

Chester World Development Forum

Annual report May 2020 to April 2021



This has been a year under the shadow of Covid19, with lockdowns and rules severely restricting what could be done face to face. First the Committee, and then from September, Forum meetings have been held via Zoom - a new innovation for most of us, but we did it! We have also been very conscious that even though the Covid restrictions were challenging for us, they were much more challenging for poorer and disadvantaged people in the UK and around the world. In many African and Central American countries, and in some countries in Asia, the situation was even more difficult because of the Climate Crisis; this has continued to be at the top of our agenda.

Sadly, two of our long serving members - Gerald Grant and Peter Byrne - died this year. We are so thankful for their committed input to CWDF; they will be sorely missed.

The **May** 2020 Forum meeting should have been our AGM, but this had to be cancelled because of the Covid lockdown which gave us much to think about in how to keep CWDF up and running. We began using Zoom for our monthly Committee Meetings in June, and decided this was a possibility for Forum Meetings. On 14 July, we had a trial Forum Meeting by Zoom which went well, and so our **September** meeting was held this way. We welcomed Namrata Bhattacharya-Mis, a Senior Lecturer in Geography and International Development at the University of Chester. She gave a comprehensive and most interesting talk on 'Twin perils of Disaster among Pandemics - Reflections from the Global South'. This was based on research work Namrata had carried out into the impact of one of the largest cyclones in NE India and Bangladesh alongside of Covid19.

On 1 **October**, we had a Zoom Forum meeting with the City of Chester MP, Chris Matheson. We particularly wanted to make him aware of our concerns about the need for action by the Government for the UK to become carbon neutral by 2050, and preferably sooner; our concern about DFID becoming part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; concerns about the Aid Budget; the impact of post-Brexit trade deals on food standards and farming in the UK; and about the impact of debt on poorer countries also struggling with Covid.

Our final Forum meeting of 2020 was in **November**, when Stephen Maund gave us an update on his 'Capacity Foundation' project in Malawi. We were very impressed by the progress made in developing local business initiatives through loans of money built up within the project from the contributions of its members, local people.

In **January** 2021, Ciara Hogan - Community Participation Co-ordinator for CAFOD - gave us a presentation about CAFOD's latest campaigns, particularly the impact of Covid19 which has caused the worst health crisis in over a century. She also said that Covid19, sadly, had a significant negative impact on the Sustainable Development Goals. It is projected that 71 million people will be pushed back into extreme poverty, with women and children suffering the most. She also explained key elements of 'Fratelli Tutti', the Pope's Encyclical on Fraternity and Social Friendship.

In **March**, Martin Evans, an Honorary Research Fellow at the Centre for Agro-ecology, Water and Resilience, Coventry University, gave us a most enlightening presentation on 'Development

interventions and social realities in paddy rice farming in South Senegal'. The main rice growing was in villages and climate change was having an impact - even though Senegal was responsible for only 0.1% of global carbon emissions! Many families were also having difficulties because of land tenure issues, and outward migration causing younger people to move to Dakar for employment opportunities.

Our experience with Zoom led us to realise that while it could never provide a full substitute for face-to-face meetings it did have some advantages: no need to find and book a venue (therefore quicker to arrange), no problem about enlisting a speaker who might be from another part of the country. Accordingly, the Committee looked to arrange extra sessions between the dates of the regular bi-monthly meetings.

The first such session was in **April**, taking up the offer of a talk by professional photographer Jim Holmes who has built up a number of presentations to illustrate different aspects of his work across many parts of the world. His presentation for us was entitled 'The Lower Mekong, Water, War, and Watts': a most interesting talk about that great river in SE Asia, illustrating how climate change and hydro dam construction is affecting the livelihoods and sustainability of the river and the people who rely upon it for their living and survival. The talk was well attended and well received, giving the Committee encouragement to arrange further sessions.

