

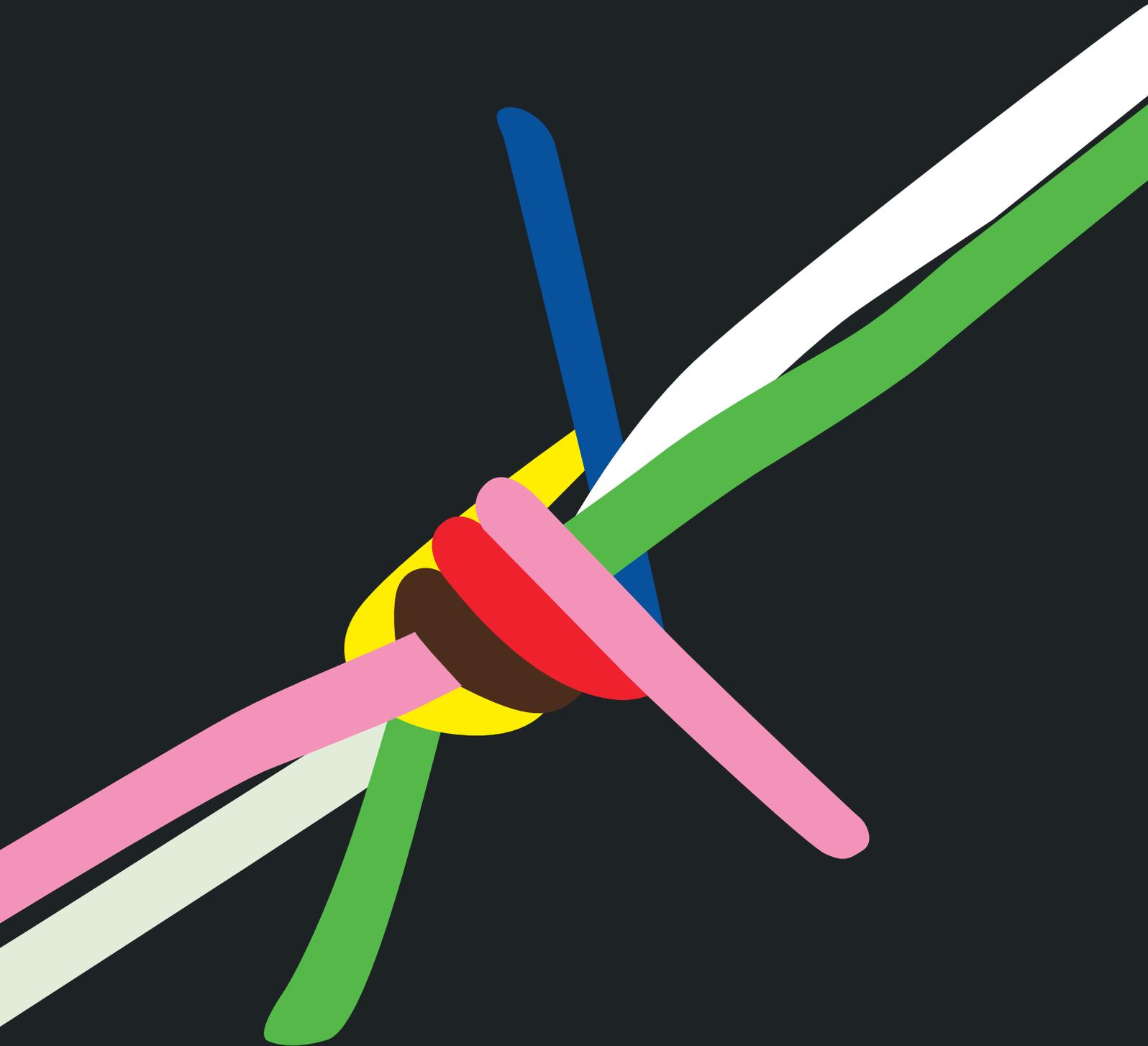
FOCUS

ACTION FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE



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INSIDE 100% debt cancellation: fact or fiction? / Hunger in the cathedral
The Irish asylum system / Bolivia's water wars / Tiger volunteers / Tin can
wars / Elephant grass - an environmental giant



Credits & Contact details

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

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And you will get to **meet others wanting to make a difference!** Comhlámh's vision is of a **just and sustainable world**.

Action: 100% debt cancellation: Fact or fiction?

Remember 2005, a year full of expectation and promise? It was a year when thousands took to the streets in Dublin, Edinburgh and around the world calling for 100% debt cancellation for the poorest countries – countries where governments are paying more on debt repayments than on their people's health, education and futures.

After the G8 deal of 2005, Bob Geldof announced that millions of people would wake up for the first time in their lives without owing you or me a penny from the burden of debt. Was this fact or fiction?

Fact 19 countries qualified for some debt cancellation as a result of the 2005 G8 deal.

Fiction “100% debt cancellation”. This is in fact “100% of part of the debt” and turns out to be merely 10% of the debts owed by approximately 52 of the world's poorest countries – countries where debt repayments are a major obstacle to fighting poverty.

If you look closely behind the headlines, you will find that four of the poorest countries in our world did not receive the promised 100% debt cancellation. For example, Nicaragua will only receive 23%, Bolivia only 31%, Guyana only 21% and Honduras only 28%. This is not 100% debt cancellation.

There is no such thing as a free lunch

To qualify for “100% debt cancellation” the 19 countries have been forced to follow harmful conditions laid down by the World Bank and IMF. For example, Bolivia had to privatise its

water services as a condition for receiving debt cancellation. Consequently, those who can't afford to pay the water charges must go without. Want to know more? *See the next 2 pages.*

Where to now for debt campaigners?

The World Bank and IMF met from 14–20th September in Singapore this year – where civil society gatherings and protests ‘are not encouraged’. Irish Finance Minister Cowen, as a governor of the IMF, attended these meetings. Debt campaigners from around the world, including Nessa Ní Chassaide of the Debt and Development Coalition, held parallel meetings in Indonesia to tackle some of the injustices (i.e. conditionality and illegitimacy) of the debt crisis.

Debt and Development Coalition Ireland, in partnership with Jubilee South, are calling on people to stand united in demanding an end to the destruction visited upon people of the South, through the debt crisis, by the IMF, the World Bank, the other multilateral banks, and the countries that control them. Check out www.jubileesouth.org.

Want to know more about current debt campaigns? Log onto:

www.debtireland.org
www.odiousdebt.com
www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk/?lid=2028

Words by Anne Reilly, Education and Campaigns Worker for the Debt and Development Coalition

Blockages to 100% Debt Cancellation

Runners & Riders!

Since 1996 the IMF and WB have insisted that poor countries must complete a race that involves 'jumping' a certain number of 'fences' (conditions), within the HIPC initiative in order to qualify for debt cancellation. After 10 years of struggling to qualify, many countries have ended up poorer.

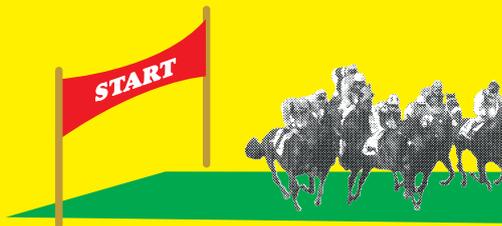
Let's critically examine some of the 'fences' to see if they are about eliminating or creating poverty.

