

Scottish Parliament CPG on International Development

Thursday 11th June 2020

What does COVID-19 mean for global, sustainable development?

12:30-2:00 pm

**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), Dr Alasdair Allan MSP, Alexander Stewart MSP, Sarah Boyack MSP, John Mason MSP

Member Organisation list: Scotland's International Development Alliance, ACTSA, Carey Tourism, Comfort International, Christian Aid, Corra Foundation, DEC Scotland, Friends of Chitambo, Glasgow Caledonian University, International Justice Mission, Jubilee Scotland, IIED, Link Community Development, Mastercard Foundation, Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF), UK, Oxfam Scotland, Queen Margaret University, Rwanda Scotland Alliance, SCIAF, Scotdec, Scottish Fair Trade Forum, Tearfund Scotland, Thrive, Unicef UK, UN House Scotland, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, WOSDEC

Individual List: Philippa Bonella

Non-member Organisation List: Click Maths, Women's Enterprise Scotland, HALO Trust, WaterAid, Edinburgh World Justice Festival, Restless Development Uganda, Caritas Uganda, Tearfund Zimbabwe

Apologies: Maurice Golden MSP

Welcome: Lewis Macdonald MSP welcomed everyone to the meeting. He pointed out that this is the first ever online meeting of this CPG. He explained that also for the first time ever, there are international speakers joining the meeting online. He introduced the guest speakers:

- Jane Salmonson, CEO of Scotland's International Development Alliance
- Carsterns Mulume, Director of Social Development for the Episcopal Conference of Malawi
- Chilufya Chileshe, Southern Africa Regional Advocacy Manager for Water Aid
- Jane Strangways, country lead for the HALO Trust in Somaliland

The Minutes for the last meeting on 26th November 2019 were agreed upon. Lewis went through some items of housekeeping.

- He reminded participants that as this was a Zoom call and not a normal meeting, things would be slightly different.

- He asked participants to enter their name and which country they are from in order to prioritise comments and questions from those from countries other than Scotland.
- He told participants that they would be using the Zoom 'raise hand' function and the 'Q&A' function.

Lewis then passed over to Jane Salmonson.

Jane Salmonson:

Jane began by thanking Lewis. She said that COVID-19 is the worst pandemic in living-memory, and the long-term impacts are likely to be extensive and painful. Although the disease has yet to take hold as drastically as had been feared, the coming months could see new humanitarian crises amongst the poorest communities in the world.

She went on to say that whether or not this grim scenario emerges, the indirect, secondary impacts to economies and societies are already real and devastating and are likely to worsen as international markets shrink. She pointed out that the world is facing a triple emergency: the primary impact of the virus, the secondary economic and social impacts, and the climate crisis.

She outlined the ways that Scotland's international development sector have been responding to the crisis. Scottish international development organisations have been focusing on raising awareness of COVID-19, and helping partners to provide water, sanitation and hygiene interventions as the first line of defence. Work is underway to support partners in their efforts locally to counter the threat of widespread transmission. She also outlined some of the financial problems faced by these organisations, and the ways that they have been coping for example by adapting project grants from their original purpose to help meet the new realities on the ground.

She said that in the longer term, organisations are looking ahead for opportunities as well as threats, to ensure that the messages of the international and indiscriminate nature of the pandemic are built into our way of looking at development. She also highlighted the importance of maintaining focus on the climate crisis, which also acts to exacerbate poverty and marginalisation, and risks being side-lined or downplayed as economies struggle out of the recession.

She pointed out the economic challenges faced by the international development sector, such as the loss of charitable funding, and inability to engage in face-to-face fundraising activities due to lockdown restrictions. She said that some Alliance members are looking for a resilience fund similar to that made available to domestic charities to help them meet essential core costs until lockdown is eased, while others have asked for greater flexibility from institutional donors.

She highlighted the importance of the Scottish Government setting an international example by building back better and ensuring that Scotland's recovery is green and just. She said that the Alliance had joined over 80 organisations in writing to the First Minister at the start of June, asking her to ensure that Scotland's recovery is both

green and just, and called for attendees to add their names to this letter if they had not done so already.

Jane ended by highlighting the importance of policy coherence and supported the formation of the new inter-ministerial group on policy coherence for sustainable development, recently re-affirmed by Jenny Gilruth MSP, the Scottish Government Minister for Europe and International Development.

