

# Programme of Strategic Cooperation between Irish Aid and Higher Education and Research Institutes



Irish Aid has awarded funding for a new 3-year research programme in Zambia and Malawi to a team of researchers led by **Professor Ruairí Brugha, Dr Elaine Byrne and Aisling Walsh** from the Population Health Sciences Division. '**Community Systems Strengthening for Equitable Maternal and Child Health' (COSYST-MCH)** is a partnership of development researchers and practitioners, whose Irish partners are in DCU and Concern Worldwide. The aim of the research is to strengthen community systems and increase health equity so as to achieve better maternal and child health (MCH) outcomes, focusing especially on vulnerable mothers and children in the first 1,000 days of life. The hypothesis to be explored and tested is that Irish Aid's hunger, HIV care and support, and poverty-focused strategies are contributing to the achievement of the Health Millennium Development Goals for mothers and children.

COSYST-MCH has two components. The first consists of research case studies of districts and community settings in Malawi and Zambia where the NGO partners are implementing projects in the areas of: (i) food and nutrition, (ii) livelihood support and poverty mitigation, and (iii) HIV support. MCH, HIV and nutritional outcomes and impact will be measured, mainly using available population, health service and project data. Additional qualitative research will be conducted to explain the causal factors contributing to those outcomes. A community systems analysis framework will be developed for explaining how these multisectoral interventions impact on mothers' and children's HIV, Health and nutritional indicators.

The second component addresses sustainability and scalability beyond the period of funding through (i) the building of capacity in three constituencies: researchers, NGOs and development agency staff, and (ii) the development of networks involving these constituencies. This component will offer capacity-building to all the country partners in the form of blended learning in community systems research - combining new distance learning e-modules and in-country training courses, building up to Masters qualification in research methods.