A permanent exit from the debt trap has been consistently and wilfully impeded by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, whose policies have kept debtor countries in a state of dependence and subordination.

A constant drip-feed of half-fulfilled promises, down through the years, has ensured that poverty continues to blight the lives of millions in the Southern Hemisphere.

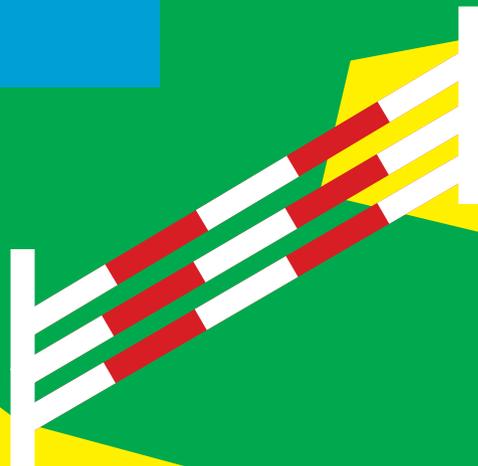
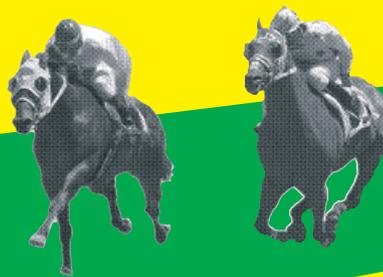
Non-runners

Some countries that don't qualify under HIPC yet – *Angola, Indonesia, Kenya and Yemen* – are so burdened by debt that they can't even get to the starting line



And they're off!

The runners and riders at the starting line have qualified to take part in the IMF/World Bank HIPC race to end the debt crisis.



Odious and Illegitimate debt

The people of Bolivia have to pay back the US\$3 billion contracted to the military junta by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Who calls the shots at the IMF and World Bank?

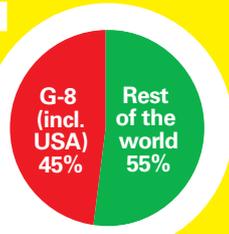
Most countries in the world are members of these bodies, and each country's voting power is based on the financial contribution it makes. Money talks in these institutions as they are, inevitably, dominated by the views of the richest and most powerful countries.

How the voting weighs up

- The USA holds by far the greater single share of voting power – **17%** – while the

combined G8 countries have over **45%**

- Ireland alone holds **0.3%** of the vote, but combined with the EU becomes a powerful block with **32%**
- But 51 African Countries have only **5.4%** while South American countries have **8%**



www.debtireland.org

Power

Developing countries are at the mercy of the IMF and World Bank because of:

- Lack of a democratic framework within the IMF and World Bank
- Dominant influences of the rich countries within the IMF/World Bank

(See above for more detail.)

Conditionality

Externally imposed conditions, by the IMF and WB, as part of Debt Cancellation, undermine the sovereignty of people to determine their own path of development. They have proven harmful to livelihoods and the environment and they keep Southern economies tied to the interests of global private profit.

Privatisation

In Bolivia, the World Bank and IMF facilitate big corporate business interests while putting pressure on the Government to privatise its water services as a condition of receiving debt cancellation. Consequently, those who can't afford to pay the water charges must go without.

Why should the world's poor have to pay these guys' debts?



Suharto Indonesia	Marcos Philippines	Pinochet Chile	Mobutu Zaire
\$126 billion	\$40 billion	\$13 billion	\$13 billion

What is illegitimate and odious debt?

An academic lawyer named Alexander Sack developed the concept of odious debt at the beginning of the 20th Century. In referring to the national debt of a country he wrote:

"If a despotic power incurs a debt not for the needs or in the interest of the State, but to strengthen its despotic

regime, this debt is odious for the population of all the State. This debt is not an obligation for the nation."

Some cases of Odious and Illegitimate Debts

- Why should the people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) be expected to repay over US\$13 billion stolen by the dictator Mobutu?
- Why are the people

in the Philippines expected to repay the debt incurred by former president Marcos, who is estimated to have fled into exile with some US\$5 to US\$13 billion in 1986?

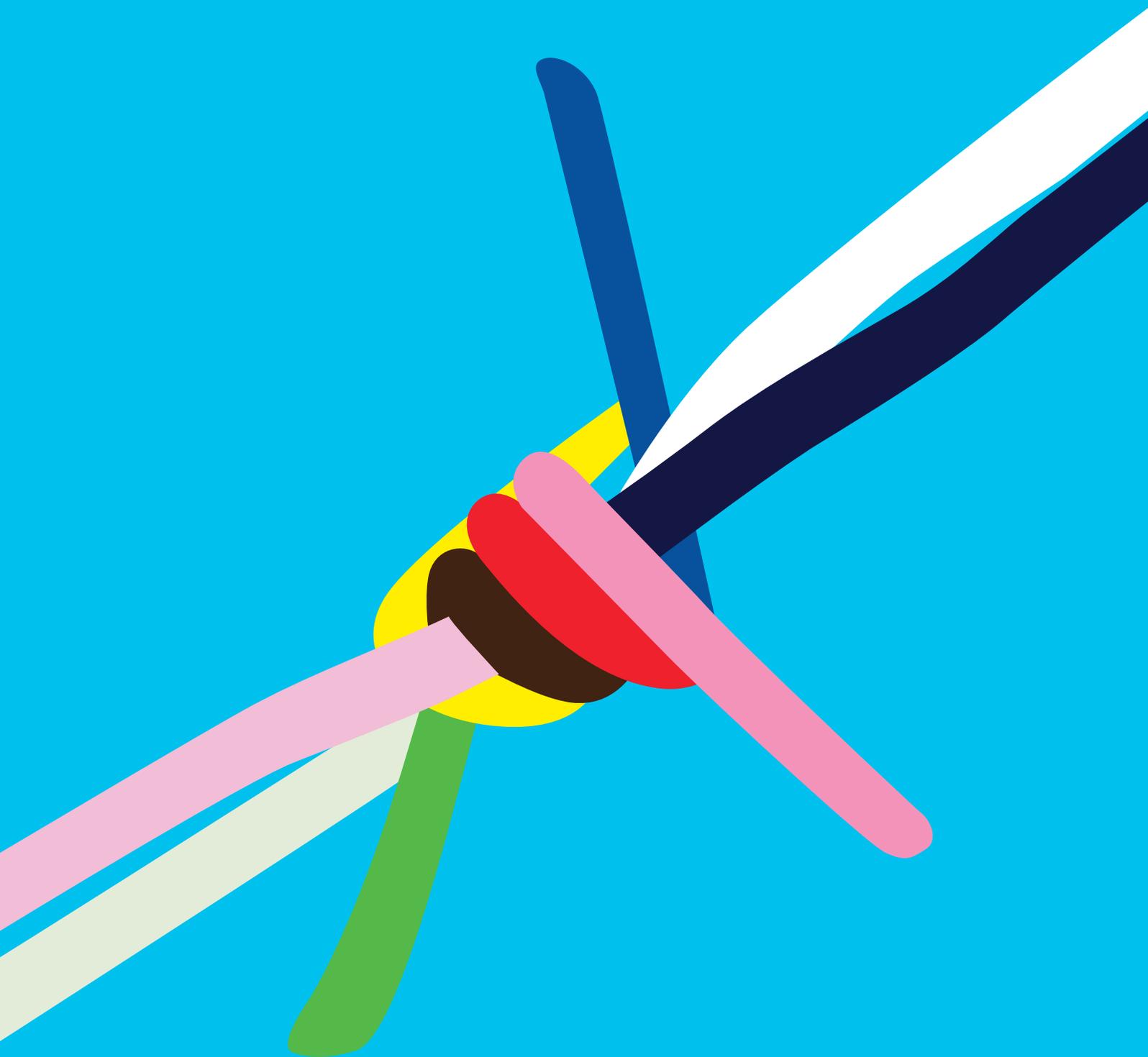
- Why should the people of Tanzania bear the full responsibility for twelve failed agricultural projects which were designed, implemented and monitored by the World Bank?

