

## CPG on International Development

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2019

### “Good humanitarians? The Scottish Government’s Humanitarian Emergency Fund”

6pm-8pm, Committee Room 3

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

**Attendees:** Lewis Macdonald MSP (Convenor), Alexander Stewart MSP, Gordon Lindhurst MSP

**Member Organisation list:** Scotland’s International Development Alliance, British Red Cross, Carey Tourism, Christian Aid, Corra Foundation, Disasters Emergency Committee, Mercy Corps Europe, Mission Aviation Fellowship, Oxfam Scotland, The Salvation Army, SCIAF, Scotdec, Scotland Zambia Partnership, Sector-3.org, Tearfund Scotland, Unicef UK, University of Edinburgh, University of West of Scotland

**Individual list:** Angus Jinks, Ashleigh Zimunya, James Melvin, Jerusalem Barnabas, Kristina Lund, Mike Armstrong, Mildred Zimunya, Omalara Plang, Sune Segal

**Speakers:** Michael McKean (Mercy Corps), Huw Owen, (Disasters Emergency Committee), Jane Salmonson (The Humanitarian Emergency Fund panel chair), Lorna McDonald (Tearfund Scotland), Rob Angove (SCIAF)

**Welcome:** Lewis Macdonald MSP welcomed guests and speakers. He introduced the theme for this meeting The Scottish Government’s Humanitarian Emergency Fund. The previous meeting’s minutes were agreed by the group. Lewis then gave the floor to the first speaker, Jane Salmonson, Chair of The Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF) panel.

**Jane Salmonson:** Jane opened discussions by giving background information into how the HEF operates. She explained that the fund has two funding streams, the first of which aligns to Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) appeals, and the second which funds other non-DEC humanitarian emergencies.

For the second stream, the panel meets quarterly and funding is allocated based on a rigorous peer review system, where panel members bid for funding in relation to current humanitarian crises and their own response capabilities.

All panel members compare bids against a set of criteria, and select the most effective option for the relatively small amount of funding available. Jane emphasised that for every HEF activation after this peer review process, there are always other bids that could easily win the peer review process on another day.

**Michael McKean:** Michael explained that he is the Director of Programmes, Funding and Operations at Mercy Corps, and has worked for Mercy corps for nearly two decades. He gave some details of his 18-year career of front line work in the humanitarian sector, including South Asia, the Middle East, Afghanistan and Africa.

He spoke about Mercy Corps Europe's humble beginnings as Scottish European Aid (SEA), an Edinburgh-based volunteer-led organisation which started like many other organisations at the time – by collecting donated goods here at home (clothes, blankets, food supplies) and driving trucks out in convoy to the scene of the crisis – in this case to the Balkans – to Romania initially and then Bosnia.

In 1996, SEA merged with Mercy Corps, a global organisation based out of Oregon and retained Edinburgh as its European HQ to this day, now with a team of over 50 people based here, who regularly travel and deploy to some of the 40 countries in which they operate; where last year they reached 28 million people through their work.

He said he is proud to be part of a Scottish-based organisation that has such considerable impact on the most vulnerable communities around the world and was delighted when the HEF was established so they could directly support those in need, and strengthen collaboration among partner organisations.

He explained that the needs of people in humanitarian crises are different everywhere and have changed over time. The organisations responding to crises have therefore had to adapt too, even though core humanitarian principles have remained steadfast.

He exemplified this by explaining that driving truckloads of goods from Scotland was no longer useful as it once was. Local procurement is faster and benefits the local economy more.

He said that the needs also continue to evolve. Looking at today's on-going refugee crisis, what is highest on the agenda for those arriving on the Greek island of Lesbos after perilous journeys across the Mediterranean? Not food or clothing, but mobile charging and an internet connection, so they can contact their loved ones and tell them they arrived safely. He said that agencies tailor their responses to needs, and have had to become more responsive.

Michael went on to give some stark and worrying statistics about how the nature of humanitarian crises had shifted in recent decades. He explained that the sheer numbers of people needing humanitarian assistance has grown and continues to grow. In 1990, less than 20m people were classed as refugees or internally displaced – people who have fled their homes. Today that figure is near to 70m people displaced (the largest forced displacement crisis since World War II); and more than 200m people are in need of humanitarian assistance.

