

Chester World Development Forum



Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 14 March 2017 at The Unity Centre

1 **Welcome:** Terry Green chaired the meeting

Present: Terry Green, Sue Bownas (CAFOD), Megan Heppelthwaite, Carrie Taylor and Jacob Mortimer (University of Chester), John Tacon, Vicki Jenner, Margaret Lord and Lindsay Cussons, (Baha'i), Matthew Jessop (Quakers), Terry Walsh (Chester CND), Ann McCarthy (CAFOD and Christian Aid), Kath Stephenson, Elizabeth Bott (Chester Asian Council), Tom Ormiston and Tony Walsh (CAFOD Ellesmere Port), Mark Rideal (Chester Friends of the Earth and Chester CND), Heather Lannin and Heather Swainston (CDEC)

Apologies: Gerald Grant, Gill Miller & Bernard Payne.

Welcome to University Chester students Megan, Carrie and Jacob in connection with Sustainable Futures Project

2 **Minutes/ notes of Forum meetings, and matters arising:**

- Forum Tuesday 17th January 2017: minutes previously circulated, including notes of talk by Stephen Maund. No matters arising
- Committees 6th February 2017 and 6th March 2017. Chair reported on key issues covered in the committee meetings:
 - Committee had agreed to send out a letter and/or visit local supermarkets urging them to promote Fairtrade Fortnight. Despite our best efforts, we did not get any response at all.
However, HS reported on great support from both Co-op and Waitrose. Co-op provided Fairtrade goodies for the Funday in the park and Waitrose put up a great display in the foyer, had various tastings in store (including tastings and free goodies for the children of Cherry Grove School) and put special offers on their Fairtrade goods.
Prior to Fairtrade Fortnight, HS had contacted those producers who have visited Chester in the past and asked them to tell their stories of how Fairtrade has helped them. She had replies from 4 producers and they told some really powerful stories. The stories have now been put on banners which can be used for other events. HS took the stories round to 5 schools and various community events. One Fairtrade assembly was attended by MP, Chris Matheson. The Funday in the park was well attended with over 100 people visiting the activity area. And Albert shop has also been very busy promoting Fairtrade Fortnight having visited 20 different schools.
 - Public Workshop on Syrian Refugees: Both TG and JT attended this workshop and their report went out with the last mailing. Government money being made available to get the families established. 3 refugee families are already housed in Ellesmere Port. TO and TW reported that the support from people in EP has been overwhelming. 4 families coming in April to be based in Chester. The charity "P3" are involved. It is thought that 100 refugees are to come to West Cheshire
 - TG attended Action Aid event in Manchester re their latest campaigns. Worth noting that the tax evasion did not get a mention in the latest budget!

3 **CWDF Sustainable Futures project** – to hear from Chester students about their study, including the suggested survey arrangements.

Megan, Carrie and Jacob reported on progress so far. The project is aimed at finding ways to get younger people involved in the work of CWDF. Questionnaire has gone out on social media to ascertain what issues younger people are interested in. Seemingly, at present, younger people only go to lectures to learn about development issues. Is this where social media comes in? Idea maybe to link in with national campaigns and then use social media to advertise events/disseminate information.

At the university there is a "Society for International Development". Suggestion that CWDF should meet with group and find out what they're doing. Then there can be an exchange of information. More activity based would be better than speakers as an introduction. We need to draw youngsters in and then possibly introduce speakers

4 Admin matters:

- Finance: £443.77 in bank
- Memberships: Quite a number of individuals and groups not yet paid their subs. A reminder letter has been included in the last mailing

5 Around the Table:

HS: Gathering peoples stories from Brook Street in Chester. Project funded by CWaC. Look on their website for more details

SB: CAFOD - Focus on Zambia and sustainable development of fish farms 17th March, 7.30 - "Fairtrade partner stories" in Heswall Friends Meeting House 18th March, 2pm - Wrexham Cathedral - celebrate Oscar Romero

24th March – play in Ashton Mersey

Report back on letter to Chris Matheson which raised issue of new trade rules working for the poor. Seemingly all those who signed have had the same reply stating that he hoped our concerns had been dealt with but in fact none of us have received anything other than this letter

TW: CAFOD fundraising quizzes in Ellesmere Port are continuing with last one for the year taking place on 24th March. £1200 raised so far. Justice and Peace group have made contact with local Imam.

