

Changing Irish Foreign Policy in an Era of Turbulence.

Tom Arnold.

Chair, Ireland Africa Rural Development Committee (IARDC).

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Changing Irish Foreign Policy in an Era of Turbulence	5
1. The Context for Irish Foreign Policy in the Trump Era	5
2. Proposed Priorities within Irish Foreign Policy, 2025-29	7
2.1. Food and Nutrition Security	7
2.2. Health and Human Capital	8
2.3. Climate Justice and Action	8
3. Irish Positioning at the 2025 Meetings	11
3.1. Nutrition for Growth (N4G)	11
3.2. The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4)	12
3.3. The UN Food Systems Summit (UNFFS)+4	13
3.4. COP 30 on Climate Change	14
4. Ireland's EU Presidency 2026: Leadership in the Follow-Up to the SDGs	18
5. Ireland - EU - Africa strategy, 2026	19
6. Influencing Policy at International Level	21
7. Summary	23
Bibliography	26
About the Author	27

Executive Summary

The Trump Presidency has radically changed US domestic and foreign policy since it took office on 20 January 2025. Its announcement on 2 April of a wide range of tariffs has triggered fears of trade disruption and of a possible global economic recession. The US foreign policy changes represent a major reset of international relationships and rules which have prevailed over the past 80 years in the post-World War II era. Allied to the wide-ranging economic implications of artificial intelligence (AI), the world may be pivoting on a historical turning point involving major political and policy change.

Ireland's domestic and foreign policy will have to adjust to these changes. The paper focuses on the humanitarian and development part of Irish foreign policy and identifies a number of international events over the next five years at which Ireland has the opportunity to make a distinctive contribution which can yield political and economic benefits

The new US policy prioritizes its 'America First' stance and represents a retreat from a leadership role in tackling global problems. But these problems - global warming, regional and local conflicts, inequality - remain and in many respects are getting worse. Movement towards a multipolar world, where power is distributed among multiple large and influential states, is evident.

The main short-term political decisions for Irish policy will focus on economics, particularly on the response, in collaboration with the EU, to the tariff proposals and additional changes in US tax policies.

Broader foreign policy will need to adjust to the changing geopolitics. Ireland has built a strong reputation over decades in such areas as peacekeeping, human rights, humanitarian and development policies, and food and nutrition security. The new geopolitics affects each of these areas, through the move towards US isolationism and the undermining of the current multilateral system; the large increase in global defence spending, including at EU level, which is a key factor in the reduction in Overseas Development Assistance (ODA); and the growing inequality between rich and poor at international level.

This paper suggests that the current and likely future global turmoil may offer political opportunities for Ireland, at domestic and international level. Such opportunities would be founded on Ireland's long-standing political credibility and policy consistency and coherence in certain areas.

The paper's central proposition is that, for the part of foreign policy covered by humanitarian and development matters, the Irish government should agree on a high-level statement of intent on the substantive foreign policy commitments it plans to implement over its five-year governmental term. These would include:

- **The four important international meetings in 2025: Nutrition for Growth (N4G); The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4); UN Food Systems Summit +4 (UNFSS+4); COP 30 on Climate Change.**
- **The Irish EU Presidency in 2026.**
- **Future Ireland/EU/Africa strategy, to be published in 2026.**
- **Playing a leadership role in developing a set of global commitments to succeed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) post-2030.**

The paper discusses in detail the four meetings in 2025 while the EU Presidency, the Ireland/EU/Africa strategy and the future SDGs are dealt with in more general terms.

In each of these areas, Ireland should seek to be a political and policy leader, drawing on the lessons of its own development experience over the past 50 years and the coherence between its current domestic policy and its advocacy in its foreign policy.

The paper sets out an assessment of the new realities which confront Irish policy. It proposes a set of interlocking priorities - food and nutrition security; health and human capital; and climate justice and action - which should be central to foreign policy in informing Ireland's positioning in its international engagements. A strong emphasis on gender equality should be a cross-cutting thread running through these priorities.

It draws on past examples of successful Irish influencing at international level to indicate the nature and the level of political, official, and societal coordination required to optimise Irish efforts. It suggests there will be political opportunity at both the domestic and international level: domestically, in forging a political and societal consensus around these issues; internationally, in positioning Ireland as a leader in a multilateral system capable of responding to global problems. It concludes by specifying the political and economic benefits accruing to Ireland should the proposed changes be implemented.

Changing Irish Foreign Policy in an Era of Turbulence

1. The Context for Irish Foreign Policy in the Trump Era

The US government led by President Harry Truman was the dominant influence in shaping the international order post-1945. The UN and its institutions represented the functioning multilateral system. Ireland's UN membership since 1955 has been central to its foreign policy. From 1973 onwards, Ireland's EEC/EU membership has been a crucial enabler of the country's political, economic and social transformation.

Since its commencement on 20 January 2025, the second Trump presidency has radically changed US domestic and foreign policy. The announcement on 2 April of a wide range of tariffs has led to uncertainty about future international trade and economic growth and fears of a global recession. The foreign policy changes instituted represent no less than an undermining of the international order set in place by President Truman.

As of June 2025, there are huge uncertainties about the future of geopolitics and the global trading and economic system. The US government is pursuing its 'America First' policies, politically and economically, and is largely bypassing the multilateral system.

These changes represent a major challenge for Irish economic and foreign policy. The main short-term political decisions will focus on economics, framing the Irish response, in collaboration with the EU, to the tariff proposals and additional changes in US tax policies.

The cutbacks in foreign aid - overseas development assistance (ODA) - by the US and other OECD countries are a new reality. The international community faces the challenge of addressing key issues facing humanity - food and nutrition security, global health and climate change - without US policy leadership or finance. The US is also seeking to reverse a growing global consensus over the past two decades of the importance of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) agenda.

