



AFRI

DIRECTORS' REPORT

For the year ended 31 December 2021

1. Introduction

Another eventful and challenging year has passed, book-ended by a pandemic at the beginning and Europe's latest war soon after its end. The hope that many people held that the pandemic would provide an opportunity to stop and think and choose a different path was shattered by the news that another war had started following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. That the invasion came in the wake of unprecedented NATO expansion and build-up of weapons and has resulted in a proxy war between two nuclear-armed 'superpowers' is a deeply alarming development. The fact that the response of many in Europe, the US and indeed Ireland to this horrific war has been – not to work towards de-escalation and disarmament - but to prepare for more war, is disturbing beyond belief.

But despite the grounds for despondency in face of the threat of war and climate change, we must take heart from those who continue to resist war, to work for peace and to point us in a different direction, people like our wonderful patron, Desmond Tutu, who sadly passed away at the end of the year under review. What an example he was of maintaining hope in the face of despair. Living through the darkest days of the iniquitous apartheid system in his own country, he nonetheless always chose the path of peace and celebrated the goodness and courage of people, seeing the beauty of our world despite all the problems that beset it. All of us who knew him in Afri were privileged and it was an honour to have had him as our patron for many years. We organised a memorable and very special online tribute in his honour and we will continue to draw on his example and his inspiration in the years ahead.

In the context of the bleak global situation, Afri's work continued and took on added significance as the relevance of themes we've worked on for many years became ever more glaringly obvious and critical; militarisation, war and climate change and their twin progeny of forced migration and hunger.

Afri will continue to work all the more urgently to eradicate the war industry from the face of the planet; to tackle climate change; to ensure that people are not forced from their homes and homelands and to address the real needs of people for food, clean water, health care and education.

It is in this context that our work of awareness raising, campaigning and education remains so important.

2. Global Citizenship Education

Much of our education work is done as part of our WorldWise Global Schools (WWGS) funded global citizenship programme with a network of ten secondary schools. Although the pandemic continued to cast its long shadow over our 2021/22 programme, we again managed to circumvent the obstacles or find creative ways through them to complete our programme - focused on the themes mentioned above. Exploring the root causes of global hunger while aiming to raise awareness, increase understanding and help empower participants to take

action for change, continued to be our goal. Progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) underpinned all aspects of the programme.

Our achievements included:

- Organising a memorable online tribute to our patron, Desmond Tutu, with a wide range of excellent contributors – viewed by almost a thousand people;
- Completion of the ‘End Direct Provision’ report which was launched in 2022 and will be reported on next year;
- Launch of Downpatrick Declaration by Nobel Prize Winner Mairead Maguire in Downpatrick;
- Deepening of our work on anti-militarisation through our involvement in StoP (Swords to Ploughshares);
- Article written by Afri Coordinator, published in *Irish Examiner* on the failure of COP 26 to include the war Industry in its calculation for greenhouse gas emissions, followed by an interview on Newstalk Radio;
- Significant progress regarding our work with Third Level Colleges - building on the success of our work with Technological University Dublin – Blanchardstown (TUD/B), we are now well on the way to replicating this in Carlow and in Castlebar;
- The Hedge School in TUD/B, already a highly successful event had the added dimension of a ‘Human Rights Walk’ around the Campus, focussing on the SDGs;
- A very successful Food Sovereignty event held in Maynooth University;
- Our second online Famine Walk attended by hundreds of people, exploring crucial issues like ‘resource’ exploitation, at home and abroad;
- Féile Bríde online, extended its reach beyond the usual target group and received extremely positive feedback from those who attended;
- Our extensive programme of work with secondary school students and teachers continued and strengthened - especially successful in the Monaghan region, where we worked in partnership with Síolta Chroí;
- Launch of three excellent resources for schools: *Interdependence Day* by Pete Mullineaux, *The Web of Life* by Nicola Winters and *Pleannana Ceachta* translated by Mark Doris;
- Series of excellent films made by RoJ on themes including COP 26, *The Danger of Data Centres* and the work of Síolta Chroí.

