

NorthEast
CALL TO ACTION

on global poverty and climate change

(Make Poverty History NE)

Overview of the year, 2010

"I was delighted to take part in this event... the North East group does an awful lot to promote the global poverty campaign." (Roberta Blackman-Woods, Labour MP for Durham Central)

"I was very pleased to participate in this Call to Action event. Poverty remains a huge problem worldwide and climate change presents an ever-increasing threat to the world's poor. It is great to see so many people in our area taking an interest in these issues." (Ian Swales, Liberal Democrat MP for Redcar)

"Campaigning groupings such as North East CALL TO ACTION are crucial in raising awareness of climate change as a real, everyday tangible occurrence which in turn undermines the lives and wellbeing of millions of lives across the globe." (Tom Blenkinsop, Labour MP for Middlesbrough South & East Cleveland)

The year started with a positively ferocious bout of campaigning against 'Vulture Funds' - unscrupulous corporate predators who try, often successfully, to hijack the relief process. Buying up poor country debts at knock-down prices, they sue for full repayment when debt relief is granted, siphoning off resources earmarked for health care, schools, etc., and making astronomical profits in the process.

Andrew Gwynne MP introduced a Private Members Bill to curb this evil activity and its passage through Parliament was a veritable rollercoaster! It was finally passed on 8th April. Our many contributions included enlisting the backing of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the President of Guyana and the former President of Tanzania, and others. Nick Dearden, Jubilee Debt Campaign's Director, said, "We hugely appreciate the contribution that the North East has made towards this bill becoming law, from grassroots regional supporters to Pro-Vice Chancellor Professor Paul Younger and staff and students unions at Newcastle University. Your support for debt relief over many years has made a big difference."

The late Spring and early summer saw the Coordinator somewhat distracted by training for the Great North Run (and the injuries and illnesses by which this was punctuated!). The Great Day was rather cold and wet, but the team did well, not only in the Run, but in raising sponsorship totalling about £13,500 with Gift Aid, excluding DWG's contribution. A happy coincidence of timing enabled us to have two gatherings to mark the UN's World Poverty Day on the eve of the Run in St Thomas's Church, courtesy of Revd Catherine Lack, which were well supported by runners, supporters and civic leaders.

We publicised the Micah Challenge's 10.10.10 initiative, which attracted the participation of an estimated 60 million people worldwide. It was warmly supported by some in the Region and, although the promises made were rather sparse, this is something on which we may be able to build.

Our 4th Regional Campaign Roadshow during October and November put into practice our aspiration to support campaigning across the entire region. It was our best ever by far, with fourteen events across the North East – from Alnwick to Redcar and Saltburn, and from Hexham to Hartlepool and Sunderland - with Newcastle, Durham, Birtley and Wallsend bringing up the centre!

MPs attended and spoke at seven of the events; guest presenters included Nick Dearden, Director of Jubilee Debt Campaign; Laura Selman of Tearfund; Paul Brannen, Christian Aid's Head of Advocacy; Serena Tramonti, a staff member at Oxfam; Andy Welford of WDM; and John McBride, a Cafod Volunteer. Other presentations were given by Kevin Haigh, Vice-Chair of NE-CAP, and David Golding. This year's programme made an honourable contribution to the national 'Big Climate Connection' organised by Stop Climate Chaos, of which NE-CAP is a member, but several other topics were also seriously addressed – Debt Relief, Tax Justice, Food Speculation, British Aid, and HIV/AIDS.

The most momentous thing we did this year was... to change our name! 'Make Poverty History', the great national campaign of 2005, is now little remembered and 'Make Poverty History North East' was increasingly being misunderstood. Furthermore, although we are, and always will be, a global poverty grouping, we thought it would be useful to highlight the importance of climate change in this regard by including it in our title. And there's a precedent for "Call to Action"! The big international network is called the "Global Call to Action on Poverty" (G-CAP), so "North East CALL TO ACTION on global poverty and climate change" (*NE-CAP!*) seemed appropriate.

The year concluded with Newcastle University agreeing to establish a high profile (hopefully annual) 'Jubilee Development Lecture', relating to global poverty, the MDGs, etc. This is very good news indeed - the lecture will hopefully confirm and strengthen the university's commitment to our cause.

