

CROSS PARTY GROUP: INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

21 JANUARY 2014

COMMITTEE ROOM 5, SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

5.30PM – 7.00pm

Attendees:

Sarah Boyack MSP, Jamie McGrigor MSP, Fiona Trafton, Pauline Ward, Liz Murray, Agnes Ngulube Holmes, David Stevenson, Deirdre Muldowney, Derek Sangster, James MacLean, Linda Todd, Fiona Forsyth, Alina Armstrong, Elaine Mullan, Colin Pritchard, Jonathan Sentamu, Michael Freudenberg, Norman Chipakupaku, Jim Copland, Frances Johnston, David Kenvyn, Claude Pisani, Cathy Crawford, Katie Dearden.

Apologies:

Siobhan McMahon MSP, Patrick Harvie MSP, Alison Johnstone MSP, Jackie Baillie MSP, Kevin Simpson, Seonaid Stevenson.

Welcome and Introduction:

Sarah Boyack MSP opened the meeting in her capacity as Convenor of the Cross Party Group and thanked everyone for their attendance. Sarah apologised for the slight delay in commencing the meeting due to an IT issue in the room.

The minutes from November 2013 were approved by the Group.

Sarah Boyack updated members with notification of forthcoming events and information for the attention of members:

- Grant scheme for young Scots volunteering in Malawi – initiative of the McConnell International Foundation. Sarah advised any member to contact the office directly for more information and highlighted that the deadline for applications is 31 January 2014
- *Britain and Africa at 50* event hosted by the University of Edinburgh (sponsored by Sarah Boyack MSP) – 27 February 2014, 5.30pm, Scottish Parliament.
- Norman Chipakupaku, Capacity Building and Development Office for Africa-UK Scotland, alerted members to a forthcoming event being planned for October 2014 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Zambia.

Due to a technical fault with Powerpoint, the talks commenced without the use of visual aids.

Liz Murray, Head of Campaigns and Policy, World Development Movement:

Overview of Food Security

Liz provided a brief introduction to the work of the World Development Movement and paid a tribute to the efforts of John Blair Fish, who sadly passed away in September 2013.

Liz started the meeting by reading out several stark and shocking statistics with regards to food security, including:

- **870 million** – 1 in 8 people suffering chronic undernourishment. 836 million of these live in developing countries.
- **70%** - 70% of the population of the LDCs are involved in agriculture. (The figure for the global population involved in agriculture is just 14%)
- **34.5%** Between 2002 and 2008, the food import bill of the LDCs rose from \$9 billion to \$24 billion - an increase of 34.5%. In Africa, the percentage of food being imported has been growing by 3.5% a year since the 1980's.
- **40%** - In the UK, we import about 40% of our food – far less than developing countries, however our dependence on food imports from such countries also strengthens this model of development, further increasing vulnerability in times of a crisis.

Liz highlighted that some of the key challenges in LDC's are related to the issue of land grabbing, which is a big and growing issue, and the volume of seeds owned by three large corporations – (Monsanto, DuPont and Syngenta control 47% of seeds). The WDM are of the opinion that the latter issue has a huge impact on smallholder farmers as it has hiked up costs, impeded public sector research and undermined the rights of farmers to save and exchange seeds, which is traditional.

The World Development Movement is involved in looking at the impact of the financial sector and how this is linked to massive rises in food markets. Although there is food on the shelves in many countries, except during periods of famine in some LDC's, a barrier for millions is that they cannot afford to buy the food to feed them adequately.

Overview of Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty is considered to be a possible solution to overcoming the challenges of food security. This concept addresses power in the food system, putting people who produce, distribute and consume at the heart of policy and decision making. Food sovereignty is already in practice, to an extent, in Britain; such as through allotments, local farmers' markets and the work of co-operatives.