EB: Has recently visited El Salvador and saw firsthand the importance of Romero

HL: Chester Interfaith Forum – Sharing the golden rule – "do unto others as you would have done to yourself". To promote Fairtrade Fortnight HL "dressed up" as Fairtrade banana in Nursery and After School Club

May 13th in Grosvenor Museum – Globe Trotters – lecture on global Health

Reference to CWDF Diary entries: The play "The Lost Boy", running from 21st April to 7th May at St Mary's Centre (now renamed St Mary's Creative Space). It's a play featuring music and film that looks at the changing face of our communities as young people flee war-torn countries. See website for tickets

6 Arrangements for next Forum meeting:

Tuesday 9th May: Forum AGM, 6.45 for 7.00pm at The Unity Centre. In addition to the AGM business, we will have a talk by Cat Barton, Chester Zoo's Field Conservation Manager.

7 AOB: CWDF has received appeal letters from Action Aid and British Red Cross re East Africa Food Crisis Appeal. Meeting agreed to send any monies placed in "The Tin" at the meeting would be sent for this appeal.

Presentation on Vietnam by Ann McCarthy

John, my husband, and I visited Vietnam in November 2015 – so quite some time ago - but the memories of this wonderful country are still very vivid. Essentially this was a PowerPoint presentation of just a few of our “holiday snaps” but I hoped to record alongside these some of my thoughts on the rapidly developing economy of Vietnam. Vietnam has the fastest growing economy in Indo-China and tourism plays a significant role in this development. Though tourism may bring valuable income into the country, it sometimes comes at an ethical, ecological and environmental cost.

We began our journey in Hanoi with all the trappings of a modern developing city with great skyscrapers and bustling streets. But amongst the fancy shops selling beautiful crafts for the tourists were many, many people selling just about anything to eke out a living. Many of these vendors were women and they carried unbelievably heavy loads in baskets on a yoke from dawn until dusk. Bearing in mind that they are only between 4ft – 5ft in height, they must have great strength and steadfastness.

Street Vendor



Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum

If in Hanoi you have to see the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, a vast imposing structure which houses the embalmed body of Ho Chi Minh who is acclaimed as the leader and primary force behind Vietnam’s struggle for independence. He was a gentle and unassuming man who led a very simple lifestyle as we saw from the basic rooms where he held meetings with foreign visitors. Although very respectful of the man, our guide admitted that Ho Chi Minh would not have approved of this building! If you look very carefully at the picture you can just make out one of the guards in white on the right-hand side of the photo, giving you an idea of the vastness of the building.

Whilst in Hanoi, we visited a charity named Blue Dragon which takes in very vulnerable street children and youngsters who have been abandoned by their parents. Blue Dragon clearly did some wonderful work as evidenced by some of the youngsters we met whose lives had been turned around. They were all very keen to learn English! The photo shows our group having a breakfast prepared for us by the young people.

Blue Dragon Charity



We then travelled to the coast, to the beautiful Halong Bay with its pinnacle-shaped limestone and dolomite outcrops and stayed overnight on one of these boats. The scenery out to sea was truly spectacular but sadly, because of the vast numbers of boats, the waters were becoming somewhat polluted which was having an impact on marine life. This was also affecting the floating fishing villages, which clearly relied very heavily on the sea for their livelihoods. However, we were told that steps were being taken to limit the number of vessels.



Floating Fishing Village in Halong Bay

The next place we visited was Hue, a fascinating old city, and here we felt the full force of the monsoon – but at least it was warm rain! What struck us both here and in the next town, Hoi An, was how hard the people worked to make a living and how inventive they were in their ideas.

For instance, by far the most important means of transport in Vietnam is motorbike/scooter and so they used this as a tourist attraction taking tourists on rides round the villages. We really enjoyed the ride and saw some traditional village life in the process even though we were soaking wet on our return.



Scooter ride



Of particular note in the villages was the way the people made the best use of what was readily available and they did not waste anything. As an example – the lady in the picture is making spring rolls out of rice flour. The countryside is full of paddy fields and the best rice is sold at market with the smaller grains being used to make rice flour. The husks from the rice grains are

used to fuel the stove and the remains of the grains after the flour is made are used to feed the pigs. Hence, no waste.

