

CLAIMING OUR FUTURE

A DEBATE TO IDENTIFY THE CHOICES CIVIL SOCIETY COULD RALLY BEHIND

CONTEXT

The ‘Claiming Our Future’ event takes place in the Industries Hall of the RDS in Dublin on 30th October 2010. People from a wide range of civil society sectors are meeting to stake our claim to, and articulate our vision of, Ireland’s future. Trade union, cultural, communities, developing world, disability, rural, environmental, migrant worker, student and youth groups are amongst those taking part. This document seeks to support debate in the build up to the event which will in turn shape deliberations at the event. For more about how to debate/engage see the final page.

We are organizing this ‘Claiming Our Future’ event because we are deeply dissatisfied with, and concerned about, the current direction of Government policy in response to the economic recession. We do not accept that there is no alternative to these policies. We have choices.

Irish society is subject to a wide range of global, regional and national forces for change. These are not just economic but also include demographic, technological, and environmental forces. Ireland can only negotiate a way through these forces for change on the basis of a clear set of values that inform the type of society we want to be. We believe that values such as those of equality, inclusion, sustainability and human dignity offer a necessary compass for Ireland’s future and suggest very different approaches to addressing and managing these forces for change. The kind of policy choices that could reflect these values are set out below for discussion.

CREATING THE SPACE FOR CHOICE

We need to move from a reactive response to the present economic forces for change to a more proactive management of our collective future. We need to create the space to advance an alternative response to the economic recession. The various choices outlined below would be enabled by:

- Establishing values that include equality, inclusion and sustainability and human dignity as the criteria for making public policy decisions.
- A longer time-frame for adjustment of the public finances to the new economic reality.
- Mobilising available resources to stimulate a new approach to economic, environmental and social development.
- Effective regulation of employment relationships, business activity and the financial sector.
- Developing more robust measures of well being and progress that address economic, environmental and social benefits and costs in a more integrated way.

MAKING DIFFERENT CHOICES

The goal of a more equal, inclusive and sustainable Ireland has practical implications for economic, environmental, social and cultural policy and budgetary decisions. This goal directs us to:

1. PURSUE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THAT SERVES PEOPLE.

We could, for example, choose to:

- Implement a new economic strategy that prioritises indigenous economic activity by supporting the start up and growth of locally owned enterprise.
- Develop the social and economic infrastructure to serve the interests of the whole population.
- Invest in, and maximize, job creation in a green economy including ecosystem protection, renewable energy, energy efficiency, carbon reduction and bio-diversity.
- Develop the social economy and jobs in areas such as care services, facilities in disadvantaged communities and cultural initiatives.

2. A MORE AMBITIOUS RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES.

We could, for example, choose to:

- Implement resilience measures to protect social, economic and environmental infrastructure from the impact of climate change.
- Fully implement Agenda 21, the United Nations programme for sustainable development for the 21st century, agreed at the 1992 Earth Summit.
- Implement a renewed sustainable development strategy that caps resource use and emissions and that secures investment for sustainable development.

3. ENHANCED ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

We could, for example, choose to:

- Increase the labour market participation rates of men and women.
- Recognise and reward all meaningful work and ensure access to such work for all.
- Reduce relative poverty and eliminate consistent poverty.

- Invest in the work of artists, arts workers and arts created through community initiative and in access to the arts.

4. PUBLIC SECTOR RENEWAL

We could, for example, choose to:

- Move towards universal publicly funded services in the provision of such as health, education and care services.
- Develop new approaches to the front line delivery of public services.
- Strengthen the equality, social inclusion and human rights infrastructure with renewed legislation, institutions and policies.
- Meet the investment target of 0.7% of national income on overseas aid.

5. REFORMED TAXATION AND INCOME POLICIES

We could, for example, choose to:

- Increase the tax take and broaden the tax base by, for example, introducing asset tax or land value tax or tax on financial transactions.
- Strengthen, individualise, and increase the flexibility of the social protection system.
- Achieve greater income equality through wage, tax and income policies that ensure maximum income is not more than a specific multiple of the minimum income and ensure every person has a guaranteed minimum income sufficient to live life with dignity.

6. DEMOCRATIC REFORM

We could, for example, choose to:

- Develop participatory and deliberative forms of governance, greater diversity in representative governance, greater levels of devolved government and more open and transparent government.
- Provide a legal basis for collective bargaining.
- Enhance democratic participation by investing in the advocacy role of civil society organisations and in citizenship educations in schools.

BUILDING ON THE CHOICES

This document has been prepared to promote a debate on the choices that we have in relation to developing an Ireland based on equality, inclusion, sustainability and human dignity. Between now and the 'Claiming our Future' event on 30th October 2010 it should be the focus for debate around the country and across all sectors of civil society.

Are there policy choices here that have a particular potential to start the transformations required in Irish society and that all of civil society could unite behind?

Are there weaknesses in the policy choices put forward? Could you identify how to strengthen particular policy choices so that they might better contribute to these transformations?

Are there gaps in the policy choices put forward? Could you identify additional policy choices that are necessary?

We hope to track, record and make public the debate so let us know your conclusions. You can send them to info@claimingourfuture.ie and we will put them up on the website. You can track the debates yourself on the website www.claimingourfuture.ie

By way of example:

The global justice sector has identified a weakness in the manner in which issues of global justice are dealt with under the theme of public sector renewal. They have proposed that the policy choices should be more justice centred and should be expanded to meet wider justice concerns. The policy choices would therefore read:

- Meet the UN target for overseas aid spending of 0.7% of national income and ensure that this aid is used to promote justice and sustainable development.
- Develop Ireland's foreign and economic policies and international relations to advance the rights of impoverished and exploited people in the countries of the Global South".