New leadership coalitions must now emerge to address these issues, a number of which such as global warming and acute poverty are getting worse. 2025 is a crucial year in that four important meetings have been organised: the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit in Paris in March; the 4th Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4)) in Seville in June/July; the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) +4 in Addis Ababa in July; and the COP 30 meeting on Climate Change in Belem, Brazil in November.

Ireland is an outlier among OECD countries in that it maintains its commitment to allocate 0.7% of its gross national income (GNI) to ODA by 2030. In January 2025, the incoming government committed 'to increase its ODA annually working towards the 0.7% target'. This decision

provides a political basis for Ireland to seek a role in the leadership coalitions which will emerge around the presidencies of each of the 2025 meetings.

This paper's central proposition is that, for the part of foreign policy covered by humanitarian and development matters, the Irish government should agree on a high-level statement of intent on the substantive foreign policy commitments it plans to implement over its five-year governmental term. These would include the four international meetings in 2025 mentioned above; the Irish EU presidency in 2026; future Ireland/EU/Africa strategy, to be published in 2026; and a commitment to play a leadership role in developing a set of global development targets to succeed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) post-2030.

An early government decision along these lines would be a strong affirmation of Ireland's commitment to the role of the multilateral system in addressing global problems and would attract attention internationally. It should be articulated by the Taoiseach or Tánaiste in a major speech on an occasion of significant moment. There should be agreement on the core policy prioritisation over the next five years, around food and nutrition security; health and human capital; climate justice and action. This approach and these priorities should secure cross-party political and societal agreement. It would likely draw support from Ireland's important NGO movement which will be obliged to rationalise in the wake of the massive ODA cuts by the US and UK governments and a majority of OECD countries.

The rest of the paper discusses the core policy prioritisation proposed over the next five years and how it would be reflected in the messaging at different international meetings: how the Irish political and official system and wider society should combine to deliver this policy, drawing on examples of how Ireland has successfully influenced international policy; and the political and economic benefits which may emerge from a successful delivery of this policy.

2. Proposed Priorities within Irish Foreign Policy, 2025-29

The proposed policy priorities of food and nutrition security, health and human capital, and climate justice and action are based on Ireland's own development experience over the past 50 years; the evolution of Ireland's aid policy in response to changing global circumstances; and its existing domestic policies, particularly Food Vision 2030 and the Climate Action Plan. Coherence between domestic policy and what Ireland advocates in its foreign policy should be a central principle.

2.1. Food and Nutrition Security

Ireland's development corporation - foreign aid - policy was established in 1974. Tackling hunger and improving global food and nutrition security has been at its heart since then. During the 1970s/80s/90s, responding to food crises and famines, such as occurred in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan, was central to Ireland's aid programme.

Such crises became less frequent during the 2000s with early warning systems and response capacities in operation. Irish policy on food and nutrition security accordingly evolved to reflect the changing nature of the global food economy and the recognition of the triple burden of malnutrition - undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency and overweight and obesity - 'malnutrition in all its forms'.

The Irish Hunger Task Force was established by the government in 2007 to identify how Ireland's foreign policy and aid budget could have the maximum impact on hunger and poverty. Its report (2008) concluded that hunger could best be tackled by increasing the productivity of - mainly female - smallholder farmers in Africa; implementing programs focused on maternal and child nutrition; and ensuring real political commitment, at national and international levels, to give hunger the absolute priority it deserved. It recommended that Ireland, through its government and civil society organisations, should seek to provide leadership on hunger and nutrition issues at international level.

The report was issued in the wake of the 2007/8 food price crisis and its recommendations were regarded as timely and relevant. This led to Ireland attaining considerable political and policy influence, at EU and international level, in the following years.

The revision of Ireland's development cooperation policy 'A Better World' (2019) identified four core priorities: gender equality, reduced humanitarian need, climate action and strengthened governance. It acknowledged that agri-food systems were central to achieving sustainable development. Increasingly complex human, environmental and health challenges posed by food systems demanded a systematic response.

A further key development was 'Food Vision 2030' (2021), the government strategy aiming to position Ireland as a world leader in sustainable food systems by 2030. This strategy adopted a food systems approach, recognizing the interconnectedness of policies relating to food, climate,

environment and health, and emphasising the role of all stakeholders in the food value chain. Crucially, Food Vision 2030 committed to coherence between domestic policy on sustainable food systems and Ireland's foreign policy.

2.2. Health and Human Capital

In the current era of great uncertainty for many countries, Ireland's story is a hopeful and compelling one, involving as it does a political, economic and social transformation over the past 50 years. Central to this has been investment in its people.

Ireland's investment in human capital can be traced back to the landmark report 'Investment in Education' (1965) and the subsequent political decision to introduce free secondary education. This report provided the foundation for Ireland's education and training policy for later decades. The World Bank's report on Ireland's 'Human Capital' (2021) attributes Ireland's economic transformation to its sustained commitment to education and skills development, demonstrating the critical role of human capital in increasing national prosperity.

A further indication of progress is Ireland's position in the Human Development Index (HDI) published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The HDI is a composite measure to assess the overall well-being and development of countries. The index encompasses three dimensions; life expectancy at birth; education and Gross National Income (GNI) per capita.

The HDI was first published in 1990 when Ireland was ranked 23rd globally. The most recent 2023/24 Human Development Report ranked Ireland seventh globally, sharing the position with Germany, and classifying both countries in the 'very high human development' category.

The fact that Ireland was a member of the EEC, then EU, over the past 50-years-plus period was of immense benefit to the country. But the key factors underpinning its economic and social transformation - which can be relevant to other countries - were political stability; sustained investment in its people; consistency in a number of key policies, including education and industrial strategy; conflict resolution; and a vibrant civil society.