2.1 Féile Bríde <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Arpcp3Irz64>

Our annual Féile Bríde conference moved on line for the first time in 2021. Though reluctant to do so, an unexpected and revealing outcome was the fact that over 300 people attended – twice the number we could accommodate in Solas Bhríde in Kildare. Facilitated by Ruairi McKiernan, it was an extremely participative and interactive affair.

We had the usual blend of inspirational speakers, including Karen Jeffares and Gareth Conlon from Síolta Chroí; Sikhulekile Ruth Ndlovu from the Restart Initiative which helps asylum-

seekers integrate with the local community; Sinéad Fortune from the Gaia Foundation as well as great music from Emer Lynam, RoJ Whelan and Paul O'Toole and wonderful poetry from Grace Wells and Pete Mullineaux.

The positive response is reflected in the comments below:

“As a regular attendee at Féile Bríde, I was surprised and delighted to see how well it worked online”;

“Once again, it reinforced the importance of biodiversity and sustainable food production which can't be overstated”;

“It reinforced the need for urgent action”;

“Reinforcing, reminding and re-invigorating efforts to continue to work on these issues”;

My awareness around the importance of seed saving has been heightened”;

“The need for increased and improved links for wider collaboration and solidarity for global change to happen”;

“It taught me the value of remaining positive in times of adversity”.

2.2 Doolough and Carlow Famine Walks

When we were unable to organise our planned famine walks ‘on the ground’ we combined both the Doolough and Carlow Walks in an online event. This was our second online famine walk and we had learned valuable lessons from the first experience. We had excellent speakers in the historian Christine Kinealy and Blanca Blanco from Trócaire who spoke about the impact of big logging companies on communities in Central America, especially in Honduras. Rose Kelly brought it back home by highlighting the impact of mining throughout Ireland, despite its impact on water and the environment in general. It was an informative, engaging and participative event and had the added benefit of introducing the ‘famine walk concept’ to people who might never be able to experience ‘the real thing’. Whereas there are obvious limitations to such an approach, there are also surprising and unexpected positives. The main positive is the fact that people can join from anywhere, within or outside Ireland

Comments included the following:

“I was really taken by the presentation by Christine Kinealy. I am compelled to learn more about Famine History. I have shared the recording of the event with many people. Rose Kelly was a shining light, too. The work of Blanca Blanco resonated deeply.”

“I will try to be more vocal with friends and colleagues about the consequences of our actions and the relevance of our own history in relation to events which are happening today around the world which are on a par with our experience of The Great Hunger.”

“This was an amazing and beautiful event. My daughter watched as well, and we were both very moved. I was surprised by how deeply this moved me. I liked the interweaving of talks, music and poetry. It was perfect. Thank you so much!”

“I know COVID 19 is awful however as a disabled rights worker zoom has opened up many doors to different events like this and for the first time I could show true solidarity with others and I hope others can do the same to other groups.”

“Excellent adaptation to online format, good mix of talk and relevant arts, music and poetry. Thank you for this event, it was simply great, very well structured, motivating and informative. Please continue your critical and independent work - it is so important for others”!

2.3 Famine Walk in Germany

Friends from around Stuttgart in South Germany joined Afri’s Famine Walk in 2018 and 2019 in county Mayo and due to the pandemic, they joined the walk online in 2020 and 2021. Following this online event, they decided to organise an actual walk in Germany. A wonderful walk followed. One of the walk organisers, Gerd Hofheinz described the experience, as follows: *“Our former schoolmaster met us on three stops along the route. After listening to a German harp and an Irish Tin whistle, we discussed hunger and emigration in Ireland and Germany; we shared memories from our walks and times in Ireland and found deeper concern for the past and its consequences for our future. Topics were not all new but were felt intensely. There was a sense of solidarity among us and sunny weather helped us on the long 15 km walk.”*

2.4 Hedge School

The Hedge School took place online again this year despite our intentions to go back to the TUD/B Campus for the event. Nevertheless, it was an excellent event with great participation from students and Lecturers. As stated previously in this report, this is a model event in terms of themes, content, participation, student involvement and how TUD/B has taken ownership of the Hedge School. The inclusion of a Campus Walk focussing on the SDGs (and particularly on the ‘Missing Goal’ – abolishing war) was yet another great addition to this excellent event and can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yT25uB-uytA>.