Debt & the MDGs

The HIPC process will never resolve the debt crisis. IMF and World Bank will never resolve the debt crisis. The G8 will never resolve the debt crisis.

Who and what can end the debt crisis?

Special Focus: The Irish Asylum System



Hunger in the Cathedral

Ireland's asylum system drove thirty-two Afghan men to start a hunger strike in St. Patrick's Cathedral. In an interview with one of the protesters, Markham Nolan hears that things have only gotten worse in the aftermath of their desperate actions.

There's a nervous air about Ali Khan (not his real name) as we enter the park adjoining St. Patrick's Cathedral. On 14th May, he and 31 other asylum seekers strolled into the cathedral posing as tourists and stayed there on hunger strike for nearly a week, sleeping on the cathedral's hard wooden benches, in a bid to call attention to their plight.

Ali was twice brought to hospital; others threatened suicide and the minors among them were taken into the care of the state. Through it all, Ali fielded queries from a hostile press, and pleaded with a stony-faced Minister for Justice to fix the flaws in the asylum process.

"I can't believe I did it now," says Ali, with a grin on his face.

He frankly admits the strike accomplished little, other than gaining some kudos among Afghans seeking asylum here and respect from the staff of the hostel where he and 45 other asylum-seekers are sequestered. "Since I came from the cathedral they know I'm a serious man," he says.

A serious man with serious problems. Now aged 27, Ali fled Afghanistan in 2004 having spent two years in a Kabul jail after the collapse of the Taliban regime. Despite his secular, liberal views, Ali was employed in the Taliban administration.

"Because of our tribe, we had to go and follow them. We were Afghan nationalists, we were from the south, and our forefathers were ['Khan'] tribe, a very famous tribe in Afghanistan. The leader of the Taliban is from the same tribe, so for that reason, we have to go in with them and stay with them," he explains. With a Taliban cabinet minister for an uncle, Ali was put to work as a secretary in the Ministry for Information and Culture.

Asylum seekers ... live life in the gaze of Big Brother, with nearly every element of their lives strictly controlled.

Branded with the Taliban mark, he was captured and jailed when Kabul was overrun by the Northern Alliance troops after 9-11. As a member of a "high profile family", as he puts it, sticking around was not an option, so Ali made his way to Ireland. Asylum is granted to refugees not on the basis of their political affiliation – but when they face a threat to their security.

Two years after his arrival, Ali is still

living in a dingy Dublin hostel, surviving on a pittance, with regimented meal times and days devoid of activity. Asylum seekers have no right to work or education, and live life in the gaze of Big Brother, with nearly every element of their lives strictly controlled.

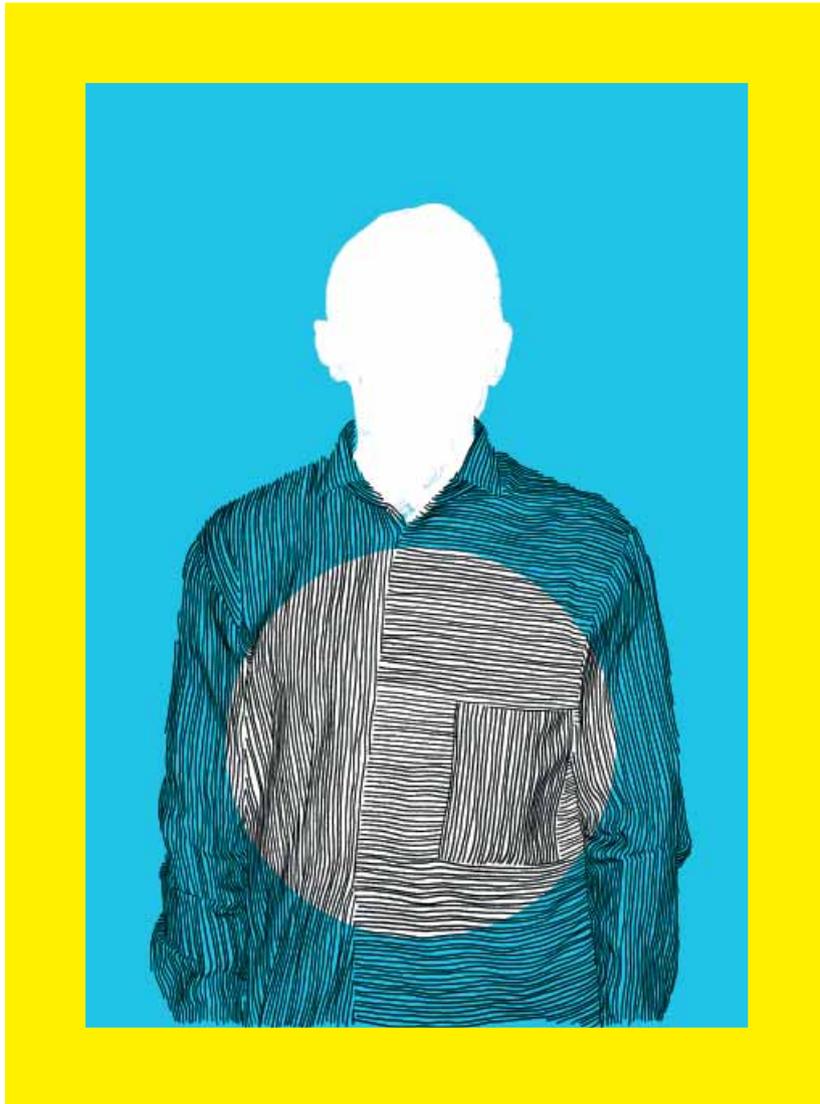
"Everything is under scrutiny," he says. "You don't have any freedom at all. It's really depressing the way you don't have anything, everything is shared. I'm sharing with my cousin a small room now for two years, you don't have any privacy. You can't bring any guests to your rooms."

The frustration of living like prisoners was too much, and pushed Ali to organize the cathedral protest in a fit of despair. "We'd been left in limbo, left waiting for a long, long time. It was hopelessness that took me to St. Patrick's, frustration and hopelessness."

Hopelessness, and a sliver of faith in an Irish compassion that failed to materialise. "Our hope was that, as we realized that Ireland was a civilized and democratic society, that someone would come and listen to our voices," says Ali.

I ask him if that happened. "I don't think that happened, no, not at all." Vilified in the press and ignored by the government, the initial hopelessness of the protesters was compounded by Irish apathy.

"For three or four days nobody came to



listen to us from the authorities, and if you don't eat for three or four days your brain doesn't work. I was thinking 'This is 100 per cent, you're not going to retreat and somebody will come and help us and if not this is the case that every one of us, one by one, will die'."

