

## **Cross Party Group on International Development**

**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2018**

### **“The role of the media and perceptions of international development in Scotland”**

**6pm, Committee Room 6 (David Livingstone Room)**

*\*Please note that it is not the intention of the minutes to record a verbatim account.*

**Attendees:** Lewis Macdonald MSP (Convenor), Patrick Harvey MSP (Deputy Convenor), Ross Greer MSP

**Member Organisation list:** Scotland’s International Development Alliance, Bridge 47, Christian Aid, Corra Foundation, Disasters Emergency Committee, EMMS International, Engineering Outcomes Ltd, Friends of Chitambo, Honorary Consul Rwanda, International Nepal Fellowship, International Voluntary Service, Labour Behind the Labour, Leonard Cheshire Disability, Leprosy Mission Scotland, Link Community Development, Mercy Corps Europe, Open University, Opportunity International UK, Oxfam Scotland, Palcrafts, Rwanda Scotland Alliance, SCIAF, Scotland Malawi Partnership, Scottish Fair Trade Forum, Scottish Love in Action, Tearfund Scotland, The Ferret, The Turing Trust, University of Edinburgh

**Individual List:** Patricia Bryden, John Francis

**Apologies:** Liam McArthur MSP, Andy Wightman MSP, David Stevenson, James MacLean

**Welcome:** Lewis Macdonald MSP welcomed guests and speakers. He mentioned that Andy Wightman has now officially joined this CPG but was unable to attend this meeting and sent last minute apologies. He then introduced the topic of the evening’s meeting: the role of media and perceptions of international development. At this point, Lewis Macdonald MSP then invited each speaker to present in turn.

**Jamie Livingstone, Head of Oxfam Scotland:** Jamie started by saying that this is critical time for the international development sector and that he was pleased to be here. He explained he has a foot in two camps because, prior to joining Oxfam, he was a journalist for 10 years.

He then went on to speak about recent revelations about actions of Oxfam staff in Haiti in 2011. He said that Oxfam failed to do enough to protect women from sexual exploitation at this time, and that as an organisation, they are deeply sorry. The actions of these individuals went against the values of the organisation. He also said as a result of this in 2011, the organisation started a process of change, and that they continue to do so. He said that various actions being done, including a 10-point action plan to strengthen safeguarding systems across the organisation and to do all they can to stamp out abuse.

Moving on to the wider sector, he began by highlighting that this isn't a Cross Party Group on 'aid', but a Cross Party Group on International Development. He said it is important to recognise that aid money is only part of the wider international development effort, and that barriers to sustainable development are structural, such as extreme and growing economic inequality, unfair work practices, enduring gender inequalities and climate change.

He then emphasised that even though this is the case, aid is a significant element of our work, and everyone will feel the aftershocks of recent events for some time. The whole sector must accept that public trust has been undermined.

Coverage of the abuses in Haiti, dominated news headlines for nearly 2 weeks, but the story landed amid a pre-existing lack of trust in our sector and intense scrutiny of the impact of international aid. He mentioned that in Scotland, there is cross party support for aid and a generally more supportive media environment. However, recent events have made the job of defending good quality aid all the harder.

Speaking on the issue of trust in those who spend it, he said that UK figures showed that trust in charities had fallen 6% since the Autumn to 54%. Trust in overseas aid and development charities is particularly low (the second lowest), and in Scotland, SCVO data shows public trust in all charities has fallen by 9% over the last two years, and that direct, personal experience was a key indicator of people's trust in charities – a real challenge for our sector. He said that trust underpins everything we do, and part of that is how and what we communicate about our work – including the level of transparency, and honesty.

As a former journalist, Jamie said he recognises and values the critical role of the media, and that the sector can't discount the impact of either traditional media, or the importance of direct engagement. Media is critical in scrutinising and challenging power, including for example, within the church or the humanitarian sector.

He said that it is a diverse sector with many competing voices, and interests, and although that is often a strength, it also makes it hard to speak with a sufficiently unified voice or message. But one organisation won't succeed for long, without enhancing the reputation of our sector. Working together is time consuming and challenging. He believes that in Scotland, we are perhaps better at it due to our size.

He mentioned that there are signs of increasing collaboration on safeguarding UK-wide and that needs to develop into how we communicate too. Together, he thinks we need to find ways to tell our stories more, and better, to showcase the work and the people behind our organisational brands.

