A White Paper on Children in Crossfire’s Organisational Strategy

‘Present for the Future 2015-2019’

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**Strategy Summary**

Children in Crossfire’s Strategic Vision is to bring about a ‘compassionate world where every child can reach his or her potential’. It is our Mission ‘to work with others to tackle the injustices of poverty affecting children’. The organisation believes children have the potential to be the most powerful change-makers. Given the right care and educational opportunities, children can be nurtured to participate fully in making the world a more just and equal place for everyone.

As highlighted in the Organisational Strategic Plan 2015-2019: ‘Present for the Future’, Children in Crossfire is committed to achieving its Vision by implementing Early Childhood Development (ECD)/Early Childhood Education (ECE) interventions through a Programmatic Results-Based Management (RBM) approach leading to increased ‘School Readiness’ of young children. The organisation is also committed to achieving its Vision through engaging people across Ireland in Development Education (DE) interventions, leading to increased understanding of international development and global poverty issues.

Outlined below are Children in Crossfire’s Strategic Outcomes and Objectives 2015-2019 in relation to ECD/ECE and DE.

**Children in Crossfire expects the following Outcomes by the end of 2019:**

1. Increased School Readiness for young children in Children in Crossfire target countries
2. Increased cultivation of Global Citizenship fostered within the Formal Education sector across the island of Ireland
3. Implementing Partners in Children in Crossfire Target countries have increased capacity and resources to achieve results

**Strategic Objectives:**

1. To increase access of young girls and boys (0-6 years) to high quality early childhood education services (both Community Based and Government Provision)
2. To increase knowledge of decision makers and key stakeholders with respect to the needs and rights of young children (0-8years) leading to strong resourced laws and policies
3. To increase public knowledge of development issues, and increase the skills and values needed for Global Citizenship
4. Implementing Partners in Children in Crossfire Target Countries to have strong governance, management systems and technical capacity leading to effective performance and improved sustainability

**Strategy Renewal**

As apparent, Children in Crossfire’s Strategy is due to be renewed in 2019. Thus, in preparation for the renewal year, the organisation instigated a process throughout 2017 and 2018. The Board of Trustees assigned responsibility to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Ireland based Central Programme Management Group (CPMG) to facilitate a thorough review of ‘Present for the Future’ including:

- assessing the levels of impact achieved against the Strategic Outcomes and Objectives
- assessing the overall organisational approach which steers the Mission towards actualising the Vision
The review process involved:

- Annual Strategic Updates (ASU) involving all staff in Ireland, representatives from Tanzania staff team and representatives from the Board of Trustees. The ASU provided a space for assessing progress against Outcomes, Objectives and relevant Results Frameworks (RF) for all country programmes.
- Quarterly CPMG meetings to ensure the effective design, management and implementation of the process.
- Ethiopia Focus Group (EFG) monthly meetings to ensure a thorough review of the relevant Outcomes and Objectives. The EFG is made up of the Head of International Programmes alongside members from the CPMG.
- Tanzania Focus Group (TFG) monthly meetings to ensure a thorough review of the relevant Outcomes and Objectives. The TFG is made up of representatives from the Tanzania programme team alongside members from the CPMG.
- Members of the CPMG undertaking a ten-day consultative visit to Tanzania staff and partners to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the overall Mission approach for achieving Outcomes, Objectives and, importantly, the organisational Vision (June 2018).
- Ireland Focus Group (IFG) monthly meetings to ensure a thorough review of the relevant DE Outcomes and Objectives. The IFG is made up of representatives from the Ireland programme team alongside members from the CPMG.
- Ireland’s DE team undertaking a thorough evaluation of its DE pedagogical and curriculum approach to assess its effectiveness in achieving the relevant Strategic Objectives and Outcomes. This culminated in a consultative Think Tank involving beneficiaries, partners, researchers, educators, curriculum and policy makers (June 2017).
- A consultative workshop with CPMG members and representatives from the Tanzania and Ireland teams to assess the overall approach to partnership in relation to the relevant Strategic Outcome, Objectives, Mission and Vision (September 2018 – facilitated by Peter McEvoy).

