self-help schemes. The meetings gave them the opportunity to present their concerns and call for inclusion in social protection schemes, and ultimately led to the Council agreeing to give cash transfers providing 142 older people with a reliable income. And as if that wasn't enough of an achievement, the Council also began a new programme providing older people with goats.

MAJOR STEP FORWARD FOR LGBT ACTIVISTS CELEBRATIONS AS UGANDA'S ANTI- HOMOSEXUALITY LAW IS OVERTURNED

August 2014; Ugandans gather on the shores of Lake Victoria to celebrate gay pride after the countries controversial anti-homosexuality law is overturned. A similar parade was held in 2012 but was broken up by the police. This year the police worked closely with the LGBT community and ensured that marchers and spectators were not harassed. On August 1st the Constitutional Court of Uganda annulled the country's Anti-Homosexuality Act. The law which called for a 14-year jail term for a first conviction, and imprisonment for life for 'aggravated homosexuality had been widely criticised at home and by the international community. Many Ugandans reported an increase in discrimination since the passing of the bill including evictions, loss of employment and the denial of access to medical services.

However despite this momentous step forward there is still work to be done as homosexuality is still illegal in Uganda. However it is no longer illegal to promote homosexuality, and Ugandans are no longer required to report people they suspect of engaging in homosexual activities to the authorities.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the move and paid tribute to the human rights defenders who spoke out against the bill. In a statement made by his spokesperson the Secretary General called for further efforts to decriminalise same sex relationships in Uganda.

He reiterated "that everyone is entitled to enjoy the same basic rights and live a life of worth and dignity without discrimination, as affirmed in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Ugandan Constitution."



Students at the 8x8 Documentary Film Festival

ACTIVISM: COMMUNITY FOR CHANGE

"Angry, deceived, and disappointed. On the other hand empowered, informed, proactive and surprised." Students across Irish university campuses are being inspired to take collective action to highlight and tackle global problems.

University students are engaged in numerous activities related to global justice and development across the country, through student societies as well as at a local development level.

Over the past year one organisation recorded that more than 2,600 students at Irish universities had been inspired by their awareness-raising activities on global justice and development. This included

attending the 8x8 Documentary Film Festival which aims to raise awareness of some of the key issues that are shaping our world. One student commented that the films were "A total eye-opener. The course I do in college is on the other end of the spectrum so seeing these films really opened my mind to global and local development issues."

Six months later 75% of surveyed attendees reported to have taken action in relation to development. Some of the most common actions were; online forums, lifestyle choices, donations, awareness raising, further study and volunteering both at home and overseas.

VOLUNTEERS IN AFRICA

CHANGING LIVES IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES



Pauline Nanfuka and her daughter Florence receiving a visit from her Community Health worker, Sara Namafula, in Uganda

Volunteering in Africa. It conjures up fantastic images of eager Irish students travelling to distant countries like Kenya and Tanzania to teach. Or Irish doctors and nurses taking a year or two to work in remote hospitals in underserved communities. Without doubt, their decision to volunteer is inspirational. Their work is life-changing. But there is another important type of volunteer in Africa. Namely, local volunteers – men and women across the continent that are willingly giving up their time to try to improve the lives of their families and their neighbours. These men and women receive no salary and yet they travel, by foot or bicycle, over difficult terrain in the scorching African heat to reach their neighbours and provide invaluable health services. The men and women, to which I refer, are known

as Community Health Workers. Community Health Workers are volunteers, most often selected by their own communities, who receive basic training on particular health issues that can then be tackled locally. An example of such an initiative is the AIM Health Programme. This Programme, which is funded by Irish Aid, expects to train 3,000 Community Health Workers by the end of 2015, across 5 African countries – Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mauritania. Already, nearly 2,000 Community Health Workers have been trained. Their focus is on improving infant and maternal health. Thanks to the help of the Irish people, the lives of 75,000 women and 75,000 infants, currently being registered to the AIM Health Programme, are on course to improving greatly by 2015. These

women, are receiving important health and nutrition messages in their homes from their Community Health Workers – messages that have been proven to save lives! These messages are surprisingly simple and yet very effective. Examples include the need for pregnant women to attend antenatal care appointments and deliver their babies in health facilities in the presence of skilled birth attendants, such as midwives. For the care of young infants, the need for appropriate breast-feeding, hand washing with soap and full immunisation are among 11 health messages being promoted regularly by Community Health Workers in an effort to reduce infant deaths. These messages assist greatly in preventing and detecting serious illnesses, like malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea, which are some of the leading causes of deaths

in children under 5 years of age. What is exciting about this Programme is that these messages are already making a difference. Reports have been received showing 72% of infants in 2013 being exclusively breast-fed in the community of M'Bagne, Mauritania, compared to just 60% in 2011. What's more, in 2013, 75% of babies were delivered in the presence of a skilled birth attendant in Busia District, Uganda, compared to 32% in 2011. These changes will have a significant impact on reducing the number of lives lost in these communities. But what we must not forget is that these changes are being driven by the inspirational Community Health Workers who themselves have volunteered to carry out this life-changing work!

NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS - OR SO THEY SAY



By Olive Towey

We live in the world of “the endless newsfeed” – text, twitter, online, offline, livestream, webstream, upload, download...it's quite a job just keeping up.

But media studies have shown that bad news outweighs good news by as much as seventeen negative news reports for every one good news report. So much for fair & balanced reporting!

This daily bombardment of war, conflict, famine, drought, corruption

and scandal can't be good for us – neither for our health nor for the health of the nation.

Surely one thing we've come to appreciate – ‘post-crash’ - is the importance of trying to be positive and stay positive as far as we can. And in that endeavour good news helps!

And guess what....there IS good news out there - just waiting to be told. It may not be headlining but it's there and some of it is very basic stuff – good news about food, water, health, education – things many of us enjoy, some of us take for granted but which – in so many other parts of the world – are beyond the reach of so many...

So what's the good news?

Since the turn of the millennium, the number of children out of

school has fallen from 102 million to 57 million. More than 2.1 billion people have gained access to improved drinking water. Between 1992 and 2012, the proportion of undernourished people in developing regions has fallen from 23.2% to 14.9%. In 2012 half as many children died as in 1990.

That's a lot of statistics but behind the figures are real people – and behind this progress is the belief and the contributions made by people like you and I – who believe in the power to change – whether through Government action, the work aid agencies, missionaries or those many others who commit themselves to change at local, national and international level.

Irish aid works and – thanks to our boom and bust – there's been

growing attention on the impact and the importance of our aid. And rightly so. And the results are there to be seen. Irish aid makes a real and meaningful difference to the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable around the world. Read the annual reports, check out the websites. The facts and figures are there.

Moreover, Ireland's committed to the international commitment to invest 0.7% of our national income in overseas aid. That's just 0.70cent in every EUR100. It's a little but it does a whole lot and as the budget looms, it's worth remembering how important it is to us all that this small country continues to play a big role in fighting poverty and injustice across the globe.

That's something we can and should be proud of.



Saleh Abakar Yaya takes a shot at goal at the 2014 ConIFA World Football Cup in Sweden

CHANGING LIVES THROUGH FOOTBALL THE STORY OF DARFUR UNITED

Since 2003 300,000 Darfuri refugees have been living in twelve camps in eastern Chad. Life can be difficult and resources are limited. Children are among the most vulnerable people living in these communities.

The Darfur United Soccer

Academy was set up to bring hope joy and inspiration to the lives of the children living in these camps. Football helps build their confidence and self-esteem, supports trauma relief and gives them the opportunity to play.

In 2012 the Darfur United football

team, a team made up of Darfuri refugees travelled to the Viva World Cup in Iraqi Kurdistan. This experience not only brought attention to the people living in these camps but helped them connect to people living outside the camps. After hearing about Darfur

United, one refugee leader said: "Now we are a part of the world." Darfur United was also invited to participate in the Confederation of Independent Football Association (ConIFA) World Football Cup in Ostersund, Sweden in June 2014.

IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH DANCE

The School of Dance and Social Integration for Children and Adolescents (EDISCA) is located on the outskirts of Fortaleza Brazil. EDISCA aims to provide local children from economically deprived areas of the community with self-esteem and confidence.

The school was founded in 1992 by Dora Andrade, a Brazilian dancer who wanted to help empower at risk children through the art form that had given her so much. After an encounter with street children in her home town of Fortaleza she sold her home and used the money to create EDISCA. She had a number of selection criteria for her students; the most at risk children were given preference, all children must receive a well-rounded education and should be enrolled in the state primary or secondary school, they must have an aptitude for dance and the motivation to learn.

In the early days the school taught ballet, a subject that was usually only available to children from

wealthy backgrounds. Today the school specialises in modern dance but also offers a number of other classes including singing theatre and visual arts. Students can also attend English and computer science classes.

The school which started as an educational project has grown into something much larger. Today the families of students are provided with medical and dental services while a nutritional programme ensures that all the students receive healthy and nutritious meal. Subsidised transport is also provided so that children living on the outskirts of the city can attend.

A dance company was created to provide employment to the schools top graduates This semi-professional dance troupe had received widespread acclaim while many other former students have gone on to become professional dancers, choreographers and teachers.

EGYPTIAN WOMEN CLAIM THEIR RIGHTS THROUGH PIONEERING CYCLING CAMPAIGN

The humble bicycle is not normally associated with promoting gender equality. Yet in Egypt a group of pioneering women are using it to do just that. The simple act of riding a bicycle in public is seen as unladylike and can often lead to women being harassed and criticised.

Last year the Girls Revolution, an online movement which call for Egyptian Women's voices to be heard, launched the "We Will Ride Bicycles," campaign. The campaign aims to ensure that Egyptian women and girls can cycle their bikes in public without fear.

Last October the Girls Revolution

teamed up with the Go Bike cycling team to hold their first women's bike ride across the streets of Cairo. The event saw 100 participants cycle 7km from Panorama in Heliopolis to al-Azhar park. Participants were provided with bicycles and first aid supplies. Despite the odd negative comment by their fellow commuters, the event was deemed a success and a follow up event was held in January of this year. Embracing cycling not only allows women to claim their rights but also provides them with a healthy and environmentally friendly way to get around Egypt's busy cities.

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