Others began contemplating taking their own lives, either by hanging themselves or by jumping from the cathedral balcony. "I was taken to hospital twice," says Ali. "I thought: 'I'm going to die, obviously'."

Thankfully, none of the protestors died. The protest came to a peaceful end on 20th May, and charges brought against the men for unlawful occupation were dropped a few weeks later at the request of the authorities of the cathedral.

This should have been a source of relief, but unbeknownst to the protestors, their story had been picked up by the BBC, Al Jazeera and Sky News. Pictures of the Christian cathedral and its Muslim occupants were beamed across the world, and were being frowned upon back home.

"I didn't know that the publicity would go to Afghanistan," says Ali, "that they would check the internet, that Al Jazeera would play our clips. In Afghanistan it's a punishable thing for a Muslim like me to go to the church. My friends used to call me and now they don't call me any more, because I went to the church. I was one of the main spokesmen, everyone knows me, knows my name. If I go by any

chance to Afghanistan, I have problems.'

His father and grandfather have both been killed, yet had he known he would be treated like a criminal in Ireland, Ali says he would probably have taken his chances with warlords and US troops in Kabul. "If I was killed myself, it would be better than to live like this. For two years, you don't have any hope, you don't have anything. To be honest, since I came to Ireland, right now I regret it."

The hope that brought them here remains out of reach for Ali and his compatriots. "We want to live free, we want to live proud. But we are like prisoners in this hostel. We are living like thieves. I shouldn't have come in the first place."

Our asylum system = fair enough?

During the recent crisis in St. Patrick's Cathedral, the UNHCR lavished praise on Ireland's asylum procedures. However, people working on the frontline of the asylum system are not as impressed, as Stephen Rigney finds out.

While the Afghan asylum seekers were hunger striking in St. Patrick's Cathedral, the UNHCR representative in Dublin, Manuel Jordão, jumped to the defence of Ireland's asylum system. Criticising the Afghan men for their actions, he praised the State's procedures for asylum seekers and refugees here as "being among the fairest in Europe."

Mr. Jordão's comments received widespread media coverage and certainly went down well with the Government, at a time when it was coming under fire for trying to wash its hands of the events in the cathedral.

However, people on the frontline of the State's asylum system are not impressed with Mr. Jordão's conclusions. Gertrude Cotter of NASC, a Cork based immigrant support centre, questions the value of European comparisons. "Asylum systems vary across the union," she explains. "We're not the worst but the rest are a very mixed bunch. The notion of putting us in a league table is silly because aspects in some systems are better than others, while others are much worse."

Instead of allowing the Government off the hook by comparing us with our neighbours, Gertrude and others would like to fix the flaws in the Irish asylum process. And one of the biggest flaws is the system of direct provision, under which asylum seekers are given accommodation and meals in State-approved hostels. They are prohibited from seeking work and the €19 cash allowance they receive each week gives them no choice but to rely on the State for all their needs.

Gertrude has strong criticism for the fact that 27% of asylum seekers have been in direct provision for more than two years. "Whatever about the first six months, it is not suitable for the long-term and it just makes people more more frustrated."

Peter O'Mahoney of the Irish Refugee

Council agrees. "It is reasonable to expect that nobody should spend years in such a system," he says. "The ideal would be for the system to be ended, but the minimum is that people should be out as soon as possible."

Peter warns of the possible long-term consequences for families in direct provision. "Children are growing up in an environment that is not natural. They have no experience of normal parenting, which involves someone going to work or

"By being unable to work or access further education, many adult asylum seekers feel a festering sense of despair."

cooking, providing and deciding on meals."

Even children who appear to integrate well in the classroom can suffer. "When Johnny down the road invites them to his house, they can't reciprocate the invitation," says Peter. "Another normal element of a child's upbringing has gone by the board."

Adults can also suffer from being isolated and forced into a dependency relationship with the State, with potential implications for wider Irish society. "For adults, there is the issue of disempowerment and isolation and potentially negative impact on mental health," explains Peter. "By being unable to work or access further education, many adult asylum seekers feel a festering sense of despair. Ultimately, there will be a loss to society of much of the possible contributions of long term residents."

For the most part, the hostels are privately run outfits contracted by the State to provide for their asylum seeker residents. They can vary widely in their convenience of location or the quality of services they provide – and some seem specially designed to make life difficult for residents. "One hostel in Cork is on a main road between a dangerous roundabout and the airport," says Gertrude. "The last bus leaves town at 5.30pm and it is hard for women with buggies to manoeuvre to the hostel. If you can't afford a taxi, you're stuck there in the evening."

Gertrude feels problems are exacerbated because hostels rely on catering staff to look after residents, rather than employing professionals from a social work or refugee background. The lack of specialised training means that minor complaints can blow up into serious disputes.

"For the past five years, there would not be a day without a complaint about a hostel," says Gertrude. "Some are about small things, such as cups of tea, which a trained person would resolve very quickly. Instead, I know of cases where the gardaí were called in and the resident transferred."

Peter has also noticed how the quality of staff in individual hostels can affect the experiences of asylum seeker residents. "There is a huge range from the caring and competent to the far less caring or competent," he says. "That shows up in particular where there has been a change in manager and the standards of care change dramatically."

Peter and Gertrude are happy to acknowledge that the asylum system has improved since 1999, when it was described as a "shambles" by then Minister of State for Overseas Development, Liz O'Donnell. However, both agree that the Government has a long way to go before Ireland can be properly described as having the "fairest asylum system in Europe."



'Do you have any cashew trees?'

Ten years ago a heated debate was taking place over World Bank conditions on Mozambique. Niall Condon looks back on a shameful example of 'conditionality' which led to the demise of Mozambique's cashew nut processing industry

The cashew nut sector has long made an important contribution to livelihoods in Mozambique. The cashew nut is a rich source of fat and protein and plays an important role in food security, particularly in rural areas. But cashew has also been central to the story of Mozambique's process of development.

With cashew processing, Mozambique saw a route out of the 'commodity trap', and as early as the 1950s became the first African country to develop a processing industry. This meant value-added exports, industrialisation, foreign currency earnings, and 15,000 jobs at its peak – half of which went to women. Farmers also gained, with factories sourcing the raw nuts from millions of smallholders across the country.

So important was the cashew nut to Mozambique that the 1997 census even asked 'Do you have any cashew trees?'

The processing industry suffered during the 15 years of civil war which followed independence from Portugal in 1975. Farmers could not safely get their nuts to the factories and factories put into

including privatisation of most state owned industries in the country. Unlike the banks, rail-company and sugar processing industries which were sold to foreign companies, six of the cashew factories were purchased by Mozambican entrepreneurs who then invested in rehabilitating the run down factories.

Then in 1995, the World Bank announced it would not lend money to Mozambique unless it got rid of the export tax on raw nuts. The bank's logic was that millions of farmers were getting a lower price from the local factories compared with what was on offer from Indian factories.

Cashew nuts became the centre of the anti-liberalisation debate, as a glaring example of the need to free countries from the debt which subjects them to such conditions. In response to public pressure, the Bank commissioned Deloitte and Touche to conduct an 'independent' examination of the case.

Their recommendation was that the World Bank condition 'should be abandoned' as otherwise it would 'dismantle the processing industry'. A 'fundamental change' in Bank policy

and this alone is sufficient reason to support the processing industry against competition from India.'

At first it looked like the Bank would accept the Deloitte and Touche findings. But then politics overcame logic and the condition was retained.