He said that the sector needs to boost understanding about aid's role within international development, but also needs to seek more coverage linking poverty to the root causes, such as the way markets operate, inequality and climate change. We need to develop deeper engagement that boosts understanding of our work, and loyalty with it. He finished by saying that unless we rebuild trust and communicate better, Oxfam and other international development agencies are likely to be working in fewer areas and reaching fewer people.

**Sally Foster-Fulton, Head of Christian Aid Scotland:** Sally started off by saying that she wanted to speak about the messaging that is needed at this time for this sector. She agreed with Jamie, that the international development sector is no different to any other, and that action must be taken to ensure safeguarding issues are dealt with.

She then went on to speak about why this sector does what it does. She said that this is important to get messaging right. She asked those present to think of someone they love, and emphasised all the things that makes that person unique, before saying that no-one on the planet is any different. She said that behind every number and statistic there is a person no different to our own loved ones and that all of us have the same basic human rights.

Understanding and sharing that idea of humanity is at the core of her organisation's mission.

She then mentioned that the name of her organisation consists of two challenging words, but ones that are foundational to their existence. She said that Christian Aid works with people and groups of all faiths and none to eradicate poverty.

She said that focusing on global prosperity rather than poverty eradication is also a key part of messaging. She then rhetorically asked what prosperity looks like for women across the world, and how solving systemic barriers to development is possible. These example questions demonstrated that solutions are often complex and require much deeper understanding.

She then said that partnership is therefore vital, and that complex stories need to be shared, so the media must be one of those partners. She then shared examples of sustainable development and partnership, including technology for a solar oven that has developed into inter-continental South-South sharing and partnership.

Sally finished by saying that she looked forward to hearing from other speakers and the wider Cross Party Group on how partnership and media engagement can support this key messaging around sustainable development and partnership.

**Susan Dalgety, freelance writer & columnist, and former Special Adviser to First**

**Minister Jack McConnell:** Susan began by giving background on her own professional experience. She was chief press officer for Jack McConnell as First Minister of Scotland and Head of International Communications for the Scottish Government. She is now a freelance journalist, but is also a trustee on the board of different international development charities, including 500 miles and Link Community Development.

She then started her speech by saying what the media want and don't want when it comes to international development stories. On the one hand, she said that the media want smiling children or a scandal of some sort, like recent coverage has proven. Then on the other hand, the media has no interest in the technical side of global development, for example transparency and accountability policies being well implemented in partner countries.

She said that ultimately communicating your message and successfully engaging the media is about 'people to people' stories. Finding connection is vital. She went on to explain that during her time working for Jack McConnell that she was involved in the beginning of the Malawi development partnership. She recalled that she took a group of journalists from a variety of publications over to Malawi. They visited a hospital in a rural region that lacked many basic facilities. Within 24 hours two of the newspapers were vying to have the rights to run a fundraising campaign for the hospital. Money was then raised and a new ward was constructed. She said that she told this anecdote to highlight that people to people connections can motivate action, and that mainstream media is very powerful, even though print media is obviously less prominent than it used to be.

She explained that the sector must tell stories, but those stories must show the impact of work. She explained that the story of the hospital was key to the subsequent fundraising success. For media in all its forms, stories are vital.

She said that these stories have to come back to people's lives. BY using examples of a few different organisations, she explained that simple stories about people and impact on their lives is what wins people's hearts and minds.

She then talked about the difference between a country like Malawi and the Democratic Republic of Congo in terms of the stories they have told about them. She highlighted the

fact that without people to people stories, what we know about the DRC is limited. Direct personal experience is therefore key.

As a caveat, Susan mentioned that it is her belief that we must tell our stories in the countries where we or our partners are working as well as here at home. This is of growing importance in the digital age where mobile phones ownership is at record levels.

To finish, Susan said that her advice to the sector is to gather stories as much as possible, talk about the challenges, include calls to action, use all platforms, never forget about mainstream media, keep talking, be open, and finally, don't worry about the Daily Mail.

**Daniel Maxwell, Editor of Politics and Current Affairs at BBC Scotland and Executive Editor of BBC1's Question Time:** Daniel began by saying he was going to talk about different broad areas, including: audiences, changes to the media landscape, news formulation and partnership working.

He then asked the room a question – what are the top 10 issues that matter to people in the UK? He then elicited the answer from guests, which included all the main current affairs issues of the day, such as the NHS, Brexit, immigration, foreign affairs, housing, unemployment, defence and security, the economy, education and poverty. His point was that, international development was not on that list, and that the sector had to face up to that fact.