2.3. Climate Justice and Action

The concept of climate justice asserts that those least responsible for climate change often suffer its worst consequences. Climate justice emphasises the fair treatment of all people and the right to equitable protection from climate related harms.

Climate justice began to get political traction during the early 2000s mainly from frontline communities affected by climate change and from Global South activists. At international level, former Irish president Mary Robinson was an early promoter of the concept. The Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice (MRFCJ) was established in 2010, aiming to serve as a hub for

thought leadership, education and advocacy, focusing on justice for the most vulnerable to the impact of climate change.

During Ireland's 2013 EU presidency, the Irish government co-hosted the 'Hunger Nutrition Climate Justice' conference with the MRFCJ, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Climate and Food Security Centre. The conference explored the interconnections between hunger, nutrition and climate change, and sought to ensure that the voices of those most affected by climate change, particularly from developing countries, were heard in policy making.

For most of the period since 2000, Ireland's record on climate policy and action was poor. In 2018, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar acknowledged in the European Parliament that 'Ireland was a laggard in climate policy' and made a political commitment to change that. In the subsequent years significant progress has been made.

The Climate Action Plan 2023 outlined a comprehensive strategy to achieve a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and to reach net zero emissions by 2050. The Plan committed to sectoral emissions targets with the target for the agricultural sector set at 25% reduction by 2030. Other commitments involved sustainable farming practices, improved land use management, additional forestry, and the promotion of biodiversity.

The Climate Action Plan is updated annually. While progress has been made during its first two years 2023-25, two reports during the early months of 2025 - a joint report from Ireland's Fiscal Advisory Council and Ireland's Climate Change Advisory Council and a report from the ESRI - are clear that progress will need to be accelerated if the national targets are to be achieved.

In summary, of the three priorities proposed for Irish foreign policy over the next five years, Ireland is seen as a world leader in food and nutrition security, has a proven track record in health and human capital, and has an ambitious policy framework in climate justice and action but faces challenges in delivering on its national targets.

The next logical step should be to build structured connections between these three priorities, both within domestic and foreign policy. This is analogous to what occurred when Irish policy on food and nutrition security evolved from the relatively straightforward objective of reducing hunger to committing to sustainable food systems which was appropriate to dealing with 'malnutrition in all its forms' and to the increasingly important linkages with health and the environment.

The changing global context suggests that such a policy transition is appropriate and timely. The reduction in ODA will necessitate a rethinking of aid policies and practices. Many developing countries which have been substantially dependent on aid will have to rethink their development strategies including the greater use of their domestically generated resources.

There is growing support internationally for a '**Nexus approach to development**', particularly the **Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus**. UN Deputy Secretary General Amina

Mohamed has been a leading voice advocating for integrated strategies that address the interconnected challenges of conflict, climate change, inequality and fragility. Such an approach aims to address the root causes of crises and build resilient communities.

Policy along these lines resonates with Ireland's long-standing commitment to the promotion of peace and reduction of conflict internationally, to its peacekeeping record and to the principle enunciated in 'A Better World' of 'leaving no one behind' and 'prioritising the furthest behind first'.

A foreign policy prioritising food and nutrition security, health and human capital, climate justice and action; with structured connections - a nexus approach - between the priorities aiming to achieve synergies and optimum use of resources; a strong emphasis on gender equality as a cross-cutting thread linking the priorities; policy coherence between Food Vision 2030, the Climate Action Plan and advocacy in foreign policy; can serve as a foundation for key aspects of Irish foreign policy over the next five years. How such a foundation can be used to shape policy positions to the individual key events and processes over this period is dealt with in the next section.

3. Irish Positioning at the 2025 Meetings

The four 2025 meetings represent an important test for the capacity of the multilateral system to address critical issues without US policy leadership or finance. They also represent an opportunity for Ireland to make a distinctive input, seeking to be part of the leadership structure and outcomes of these meetings, and reflecting its foreign policy priorities tailored to match the specific challenges each meeting is dealing with.

3.1. Nutrition for Growth (N4G)

The idea of Nutrition for Growth (N4G) was initiated at a UK-government led London Summit associated with the 2012 Olympics aimed at tackling child undernutrition and stunting. The first N4G Summit was held in London in 2013 and it was agreed that further meetings would be held in tandem within future Olympics. Subsequent meetings were held in Rio de Janeiro (2016) and in Tokyo (2021).

The N4G meeting in Paris in March 2025 raised \$27.55 billion to advance nutrition goals, slightly up on the level of commitments made at the Tokyo Summit. In 2021, the US government's commitment was \$11 billion: in 2025, the US made no financial commitment. So the achievement of \$27.55 billion in 2025 represented a combination of certain donor countries increasing their commitments from 2021 and the addition of a number of new governmental and non-governmental donors.

Among the most notable commitments in Paris were the EU Commission (€3.4 billion 2024–27); Germany (€870 m 2022–27); France (€750 m by 2030); Netherlands (€400 m by 2030) Ireland (€250 m per year 2026–29). The Team Europe - EU Commission plus Member States - commitment at N4G was €6.5 billion.

The multilateral development banks, the World Bank and African Development Bank (AfDB), committed respectively \$5 billion and \$9.5 billion by 2030.

Other notable developments at N4G was the agreement of the Global Compact for Nutrition Integration, a new commitment to embed nutrition into economic growth strategies and the Paris Declaration on Business and Nutrition, committing business to build a strong nutrition economy.

Ireland's commitment of €1 billion over a four year period 2026-29 means that, as with the N4G meeting in 2021, Ireland was the largest donor on a per capita basis on both occasions - an important indicator of Ireland's political commitment to nutrition. Its 2025 commitment is directed towards both nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive interventions, with a focus on the humanitarian context and dedicated funding to address child wasting.