The government's hand was effectively forced and it introduced a timescale to gradually reduce the export tax to zero by 1999. Factories began to close rapidly. Protests and opposition to the policy intensified, so the government finally passed an act in 1999 – against the advice of the World Bank – reintroducing a new, but lower, rate of export tax.

However, for many this measure came too late as by then all but one of the 14 processing factories was out of business and 90% of the sector's 11,000 workers were unemployed.

Eventually, at the end of 1999, the World Bank finally capitulated to allow Mozambique retain its tax on raw cashew exports.

Recent years have seen some recovery in the industry. Nevertheless, all of the large factories from the colonial era have now closed permanently. Some have been replaced by smaller facilities, relying on labour intensive technologies, similar to those used in India. An American NGO, Technoserve, has supported the establishment of a number of small factories which use an innovative new technology, and operate good terms of employment.

But gone are the days when the cashew processing industry employed 15,000 people, and Mozambique got to add significant value to its export crop.

The people of Mozambique have learned how conditionality can go wrong. How will the policy makers learn?

All but one of the 14 processing factories was out of business and 90% of the sector's 11,000 workers were unemployed

state ownership lost some of their earlier efficiency. To ensure raw nuts went to the factories rather than to India for processing, the government introduced a tax on the export of raw nuts.

When Mozambique looked for loans from the World Bank and IMF in the late 1980s, the money came with a Structural Adjustment Programme attached,

was needed, they said. The Deloitte and Touche report put forward four key reasons: India subsidises its industry; privatisation was bringing about improvements in efficiency; the increase in price offered by the Indian factories was creamed off by traders and did not reach the farmers; and the added-value of processed nuts was \$130 per tonne

Bolivia's Water Wars

Threatened privatisation of Bolivia's water supplies forced the people to take to the streets to protect their rights, writes Sadhbh Goggins.

January 2000 was the month when the fight turned for the people of Cochabamba in Bolivia. The city was being torn apart by a corrupt water privatisation scheme, leaving communities with no choice but to mobilise in a united front to protect themselves.

Their protests were the beginning of a social movement that swept the country and attempted to wrestle Bolivia's water rights from the grip of foreign private interests and return them to the hands of the people.

The social movement in Bolivia over the last six years has attracted worldwide media attention, forcing multi-million dollar companies to back down in the face of global condemnation and sparking similar protests across Latin America.

Cochabamba's troubles began when the Bolivian government accepted a \$25 million loan from the World Bank, with the proviso that water services had to be privatised and subsidies discontinued.

The water contract was handed over to the sole bidder, Aguas Del Tunari, a subsidiary of the Californian engineering giant Bechtel, which immediately jacked up water bills by an average of 50% and in some up to 100%. Minimum wage earners found themselves literally having to choose between water and food.

The public responded with massive protests and road blockades, organised under the Coordinadora, the Coalition for the Defence of Water and Life and led by a former factory worker, Oscar Olivera. The government's answer was to send in troops and police and to declare martial law. Many were hurt in the ensuing violence, including the tragic death of a 17-year-old boy, Victor Hugo Daza.

At a recent Water Development Movement conference in London, Oscar Olivera said, "We are not poor, we are impoverished because our wealth has been taken from us...Water is a legacy that we inherit from our parents and pass onto our children".

The protests saw their first major success

when Aguas Del Tunari was forced to leave Bolivia. The water service was handed over, loaded with debts, to the public. Then, eighteen months later, Bechtel tried to sue the Bolivian government for loss of potential earnings. This time, the public outcry was deafening, kicking off a global campaign which shamed Bechtel into dropping the case.

In 2005, a second water war began in El Alto, where AISA, a subsidiary of French water company SUEZ, had taken control of the public utility and started charging water connection fees of \$445. In a country with an average daily wage of \$2.50 and where over 200,000 people live without access to water, the fee meant destitution for most Bolivians.

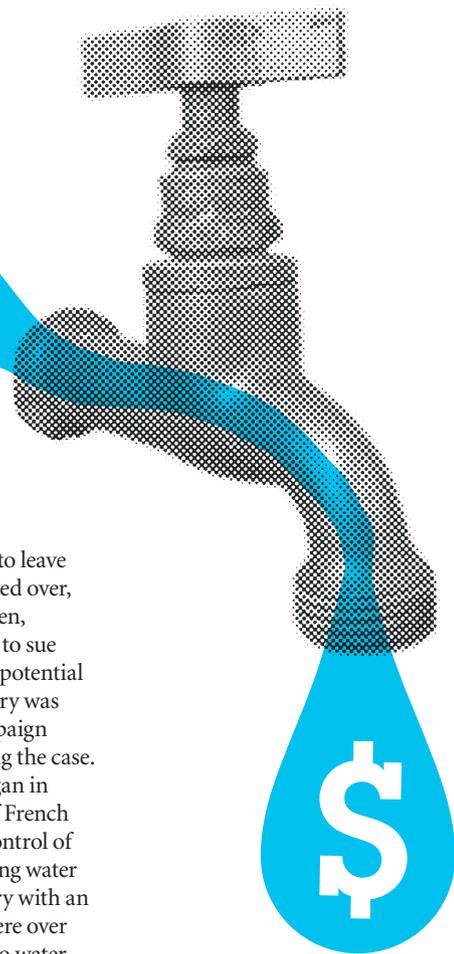
Representatives of the city's neighbourhoods tried to negotiate with the company but turned to strikes after five months of hard work brought them no closer to a solution. Their strikes and blockades ground the city to a halt and forced the government to terminate its contract with AISA.

Unfortunately, one year later, the company is still in charge of water services in El Alto. Its activities from 1997 to 2005 are now being investigated to find out whether it has breached its contract, but residents are growing weary of waiting and there is talk of ousting the company through force.

As they struggle on, the residents of Cochabamba and El Alto lend hope to other communities by showing how local and international solidarity can stop the rising tide of privatisation sweeping through Latin America. The Bolivian water wars are a shining example of the power of the people in the face of corporate greed and human rights abuses.

Additional contributions by Miren Maialen Samper.

For further information see www.nearfm.ie for the three part series by Muireann De Barra addressing global water issues, "Water Cannot Wait".



Tin Can Wars

Wars in developing countries may seem remote from us in Ireland. In fact, writes Derek O'Halloran, the link may be as close as the humble can of beans.



From expensive luxuries like diamonds, to mundane necessities like tin cans and mobile phone components, many of the goods we use in our daily lives come from conflict regions. Because of a lack of accountability and traceability, our collective demands for these consumer goods can indirectly fuel wars.

For example, the trade in cassiterite - a mineral from which tin is derived - has fanned the flames of conflict in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and amply illustrates the connection between first world consumption and developing world conflict.

In early 2004, new environmental regulations were introduced in Japan and the EU, requiring electronics manufacturers to replace lead with tin for the material used as solder on circuit boards. The consequent demand for tin on international metals markets saw prices triple to a high of \$9,600 per tonne. In the east of the DRC, far from the trading houses of Europe and Japan, conflict escalated as several armed groups vied for control of the vast deposits of lucrative ore in the region.

Throughout two long wars in the DRC which resulted in up to four million deaths and, finally, an uneasy transition towards peace, resource plunder paid for the weapons used in the struggle to control the country's mineral rich regions.