Findings and Recommendations

Key Finding and Recommendation 1:

The organisation is demonstrating positive results against Strategic Outcome 1 and Strategic Objectives 1 and 2. However, to deepen the impact and sustain these results, it is recommended that the organisation consider consulting target groups and beneficiaries to assess how immediate needs and community poverty issues might impede on their capacity to fully engage in Children in Crossfire’s programme.

In implementing its ECD/ECE interventions, the organisation has tailored a niche approach towards achieving increased School Readiness for young children. The approach involves creating a stimulating learning environment for children aged 0 – 6 years through:

a) In-service teacher (pre-primary) and educator (pre-School) training to support the development of skills, knowledge and confidence to implement School Readiness approaches in order to maximise Learning Outcomes so that young children can reach their potential.

1 See file:///C:/Users/cmurphy/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/IE/8DG1WZP3/15-07-Strategic-Report-FINAL.pdf for an in depth definition and intervention model of Children in Crossfire’s school readiness approach.
b) Supporting the development of locally sourced and sustainable learning materials

c) Supporting parents and caregivers so they are fully engaged in increasing the School Readiness of their children

d) Supporting community leaders and local government officials to prioritise learning opportunities for young children

e) Supporting national government to embed the School Readiness approach within national ECD/ECE policies across the countries of operation

f) Ensuring results and impact make a direct contribution to major donor development policies\(^2\) and the wider international development agenda with a key focus on demonstrating progress against Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.2\(^3\)

To date, positive results include:

a) **Children**: reached more than 60,000 children, helping them towards achieving their potential intellectually, physically and socially

b) **Teachers and Educators**: trained and mentored more than 300 pre-primary teachers and preschool educators to increase the School Readiness of young children

c) **Parents and Caregivers**: raised awareness among thousands of parents and caregivers on the importance of creating a stimulating learning environment during the early years of a child’s development

d) **Community Leaders and Local Government Officials**: supported hundreds of community leaders and local government officials to prioritise a range of early years learning opportunities for young children

e) **National Government**: supported ministries in both the formulation and nationwide implementation of policy for improved ECD/ECE delivery through School Readiness

Organisational Responses to Key Recommendation 1 include:

a) Under the direction of the CEO, the CPMG developed a high level organisational protocol in relation to working with target groups and beneficiaries. This protocol is clearly defined in ‘Children in Crossfire’s Central Management System’ document. Ultimately, the protocol stipulates that Children in Crossfire will ‘actively address barriers and constraints which might impede upon the full capacity of children and communities to participate fully in our School Readiness programmes, combining development and humanitarian approaches if required in specific country’

b) In order to put the above protocol into practice, Children in Crossfire introduced a ‘Participatory Barriers Assessment’ (PBA) methodology into its overall country programming approach. This is intended as a means to consult directly with target groups and beneficiaries in order to identify any pressing needs, issues and barriers which might impede on their capacity to participate in the School Readiness programme. The PBA is clearly articulated in Children in Crossfire’s revised ‘International Programme Operations Manual’\(^4\), together with the relevant templates and guidelines for implementing the PBA

c) In order to monitor and evaluate PBA progress, Children in Crossfire has ensured that this is a standing agenda item on the EFG and TFG with a subsequent PBA working group driving the design and implementation process

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\(^2\) See [https://www.irishaid.ie/what-we-do/who-we-work-with/civil-society/civil-society-programme-funding/](https://www.irishaid.ie/what-we-do/who-we-work-with/civil-society/civil-society-programme-funding/)

\(^3\) SDG Goal 4: ‘to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.’ Target 4.2 ‘by 2030 ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.’ See [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4)

\(^4\) Contact caroline.murphy2@childrenincrossfire.org for relevant documents
Key Finding and Recommendation 2:

The organisation is demonstrating positive results against Strategic Outcome 2 and Strategic Objective 3. It has significantly deepened curriculum links and developed pupils more holistically by evolving its DE pedagogy through ‘Educating the Heart’. It is recommended that the organisation continues to evolve its educating the heart approach, and it should also take its programme beyond formal education only, so that the wider public and informal sector can be engaged through Strategic Objective 3 and Outcome 2.