The French presidency of N4G deserves credit for the success of the 2025 meeting, in terms of the scale of the financial commitments it helped deliver; of connecting N4G with other global development processes such as the UNFSS+4, COP 30, the Biodiversity COP, and the G7 and

G20 initiatives to ensure that healthy and sustainable diets contribute to global development goals; and highlighting the benefit of nutrition becoming an integral part of other sectoral strategies such as health and education.

3.2. The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4)

The 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) will take place in Seville from 30 June to 3 July 2025. The FfD4 builds on earlier conferences in 2002, 2008 and 2015 held to establish a framework for financing development and the mobilisation of domestic and international resources to achieve development goals. FfD4 aims to address the evolving financial landscape and the need to align financial flows with the requirements of the SDGs.

The sharp fall in ODA provides a sobering background to FfD4. In 2023, ODA amounted to \$223.3 billion: the US contributed \$71.9 billion, approximately 32%. The cut in US foreign aid budgets in January 2025 amounted to some \$60 billion. This has major implications for all aspects of US bilateral humanitarian and development programmes, and for many UN and international institutions and NGOs.

In addition to the US, other OECD countries are also cutting their aid budgets. The UK has cut its aid target from 0.5% of its national income to 0.3%: this is part of the plan to increase its spending on defence to 2.5% of its national income, with a further increase to 3% during the term of the next parliament.

These reductions in ODA are already having profound effects on vulnerable people worldwide. A study by Nature has analysed the likely severe human consequences of the foreign aid cuts by major donor countries. The analysis estimates that the cuts could lead to an additional 369,000 child deaths annually due to severe malnutrition. The cuts are expected to halve emergency nutrition spending, leaving approximately 2.3 million children without access to life-saving treatment for severe acute malnutrition.

In addition to the health impacts, the aid reductions have led to widespread economic distress. In Africa many families rely on a single income earner. Job losses resulting from the aid cuts mean that children are dropping out of school, families are losing health insurance, and overall economic stability is threatened.

The significant fall in ODA will require rethinking of aid policies and practices. Many donor countries may wish to focus available aid to deal with the most acute humanitarian situations, frequently linked to post-conflict situations. This will put further pressure on funds for long-term development.

Countries which are not in the poorest category, including those aspiring to middle income status, will need to use smaller amounts of ODA more strategically, through leveraging public and private sector investment. They will need to work towards a new financial framework for

their development, including the role of nationally generated resources and foreign direct investment.

Certain advocates for change see FfD4 as an opportunity to integrate development, climate and nature into a coherent development framework. FfD4 may shift the discourse from ODA and the focus on the 0.7% target, to an investment driven model. There is an opportunity to reset concessional aid for sustainable development and reflect on the role of all multilateral, bilateral, and national development financial institutions.

Ireland's contribution to the debate and decision making at FfD4 should be supportive of innovative measures to raise additional resources for development finance; advocate for more effective use of available ODA; and in line with the principle in 'A Better World' of 'Leaving No-one Behind', prioritise the poorest people, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected regions, in its own aid policy and in its international advocacy.

3.3. The UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS)+4

The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres proposed the idea of a UNFSS on the basis that sustainable food systems had an integral role in attaining the SDGs. The first UNFSS was held in September 2021 with President Michael D Higgins and Taoiseach Micheal Martin playing prominent roles. The main achievement of the meeting was that 126 countries have adopted national pathways for food system transformation. It was agreed that a stocktaking on progress made in these pathways would be held every two years. UNFSS +2 was held in Rome in July 2023.

UNFSS+4 will take place in Addis Ababa in July. It will assess progress in transforming food systems since the first UNFSS in 2021, strengthen accountability and mobilise investment for sustainable solutions. Five regional preparatory meetings have been organised between February and May 2025. These gatherings bring together national convenors, UN agencies, civil society, academia, the private sector, financial institutions and youth organisations.

Ireland has a positive story to contribute to UNFSS +4. Food Vision 2030 is the fifth stakeholder-led process since 2000 to direct Ireland's domestic agri-food strategy. This long experience of collaboration between government and stakeholders is relevant to many countries, particularly in Africa, which have embarked on their own national pathways for food systems transformation.

A critical element of Food Vision 2030 is the annual implementation report which maps progress in delivery against its four core missions: A Climate-Smart Environmentally Sensitive agri-food sector; Resilient Primary Producers with Enhanced Wellbeing; Food that is Safe, Nutritious and Appealing, Trusted and Valued at Home and Abroad; and an Innovative, Competitive and Resilient agri-food sector driven by Technology and Talent. A key part of Ireland's contribution to UNFSS+4 could be a succinct statement of the delivery against the core missions in the first three years of Food Vision 2030.

Ireland has provided technical assistance to a number of African countries in their National Implementation Pathways. A further element of Ireland's contribution could be an update on progress thus far, lessons learned and plans to continue this technical assistance programme with existing countries and new future partners.

This can be framed in the context of the Kampala Declaration, approved by the African Union (AU) in January 2025. Preparatory work for the Kampala Declaration involved a review of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) which has operated, with mixed success, since 2002. During 2024, a number of working groups, which Ireland financially supported, reviewed the past and planned for the future. This led to the Kampala CAADP Declaration, which sets African agri-food policy for the 2026-35 period, based on a food systems approach and with a strong emphasis on the link between food systems and climate change. Ireland supports the Kampala CAADP Declaration and will be orienting its future programmes/support in line with Africa's implementation of the Declaration.

Food Vision 2030 committed to 'Policy Coherence and Synergies in Sustainable Food Systems between Ireland's Domestic Policy and Council for the Global Bioeconomy (IACGB), a potential collaboration with the AU and certain African countries in preparation for the Summit.

3.4. COP 30 on Climate Change

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was established at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, known as the 'Earth Summit'. The first meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the UNFCCC was held in Bonn in 1995. Annual meetings of the COP have been held since then and COP 30 will take place in Belem in the Amazon region in Brazil in November 2025.