At the moment, there are signs of hope for the DRC. The country's first free elections in 45 years were held at the end of July, and human rights groups in the east of the country confirm that the situation there is calm but tense. However, sporadic fighting has continued during the spring and the integration of the various militias into the national armed forces is moving slowly.

Katana Bukuru of SOFAD, a human rights group based in the troubled South Kivu region of eastern DRC, is still uncertain about the future. "We can't say the election will resolve the problems because all around this area militias are armed. So if they're not happy with the election results they can start to fight again. But we have to believe because we can't continue in this way." All sides in the conflict are reluctant to give up power and the access it brings to mineral wealth, so it remains to be seen if the militias will respect the election results.

The transitional Government has signed up to the Kimberley Process, which regulates the trade in diamonds from regions of conflict, and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, which is trying to establish a similar framework to ensure accountability in the mining and mineral sector.

But not everyone is convinced of the legitimacy of the electoral process or that the mineral wealth will be used to develop the country. "The elections are like a showcase, behind it is a masquerade to legitimise looters and their foreign supporters," said Valentin Mubake, president of the UPDS national committee, the main democratic opposition party. His party has boycotted the presidential election and he complains that lucrative mining concessions are being sold off to US, Canadian and European interests.

So while the first tentative steps toward a democratic transition seem possible in the DRC, the long process of making the country's vast wealth work to its citizens advantage may still be a good way off. And that is something to think about the next time you open a can of beans.

Tiger Volunteers

With greater demand for volunteering, there is now greater need to meet the needs of volunteers and host communities. Barry Dunning looks at one initiative to do just that.



Deirdre Keogh, Irish volunteer, with Grace Ngoben, Ireen Mukhari and Pete Makondo at the Rivoni Centre for the Blind, South Africa (Photograph: Derek Speirs)

Newly grown Celtic Tiger cubs are increasingly volunteering overseas as a way to fill the gap between college and career. It's not just the cubs who want to swap the comforts of Ireland for an opportunity to share and learn in the developing world – more and more of their parents, with families raised and mortgages paid, are going overseas on short-term volunteer placements.

This growing commitment to volunteerism is widely welcomed in development circles. However, it isn't always guaranteed that volunteers will have a meaningful experience at the same time as benefiting their host communities. It's not unusual for volunteers to hit the wall of reality when dreams of saving the world thud into local expectations and organisational constraints.

Dervla King, project officer with *Volunteering Options*, is aware of the pitfalls that volunteers can face. "People can get into situations they aren't prepared for. Volunteers will rarely be entering into a situation that isn't in some way defined or affected by the past actions of people from developed countries.

Volunteering Options is a new service from *Comhlámh*, with funding from Irish Aid, which aims to help volunteers reap the widest benefits from their experiences. The service provides information for volunteers about overseas placements, offers pre-decision workshops on understanding the wider context of development and supports

returning volunteers in developing a long-term commitment to global solidarity.

Putting volunteer work in a wider context is a key objective, says Dervla. "Most of the people who contact us want to help or 'give something' back. We argue the best way to do that is to look at volunteering as a way for people to develop awareness in themselves, in the organisation or community they're working with and at home, when they get back."

"We encourage people to think about wider development issues and equip them to ask useful questions of volunteer organisations."

Volunteering Options' website and the pre-decision workshops play an important role in encouraging prospective volunteers to build that awareness. "We encourage people to think about wider development issues and equip them to ask useful questions of volunteer organisations."

When it comes to volunteer organisations, the variety of skills and size on offer ranges widely, from specialised or *ad hoc* affairs to long-standing Irish

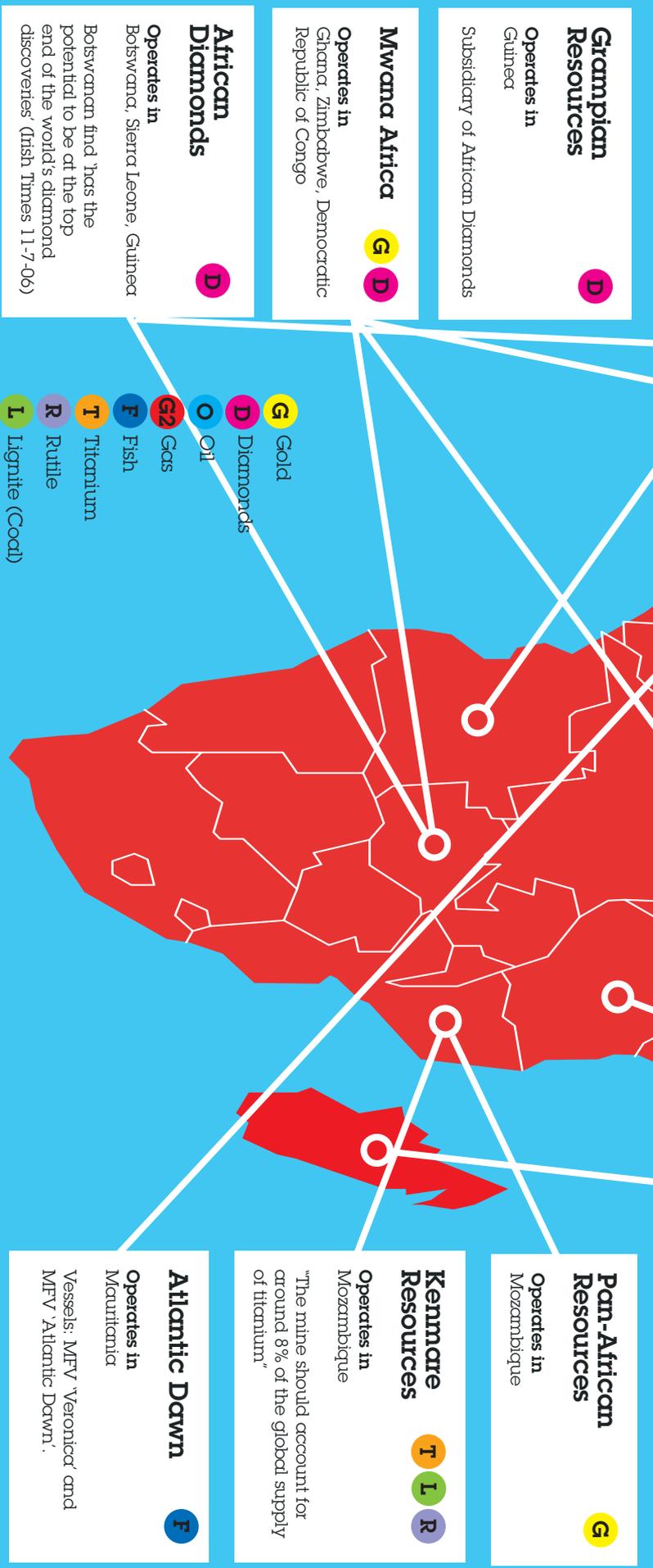
NGOs such as Trócaire and Concern. One of Volunteering Options' missions is to get volunteering organisations in Ireland to share their expertise. "We are trying to get organisations to work together to share resources and best practice, so that people don't have to reinvent the wheel every time," says Dervla. "Some, like Concern and VSO can bring years of experience, while others can share specific strengths, like child protection."

Ireland has not yet experienced any of the issues associated with "gap-year" volunteering in the UK, where some organisations have been accused of commercialising the volunteer sector. All the same, Volunteering Options is helping to develop a code of practice that could ward off such a danger.