Communications continue to be very important, and our website is still a most important information outlet with full details of all our events, particularly for people not on our email circulation list. We send regular emails to members, giving them updated information of our own events and those of our partner organisations listed in our CWDF Diary. A new member, Georgina Wilson, has joined our Committee and has greatly helped with 'social media'. She has taken over our Facebook activity and set up a Twitter account. We hope this will broaden the audience for our messages, bring us new contacts and, hopefully, new members. With advice from a graphic designer, we have produced a new A5 publicity leaflet which is aimed at people we meet at outside events who often have no awareness at all of CWDF. The leaflet looks very eye-catching and is now ready for print, having been approved at the January Forum meeting. Increasing public awareness of CWDF and gaining new members are key objectives for our group's future.

Our numbers of subscribers has kept up well, but attendance at the Zoom Forum meetings has sadly been lower than when we held meetings at the Unity Centre. We never have an abundance of money, but we always have enough to cover our costs with a current balance of £626.41 (this figure will be updated at the AGM). We have been able to make a donation of £60 to the DEC appeal to help with the Covid crisis in South Sudan.

Links with the **Department of Geography and International Development Studies at the University of Chester** are important to us, and have been strengthened by Gill Miller - Lecturer Emerita - joining our committee. Unfortunately, our joint meetings at the University have been another casualty of Covid19.

We have continued our membership of **Chester Sustainability Forum**, but sadly Covid 19 has prevented the planned exhibition 'Our Journey to Sustainability' from taking place, although we hope that this may take place at the Cathedral later in 2021. Links with Friends of the Earth have continued, and CWDF members have been involved in their Zoom events and

weekly 'Tellus TV' Crowdcasts. CWDF members have also kept in close touch with many other local organisations, amongst them Friends of Palestine, Christian Aid, City of Sanctuary, and the Fairtrade Steering Group.

Moving forward through the year, we have Forum meetings planned for May, July and September on new and challenging issues: "Mitengo coffee - tree planting through ethical coffee"; "Fair Tax Now" and "A Year of Summits". We also hope to arrange further online events on dates in between our regular bi-monthly Forum meetings.

The issues we are so concerned about (the climate crisis, sustainability, poverty, debt) have all been exacerbated by Covid19 which has been the focus of governments around the world. As individuals and as a Forum, we do need to work with other groups to ensure that these major issues are not overlooked. For this reason, we need to take an active interest in any significant policy reviews carried out by the UK government. A highly significant document was published in March 2021: "**Global Britain in a competitive age**", sub-titled The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy - in effect a manifesto to shape the programmes of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office which has absorbed the functions of the former Department for International Development.

Through government statements in autumn 2020 we already knew that the UK Aid target of 0.7% of GNI (Gross National Income) was to be reduced to 0.5% - albeit said to be a temporary measure, to revert to 0.7% "when the fiscal situation allows". Nevertheless, it was most disappointing to see this action further written into the script in the Integrated Review, despite the wide range of criticism that this reduction had received when first announced. The Committee has a number of concerns about the implications of the Integrated Review for the UK's approach to international development matters. We hope to prepare a note on these concerns for consideration at the AGM. This will take account of recent policy statements by the Foreign Secretary and his appearance before the parliamentary Select Committee on International Development.

*Full details of all future events are on our Diary and on the website.
Please do let your friends and family know about CWDF and our Forum meetings,
which we aim to make informal, friendly, interesting and educational.*

*Terry Green
CWDF Chair
April 2021*

CWDF Participating Groups:

Amnesty International Chester & Wrexham Group, Cheshire Asian & Minority Communities Council, Chester Bahai's, Chester CAFOD Support Group, Chester Christian Aid Committee, Chester CND, Chester City of Sanctuary, Chester Fair Trading, Chester Friends of Palestine, Chester Muslim Association, Chester Quaker Meeting, Holy Trinity Church Blacon One World Group, Our Lady's Justice & Peace Group, St Columba's Third World Group, Transition Chester, University of Chester Dept of Geography & International Development, Wesley Church Centre, Wirral Trade Justice Group

www.chesterwdf.org.uk

<https://www.facebook.com/ChesterWDF>

<https://twitter.com/home?lang=en-gb>