The Brazilian government is strongly invested in making COP 30 a success. If it is successful, it will be a victory for the multilateral system. In January 2025, President Luiz Inacio Lula De Silva appointed Ambassador Andre Aranha Correa do Lago as President of COP 30. Ambassador do Lago is a highly regarded diplomat with extensive experience in COP negotiations and a climate specialist. In an address to the UN General Assembly, he has positioned the COP as a platform to advance international collaboration on climate action.

Work is progressing on the COP 30 Action Agenda which will be presented to a meeting of the UNFCCC in Bonn in June. This will serve as the subsequent basis for negotiation between June and November on the final COP outcome.

Brazil has made clear that it wishes to work closely with international institutions and existing processes and avoid duplication of effort. The UNFSS+4 and COP 30 agendas are mutually reinforcing, addressing a nexus of sustainable food systems and climate change through shared themes of environmental sustainability, financial support and collaborative policy making.

The fact that the link between climate, agriculture and food will be a central focus of COP 30 is of particular significance. Since its start in 1995, the COP process has paid little attention to this link. However, in recent years as climate change increasingly threatened food security, COPs have started to treat agriculture as both a driver and a victim of climate change, pushing for more integrated solutions.

COP 23, Bonn, 2017 launched the Koronivia Joint Work Programme on agriculture, the first dedicated COP initiative linking climate and food security.

COP 26, Glasgow, 2021, focused on methane reduction, regenerative agriculture and deforestation. It also launched Agriculture Innovation for Climate (AI4C) and the Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN).

COP 28, Dubai, 2023, officially recognised food systems in the climate agenda, pledging to integrate food and agriculture into national climate plans. A major outcome of COP 28 was the Emirates Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action, signed by 159 countries. In addition the Vision for Adapting Crops and Soils (VACS), with US leadership, was launched.

Ireland actively engaged with all of the above climate-food initiatives, having signed up to the Koronivia Joint Work Programme and the Emirates Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action and becoming a member/supporter of AI4C, I-CAN and VACS.

The Brazilian Presidency aims to build on the above progress. COP President do Lago has already indicated his wish to accelerate the transition of agreed measures under previous COPs into concrete actions. This is of particular relevance to two outcomes of COP 28: the Emirates Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action; and a consensus to enhance efforts towards halting and reversing deforestation and land degradation by 2030.

An additional notable initiative is the **Global Alliance (GA) against Hunger and Poverty**, proposed as part of Brazil's G20 Presidency in 2024. The GA is expected to play a pivotal role in the COP 30 agenda, through highlighting sustainable food systems, mobilising resources for climate adaptation, and strengthening global partnerships. As of April 2025, the GA comprises 82 countries, the AU, the EU, 24 international organisations, nine international financial institutions, and 31 philanthropic and non-governmental organisations.

Ireland was an early joiner of the GA. Each country committing to the GA is required to sign a Statement of Commitment covering three areas: policy cooperation and support; financial support; and knowledge support.

In its Statement of Commitment, Ireland has undertaken to share its own learnings, and to help and support other GA member countries; continue Ireland's work on addressing Child Wasting

with UNICEF and WHO; support global efforts for food system transformation; notes that Ireland has committed \$350 million over 2024-27 to fight hunger and poverty and address SDG 1 and SDG 2; and commits to knowledge support, technical assistance and capacity building with other GA members to develop innovative solutions and good practice in the fight against hunger and poverty.

This all suggests that Ireland has a considerable opportunity to make a constructive input to COP 30. Ireland's agri-food strategy - Food Vision 2030 - and its climate policy - Climate Action Plan - are in strong alignment with the objectives of UNFSS+4 and COP 30 and their shared agendas. This high level of policy alignment is further accentuated by the GA and its priority on hunger and poverty, which has been central to Irish foreign and development cooperation policy since 1974. However, the detail of what Ireland's optimum policy contribution should be to COP 30 is not yet clear.

Ireland has played a prominent role in recent COPs. The main focus of Irish efforts has been on increasing climate finance and putting in place a Loss and Damage Fund to assist developing countries mitigate the impact of climate change. Progress on both issues was made at COPs 28 and 29.

The difference on this occasion is that food and climate will be central to the COP for the first time. The specifics of the main negotiations should become clearer when Brazil presents its Action Agenda to the UNFCCC in June which will serve as the basis for negotiation in months leading to November.

The Irish policy position for COP will be influenced by developments and debates in a number of other fora. At EU level, the implications for Irish agriculture of new proposals on the European Green Deal (EGD) and the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) remain unclear. The South African Presidency of the G 20 has prioritised Agriculture and Food Security in its 2024/25 term of office and Ireland, as a 'Friend of the G20', is contributing to the work programme.

The Global Research Alliance (GRA) on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases is focused on research, development and extension of technologies and practices that will help to grow more food and more climate resilient food systems without growing greenhouse gas emissions. Ireland is the current chair of the GRA, holding the position from 1.1.2025 until 30.6.2025. Important debates on the link between livestock and greenhouse gas emissions are taking place within the FAO COAG sub-committee on Livestock: Donal Coleman, former Deputy Chief Inspector at DAFM, is chair of this committee. As a member of the Global Alliance (GA) against Hunger and Poverty, Ireland will contribute to the debate on what will be contained within one of the likely key outcomes from COP 30, the Belem Declaration on Hunger and Poverty.

This all points to the need for clarification of Ireland's positioning for COP 30, taking into account the various perspectives mentioned above and working towards a coherent

narrative. This will require coordination between DECC, the lead department on COP, DAFM and DFA.