Volunteering Options stands to become a critical part of the overseas volunteer sector. The continued strength of volunteerism may demonstrate that Ireland's wealth has not distracted everybody from surrounding poverty but it will take co-ordination like that offered by Volunteering Options if we are break through the wall to a better world.

You can visit the Volunteering Options website at: www.volunteeringoptions.org

Working for a Better World, a book filled with advice on overseas volunteering can be bought from most bookstores or directly from Comhlámh.



Gramscian Resources **D**

Operates in Guinea

Subsidiary of African Diamonds

Mwama Africa **G D**

Operates in Ghana, Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo

African Diamonds **D**

Operates in Botswana, Sierra Leone, Guinea

Botswanan firm 'has the potential to be at the top end of the world's diamond discoveries' (Irish Times 11-7-06)

Pan-African Resources **G**

Operates in Mozambique

Kenmare Resources **T L R**

Operates in Mozambique

"The mine should account for around 8% of the global supply of titanium"

Atlantic Dawn **F**

Operates in Mauritania

Vessels: MFV 'Veronicc' and MFV 'Atlantic Dawn'.

This mcp focuses on Irish companies operating in Africa, but several other Irish companies operate in developing countries:

- Latin America:** Minco prospects for silver in Mexico, while Irish Stock Exchange listed MinMet explores or mines for gold, diamonds and zinc in Brazil, Dominican Republic and Peru. Par-Andean produces oil and gas in Bolivia and has an acquisition in Argentina.
- Asia:** Tullow Oil operates in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, Dragon Oil operates in Turkmenistan, and Amnutex has oil and gas rights in North Korea.
- Eastern Europe:** Zabcakal Mining Corporation explores uranium in Russia; European

Metals and Minerals Ltd seeks gold in Romania, while Ovoca recently struck gold in Russia but also seeks platinum and zinc there.

- Middle East:** Irish companies have for some years had a presence in Iraq; Petrel Resources has oil and gas rights in Iraq and Jordan. As Petrel says on its website "Before the fall of Saddam Hussein, Petrel had signed a working agreement to explore Block 6 in the Western Desert. But most of Iraq's oil is in the east of the country. The Western Desert has hardly been explored. The Saddam Hussein authorities were keen for new exploration rather than the reworking of "existing but run-down fields". Bula Resources, also enjoyed oil rights in Iraq. While the holding company has ceased operating, its liquidator stated that he was not closing its subsidiaries.

Multinationals
A number of extractive companies registered with the Irish Companies Registration Office are divisions of larger multinational companies. For example, Teck Cominco which mines copper in Peru has a registered address in Eambsfort Tee, Dublin, but is part of its Canadian based parent company. Likewise Bhp Minerals International Exploration, a diamond and minerals company, has a

registered office at Harcourt Road, Dublin 2, but is part of a larger Australian based multinational. Other multinational extractive companies registered in Ireland include Ivernia and Anglo American.

Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
The EITI supports improved governance in resource-rich countries through the full publication and verification of company payments and government revenues from oil, gas and mining. Many countries are rich in oil, gas, and minerals and studies have shown that when governance is good, these can generate large revenues to foster economic growth and reduce poverty. However when

governance is weak, they may instead cause poverty, corruption, and conflict – the so called "resource curse".

Some twenty countries have either endorsed, or are now actively implementing EITI across the world – from Peru, to Nigeria. EITI is currently based in the UK's Department for International Development and works closely with the World Bank and IMF. EITI is also supported by donors: many of the largest oil and mining companies in the world, by investors and by civil society groups who work under the umbrella of www.publishwhatyoupay.org, another related initiative. See www.eititransparency.org

What Irish companies operate in Africa?

Readers may not be aware how many Irish companies are involved in extractive industries in developing countries. Using publicly available information here is some of what we found about where they operate and what resources they seek.



Elephant grass: an environmental giant

*An environmentally friendly, alternative crop for Irish farmers that's good for developing countries too. **Sadhbh Goggins** examines why experts are trumpeting the benefits of Elephant Grass. Photographs by **Bríd Ní Luasaigh**.*



Opposite: Mrs. Helen Hogan, who with her husband, Joe, grow 'Elephant Grass' on their farm in Adare, Co. Limerick. Elephant grass can grow as high as four metres and, when harvested and processed, provides excellent biofuel.

On his family's farm outside of Adare, Co. Limerick, Joe Hogan planted 400 acres of the first commercial crop of *Miscanthus giganteus* - Elephant Grass, by its more common name. Three years later, the experimental crop has reached full maturity and business couldn't be better. "The main problem at the moment," says Joe, "is that there is not enough being produced to meet the demand".

Joe isn't the only one to be excited about *Miscanthus*. An environmentally friendly, low-maintenance and sustainable energy crop, it may be the solution farmers need to allow them to supply a very lucrative Irish market without competing with farmers in the Global South.

Originally hailing from Japan, *Miscanthus* is a giant of a plant that can grow to over four metres in height. It grows well in a mild, wet climate and once planted, the crop will continue to produce annually for up to 30 years. It is infertile, requires no fertilizers and currently resists pests and diseases, so once the initial investment is made, it needs little effort or expense until harvesting.

At the moment, *Miscanthus* is mainly used for horse bedding, but Joe says they have begun pelleting the crop for use in the new generation of environmentally friendly home and business heating systems. A midlands electricity company, Edenderry Power, has already expressed interest in burning shredded *Miscanthus* in its power plants.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, Miscanthus is considered carbon neutral ... given the qualities of this crop and the lack of fertilisers needed for its growth, it makes an excellent choice for biofuel.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, *Miscanthus* is considered carbon neutral, with the CO₂ produced by burning being balanced by the CO₂ consumed in its growth. And given the qualities of this crop and the lack of fertilizers needed for its growth, it makes an excellent choice for biofuel. Professor Mike Jones, Chair of Botany at TCD, believes Ireland can meet 30% of its energy needs by growing the grass on just 10% of its arable land.

"The market for *Miscanthus* is huge," says Joe. "There are 60 farmers involved in growing this crop at the moment, the only problem is the initial investment needed for planting, as the first commercial crop doesn't mature until the third year."

Its potential is even more significant in light of CAP reform. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was originally introduced in 1962 to protect farmers from fluctuating market prices and to stabilise European food supplies. Recent reforms have cut back on farmers' subsidies to encourage them to produce in response to market and consumer demand, rather than for subsidies, and to protect the environment by reducing their use of fertilisers.

Ireland can meet 30% of its energy needs by growing the grass on just 10% of its arable land

One effect of CAP reform is to reduce the amount that EU subsidies depress world food prices. This is good for poor countries that sell food abroad, but hard on countries who need to buy much of their food from outside.

In Ireland, the biggest victim of CAP reform has been the sugar beet sector, which found itself unable to compete on the global market without subsidies.

Part of the solution to both these problems may be found in the diversification of products on EU farms, allowing farmers to produce crops for alternative markets. Counsellor Mary White of the Green Party has been very active in the fight to convert Mallow sugar factory for biofuel production. "Sugar Beet is gone now," she says, "but the land bank is in place and the sugar factory could easily be converted for the purpose of biofuel production. *Miscanthus* could play an important role here".

Joe Hogan couldn't agree more "This is a fantastic opportunity for farmers, there's a huge market for *Miscanthus*."

CAP reform has long been the elephant in the living room for Irish farmers. It looks like *Miscanthus* is the solution that leads the elephant back into the field, and puts it to work to all our benefit.

