

## **Chester World Development Forum Annual Report May 2021 to April 2022**



This has again been a year under the shadow of Covid19. Many Forum and Committee meetings were held via Zoom, but gradually we have moved to face to face Committee meetings and face to face Forum meetings. Our Forum meetings at The Unity Centre also have Zoom facilities for members who are still unsure about attending in person. Throughout the year we have been very conscious that people in Developing countries with limited vaccination have struggled much more than people in western nations. We have also been most concerned about the Climate Crisis and that insufficient action was being taken around the world to maintain temperature rise to 1.5 degrees; consequences are already evident, particularly in Developing countries / global South.

### **Regular Meetings through the Year**

On 13 May we had our AGM via Zoom, and before that Dr Henry Sidsath - a lecturer in Business Studies at the University of Chester - spoke to us about his twin loves: coffee and tree planting. He imports some coffee and ensures that it is ethically produced, and that the farmers get a fair price for production. With money from selling the coffee, he supports tree planting in Malawi, one of the world's least developed countries. Our AGM followed, in which the Annual Report and Financial Report were accepted, and officers and Committee membership agreed. A Government Review of the issue of Nuclear weapons and disarmament was also considered. It was agreed that a letter should be sent to the Foreign Secretary expressing concern about the proposed increase in nuclear weapons, especially following the decrease in Overseas Aid.

We had an extra meeting on 7 June via Zoom when we listened to a most interesting TED Talk on "How Africa Can Keep Rising". The Director of the World Trade Organisation and former Finance Minister of Nigeria described the positive progress in the continent, and outlined the challenges African nations still needed to address. Although the talk was 4 years old, it was still very meaningful in considering current issues.

Our next Forum Meeting, again on Zoom, was on 13 July when Dr Justin Thacker, a former Director of the campaign group, Church Action for Tax Justice, spoke to us about 'Fair Tax Now' and called for a fairer tax system for all. He particularly focussed on the need for this in Africa, using cobalt

extraction in Zambia as an example. The company mining cobalt and exporting it to countries where batteries are made makes large profit by declaring the profit in a country with a low corporate tax rate. A tiny profit is declared in Zambia, which receives little benefit for having the cobalt.

On 14 September, we had our first Covid face to face Forum meeting at the Unity Centre with a talk on "A Year of Summits" by Gill Miller. We also provided a Zoom facility. Gill gave a most interesting overview of the major International Gatherings that had taken place or were still to take place in 2021. These included meetings of G7, G20 and COP26. We were surprised by the large number of gatherings, and wondered whether there was sufficient co-ordination between them all.

On Saturday 6 November, the Chester Sustainability Exhibition took place at Chester cathedral and CWDF had a display, with members in attendance the whole day. It was good to have the event, but we had concerns about it being in the cloisters (quite dark) and that most exhibitors were advocates of action to avoid a devastating rise in global temperatures. None the less, we had some interesting conversations and handed out our new glossy leaflets.

Our Forum Meeting on 16 November followed both this and COP26 (1 to 12 November in Glasgow). Together with representatives from local groups concerned about Climate Crisis, we discussed the outcomes and implications of COP26. We met at the Unity Centre, again with a Zoom link in place. Meeting chair Gill Miller briefly summarised the outcomes, and then views were given from the local groups. There were some positives, but many concerns about whether adequate action would be taken world-wide and whether support for Developing Countries would be adequate.

On 14 December, we held an informal Forum gathering at the Unity Centre to prepare for Christmas and to share updates with members from other local groups.

Our first meeting of 2022 was held in the Unity Centre on 28 January, when our Chester City MP, Chris Matheson, joined us. We discussed the reduction in Overseas Aid and the Labour Party's approach; what the Government are doing to ensure that Nations are taking action to reduce carbon emissions before the COP27 meeting in Cairo in 2022; and what CWDF should be doing locally on the Climate Crisis. Chris was very helpful in his comments and there were a number of questions and comments. Chris and the Labour Party are very keen

to ensure that the Overseas Aid Budget is restored to 0.7% of GDP, and that action is taken to prevent a rise in temperature above 1.5 degrees. He said that the Government was making positive statements but we would need to see if action were taken soon enough. He said that it would be good if CWDF and other local groups continued to seek to make Climate Crisis issues known, to speak out, and for individuals to take their own action in changing lifestyles.

Our last Forum meeting on 2 March was held at the University of Chester, as part of their 'Go Green Week'. Our speaker was Dominic Brain, Global Head of Programme Development and Funding at Christian Aid, and his subject was "Disaster Reduction and Social Safety" programme in Nigeria. It was such an informative talk about the situation in Northern Nigeria. He had been there himself, and gave local information as well as an overview of the situation. It was so good to hear about local issues and developments involving local people to prepare them for extreme situations, like floods, which are likely to occur. This preparation helped ensure that local people knew how to react and so prevent a disaster. The meeting was at the University and we were very disappointed with a fairly low turnout, especially of CWDF members, for a high profile speaker.

## **Other Issues**

In addition to Forum meetings the Committee has met monthly, at first by Zoom but latterly face to face. In addition to planning meetings, we have focussed on publicity. A major aspect was preparing a new CWDF leaflet with the help of a local designer. This has now been printed and is in full use. The other key aspects have been keeping our website up to date, enhancing our Facebook page, and branching out onto Twitter. This has greatly enhanced the number of people in contact with us. Georgina Wilson has run our social media channels, but she has now left for a teaching assignment on Ascension Island. We are very keen to find someone to take over this key role.

We are very supportive of Fairtrade and were very pleased to be able to join them at Chester Cathedral Refectory on 28 February to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Chester becoming Britain's the first "Fairtrade City".

A most important aspect of our communications is our Diary. It is issued regularly, and includes information about events of other local groups who are members of CWDF. A very regular weekly event is "Tellus": Eco Communities Crowdcast hosted by Chester Friends of Earth. We are members of Chester

Sustainability Forum which keeps us in touch with wider sustainability issues such as the "HyNet" project, which will produce Hydrogen from natural gas as a fuel for the Ellesmere Port industrial complex, and possibly as a replacement gas for domestic consumers in Frodsham - about which we have many concerns.

Finance: we never have an abundance of money but we do have enough to cover our costs. Holding meetings on Zoom meant that we did not have to make payments to The Unity Centre, but we decided to make donations to them of the same amounts we would have paid to meet there. This was a help to them in a very difficult financial position. We have also made donations to DEC for South Sudan Emergency and the India Covid Emergency appeals, and to Médecins Sans Frontières for disaster relief in Haiti. At the end of the 2021 year, we had a balance of £157.24

## **Conclusion**

It has been a frustrating year largely due to Covid, but we are so thankful that we have achieved a full programme of meetings with help from Zoom, and continued to make an impact locally. But we are most concerned about smaller numbers at meetings, and that our membership is not growing and is ageing! We need members to publicise CWDF wherever possible, and by making full use of our new leaflet.

Terry Green  
Chair CWDF  
May 2022