

CPG on International Development

Tuesday 29th January 2019

“Leave No One Behind: Gender Justice, Rights and Empowerment”

1.00pm-3.00pm, Committee Room 2

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

Attendees: Lewis Macdonald MSP (Convenor), Patrick Harvie MSP (Deputy Convenor),

Member Organisation list: Scotland’s International Development Alliance, ACTSA Scotland, British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Church of Scotland, Church of Scotland World Mission Council, CMS, Corra Foundation, Deaf Action, International Justice Mission, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Link Community Development International, Mercy Corps Europe, Results UK, Rwanda Scotland Alliance, SCIAF, Scotdec, The Salvation Army, UN House Scotland, UNHS, Unicef UK, University of Edinburgh, University of Strathclyde, WOSDEC (IDEAS)

Individual List: Philippa Bonella, Helen Wedgwood

Non-member Organisation list: Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS), DfID, Insightful Moves, Side by Side Global, New Town Partnership, Sacro, Saddiq Movietone, Scotland CAN B, Scottish Government International Development, The Equality Network, The Guild, The Scottish Episcopal Church, Women’s Enterprise Scotland

Speakers: Jane Machira from Christian Aid & Side by Side Global, Shahin Ashraf from Islamic Relief Worldwide, Dr. Lesley Orr from University of Edinburgh, Mike Battcock from Department for International Development

Welcome: Lewis Macdonald MSP welcomed guests and speakers. He introduced the theme for this meeting – Leave No One Behind (LNOB), with a particular focus on gender justice. The previous meeting’s minutes were agreed by the group. Lewis then gave the floor to the first speaker, Jane Machira, a Kenyan national and the Gender and Inclusion Advisor at Christian Aid.

Jane Machira: Jane started off by explaining that her work with Christian Aid is underpinned by 4 pillars of inclusion and the ‘Leave No One Behind’ principle:

- Challenging Gender and power imbalances
- Meaningful access and participation / addressing barriers
- Safety, dignity and do no harm
- Accountability – ensuring all people have opportunities to provide feedback

However, she emphasised that ‘Leave No One Behind’ means inclusion in all its forms, and that Christian Aid programming focuses on sex, age, disability and diversity.

Jane went onto explain how Side by Side, a faith movement for gender justice that brings all faiths together, has the potential to be truly transformational. Since its inception in 2015, 10 chapters of the movement have sprung up across the African continent.

In many contexts across Africa and elsewhere, faith leaders remain influential in shaping political and cultural discourse. “When they speak, we listen” Jane said, as she explained the

importance of bringing faith leaders on board to achieve gender Justice. They have a prominent role when it comes to engaging with policy makers, stakeholders and governments.

In Malawi only last week, the Side by Side campaigned against political violence towards female candidates in the run up to the election there. In Burundi, the movement has focused on Inheritance Law. Jane emphasised that gender justice work on this theme can be redistributive and help fight poverty as well.

Shahin Ashraf MBE: Shahin, Global Advocacy Advisor at Islamic Relief Worldwide, spoke passionately and openly about the reality of fighting for gender justice in the context of Islam. She said that cultural traditions have been used to legitimise gender inequalities, and emphasised that harmful practices must be challenged by faith leaders in Islam.

She acknowledged that patriarchy continues to influence how scripture is implemented and structured which impacts on societal roles and abilities assumed by both men and women.

Islamic Relief Worldwide have recently launched a pioneering Islamic Declaration of Gender Justice. The Declaration is a call to action against gender inequality from an Islamic faith perspective, and seeks to tackle discrimination and harmful practices, especially against women and girls in Muslim communities.

Shahin went on to say that this declaration and their work on gender justice is particularly important in ex-conflict zones where women often shoulder the burden of peacebuilding. She highlighted the need for new types of religious leaders – people who challenge traditional interpretations. The declaration does just that, it asks people to face up to contemporary and historical patriarchal challenges.

However, she also said that this process must be bottom up in its approach, not top down: “We must encourage and empower Muslim leaders, mobilise communities, restore social relations, and support inter and intra faith dialogue.”

Dr Lesly Orr: Lesly, a historian, theologian and activist, from the University of Edinburgh has extensive experience working in the NGO and public sector for gender and social justice. Focussing on the Scottish context, Lesly reiterated the importance that faith communities play in the wider movement for gender justice.

Scotland has come a long way on the road towards equality. In the 100 years since women gained the vote in this country, there has been significant progress on equal pay, employment, autonomy over bodies and recognition in religion.

She told the story of Helen Crawford, a suffragette motivated by women around her in desperate poverty in Glasgow in the early 20th century. Her message of speaking out to catalyse transformative change is still relevant today. The voices of women have often been silenced and subordinated, but a big part of the journey in Scotland, she said, “is women speaking for ourselves”.

The realisation that the system and structures in place were the root cause of gender inequality was transformational in Scotland. For many, religion was part of that problem, perpetuating the status quo. But women’s voices within churches challenged this, through messages of love, liberation and equality.

Today in Scotland, the changes are stark – we have a female First Minister and a Cabinet that is 50% women. However, we still live in a society with significant and continuing gender

inequality. The pace of action for many women, particularly minority groups is slow – many are still being left behind. Thankfully, women across Scotland are rising to the challenge.

Mike Battcock: Mike started off by saying that he works at the Department for International Development (DFID) with faith groups, and that he was at the meeting to respond to other speakers by saying what DFID currently do and what they should do in the future.

Faith leaders, faith groups and faith communities are vital for international development. He told of his personal experience of engaging faith leaders, and how he has reflected that in many cases the Church, Mosque or temple is more embedded in communities and are often less transient than many secular civil society organisations.

He said that the international development sector had not always recognised the need to understand the role of religion in society. But DFID had certainly changed. DFID works to build up a better understanding of the role of faith and faith groups in development; to document the impact of faith groups on society and to create safe spaces to discuss those important contentious issues where we do not necessarily agree with each other.

DFID works with faith groups directly, such as faith based NGOs. He mentioned the recently launched UK Aid Connect's freedom of religion or belief programme, which he manages.

Mike finished by looking towards the future. He said that DFID must do more work with theologian feminists to interpret scriptures in new ways, and that existing faith in development training needs to be further developed.

Discussion: A few questions were put to the speakers, including: How is faith addressed in curriculums for girls? Is this addressed by Side by Side? How can we assist with the socialisation of men around gender justice?

In Kenyan context, more than half of Kenyan schools were opened by faith organisations. Faith has always been central to education curriculums, but gender is conspicuously absent, or at least it was when Jane was young.

A member of the Side by Side steering group from Uganda mentioned that gender is not part of theological training – but inclusion of this is key going forward.

In relation to the socialisation of men question, responses highlighted that capacity building is necessary, but also that engaging men and boys is essential. Any progressive legislation can be undermined by engrained views and practices in the home. Legislators often sign one thing, then go home and do another – this narrative and norm must be challenged.

Ultimately, gender education is fundamental to reducing inequality, and challenging and changing narratives.

Lewis Macdonald MSP concluded by thanking all speakers and guests. He said to contact the secretariat, via Lewis Ryder-Jones, with any further ideas for upcoming meetings.