The WTO is Dead. Long live the WTO!

The WTO was only founded in 1995 but talks collapsed in Hong Kong last July. Does this mean the end of the WTO? Unlikely. Conall O’Caoimh, who witnessed what happened, explains why.



After five years of bickering, leading only to stalemate, the ‘Doha Development Round’ of trade negotiations at the World Trade Organisation was indefinitely suspended at the end of July. Despite the G8 just two weeks previously having directed trade ministers to reach a deal, the talks ended in acrimony and mutual recriminations.

Trade ministers flung accusations at each other, blaming everyone but themselves for the breakdown. Was it the US for refusing to put an offer on the table? Or the EU for improving its offer, but riddling it with let-out clauses? Either way, these are not the losers.

As Pascal Lamy, the WTO Secretary General, talked up the situation declaring a ‘time-out’, political leaders quickly moved to secure trade liberalisation through country-to-country, or bilateral, deals instead of at the global level.

NGOs have differed as to whether it is good or bad for developing countries. Oxfam said it was a ‘tragic outcome’; Christian Aid called it a ‘terrible blow’. War on Want looked on the bright side saying no deal was better than one that would harm poor countries. Civil society voices

from the South were stronger, claiming victory in Pascal Lamy’s defeat. One adviser with Mali’s agriculture ministry, said: “Everybody will lose out and there are those who will lose out more, including Africa.”

Who stands to lose most are the poorest countries – especially African states. They will be further marginalised in the alternative scenario of liberalisation by bilateral deals. They don’t have the might to demand much of the EU or USA. In the free trade areas already being negotiated by the EU with the 77 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries they have to open ‘substantially all trade’ to European competition – even where the EU uses subsidies. And those Economic Partnership Agreements are supposed to be an aid initiative.

Don’t believe the spin that these talks were ever about the poor. They were about business. A Forfás report for the Irish government had shown that the would-be gains to Irish industry were over five times what might have been lost in the area of agricultural exports.

The squabble in the failed ‘Doha Development Round’ was clear: Europe and the US pressuring everyone else to buy their exports, especially services such as banking,

telecoms and insurance. On the other side, the middle-income countries, such as Brazil and India, refusing to concede to the EU and US unless in exchange for meaningful reductions in farm subsidies. It was the sideshow that got most attention: the EU and US playing cat and mouse – trying to ensure the other would suffer more of the sting on agriculture. It was this refusal of both the Titans to match their ambitions for industry with concessions in agriculture which inexorably led to the breakdown.

The poorest countries, especially African countries, remained largely on the margins, hoping for some crumbs to fall from the table. The market access benefits from the round were largely going to the middle income countries.

The WTO was only founded in 1995, suffered a breakdown at Seattle in 1999 and another at Cancún in 2003. Does this latest failure mean the end of the WTO?

Unlikely. Firstly, the Doha Round could be revived either when the US gets over its mid-term elections this November, or after the next Ministerial meeting due before the end of 2007. Each of the previous ‘rounds’ of trade talks has had a supposed breakdown but revived.

Even if the action moves to the

bilateral level for the coming period, the WTO will still continue its role as adjudicator in trade disputes. Indeed, the one thing that was agreed before the collapse of the talks was a set of new rules for the WTO to regulate the over 200 bilateral and regional trade agreements that already exist. The WTO has not gone away, you know.

But if negotiations are to be revived at the WTO, Europe will have to give ground on agriculture. When that eventually happens, it must ensure that advantage goes to the likes of small sugar producers in Mozambique instead of Brazilian sugar multinationals. And at home the EU must ensure that those who suffers the pinch are the top 3.5% of farmers who have as much land as the bottom 40%. Because subsidies are distributed largely according to farm size, the cash ends up being dealt out with similar inequality.

And what now happens to the 'development package' that was to benefit poor countries in the Doha Round? EU Trade Commissioner, Peter Mandelson, said "We should extract from the rubble a significant development package". In other words, rich countries should go ahead with the 'duty-free and quota-free' access to industrial country markets for the 50 poorest countries, and should continue with the promised 'aid-for-trade' spending. The EU was already doing some of this, but without an overall agreement it is unlikely that many countries will give away what was a valuable bargaining chip.

Immediately after the collapse of the talks the chief negotiators of the powerful countries moved to progress liberalisation through bilateral deals. India, China, Chile, and others are being wooed. The rich can now cherry-pick their preferred trading partners – essentially those who have lucrative markets to open up in exchange. The poor must always wait.

It is a new world we live in. The US and EU can no longer presume to push about the likes of Brazil, India and China. They failed to read this in the earlier WTO collapses at Seattle and Cancún. There are powerful new actors on the stage. The bilateral option may protect the US and EU from learning that lesson for another while. But the writing is on the wall.

Either way, African trade ministers' telephones will not be busy.

Conall O'Caomh is Policy Officer at Comhlámh

A Brand is Born!

The 'Heart of Africa' logo is appearing in the shops on products promoted by Traidlinks, a new initiative to support African business

Focus recently attended the launch of a new brand and a new agency. The 'Heart of Africa' logo is now appearing in the shops on products promoted by Traidlinks.

Traidlinks supports African producers to export more – and in that way to contribute to development. That support involves advice on product development, reaching EU health standards, packaging, marketing, etc.

The agency has emerged from the 'Private Sector Forum', initiated by Tom Kitt when he was minister for development. Behind Traidlinks are a number of business leaders from Bewley's, Barry's Tea, United Drug and Jacob Fruitfield. The latter will act as distributor of the products in Ireland. Each of the Irish companies concerned has been involved in passing on its know-how and market experience. The companies have pledged that their



profits from the Heart of Africa products will be contributed to Traidlinks trade capacity work.

Initially the array of products includes tea, coffee, dried fruits and nuts – but there are plans to expand the range. Some of the dried fruit is brought to final stage and packaged in Uganda, while other products are processed in Ireland. Traidlinks says it intends to seek Fairtrade certification for some of its product lines.

For more information visit www.traidlinks.ie

Recognition for Focus magazine at the MAMA 2006 awards

The team at *Focus Action* was delighted to be short-listed for an award at the 2006 Metro Éireann Media Multicultural and Media Awards – the MAMAs. The MAMAs were set up to recognise outstanding contributions by individuals and groups in creating cross-cultural understanding and co-operation in Ireland. The awards also recognise and celebrate initiatives that promote and celebrate cultural diversity in Ireland.

Focus Action was up against four other nominees for an award in the print media section. The judges paid special attention to our series of campaigning articles about problems with Ireland's immigration system and our profiles of members of the immigrant community.

On the night, the award was won jointly by the *Polski Herald* and the Ethnic Section of the *Limerick Leader*. The *Polski Herald* is aimed at the Polish community in Ireland, covering Irish news stories to allow readers gain an insight into Irish society. The *Limerick Leader's Ethnic Pages* carries contributions from Chinese, Polish, Russian and African residents of Limerick.

Other media award winners included Lizelle Joseph and Olatyn Jidowunu in the student media category, RTE's *The Den* in visual media and Inishowen Community Radio's *China Times* in broadcast media.



Have you heard the
one about Africa
giving aid to Europe?

No, it's not a joke. African
countries will have to buy EU
products in return for EU aid. The
EU calls it Economic Partnership
Agreements. We call it ...

giving with one hand and
taking away with the other



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