In summary, Ireland has a strategic interest in working to ensure that the four international meetings in 2025 are successful, both to advance their individual and complementary objectives and to demonstrate the importance of an effective multilateral system committed to international development. Ireland has an important, but limited, financial contribution to make to these meetings but the real significance of its engagement should be to serve as a political and policy leader in supporting the idea that the multilateral system has an important continuing role in tackling global problems.

End-2025 will be an appropriate moment to assess how effective Ireland has been in influencing the outcome of these meetings and to draw lessons. This assessment can include the overall success of the multilateral system in delivering over the four meetings without US policy leadership and finance and the capacity of the system to plan and operate in a more integrated way. Ireland should have a particular interest in focusing on the effectiveness of the Ireland/EU/Africa relationship over meetings and the degree to which the objectives of the Kampala Declaration have been supported.

End- 2025 will also be a moment to agree a set of mutually reinforcing priorities for Irish foreign policy to 2030 and beyond. The key engagements over this period will include: Ireland's EU presidency in the second half of 2026; the campaign during 2026 to secure membership of the UN Human Rights Council in 2027-29; the development of Ireland's next Africa strategy; and the campaign at UN level to agree a successor strategy to the SDGs.

4. Ireland's EU Presidency 2026: Leadership in the Follow-Up to the SDGs

Ireland has held the EU Presidency seven times since joining in 1973 - in 1975, 1979, 1984, 1990, 1996, 2004, 2013. Its Presidency in 2026 will be the eighth time it has held the office.

There is a broad consensus that Ireland has always performed well in the presidency role, with significant political achievements along the way. In 1975, Ireland signed the first Lome Convention, defining the relationship between the EEC and the 46 African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states. Ireland also signed the second and third Lome Conventions, in 1979 and 1984. Ireland's 1990 Presidency played a key role in facilitating German reunification, an achievement still well remembered by successive German governments. The 2004 Presidency heralded EU enlargement, with 10 new Member States, mainly from Eastern and Central Europe joining the EU.

Since becoming a member of the UN in 1955, Ireland has continually played a leadership role in important international processes. It has seen continuous service as a UN peacekeeper since 1960, when it engaged in the Congo, now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In 1968 Ireland was the first signatory of the Non-Proliferation Nuclear Weapons Treaty (NPT) in recognition of its pioneering work to secure the Treaty. In 2008 Ireland led negotiations which agreed to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

In the past 15 years Ireland has served as a member of the Security Council (2021/22); has chaired the Commission on the Status of Women (2023); co-chaired a dialogue on the UN of the Future, focused on enhancing multilateralism for international peace and security (2024) and, most relevant to this paper, co-chaired, with Kenya, the process which led to 191 countries agreeing to the SDGs (2015).

Ireland thus approaches its 2026 EU Presidency and the UN process leading to a successor framework to the SDGs with a long track record of credible delivery. The current febrile geopolitical situation and the US's unpredictable behaviour means that a reshaping of a more effective multilateral system will become of central political importance.

5. Ireland - EU - Africa strategy, 2026

Ireland's association with Africa is long-standing and multifaceted. From the mid-19th century onwards, Irish missionaries played a significant role in improving African education and health systems. During the 1960s, the 'Decade of Decolonisation' Ireland was a strong supporter of the process at the UN. From the 1970s onwards, the major Irish NGOs - Concern Worldwide, Trocaire, GOAL - as well as smaller NGOs, were deeply involved in humanitarian and development activities.

The Irish government has had two formal policy statements on Africa: 'Ireland and Africa: Our Partnership with a Changing Continent' (2011) and 'Global Ireland: Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025 (2019). The shift between the two strategies reflected a broad, more integrated vision that extends beyond development aid to encompass diplomatic, economic and cultural dimensions.

The 2019 Strategy set as an objective the doubling of Ireland's diplomatic footprint in Africa by 2025. In addition to expanding diplomatic presence, the Strategy emphasised strengthening political partnerships, and enhancing trade and investment across the African continent, in collaboration within an EU framework.

Building on the 2019 Strategy, there is a strong case for the successor strategy post-2026 to aim for a new level of political and economic ambition.

In the emerging multipolar world, Africa's geopolitical importance is rising due to its population growth, resources, market potential, and strategic location.

Africa's population is projected to double from 1.25 billion in 2025 to 2.5 billion by 2050, when it will account for a quarter of the world's population. Over this period, most major countries and regions will see substantial population decreases contrasting with Africa's rising youthful population.

At political level, Africa with 54 countries is the largest regional voting block in the UN. The AU's recent permanent G20 membership is a boost to the continent's global political influence. South Africa holds the G20 Presidency in 2024/25.

While Africa is the source of increased attention from many large countries, the US Administration has signalled a significant reduction in future US engagement with the continent. In April 2025 a State Department review of its Africa policy proposed a substantial reduction in US diplomatic presence; the abolition of its Bureau of African Affairs; the elimination of the highly regarded HIV/AIDS programme PEPFAR and a reduction in US-funded energy programmes affecting access to electricity for 600 million people.

There are concerns among many US political and civic leaders that this policy shift will damage US- Africa relations, open opportunities for increased Chinese and Russian influence in Africa and have negative implications for security.

By contrast, there are possibilities for improved EU/Africa relations in coming years, driven by mutual interest in sustainable development, economic integration and geopolitical realignment. Current strategic priorities and initiatives include the Global Gateway Africa Europe investment package which has committed up to €150 billion by 2027 to support Africa's Agenda 2063 and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) aimed at strengthening peace and security through joint efforts.

The upcoming 7th AU-EU Summit, scheduled for late 2025, aims to deepen the strategic partnership between Africa and the EU, based on 25 years of AU-EU Summits. The Summit will focus on four central pillars outlined in an agreed Joint Vision for 2030, aligning with Africa's Agenda 2063 and EU political priorities. The four pillars are 1. Prosperity: advancing sustainable economic growth. 2. Peace, Security and Governance: strengthening stability. 3. People: investing in human capital. 4. Planet: promoting environmental sustainability.