Carsterns George Mulume:

Carsterns began by thanking the convenor for the opportunity to talk about Malawi's experience with COVID-19. He said that the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed on 2nd April 2020, and that a Malawian Government directive banning all gatherings and declaring a State of Emergency on the 21st April was later nullified by the High Court due to a lack of safety nets for rural communities. There is currently no lockdown in Malawi.

He outlined some statistics about COVID-19 in Malawi; by 7th June, Malawi had registered 443 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with 4 deaths and 55 recoveries. He said that he was worried that the disease had been recorded in 21 out of 28 districts in Malawi, and that the country had only 18 testing centres and 6 treatment centres.

He went on to talk about the effect of COVID-19 in Malawi, saying that the country's poverty posed significant challenges for the country's response and that the 2.5 billion kwachas set aside by the government to tackle the pandemic was insufficient. He said that rural communities are particularly at risk due to a lack of knowledge about preventive measures, and a lack of PPE and ventilators.

Carsterns also talked about the decision to raise the price of public transport, which he says has disproportionately affected Malawi's rural communities. Similarly, he said that lockdowns in neighbouring countries have driven up prices due to a lack of supply.

He said that much of the outbreak can be attributed to Malawians who have been repatriated from South Africa and other neighbouring countries.

He then turned to the upcoming presidential elections which will be held on 23rd June, having originally been scheduled for 19th May and later 2nd July. He expressed fear that campaigning will lead to the further spread of COVID-19, as social distancing measures are not being adequately followed.

He said that the Catholic Church through the Catholic Health Commission and Caritas Malawi (CADECOM), with funding from SCIAF, will undertake a nation-wide programme stressing the need for social distancing and hygienic practices. He said that there is a need for more effective messaging to ensure that Malawians take the threat of COVID-19 seriously.

Chilufya Chileshe:

Chilufya started by thanking the hosts for inviting her to speak. She said that while we are being constantly reminded of the need to wash our hands and wash surfaces, little attention is given to the fact that millions of people are not able to do this due to the unavailability of sufficient water. She said that the pandemic was highlighting the slow progress towards SDG 6 – ensuring that everyone everywhere has access to water and hygiene services by 2030.

Chilufya went through some statistics on global access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH): 785 million people do not have clean water close to home; 2 billion people do not have a decent toilet of their own; 3 billion people do not have handwashing facilities at home; 2 in 5 healthcare facilities lack hand-hygiene facilities at the points of care. She argued that more attention needs to be paid to the global lack of WASH facilities, both in the context of COVID-19 and going forward in the long-term.

She then turned to the local context in Malawi and Zambia, stating that lockdowns are proving difficult due to economic pressures, and that many people are living in crowded conditions with little or no access to hand-washing facilities. Chilufya raised the issue of water utility companies who have been advised by the government not to turn off supply for those who cannot afford their water bills. She said that the effect of this has been that already poorly performing companies have lost up to 30% of their revenue and are struggling to acquire the additional water needed. She said that Zambia's vastness meant that its rural population were being underserved.

She then went on to talk about the impact of a lack of WASH facilities on women and other marginalised groups. She said that it exacerbates gender inequality as it leads to an increase in both unpaid domestic and unpaid care work. She also highlighted the recorded increase in domestic violence in South Africa and other countries as well as issues faced by people with disabilities with regards to WASH.

Chilufya talked about WaterAid's short-term actions in response to the pandemic; they have been working with governments to target communities that need urgent water supplies, seeking to supply the infrastructure for WASH facilities that are tailored to the needs of those with disabilities, and enacting hygiene behavioural change communication. She said that they have also continued their longer-term work to ensure that governments are well-prepared for the impact of the pandemic. She highlighted the need for sustainable solutions to the global WASH crisis going forward and stated her hope that Scotland can be a global champion for new financial commitments to WASH as a first line of defence against COVID-19 and an essential input for sustainable development.

Jane Strangways:

Jane began by thanking the house for inviting her to speak about the work of the HALO Trust (Hazardous Area Life-support Organisation) in Somaliland. She highlighted the fragility and poverty of Somaliland, which is an internationally unrecognised state.

She talked about the history of HALO in Somaliland – the organisation has been working there for twenty years clearing mines and is the third-largest employer in

Hargeisa. Most INGOs were evacuated due to the pandemic, so there is a lack of coordination and assistance to the government.