Comments from participants included the following:

“It was a very informative and powerful event. Well done to everyone involved.”

“Very well presented in a challenging online environment.”

“Excellent event. Well done to all involved. Great place to share, reflect and identify actions moving forward.”

“I think it was extremely informative, having speakers with personal experiences was empowering and inspirational. It was a very hopeful meeting that truly shows what people can accomplish with solidarity.”

“The whole event was really inspiring and informative. Raphael Olympio was excellent and covered such a broad range of topics. The filmed walk was also particularly powerful”.

2.5 Food for Thought

This Food Sovereignty event, involving Maynooth University and the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT), had over eighty participants from a range of groups and backgrounds. Many of those present were actively involved with food in various ways – including growers, small farmers and market gardeners. It was more restrained than usual in the circumstances but the fact that it happened is extremely positive and opens the door to greater things in coming years. Although pleased with the event, we need to do more work in increasing GMIT participation next year, which worked well online last year.

Comments included:

“A fabulous conference! I am more informed and will continue to improve my knowledge and make some changes in how and with whom I shop and I will support advocacy groups on food sovereignty issues”.

2.6 WorldWide Global Schools Programme

Though better than last year, this year remained difficult in terms of the pandemic, especially for the first 5 months, or so. Whereas last year was about moving from actual to online platforms this year was mainly about moving in the other direction. We found that many teachers and students were suffering from zoom fatigue and were not keen to add yet another online dimension to their school programme. Some delayed their Global Citizenship Education (GCE) programme, pushing it back in the hope that onsite visits would be possible later in the year.

Notwithstanding this, we had one extremely interesting online event where students and teachers from five different classrooms joined an Afri online event on the significance of An Gorta Mór and its relevance for today. This took place as a result of our being approached by Lucan Community college at the suggestion of Lizzie Noone of WWGS. There was a good level of participation by students during this workshop, which was facilitated by Joe Murray, with several asking questions and contributing comments. It was a very interesting experience to have a network of several classes and teachers taking part in an online event

and it is a clear demonstration of what is possible even though, of course there is nothing to compare with actual face-to-face events and activities.

Other successful elements included the outdoor classroom events. Although unable to do these in Galway this year because the Galway schools had pushed back their school musical and then were unable to find time for the Celia Griffin walk, we incorporated them into more of our sessions with students especially in Monaghan but also in Mount Temple. Again, as was stated last year, being outdoors was not only a good location for doing GCE and exploring issues, especially in relation to the theme of food, but it was also good for students' mental health during difficult times.

Our seminars with students, our teacher training and our resources all promoted GCE methodologies such as critical thinking, questioning, reflection, participative approaches, curriculum links and follow up action. The addition of a new resource in Irish this year adds to an ever expanding portfolio of such resources which Afri has provided.

Gareth Conlon was our GCE facilitator in our very successful work with a cluster of three schools in Monaghan. These were the Patrician High School, Inver College and Largy College. Gareth also facilitated two workshops in Mount Temple which were very well attended and successful and one of which was outdoor. Plans are already afoot to deepen and develop the work in these schools next year. Gareth and his partner Karen are the founders and directors of Síolta Chroí, which complements Afri's themes of hunger, food sovereignty and seed sovereignty. Gareth and Karen carried out some excellent workshops on behalf of Afri in outdoor classroom settings, which involved students actually planting seeds and taking part in ecosystem regeneration work.

Between the three schools in Monaghan and Mount Temple in Dublin, twelve workshops were organised, eighty-seven students participated and 259 trees were planted. But this did not happen in a vacuum. In the first workshops in each school students were introduced to GCE and to local and global justice issues, recognizing the importance of laying the foundation for critical thought in the students before moving on to practical tree planting. In this session students were introduced to the work of Afri and Síolta Chroí. An exploration of what global citizenship education is and why it is important was facilitated. From here we moved on to introducing the sustainable development goals, what they are, how they are all interconnected and how we need to work on all 17. To conclude the workshop students were invited to begin to restore the ecosystems of their school as part of the work we are doing together.