Economically, Africa is a continent of contrasts. The World Bank's 2024 International Debt Report highlights a continuing escalation in debt burdens among Africa's 26 poorest countries, which are experiencing their most severe financial conditions in nearly two decades. ODA to these countries has fallen to a 21-year low, constituting only 7% of their GDP in 2022.

In the UNDP's 2023 Human Development Index, 27 of the bottom 30 countries are African, highlighting the challenges the continent faces in areas such as health, nutrition, education, and economic development.

A more positive perspective is that Africa represents a growing market, with an increasing middle class, rising incomes and consumption and emerging markets which are attracting global investment. The steadily developing African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represents the world's largest free trade area, by number of countries, offering significant investment and integration potential.

A key foundation of Africa's economic growth over coming decades will have to be the development of its agricultural and rural economy. The AU's adoption of the Kampala Declaration in January 2025 - referred to above- has provided the policy framework for African agri-food and rural development for the next decade, 2026-35.

Ireland is well placed to play an important role in this, given its long standing partnership in working on African food and nutrition security and its financial contribution to the development of the Kampala Declaration. The decision by the South African G20 Presidency to invite Ireland to be a 'Friend of the G20' and to contribute to its work on agriculture and food security is a further acknowledgement of Ireland's overall record in regard to Africa and the relevance of its ideas on African and international agri-food and rural development policy.

6. Influencing Policy at International Level

Should Ireland choose to follow the broad approach and agenda outlined above, there are two key factors necessary to maximise its international influence: drawing on lessons from the past when Ireland has achieved significant influence in international affairs; and investing in strategic partnerships with governments and non-governmental organisations which share Irish objectives.

There are two key and relatively recent examples of Ireland achieving influence in shaping international policy: the Irish Hunger Task Force (2007-8) and the Brexit campaign (2016-21).

The recommendations of the Irish Hunger Task Force report (2008) were judged to be highly relevant and timely in addressing the international food and nutrition challenges in the wake of the 2007-08 food price crisis. As a result, Ireland had a significant influence on European and international food and nutrition security policy during the period 2008-13. This also brought political recognition and benefits at a time, post the 2008 global financial crisis and the Irish economic bailout, when such political benefits were in short supply.

Ireland's Brexit campaign was marked by clarity of purpose at political and official level; cross-political and societal support; and mobilisation of strategic partners, at European and international level, through a coordinated political and diplomatic strategy. History will likely recall that the Brexit campaign represented a 'gold standard' of collaboration between the political and official systems and wider society.

There should be benefits in seeking to develop a current political and societal consensus about the aspects of foreign policy discussed in this paper. Since 1974, when Ireland's development cooperation policy was launched, there has been broad political agreement about the nature and direction of the policy, which in turn was backed by the public's generosity towards the main NGOs.

There is ample scope for political division between government and opposition on other aspects of foreign, economic, and social policy. But for the range of issues discussed in this paper it should be possible to agree on the core elements of policy, achieved through a consultation process at political level and involvement of relevant Oireachtas committees. In many other countries, there are political divisions on such issues as foreign aid and immigration policy. By adopting the above proposed approach Ireland could improve the tone and temper of its domestic politics and demonstrate its distinctiveness in what it advocates at international level.

Forging **strategic partnerships** was key to the success of influencing in the case of both the Hunger Task Force and the Brexit campaign.

Fortunately Ireland can build on existing strong relationships with the EU and key UN bodies, particularly the UN Rome based agencies. Being part of a 'Team Europe' approach in any of the 'coalitions of the willing' for future international meetings should be key to Ireland's advocacy strategy.

There is scope for effective collaboration with the UK government in a number of areas discussed above, akin to the positive relations the two governments had in promoting food and nutrition security during the 2008-13 period.

There is a strong case for greater investment in future partnerships with Brazil and Africa.

Relations with Brazil are important in the run-up to COP 30, but that should be the prelude to a further strengthening of relations in the longer term as part of Ireland's Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean (2023).

The case for bringing long-term relations between Ireland/EU/Africa to a new level of importance is persuasive and is outlined in more detail above.

7. Summary

The current US Administration, with its America First policy and the range of changes flowing from this, has fundamentally changed the international order which has prevailed, more or less, since 1945. Yet the challenges facing the world - climate change, regional and national conflicts, inequality - are in many regards getting worse. A new international order must now emerge to deal with these challenges, in the absence of US policy leadership and finance. **The paper's central proposition is that this emerging order should present political and economic opportunities for Ireland.**

These opportunities are grounded in two key factors: Ireland's development experience, particularly over the past 50 years, leading to its political, economic and social transformation; and Ireland's positive contribution to the UN and the EU over many decades, its policy consistency and its resulting credibility as a development actor and advocate.

The paper proposes that Ireland should adopt three key priorities, food and nutrition security, health and human capital, climate justice and action, as a central component of its foreign policy for the five years and possibly longer. A strong emphasis on gender equality should be a cross-cutting thread across the priorities. It should build structured connections between these priorities, emphasising coherence between domestic and foreign policy. This should deliver synergies and better use of limited resources.

These priorities and the approach proposed should be applied to the range of meetings and processes during the lifetime of the current government: the four international meetings in 2025: Ireland's EU presidency; future Ireland-EU-Africa strategy; and the UN process leading to the successor framework for the SDGs.

Optimising the benefits of this approach will require a government decision and cross-party political support; effective coordination between the political and official systems and wider society - similar to the coordination model used during the Brexit campaign; and the development of strategic partnerships with governments and non-governmental organisations which share Irish objectives.

Should the approach advocated for be implemented, there should be political and economic benefits for Ireland.