Climate Change

From “Cancun climate change talks: Oxfam says we’re off life support with hope for the future”

(December 13th 2010)

“The Cancun climate change talks produced a last-minute deal late on Saturday, following two weeks of negotiation, argument and fear that the process would derail completely. For the first time, a commitment has been made by all the world’s major economies to cut greenhouse gas emissions. But, disappointingly, this will not be enough to meet the promise of keeping global temperature rises below 2C. The deal should though help to prevent deforestation, promote low-carbon technologies to developing countries, and - crucially - establishing a fund potentially worth \$100billion (£63bn) by 2020 to help the world’s poorest people adapt to climate change...

“Christiana Figueres, the UN’s top climate official, stated: ‘Cancun has done its job. The beacon of hope has been reignited and faith in the multilateral climate change process to deliver results has been restored’... Many of the difficult decisions have been punted in the direction of the next gathering at Durban in South Africa next year. But considering the low expectations for these talks many praised the agreement as a success. The Cancun deal is not yet enough to save the climate, but enough to save the 20-year-old international climate change negotiating process from collapse.”

Jubilee Debt Campaign

Despite a severe funding shortfall for the year, Jubilee Debt Campaign has had several concrete successes during 2010, helping it to attract new funds to start 2011 on a stronger footing.

- It won rgw campaign on 'vulture funds'... and the UK Parliament introduced a law which will effectively prevent such behaviour, an act which has already shown its value in a case brought against Liberia.
- [With the support of Jubilee USA and Christian Aid (and others?) DWG], it achieved a second (and complete) debt cancellation for Haiti in the wake of the terrible earthquake experienced by that country in January. It ensured new funds were, by and large, delivered in the form of grant-aid.
- Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Republic of Congo, Togo and Guinea-Bissau also received debt cancellation.
- It engaged in educational work to convince campaigners, supporters, the media and decision-makers of the ongoing importance of 'dealing with debt' when trying to attain a just climate treaty.

Fairtrade (from the 2009/2010 Annual Report of the Fairtrade Foundation)

“Above all else, as a South African study showed, Fairtrade is giving people hope – a sense that trade can be changed for the better.” (Harriet Lamb, Executive Director, Fairtrade Foundation)

Sales of Fairtrade goods in the UK rose by 12% in 2009, to reach £799 million, and 1,137 new products were introduced. During Fairtrade Fortnight, more than a million people registered their ‘swap to Fairtrade’. Sales of FT sugar rose from (tonnes) 7,297 in 2007, and 45,561 in 2008, to 69,216 in 2009! The figures for some other products are: Coffee - 8,388, 9,666 and 11,982; Cocoa – 1,805, 1,997 and 3,556; Spices – 38, 49, and 63.

A new and important emphasis is the way Fairtrade is supporting farmers to adapt to climate change. For example, in Uganda, some are using the Fairtrade Premium in water conservation; in Costa Rica, the CooCafe farmers are reforesting 5,000 hectares to prevent soil erosion, make the land fertile again and promote wildlife.

Looking ahead the Olympic Organising Committee have promised to put Fairtrade at the heart of their sourcing policy wherever possible!

HIV/AIDS

By Michel Sidibé, UNAIDS Executive Director

“The UNAIDS Report 2010 contains some very encouraging findings that the world has been long waiting to hear. Globally, new HIV infections have fallen by 20% over the past 10 years. At least 56 countries have stabilized or significantly slowed down the rate of new HIV infections, including almost all countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa has reduced its new infections by more than one third and India by more than half! [Furthermore, over 60% of the people most in need to life-saving drug treatment are now receiving it, compared with about 5% in 2003; nearly 30% of children under 15 needing treatment are getting it, compared with 7% just four years ago. DWG]

“This is also the first time we can show that reductions in the number of new HIV infections are clearly linked to an increase in knowledge about HIV, changes in social norms and the adopting of safer behaviors. It has given us evidence that HIV prevention programmes are producing significant results.

“However we must not be lulled into complacency or denial... We still face significant challenges... there were 2.6 million people newly infected with HIV in 2009 and there are two new HIV infections for every one person starting HIV treatment. 370,000 babies were infected with HIV. Each one of them could have been prevented. So while we clearly see that investments in the AIDS response are paying off, the gains we have made are fragile. This is the time to scale up, not scale down the response to HIV.”