The causes of humanitarian crises have overwhelmingly shifted as well. By 2030, half of the world's poor will live in fragile and conflict-affected settings. The global fragility landscape has worsened significantly, with more violent conflicts than at any time in the past 30 years; with conflicts driving 80 percent of all humanitarian needs. If you compare that to a decade ago, 80% of humanitarian needs resulted from natural disasters.

As a result, humanitarian responses need to address the root causes of fragility, build resilience in communities and help them recover more quickly.

Michael finished his presentation by saying that he is immensely proud all humanitarians who work for organisations based in Scotland. Collectively, They are providing vital assistance in some of the world's most complex environments. The establishment of the HEF is a great asset to Scotland and we should celebrate in its success.

**Huw Owen:** Huw introduced himself explaining that he is the coordinator of the Scottish Government's Humanitarian Fund, supporting the 8 HEF panel members in identifying humanitarian crises and rapidly activating the fund in response. Huw also works for the Disasters Emergency Committee, where he is also the External Relations Manager for Scotland. The DEC is a coalition of 14 of the UK's leading humanitarian aid agencies who work in partnership with the UK's leading broadcasters in responding to the world's most acute humanitarian emergencies.

Huw then went on to explain more details about the HEF. He said that the key aim of the Fund is to *"Provide immediate and effective assistance to reduce the threat to life and wellbeing (e.g. hunger, disease or death) for large populations caused by disasters, disease or conflict."*

He explained that the HEF has three additional goals:

- Build public awareness in Scotland of humanitarian crises and increase funding
- Demonstrate Scottish Government's role as a responsible global citizen with a vested interest in responding to global humanitarian challenges
- Bring enhanced transparency and predictability to the Scottish Government's emergency funding

He explained that the £1 million annual fund, administered by DEC in Scotland was established in 2017, so this is now the beginning of its third year of operation.

He said that the money is allocated by the HEF Panel which is made up of 8 members: The British Red Cross, Christian Aid Scotland, Mercy Corps, Mission Aviation Fellowship Scotland, Oxfam Scotland, Save The Children, SCIAF and Tearfund Scotland.

He emphasised that all agencies follow key humanitarian standards and international codes of conduct.

He gave some context as to why the HEF is important by saying that 130 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, mostly through conflict. He explained that conflict can be fuelled by fragile politics, terrorism, economic inequality, underdevelopment and shortages of natural resources. There is now also increasing frequency and intensity of climate change related natural disasters.

He then went on to give details of all 8 HEF activations over the past two years in response to East Africa Crisis, South Asia Floods, the Rohingya Crisis, the DRC Crisis, Yemen and Syria, the Indonesian Tsunami, and most recently the crises in Mali and Venezuela.

**Rob Angove:** Rob introduced himself and explained he is a Programme Manager with the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, based in Glasgow. He is the focal point for SCIAF's current funded project in support of Venezuelan refugees in Colombia. He introduced a short video recorded at the Yopal project site in Colombia only a few days before the meeting Mark Camburn, SCIAF's Programme Officer visiting Caritas Colombia, SCIAF's main implementation partner.

**Lorna Mcdonald:** Lorna, who is Head of Programme Management for Tearfund Scotland, then gave more details about their response in Colombia. She also mentioned the 'hidden crisis' in Mali. She explained that 340 households had been helped through cash transfers, cooking utensils and mosquito nets. She explained that work on the ground in places like this often includes life and death calls, recounting the tragedy of a massacre that took place in nearby village to where Tearfund are delivering aid.

**Discussion:** A vibrant discussion on a range of topics followed. What was clear is that humanitarian assistance is clearly more necessary than ever. But building resilience through programming that focuses on localised solutions is also essential. From local staff to local procurement, humanitarian responses must help build and sustain local economies as much as possible.

Representatives from a range of panel members spoke of their organisation's responses in different parts of the world and on how important it is for agencies to remain guided by the four humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

It is clear that there are challenges for humanitarian work beyond the simple fact that it often takes place in very dangerous places. Managing tensions between the localisation agenda and need for accountability for donors remains ever-present. The need to challenge the complexities of global politics that can so often be linked to humanitarian crises adds another layer to the problem.

Closing the meeting, Jane Salmonson emphasised that funding streams like the HEF cannot be taken for granted, especially in this era of populist politics. Those of us who support humanitarian work must speak up.

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.