Politically, Ireland should aim for policy leadership in the linked areas of the three priorities. The coherence between its domestic policy on these issues and its advocacy within its foreign policy gives Ireland a unique credibility. This positioning is timely when there is growing consensus internationally that more integrated approaches are required to address the interconnected challenges of conflict, climate change, inequality and fragility.

This integrated approach is likely to emerge as a central focus of finding a successor framework to the SDGs post-2030. This would also be consistent with a core value of Irish foreign policy since it joined the UN in 1955: a commitment to multilateralism.

In the current era of political turbulence when US policy leadership and finance will be absent for the foreseeable future, Ireland's credibility based on its values, policy consistency over decades and its perspective on what is required in the medium to long-term future provides a basis to have a disproportionate influence on the emerging leadership coalitions which must emerge to tackle current and future global challenges. Given that 'it is a long road that has no turning', Ireland should continue to cultivate good relations with the US in the expectation that, in due course, the current phase of US isolationism will also moderate, and the US will then again contribute positively to a changed multilateral system.

Achieving demonstrable leadership in the linked areas of the three priorities should also deliver economic benefits. Food Vision 2030 envisaged that becoming a world leader in sustainable food systems should deliver significant benefits for the Irish agri-food sector itself, for society and the environment and would provide the basis for the future competitive advantage of the sector.

Four years on from the finalisation of Food Vision 2030, the same logic applies. But the central thesis of this paper is that now it applies to a broader canvas: an integrated approach including food and nutrition, health and human capital and climate justice and action.

Achieving international leadership in these three related areas will require continuing delivery on the objectives of Food Vision 2030 and the Climate Action Plan, evidenced by the respective annual implementation reports. It will require commitment to innovation and technology across the sectors and the focus on delivery of synergies and improved resource use. It must involve symbiosis between domestic action and Ireland's international advocacy.

It will require a clear focus on 'HOW' to achieve these objectives, involving additional resources, structured interdepartmental planning and coordination arrangements, and a longer-term planning framework than currently applies.

The economic benefits can flow from an increasing competitive advantage of the Irish agri-food sector and steadily growing reputation of Irish food and beverage exports. Irish Aid policy changed from the straightforward objective of reducing hunger to a focus on sustainable food systems because the nature of the problem it faced had changed. In 2021, Food Vision 2030 adopted a food systems approach to achieve international leadership in sustainable food systems. In 2025, the context has changed and adopting a more integrated approach to policy is appropriate to the new circumstances and is the basis for international leadership in this context.

While Ireland has made progress over the past decade in its agri-food and climate policies, it is currently ranked behind countries such as Denmark, Sweden and The Netherlands. However, this paper argues that adopting the integrated approach advocated for provides the policy basis for catching up with these current leaders.

Achieving such a leadership position should provide the basis for the next generation of exports of Irish goods and services. Not just food and beverages, but all the components for Ireland to be a leader in this integrated approach: policy advice; technology to achieve change across the food value chain from food safety, reducing food loss and waste to value addition. Irish leadership in the bioeconomy and circular economy should provide the basis for an increasing share of goods and services.

To conclude, this paper posits that the world is probably at an historical turning point due to major changes in geopolitics, including growing US isolationism, and a new economic revolution due to AI. In this situation, Ireland's domestic and foreign policy will need to be strategic and smart to advance its interests.

The paper suggests that for humanitarian and development policy, a key part of broader foreign policy, there are opportunities to make a distinctively Irish contribution over the next five years. This can be best achieved through building on established Irish strengths and investing in more structured connections between these strengths. Another traditional strength, policy consistency, should be brought to a new level within Ireland's main foreign policy engagements over the five-year term of the current government.

Implementation of the proposed approach should deliver two significant political outcomes: Ireland as a leading participant of an effective and renewed multilateral system: Ireland as a shaper of the EU's contribution to a multipolar world from which the US has retreated.

20.6.2025.

Bibliography

African Union (AU): 'Kampala CAADP Declaration in Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems in Africa'. 2025.

Government of Ireland. 'Hunger Task Force Report to the Government of Ireland'. 2008.

Government of Ireland. 'A Better World: Ireland's Policy for International Development'. 2019.

Government of Ireland. 'Global Ireland: Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025'.

Government of Ireland. 'Food Vision 2030: A World Leader in Sustainable Food Systems' 2021'.

OECD-Government of Ireland. 'Investment in Education'. 1965.

UNDP. 'Human Development Report 2025'. 2025.

World Bank. 'Building Human Capital in Ireland'. 2021.

About the Author

Tom Arnold currently serves as Chair, Ireland Africa Rural Development Committee (IARDC); Chair, Governance Committee, Co-Centre for Sustainable Food Systems; board member of the Global FoodBanking Network (GFN); member, Global Panel for Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition (GLOPAN); member, Malabo Montpellier Panel; board member, John and Pat Hume Foundation; board member, Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation.

His previous roles include serving as Ireland's Special Envoy for Food Systems; Chair, Food Vision 2030 Strategy Committee; Chair, Ireland's National Task Team on Rural Africa; board member, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN); board member, Sight and Life Foundation. For the EU Commission, he chaired the High-level Expert Group for Food Systems Science (2021) and the Task Force Rural Africa (2019). Coordinator, Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement; Director-General, Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA); Chair, Irish Constitutional Convention; board member, Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice; board member, UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF); member, Millennium Project's Hunger Task Force; member, Irish Hunger Task Force; member, Irish Government's Commission on Taxation; CEO, Concern Worldwide; Chair, Irish Times Trust; board member, Irish Times. Chief Economist and Assistant Secretary General, Irish Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM); Chair, OECD Committee of Agriculture; Administrator, EU Commission.

Tom has a degree in agricultural economics from University College Dublin (UCD) and master's degrees from the Catholic University of Leuven and Trinity College, Dublin. He is a member of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) and an Honorary Life Member of the RDS.