In implementing its DE interventions, the organisation has tailored its programme to formal education. The approach involves creating a learning environment for global citizenship through:

- Delivering accredited Continuing Professional Development and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses for primary and post-primary teachers (across Ireland) to support the development of skills, knowledge and confidence to implement global citizenship to pupils through a DE approach
- The development of DE resources, tools and methodologies with a particular focus on evolving its DE pedagogy through educating the heart
- Supporting schools to implement a whole School approach to global citizenship through creating subject links and thematic units of learning
- Embedding DE approaches across curriculum, policy and practice
- Ensuring results and impact make a direct contribution to major donor development policies and the wider international development agenda with a key focus on demonstrating progress against Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.7

To date, positive results include:

- **Pupils**: impacted the teaching and learning of more than 100,000 pupils
- **Teachers and Educators**: trained and mentored more than 500 primary and post-primary teachers
- **Initial Teacher Education (ITE)**: trained and mentored more than 500 ITE students and established partnerships with ITE colleges
- **DE Pedagogy**: successfully developed an evolved approach to DE through merging Educating the Heart across DE philosophy and practice
- **Curriculum and Policy**: successfully situated Children in Crossfire’s programme across primary and post-primary curricula in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with the programme recognised in Shared Education policy

Organisational Responses to Key Recommendation 2 include:

- Under the direction of the CEO, the DE team developed a ‘Compassionate School Award’ system as a means to ensure the sustainability of the overall Educating the Heart approach

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5 Educating the Heart uses tools and methods to nurture compassion and emotional literacy alongside critical thinking and critical literacy in order to prepare young people more holistically for participating in the world as a global citizen. See https://www.childrenincrossfire.org/what-we-do/development-education/tidal-educating-the-heart/ for further information

6 See https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/allwebsitemedia/60aboutirishaid/Irish-Aid-DevEd-Strategy-PMF.pdf

7 SDG Goal 4: ‘to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.’ Target 4.7 ‘By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.’ See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4

8 See https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/sharing-works-policy-shared-education

9 See https://www.childrenincrossfire.org/what-we-do/development-education/compassionate-school-award/
b) Under the direction of the CEO, the DE team developed an impact and advocacy strategy to collate research evidence and case studies in order to advocate to relevant stakeholders for increased investment in Educating the Heart and DE overall.

c) Under the direction of the CEO, the DE team developed a wider Public Engagement (PE) strategy which extends Children in Crossfire’s education programme beyond formal education and into non-formal settings with a niche focus on training returned volunteers, youth leaders and artists to build their capacity to engage the wider public in global issues.

Key Finding and Recommendation 3:

The organisation is demonstrating progress against Strategic Outcome 3 and Strategic Objective 4. However, it is recommended that the organisation should articulate more clearly its overall partnership approach which underpins this Outcome and Objective.

In implementing its partnership capacity building interventions, the organisation has a focus on three key principles: a) shared Vision and Values; b) clarity on roles, responsibilities and expected results; and c) commitment to joint planning, learning and decision-making. Building partner sustainability and ownership drives the overall approach, whilst ensuring alignment with best practice in international development.

To date, positive results have seen the organisation:

a) establish 3 partnerships in Tanzania, providing funding, dedicated capacity-building and programmatic support to community-based civil society organisations to champion the delivery of ECD/ECE School Readiness programmes locally (note these are TAHEA Mwanza; Childhood Development Organisation, CDO; and Maarifa ni Ufunguo).

b) establish 2 civil society partnerships in Tanzania to strengthen advocacy efforts to local and national government (note these are the Tanzania ECD Network, TECDEN; and the Union of Tanzania Press Clubs, UTPC).

c) establish 3 partnerships in Ethiopia providing School Readiness, water and nutrition based projects (note these are Addis Ababa Catholic Secretariat; St Luke’s Hospital; and Maedot, School Readiness Initiative).