She went on to talk about HALO's response to the pandemic - HALO remained in-country with its mine-clearance operations but had to think about pivoting their resources towards the pandemic response. They focused their attention on the only treatment centre in Hargeisa, the ATU Daryeel Hospital, repairing their vehicles and uplifting facilities at the hospital. Jane said that the country's health infrastructure was very poor, with no working ventilators, so their efforts were focused on bridging capacity gaps.

She said that HALO provided the hospital with a triage facility and coordinated with the Ministry of Health with regards to how best to assist the regional centres. There was a lack of basic medical equipment, so HALO funded haematology and diagnostic equipment. In terms of the COVID-19 situation in Somaliland, Jane said that there were now 500 confirmed cases but that this does not reflect the true number as there is poor testing – the Ministry of Health estimates that there are ten times that number of cases.

She went on to talk about the ways that HALO could best focus their efforts given their specialty in mine-clearance. Somaliland is apportioned international aid that arrives in Mogadishu, but for political reasons much of this aid never gets to Somaliland, and such was the case with PPE. So, Jane said that HALO repurposed its visors to be used as PPE which was very welcomed by the hospitals

She then turned to ambulance services, which were insufficient according to the hospitals; HALO was able to repurpose mine-clearance vehicles to be used as ambulances. She said that HALO hopes to be able to extend this service to the country's six treatment centres.

Jane mentioned that alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, Somaliland has been hit by a 'locust plague' which has devastated crops and complicated the pandemic response.

She then talked about the cultural difficulties with enacting a COVID-19 response and encouraging social-distancing – in Somaliland, it has been difficult to prevent congestion, particularly at Tog Wajaale, the main crossing point between Ethiopia and Somaliland. HALO have deployed public awareness teams which have been repurposed from their mine-risk education teams.

To conclude, Jane reiterated the message of previous speakers that 'no-one should be left behind'. She said that having been in Hargeisa since January, there was a feeling that Somaliland was being forgotten by the international community and called for greater recognition of the plight of people in Somaliland in order for more aid to come in. She said that the pandemic represented an opportunity for humanitarian workers to work flexibly with donors and think innovatively about how best to utilise resources towards what is likely to be the greatest humanitarian threat in our lifetimes.

Discussion:

Questions had been submitted in advance via the Zoom Q&A function, and Lewis began by paraphrasing two of these. The first question was from David Kenvyn (ACTSA), who asked about comments made by Paul Mashatile, the Treasurer-General of the African National Congress (ANC), about increasing unemployment in South Africa and increasing debt for African countries. Chilufya was asked what impact the pandemic would have on debt among Southern African countries.

She said that there were several challenges being faced with regards to debt, with some countries sliding quickly into debt. She noted that the IMF and the World Bank had said there would be debt-relief for some African countries, and that some of these debts were related to the Ebola crisis. This, Chilufya said, showed that when it comes to public health crises, countries should not be allowed to bear the full debt burden. She called for a relook into the loans that are made available to countries at times like these, with a shared global financial responsibility for global health crises.

The next question was from Callum Henderson in response to Jane Salmonson's introduction. He asked whether the crisis intervention represents a shift in thinking as between crisis intervention and sustainable development, and whether the call for greater flexibility among funders suggests that the monitoring and evaluation framework has become too strict.

Jane Salmonson said that it should be the case that this crisis has led to a change in thinking. The SDGs stress universalism – that we are 'all in this together' – which was a shift away from the Millennium Development Goals, but this is easier to say than do. She said that the way the pandemic has played out in North America and Europe illustrated how interconnected the world is. With regards to donor flexibility, she said that COVID-19 had shown the enormous value of a quick response and had led to moves in the right direction. DfID for example had proactively contacted grant-holders to ask if grants could be repurposed in response to COVID-19.

The next question was from Simon Anderson, who asked Carsterns whether Malawi's experience of HIV/AIDS helped in its response to COVID-19.

Carsterns said that it was important to remember that HIV and other diseases are still around during this pandemic. He also said that based on the country's previous experiences where there was much stigma and discrimination around HIV/AIDS, they have conducted sensitisation programmes and spread awareness to prevent this from happening with regards to COVID-19. In response to HIV/AIDS, the country developed structures such as the National AIDS Commission, and through that they also have the Presidential Committee on COVID-19.