Making spring rolls

The markets were also a great attraction for the tourists as well as being so much a part of everyday life. They were open from dawn until dusk with many of the vendors sleeping at the back of the stalls. It seemed so different to our shopping habits where we stock up at the supermarkets. In Vietnam they seem to shop every day for fresh produce.



Market stall in Hoi An



Typical cafe/street food

And certainly the food we ate always seemed very fresh, healthy and locally produced. Above is a picture of one of the “pusher” cafes but often the best food to be had was from the street vendors. They would hand pull a trailer full of everything needed for a “popup” cafe with tables, chairs (always the plastic ones as you can see in the picture), cutlery and, of course, the food). In fact in the major cities you can do a tour of the best street food – another creative way of earning a living through the tourist trade.

Whilst in Hoi An we went on a bike ride through some lovely little villages and we noted how many households grew their own food. Each household had a small plot full of vegetables and of particular note were the huge pumpkins which they use to make a delicious soup. Sadly though, vast areas have been cleared to make way for coffee growing which potentially is far more lucrative. Even some of the smallholdings are turning to coffee growing but as we know, coffee prices can fluctuate dramatically and so can production. For the small producers, therefore, coffee growing may not be sustainable.

I have taken this information from Wikipedia which shows the uncertainty in the coffee market and the problems it has caused in Vietnam.

The country's 2013/2014 coffee crop is expected to be a bumper harvest of around 17 million to 29.5 million 60-kg bags. Such a large production will add to a global oversupply of beans and will pressure coffee prices which have lost about 10 percent since October 2012. The country's coffee industry has taken a hit; of the 127 local coffee export firms that operated in 2012, 56 have ceased trading or shifted to other businesses after having taken out loans they can't repay. A few firms, such as Vietnam's top coffee exporter the Intimex Group, will benefit from the 2013 harvest. Intimex accounts for a quarter of the country's coffee exports and made \$1.2 billion in revenue in 2012. The amount of non-performing loans or debts in the coffee sector likely to go unpaid stands at 8 trillion dong (\$379 million), which is around 60 percent of all loans for the coffee industry in Vietnam.

This from "The Wall Street Journal" – "The coffee market's worst fears may be confirmed: Coffee production in the world's biggest producer of Robusta beans, Vietnam, will likely fall by nearly a third because of severe drought, according to Vietnam's coffee trade group". Could this be as a result of climate change?

Our next stop was the seaside town of Nha Trang with its high rise hotels, imported sand, fancy bars and massage parlours! It is a favourite tourist destination for wealthy Russians. Contrasting with this was our visit to a small island just off the coast of Nha Trang with its beautiful traditional fishing "fleet" and nursery school. On the other side of the island was an amazing coral reef where we were lucky enough to go snorkelling. We were horrified to find out later that a wealthy Russian wishes to buy the island to make it into a holiday resort! Who will benefit from that proposal?



Traditional fishing boats



Nursery school children all saying "hello" in English

Next we visited Ho Chi Minh (formerly Saigon), a city of some 8.426 million people, famous for the pivotal role it played in the Vietnam War. It's also known for its French colonial landmarks, including Notre-Dame Cathedral, made entirely of materials imported from France, and the 19th-century Central Post Office. It is also a city of some 7.43 million motor bikes/scooters which cause massive problems with pollution. Just look at the "rush hour" traffic! Some people wear masks but many do not and certainly not many of the children seemed to.





Chu Chi Tunnels

Just outside Ho Chi Minh are the famous Chu Chi Tunnels, an immense network of underground tunnels which were used by the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War. The tunnel systems were of great importance to the Viet Cong in their resistance to American forces, and helped to counter the growing American military effort. You can see from the photo just how limited the space was in the tunnels and yet the Viet Cong organised incredible defences in these spaces.

Whilst in Ho Chi Minh we also visited the War Remnants Museum displaying the most graphic photographs of the full horror and brutality of the Vietnam War. I only managed to go into one gallery and then had to leave.

Our final visit was to the area around the Mekong Delta where we again experienced local people tapping into the tourist trade. The photo shows a small sweet making enterprise using all local grown ingredients including the rice paper used for wrapping – all edible



Sweet making

Vietnam is a beautiful country and is well worth a visit. Tourism clearly makes a very significant contribution to the country's economy but sadly its promotion may come at a cost to the traditional way of life and to the environment.

AMcC
March 2017