Responses to Key Recommendation from Review Process include:

a) Under the direction of the CEO, the CPMG initiated a consultancy exercise in order to review the organisation’s overall approach to partnership, resulting in a clearer articulation of Children in Crossfire’s partnership rationale through revised organisational policy (see annex a).

b) In order to put the above policy into practice, the CPMG developed a partner typology template which clearly defines all partner types (see annex a, page 8), and allocates capacity building approaches in line with the partner type.

c) The CPMG further revised its approach to implementing ‘partner capacity assessments’, ensuring the key assessment areas are conducive to the partner type, and that a scoring system is implemented against proxy indicators. Subsequently, partners can be supported to increase their scoring, and the PCA is repeated annually to mark progress. The PCA further...

10 See https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/Busan%20partnership.pdf
11 See https://www.childrenincrossfire.org/what-we-do/finance-governance/ for annual reports which specify partnerships to date both in Ethiopia and Tanzania.
provides a means to establish partner risk ratings, and to manage and mitigate risks throughout the programme cycle\(^\text{12}\).

**Key Finding 4:**

The organisation Mission and Vision remains appropriate and relevant to all country programme implementation approaches, with particular progress achieved in the Ireland DE programme in relation to the incorporation of compassion based methods across its Strategic Approach.

In implementing each of its Strategic Objectives, Children in Crossfire has been striving to fulfil its Mission, ‘to work with others to tackle the injustices of poverty affecting children’, and to subsequently actualise it Vision, ‘a compassionate world where every child can reach his or her potential’. In fact, by developing its PBA approach, the organisation has strengthened its Mission by deepening its understanding of the implications of poverty related issues for target groups and beneficiaries. Such issues are an injustice that need to be tackled so that people can fully participate in the overall programme leading to the achievement of the intended Outcomes. In this respect, the organisation’s Vision of compassion is one of its key strengths and is actualised through:

a) ensuring that any programmatic intervention is tailored to meet the needs of the intended population  
b) ensuring the voices of the communities and beneficiaries are heard and responded to throughout the overall programmatic intervention  
c) providing communities and beneficiaries the space to speak for themselves, and identify their pressing needs and issues

In fact, due to its substantial expertise in delivering ECD/ECE School Readiness interventions whilst addressing PBA issues, it seems that Children in Crossfire is at a point in time where it is ready to explore bringing its expertise to humanitarian settings such as refugee camps in Tanzania. In this respect, the organisation might explore possibilities for extending its work to such settings, and therefore actualise its Vision at a deeper level through a direct but strategic response to humanitarian settings.

It is also important to note that through its DE programme, Children in Crossfire has significantly progressed its Vision by bringing practical and tangible compassion based ‘Educating the Heart’ methods to the core of its programme. Here, if anywhere, is an example of the organisation’s overall commitment to ground its Vision in the everyday practice of the programme, in order to bring about a compassionate world where every child can reach his or her potential.

**Implications for Organisation’s Strategic Plan**

In considering the overall review process and the subsequent findings and recommendations, it is noticeable that Children in Crossfire’s current strategy, ‘Present for the Future’, remains relevant and Strategic to the overall organisational approach to implementation. In fact, it is evident that the organisation has developed its approach to achieve greater depth of impact against each Strategic Objective and subsequent Outcome. Furthermore, the efforts to actualise its Vision across all Objectives is apparent, alongside its commitment to bring a participatory approach to its Mission through responding to the voice and needs of its target groups and beneficiaries. Therefore, the following is proposed:

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\(^{12}\) Contact caroline.murphy2@childrenincrossfire.org for relevant documents
a) Children in Crossfire extends its current Strategy until year ending 2021.  

b) Children in Crossfire edits Strategic Outcome 2 to state “increased cultivation of Global Citizenship fostered amongst the wider public, and specifically in the formal education sector across the island of Ireland”  

c) Children in Crossfire edits Strategic Objective 3 to state ‘to increase public knowledge of development issues, and increase the skills and values needed for global citizenship through both DE and PE programmes”  

d) Children in Crossfire continues to review the current strategy annually, and the Board of Trustees leads in the development of a new strategy beyond 2021  

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13 This will also align Children in Crossfire’s strategy to the timeline of the current Irish Aid Programme Grant fund (PGIII), which is due to end in 2021