Lewis asked Ernest Maswera, the Tearfund country director for Zimbabwe, to comment on the experience of tackling COVID-19 there. Ernest said that in Southern Africa, the impact of COVID-19 has hit economies that were already suffering from other issues around climate change, food insecurity. The impact of COVID-19 is exacerbated by the economic impact of other issues. He called for institutions to take a sustainable, holistic approach to the many concurrent issues in Southern Africa, including gender-based violence.

Lewis then asked Godfrey Onentho from Caritas in Uganda to comment on agriculture. Godfrey stressed the opportunities that COVID-19 presented for developing countries. For example, the pandemic was a chance for import substitution which could be empowering for African economies. He also said that there had been too much emphasis on Foreign Direct Investment at the expense of local entrepreneurship and that countries are reflecting on the need to invest more in local industries as they recover from this pandemic.

Chilufya was asked to respond to the question of whether the pandemic posed opportunities. She said that the main opportunity that she saw was an opportunity to rethink our approach to development. COVID-19 has shown that most investment has been towards public infrastructure, with little towards WASH facilities or water-supply infrastructure. There are also opportunities to strengthen systems, for example health systems, and an opportunity to enhance global solidarity.

Lewis said that he had received a number of questions about education, suggesting it is the first line of defence against COVID-19. He also had a question about the Scottish Government's role in preventing a mass regression in learning. Lewis asked Jane Strangways to respond on the role of education. Jane said that in Somaliland, all education facilities had been closed since the start of the pandemic, although she said that there are many challenges to education in normal times. She highlighted that these are the same issues being faced in many other countries including Malawi and Zambia. She echoed Chilufya's words about the need for international solidarity and leadership on these issues.

Geraldine Hill of SCIAF asked Carsterns to comment more about the scale of the response of faith-based organisations in Malawi, including in parts of the country that the state cannot reach. Carsterns said that churches in Malawi had been closed since the pandemic was declared, and that the media was being used to promote handwashing. Carsterns stressed that the important thing about his organisation is that they are able to reach broadly across the country. Churches were playing a key role in disseminating messages about sensitisation and handwashing.

Chilufya was asked to comment on how COVID-19 will help African countries to deal with access to WASH. She said that the pandemic had highlighted inequalities in terms of access to WASH. In most countries in Southern Africa, there is a debate about whether schools should reopen but Chilufya questioned how they could reopen given the lack of water supply, handwashing and toilet facilities at many of these schools. Some schools do have these facilities, but if they are allowed to reopen while others remain closed, this will only exacerbate existing inequalities.

Lewis noted that he was joined by a number of parliamentary colleagues and asked if either Patrick Harvie MSP or Sarah Boyack MSP would like to put any points to the panel. Patrick said that while there was an emphasis on infrastructure, there was also a need for 'cultural infrastructure' around public trust in public health messaging. He asked if as we move forward, and as things like a vaccine become available, we will face more issues with public trust, both in developed and developing countries.

Jane Strangways responded by saying that in Somaliland, public trust was interlinked faith with 98% of the population being Muslim. Imams are therefore key to

public trust and were brought in by the government at an early stage to reinforce public messaging. She said that the Somaliland President has carried out daily briefings, which have improved public trust. She acknowledged that there are questions about how these messages are delivered and said that it is important to recognise that responses by European countries do not necessarily translate to countries like Somaliland.

Kenneth Watt from Oxfam raised the point of the inter-ministerial working group on policy coherence which was announced last year. He said that it was reasonable to expect that this, as well as the publication of a report on Scotland's progress in achieving the SDGs, would be delayed, and asked Lewis and other MSPs in attendance to keep this on the agenda.

Lewis said that he was sure that they would aim to ensure that the inter-ministerial working group convened as soon as possible.

Sarah Boyack MSP asked about the impact of a lack of funding during the pandemic on a number of charities, and if there was potential for a campaign to encourage charitable donations and/or fundraising events to help to tackle some of the issues raised in the meeting.

Jane Salmonson welcomed the question and said that in Scotland people have been too focused on domestic challenges posed by COVID-19 to think about problems further afield. She added that while there was a well-developed international development sector in Scotland, there had been nothing in the public domain about Scotland's commitment to its role as a good global citizen and called for a statement to set the scene and encourage organisations to rise to these challenges. She called for a campaign and for a strategy to be put into place to ensure the survival of smaller organisations.

Close: Lewis thanked the speakers and all participants, particularly those joining internationally. He said that the CPG will next meet in the Autumn.