

FOCUS

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INSIDE Global Day of Action – 26th of January / Diverting the human traffic / Activist voices: The battle against Neo-Liberalism / Changing Investments: A Chinese Road in Ethiopia / Woman Power - North and South



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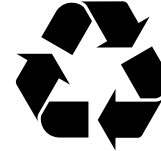
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Charity alone will never change the world



Join Comhlámh: take action for global justice

In a world that seems so unfair, don't you wish that Ireland would stand up for justice? Yet there have been moments to be proud of when Ireland helped make a difference:

- against **apartheid**
- for the freedom of **East Timor**
- for **debt cancellation**

But these breakthroughs only happen because people - like you - **demand change and make justice matter.**

For 30 years, Comhlámh (Irish for 'solidarity' and pronounced 'co-law-ve') has been **educating** and campaigning for global justice in **solidarity with the developing world.**

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Action:

Instead of the World Social Forum: A week of Mobilisation culminating in a Global Day of Action Saturday, January, 26th 2008

Act locally to change globally

This is the purpose of the 2008 Global Day of Action. The World Social Forum will not take place centrally but locally. The week is a great opportunity to show that the struggles in North and South for another just world are working together. All over the world millions of people, organisations, networks, movements, unions, communities who are struggling against neo-liberal policies, war, racism, poverty, ecological disasters and much more, will act together for another world – and commit themselves to this global call to action.

Where did the idea come from?

The idea is not new. In recent years there have been attempts to create a global day that – in analogy to the 1st May for the Labour Movement or the 8th of March for Woman's day – would be a day of the "global movement".

Why the 26th of January?

Likewise to the World Social Forum the Global Day of Action should be at the same period of the Davos World Economic Forum (where political leaders and businesspeople meet to shape global agendas) to maintain the confrontation with this important neo-liberal gathering of the elites.

Be part of it! What we want you to do?

Make your concerns, your campaign and your alternatives public. Whether at work, in public, in a college, at school do something simple to raise awareness about the struggles you support in other parts of the world or that you are involved in locally.

Ideas of action

Use your own form to make your global issue public. For example:

- A public media event in a representative place in your town (build something that relates to your topic, a globe or a politician – use giant puppets or theatre methods, etc.).
- A panel discussion or a talk to which you invite speakers on your topic.
- An information stall in public.

Show your commitment internationally

You can sign the global call to action, find out more about other actions, link with them and post your action on a world map on www.wsf2008.net.

Find local partners for a common local initiative

You can look for other people, organisations that want to organise an event in your city or region on the day of action and start preparing an event together.

Make it public!

No matter what you do, invite the press, issue a press release and make sure your message is heard. Use the opportunity of putting your event into an international setting: it is the Global Day of Action. You will see – operating in a global context will make the press more curious.

More advice?

If you are looking for more advice, ideas or speakers contact nina@comhlamh.org. There is also a small fund available from Comhlamh if your event is related to lobbying your local politician. If you are interested contact nina@comhlamh.org.

Let us know if you organise something

Watch the websites www.comhlamh.org, www.debtireland.org, www.africacentre.ie for more updates to the day.

Visit the international website: www.wsf2008.net to see what happens in other parts of the world.

**This action
is brought to
you by**



Global Day of Action - An Opportunity to Localise a Global Movement

Nessa Ní Chasaide argues that the World Social Forum (WSF) Global Day of Action provides an opportunity to bring a global movement home

The World Social Forum's last meeting in Nairobi, Kenya in January 2007 was a significant moment. For many activists, the WSF had come to represent a new hope for achieving greater global justice through connections between people-based, grassroots social movements from around the world.

“Now is an opportune time for us to reflect on the strength or otherwise of our own political work and groupings.”

This year was particularly important because by planning its meeting for Africa the WSF council was making a strong statement that it could thrive outside its typical home of Latin America. Many African activists were proud that their long marginalized continent was hosting the forum. It was also a significant political challenge to the belief that Africa does not have the possibility for building 'social movements' in the same sense that Latin America has.

Attending the WSF as a member of the debt cancellation movement, I was offered a range of opportunities to share strategies with other activists working on debt, the World Bank and the International

Monetary Fund. More importantly, the forum provided a much wider political framework for holding these discussions.