2.7 GCE Resources

We also added to our portfolio of GCE resources by launching three new educational resources and producing a film that provides a companion piece to last year's teacher's resource, *as gaeilge*. The educational resources were: *Interdependence Day* by Pete

Mullineaux; *The Web of Life* by Nicola Winters and *Pleananna Ceachta as gaeilge* translated by Mark Doris.

3. Campaigns

3.1 COP 26

COP 26 promised much but delivered little. And one of its most gigantic failures was the failure to include or address the contribution of the war industry to global warming and climate change. In general, the media was silent on this issue but Afri succeeded in having an article published in the *Irish Examiner* followed by a radio interview with Sean Moncrieff on *Newstalk* radio.

3.2 Swords to Ploughshares

Swords to Ploughshares is a new, all Ireland network of groups and individuals opposed to the growth and development of militarism and the arms industry throughout Ireland. The network was involved in supporting the Downpatrick Declaration and will continue to do so in the coming year and years. Rob Fairmichael through INNATE initiated the network and was its first Coordinator, a role now held by Iain Attack.

3.3 Downpatrick Declaration

The Downpatrick Declaration was launched by Nobel Laureate Mairéad Maguire at the Saint Patrick Centre, Downpatrick, on 7th December 2021, the 1500th anniversary of the birth of St Colmcille. The Declaration was prepared by people opposed to the current drive for expanding weapons production in both parts of Ireland and to buying into a military ‘might-is-right’ mindset internationally. The Declaration raises particular concern about the development of military drones and laser weapons in Belfast. It points out this tragic inconsistency with the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement’s commitment to ‘exclusively peaceful and democratic’ conflict resolution. Afri, INNATE and StoP (Swords to Ploughshares) also condemned the Irish Government, the other guarantor of the Peace Process, which hosted a public webinar in November 2021 with the aim of introducing small businesses and Third Level Institutions to weapons research and development. This is an appalling and retrograde step by the Irish government which sadly, but not surprisingly, was met with almost complete silence from the Irish media.

3.4 Alphabet Avenue/Ascal na hAibítire

The Gaelic Tree planting project was launched by Afri last year and is being promoted as one way of responding to climate change. It involves sowing eighteen trees or plants, corresponding with the 18 letters of the ancient Irish alphabet.

3.5 Direct Provision report

Afri worked on a report on Direct Provision throughout 2021, which was completed at the end of the year and has generated significant interest and involvement. The aim of this report is to amplify the demands for what comes after Direct Provision from those who have experienced DP themselves and to ensure that the DP system is not maintained under another name. The report is based on testimonies from ten people, to whom we are very grateful for sharing their experience. Special thanks to Orlaith Mac Eoin Manus, Donal O’Kelly, Donnah Vuma, Sian Cowman and Andy Storey for their work on this report.

3.6 Solar Lights partnerships with Development Pamoja and Kenya Pastoralists Journalists Network

We continue to work with our partners Development Pamoja and the Kenya Pastoralist Journalist Network to provide solar lights for school children, families, mid-wives and others. Hundreds of people have benefitted since we began this project some years ago.

3.7 Calendar

Afri produced its second calendar in 2021. The main aim of this is to send it as a gift to our Standing Order supporters. But it is also an educational resource, a way of promoting Afri’s work and a means of supporting our work by those who buy it.

Acknowledgments

- Again this year, we want to express sincere thanks to Larysa for her great contribution to Afri during 2021. Whether working from Belarus, Limerick, Cork or Dublin, the quality of Larysa’s work remains constant. Her work covers many key areas in Afri including reports/applications and financial matters. As stated in previous years, we consider ourselves lucky to have her in a key role in Afri.
- Thanks to our Chair, Emer for taking on the role despite being very busy in her work and her studies.
- Thanks to all Board members for their availability, when called upon.
- Thanks to RoJ for filming so many of our events and activities so excellently, and for helping in many other ways.
- Thanks to Ruairi McKiernan whose contribution was invaluable, especially in relation to our online events.

- We thank Pete Mullineaux, Nicola Winters, Gareth Conlon, Karen Jeffares, Michael McCaughan and Julia Rauch for their excellent work in our Global Citizenship Education programme.

Accounts:

- Thanks to Brendan Malone for doing the accounts – and Boylan & Dodd our auditors

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Joe Murray
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