Liz detailed the efforts of the campaign movement La Via Campesina which was founded by peasant farmers more than 20 years ago. To date, the movement now has a membership of 148 organisations and 200 million individuals from 70 countries, including peasants and family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers and environmental and urban movements. For more information on the movement please visit: <http://viacampesina.org/en/>

Agnes Holmes

Food Security in Africa - Challenges

Agnes focused primarily on Africa for her talk on Food Security and indicated the Continent's importance globally:

- African agriculture is likely to witness a significant transformation in future years;
- The rise of 'super farms', urbanisation and food security are key drivers for change;
- Prediction of new investment models in Africa.

Agnes highlighted that there are a number of advantages that Africa has in its favour, including:

- Natural resources and fertile land (supply side);
- Rising food demands locally and globally (demand side).

According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation, Sub-Saharan Africa boasts nearly 1 billion hectares of land suitable for rain-fed farming; yet the FAO has highlighted significant scope for improvement considering that yields are relatively low.

The agricultural sector remains central to solving the problem of food security and to meeting poverty reduction targets, as set by the Millennium Development Goals.

A number of challenges currently facing the African agricultural sector include:

- Farmers' lack of access to land and resources;
- Climate change;
- Poor infrastructure and high transportation costs;
- Unpredictable trade policies;
- Lack of innovation to utilise techniques and inputs.
- Long term dependency on food aid and EC aid tends to benefit wealthier farmers.

Food Security in Africa - Opportunities

Agnes highlighted that there are significant opportunities in African agriculture which should be embraced:

- Private sector capital investment and involvement;
- 'Bottom up' approach – engaging with local communities;
- Large scale farming could act as a magnet for investment and opportunity;
- The volume and scale of land is a unique resource and must be utilised effectively.

Agnes highlighted the work of the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) which focuses on four key objectives:

- Sustainable land and water management;
- Improving rural infrastructure and trade-related capacities for market access;
- Increasing food supply, increasing nutrition, reducing hunger, and improving responses to food crises;
- Improving agricultural research, technology dissemination and adoption.

Agnes finalised her talk indicating that Africa has the potential to feed the world and this is achievable through domestic and global policies, fair and effective access to inputs, such as seeds, investment by richer countries and the balance and trade-off between efficiency and self-sufficiency.

Questions and Answers

Please note that it is not the intention of the minutes to record a verbatim account but to provide an overview of the discussion.

Norman Chipakupaku raised the point that Africa is often treated as a 'dumping ground' and that some people do not realise its full potential – less than 4% of land irrigated, yet there are massive quantities of water.

Jamie McGrigor MSP mentioned the importance of efficiency and having access to machinery. Jamie raised the point that corporations cannot always be viewed through negative lenses and gave the example of banks providing aid.

David Kenvyn raised the issue of 'who owns the land'; highlighting that following civil wars and ethnic cleansing, people are often buying the land from people who 'grabbed' it unlawfully.

James MacLean contributed by highlighting that access to water is a key issue and there are instances of disproportionate division of the resources.

Sarah Boyack MSP raised the point that developing co-operatives is one solution to alleviate problems relating to food security and reducing poverty, highlighting that EU trade rules can often mean that products cannot enter the European market due to restrictions.

Cathy Crawford asked to what extent the Fair Trade movement can have a serious impact.

Jim Copland provided the example of Guatemala which is now becoming more self-sufficient and access to water is key to this.

Jonathan Sentamu mentioned the importance of helping small scale farmers on the ground and there is many Governments, locally and globally, can do.

Concluding remarks

Sarah closed the meeting thanking the speakers for their thought provoking discussions, highlighting it is a difficult topic to discuss and address. Sarah highlighted the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in the Scottish Parliament and their links to Parliamentarians abroad.

Sarah encouraged members to think of issues that they could take to their local MEPs in the run up to the European Parliamentary elections in May 2014.

Forthcoming meeting: 18 March 2014.

The topic is Universities and Colleges and discussion shall be led by Challenges Worldwide and the University of Strathclyde.