The slogan of the WSF 'Another World Is Possible' highlights the open, and radical, character of the WSF. It's never meant to be just another international 'talking shop' of policy makers. Instead, it invites all politically active people to gather and share their concrete stories of struggle and to plan the future of their struggles for a better world.

However, the Nairobi WSF came under fire from many quarters. Part of the problem was that it was quite inaccessible to poor Kenyans who had to travel a long way and pay high entry fees to access the forum. As a result, the Forum appeared to be filled with mainstream, well resourced NGOs and religious groups. This raised questions about who is actually able to access and raise the resources to attend the World Social Forum. Is encouraging activists to increase their carbon footprints by getting on aeroplanes to travel to yet another meeting really a progressive way to change the world?

Another criticism was that activists tended to disappear into their respective workshops on specific issues, leading to the WSF's failure to make enough inter-connections between movements and struggles. Some activists also believe that the WSF should aim to develop a coherent process for the compilation of an anti-capitalist or an anti-neo-liberal manifesto, but is failing to do so.

It is in this context of these unanswered questions that we should plan how to engage with the latest proposal from the

WSF to hold a Global Week of Action, culminating in a Global Day of Action on January 26th 2008. This means that the usual format of one global gathering in one location will not happen in 2008 (the next global meeting will happen in Belem, Brazil, in 2009). Instead, the WSF is calling on activists around the world to concentrate on strengthening their engagement in struggle in their own local arenas.

The common moment of the week of action, or the Day of Action, will allow activists to share their plans, thoughts and reflections with each other at a distance. But the focus should be on building the local strength of political movements. Now is an opportune time for us to reflect on the strength or otherwise of our own political work and groupings. We will then have an opportunity to take a collective approach to organising political action nationally during the week of action.

At the WSF in Nairobi in 2007, I found the value of an internationalist approach to politics re-enforced for me. But it also struck me that it is easy to invest large amounts of time in organising at the international level. The real struggle lies in challenging and pressuring our own political representatives and building our collective strength as a movement locally. The Global Week of Action in January 2008 will present a valuable opportunity to reflect on this challenge, and a chance to re-commit to building strength from the bottom up.

For more on the World Social Forum and the Global Day of Action: www.wsf2008.org

Another

World Is

Possible

Global Day of Action
Saturday, January, 26th 2008

Diverting the human traffic

Urban demand for cheap expendable labour is turning the trafficking of Indian children into a lucrative business. Zoe O'Reilly reports from Sundargarh in Orissa, where a local NGO is trying to rescue young girls from a life of exploitation in the cities.



Photo: Zoe O'Reilly

It is nine o'clock in the evening and twelve chattering girls aged between nine and twenty one are sitting on the smooth hardened mud floor of the kitchen hut eating rice and daal. The room is lit only by the dim light of the cooking fire in the corner, the already temperamental electricity supply having been cut by torrential monsoon rain. It is market day tomorrow and the older girls, Sukanti, Manju and Susmita, are preparing their culinary wares: sweets made from deep fried dough and coated in sugar. Asha and Pramila, two giggling eleven and twelve year olds, are licking the sugar from the bowls.

This is the 'field campus' of a small local NGO Pragati (meaning 'development') at Alapaka, a tiny hamlet set in the hilly jungle of the Sundargarh district of Orissa, east India. The district has a tribal population of 55% and is a large and growing source

of trafficked girls and women in India. The girls here are the rescued victims of a rapidly expanding and highly lucrative business, linking rural tribal areas to increasingly wealthy urban India.

Asha was nine years old when her family was approached by a woman from the local community, Joshna Singh, with an offer to take her to Delhi and find her work. Asha is the eldest of five children and, like most of the tribal people in the area, her family do not own the small plot of land they live on. Food is scarce and money hard to come by. Asha, being a girl, was not sent to school, and was helping her parents in the fields. Joshna offered to help the family by employing Asha through a placement office in Delhi, Joshna Sahara Bureau, owned by herself and her husband, and ensured that she could return after a year with 20,000 rupees (circa €400) in her pocket.

Asha was found in Delhi in March 2007 after about 6 months when her father, worried when he was unable to contact her, approached Pragati for help. She had been raped while still in the placement office before being employed as a domestic worker, working up to 15 hours a day. She was undernourished and forbidden contact with her family. She had received under half of her due wages, while the rest went straight into the pocket of the agent.