He then went on to say that different demographic and socio-economic groups tend to care about different things and consume media in different ways. For example, he said that more affluent people tend to care more about poverty than less affluent people, even though the realities of poverty are more likely to affect the latter. He said that these differences matter for how commissioners of content choose what and where to commission.

He added that the average age of those who watch BBC news is 54, the average of those who listen to Radio 4 is 59, and 29 for those who consume news digitally. He then pointed out that most 16 year-olds don't watch TV at all. So reaching audiences is becoming more of a challenge.

He then gave a statistic to highlight the changing nature of the media landscape. He said that up to 1 million under 18s are likely to drop using Facebook in the coming year in the UK because they see it as an outdated medium that their parents use. For this age group, platforms like Snapchat and Instagram are growing rapidly. Young people are choosing platforms like these because images are more important than words to many of them, and they show a preference for ephemeral content.

Daniel then talked about how commissioners choose stories. He said that they ask the following questions:

- Are we learning something new?
- Why cover it now?
- What will we see?
- What will we hear?
- Why should we care?

He said that may be tough for this sector to hear, but that is the reality of how news is selected.

He went on to say that in Scotland and elsewhere audiences tend to switch off when there are tough stories, and are much more interested in stories about people they relate to. So, in Scotland, people ask – are there any Scottish people involved? Is it relevant to them?

In terms of partnership building, Daniel said that we must develop open and honest working relationships. He said that maintaining objectivity is important, and that the sector must accept that news broadcasters will generally have their own set of guidelines that may clash with that of the sector.

As a last point, Daniel re-emphasised that journalism is ultimately about stories not issues.

**Discussion:** Patrick Harvey MSP opened the discussion part of the evening by saying that the media are not often invited to CPG meetings, and that it had been refreshing to have an honest conversation about how the media is involved in communicating important messages. He then asked how the media considered balancing being objective about facts on one hand, with public concerns, whether justifiable or not on the other, and used the climate debate as an example of how facts had prevailed over climate deniers.

Speakers responded by saying that climate was indeed a good example of how things had moved on from a time when there is a false balance between competing agendas, but that this is maybe not so true on other issues.

There were then questions on how to manage risk when entering into partnership with the media. Susan highlighted that there is more risk for an international development organisation than for a media outlet. Jamie agreed and added that for any organisation, the moment you put out a story, you lose control of it, and that this is inevitably high risk.

Daniel added that as a sector it is important to go against the instinct to retrench and focus on building long-term relationships with media representatives. This is essential. He added that as it become increasingly likely that BBC news expands in Scotland with the launching of a new BBC Scotland Channel, there will be more necessity to be outward facing, potentially giving this sector an opportunity to share their stories – going against the historic trend of Scottish news about Scotland and largely inward facing.

On telling a compelling story, Ross Greer MSP asked about how it is possible to balance the need to share harsh realities without desensitising people to an issue. In response, Sally said that we must focus on an asset-based approach, a move away from so-called 'Poverty porn'. Susan highlighted that with mobile technology many people in places like Malawi are starting to tell their own story, and that this could be the solution to that issue of desensitisation.

In answering a question about how to make sure stories have the necessary depth in press coverage to go beyond the headline story to the underlying complexities of issues such as corruption, Jamie said that this is difficult, but that Sunday Papers are more likely to have the ability to do that than other mainstream media. He also pointed to concepts such as The Guardian's Long Read, which gets under the skin of many issues.

Daniel added that authenticity and ambiguity are important to storytelling, and there is always a play off between immediacy on the one hand, and depth and context on the other. On authenticity, Jamie added that frontline workers are not in short supply in this sector and should be used as much as possible to help tell a more authentic relatable story.

Towards the end of the discussion, Huw Owen of the Disasters Emergency Committee, also a former BBC producer, talked about how phones are an invaluable tool for telling stories. The power of video is clear. He also added that data is important and must be made

accessible and interesting for audiences of all types. He used the late Hans Rosling as an example. By doing both these things well, we can move away from a PR model that allows us to tell the real stories. Other speakers agreed with this point, but highlighted that video content must be followed up with suitable engagement plans that make sure people see the content that is created.

**Close:** Lewis Macdonald MSP thanked speakers and attendees for an engaging and informative meeting. He informed the group that the next meeting would be in September and would also be the CPG's AGM. The date is yet to be decided and the group will be informed in due course. Lewis also reminded the group to continue feeding in topic ideas to the group secretariat, and that September's topic was yet to be confirmed.