Asha's story is typical of the girls from this area. Tribal communities of the eastern tribal belt, once self-sufficient thanks to the rich natural resources of the region, are now crippled with poverty. Their resources are being gobbled up by industry and their land confiscated for the 'common good' - development whose benefits they never see. With the increasing urbanization and industrialization of India



Photo: Zoe O'Reilly

comes a high demand for cheap expendable labour, usually in the form of women and children. An extremely high number of these labourers are brought from rural tribal villages, whose inhabitants are forced to look outside for alternative income.

In the past few years, the middlemen, or dolal, luring girls from rural tribal communities to more developed urban areas with promises of employment, wealth and good lifestyle, have increasingly come from within the communities themselves. Often they are friends or relatives of the families concerned, taking advantage of a niche in the market to use the impoverished rural economy as fuel for urban capitalist expansion.

About 90% of trafficked girls are sexually exploited. Rape, torture and abuse are regularly used as 'demoralisation' techniques. Knowledge of sexual relations often leads to not being accepted by the community or deemed unsuitable for marriage. On returning home, the factors which caused them to leave usually remain unchanged, leaving them vulnerable to re-trafficking.

Pragati is a grassroots organization

“Tribal communities of the eastern tribal belt, once self-sufficient, are now crippled with poverty. Their resources are being gobbled up by industry and their land confiscated for the ‘common good’-development whose benefits they never see.”

which challenges the economic power struggle through working with tribal communities at a local level. A large part of Pragati's work focuses on the development of community values and bettering the status of women through education and awareness. Pragati works in close contact with women's groups, or SHGs, in its 62 target villages, in order to encourage education and develop skills, both traditional and new, which will lead to self sufficiency.

Rescue workers from Pragati were aware that Asha was liable to face negative reactions from her community after her return and that she was even vulnerable to re-trafficked. They suggested that she live for some months in their centre, located about an hour's walk from her family home.

Asha now attends school for the first time in her young life, learning skills she will need for later and living among girls her own age who have had similar experiences. Pragati hopes Asha and the other girls at the centre will be able to use the education and skills they are learning to become independent and self-sufficient, so they will never run the risk of becoming victims again.

For more information or to support Pragati's work in Orissa, contact Zoë at zoreilly@hotmail.com or Pragati at rkl_spragati@sancharnet.in

“The biggest problem: the battle against Neo-liberalism”

For Rodrigo de Rato, the former managing director of the International Monetary Fund, liberalisation of international trade “is an engine of global growth because it brings about competition.” A Ghanaian woman begs to differ, firmly blaming the neo-liberal policies that the World Bank and IMF have imposed on her country for the deteriorating situation in her district: “The private investors have no duty to invest in our poor area,” she says. “Water prices have gone up so much since it is in their hands that sometimes I have to go without food so that at least my grand children have some water.”

As Rodrigo de Rato and the Ghanaian woman demonstrate, the debate on neo-liberalism dramatically polarises opinions on the causes of and solutions to global poverty. So what is neo-liberalism? In brief, the term refers to an economic philosophy which claims that control of the economy should be primarily in the hands of the private sector. The economy, as referred to here, includes all basic services, including education, health, water and electricity. And the major players in this system are corporations.

On the one hand it is promised that unregulated competition will lead to the greatest good for all because the global market will regulate itself.

On the other hand it is argued that neo-liberal economics further aggravates inequality and global poverty, creating an environment which is designed to favour those in an already dominant economic position. To get an idea of the disadvantage a small farmer faces in competing with

a multinational agro-business, think of a sheep and a giraffe competing for the leaves at the top of a tree.

Neo-liberalism is without a doubt the dominant socioeconomic philosophy of our time, facilitated by the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and all the major powers of the West. Despite the promises of neo-liberal theoreticians, global poverty and inequality rise. What are the alternatives?

The alternatives include a variety of global movements, largely arising from the civil societies of Southern countries, which challenge neo-liberal hegemony. Over the next few pages, we talk to a range of Southern activists about the challenges they face in this struggle and their vision of the future.

The concept of Neo-liberal policies includes

- **Free trade:** The removal of trade barriers, such as tariffs and subsidies
- **Privatization:** The transfer of formerly public-owned enterprises, goods, and services to the private sector, like health, education, energy
- **Deregulation:** Abolition or reduction of government-imposed restrictions on the conduct of business’ decision making with the exception of intervention designed to promote exports, some kinds of education or infrastructural development.



Aileen Kwa

Aileen Kwa has been working with the Asian Ngo "Focus on the Global South" for the last eleven years and is currently doing consultancy work.

I got involved because I was interested in Development issues, in feminist and gender issues in particular. I think both in my studies of feminism and later working on trade issues I have leant towards helping people to find their voice. And now I am trying to alleviate the frustration and isolation of the trade negotiators for developing countries who cannot make their voices heard.

The biggest problem is the ideological battle against neo-liberalism, especially in rich countries. I mean, here you look around and you think at least that it works. It's such a challenge to convince people there's a whole bunch of other people out there for whom it doesn't work!

So it continues to be hard work to keep the protest going. I suppose it's always a very difficult job to raise consciousness and getting people interested in these issues that seem maybe so far away from them. And I think now the issue facing many organisations in the South is: What are the alternatives?

A central pillar of any alternative is to pull back domestic economies to serve society in developing countries. And even in developed countries!

There is a very interesting case in a small county in Iowa in the USA. Even though most of the inhabitants were involved in agriculture there was a very high level of poverty, with rates at between 10 and 20%. So in the last few years the mayor decided to reinvigorate that economy by implementing local purchasing policies. Now all government departments can only purchase locally produced food from within a 100 mile radius. They have projections that the policy is going to increase the county's income by something like \$280 million and it's going to create many new jobs. Developing countries should be moving in that type of direction – away from export oriented economies and towards local economies.

You can find out more about the concept of deglobalisation and localisation in a book from Walden Bello, Director of Focus on the global South and Aileens former colleague: "De-Globalization: Ideas for a New World Economy", Zed Books, September 2003. Or have a look on the website of Focus on the Global South: www.focusweb.org



Gonzalo

Gonzalo Salgado has been working for the past six years with the Consumers Defense Network in Nicaragua.

We have to reflect the role of life. Life is not forever. We live in a world with selfishness, war and other issues which we have to address. We have to ask ourselves the question: what are we going to bring to our next generations?

Undoubtedly there has been significant progress in the anti-globalisation struggle by civic society organizations. Without this progress the situation for us could be much worse. An example is the strength shown on a daily basis by the Latin America civil society. And in Nicaragua we consider it a big achievement that we managed to stop the privatisation of drinking water. This strength has been achieved with the support of campaigns and international associations. I firmly believe that it is through the civil society that we can achieve these changes in both North and South. Cooperation is vital to achieve the changes.

One of the most prominent social characteristics of the neo-liberal model is consumerism and the individualism. Subconsciously we strengthen these neo-liberal policies. We need to change our attitudes: less talk more action! We should focus more on young people and children as they have an important role to play.

We live in a world where material values are important but we have to make an effort to change the priority of our current values. We place too much importance on everything to do with material goods. We have to rethink that. This has to be done by us from the bottom, as representatives of the civil society. That is where the alternatives will come from.

The challenge for developed countries is making the World Bank disappear in its current form and creating a new institution which really fulfils the objective of fighting poverty by creating wealth. Citizens from the countries that support the World Bank financially have to pressurize their governments for change, so that the bank is finally able to tackle the poverty and to create wealth. I believe that it is important to continue the progress being made in Ireland especially in relation to raising awareness among the population.

On the other hand, our challenge in South America is to counteract our government's positions of accommodating the World Bank and donating countries impositions and to demonstrate that it is possible to develop our economy from our own potentials.



Magui
Photo: Fionuala Cregan

“The system has taken absolutely everything from people, except hope. And there is hope.”

Magui Balbuena from the National Coordinaton of Rural and Indigenous Women (CONAMURI), Paraguay

The socio-economic situation in our country is currently at its worst. The poor are finding themselves more and more excluded without access to health, education, water or electricity or any form of support from the state. As land is sold to multinational corporations, hundreds of thousands of small farmers are forced to migrate to the cities where they live in miserable conditions in shanty towns.

There are cases where whole historic communities have disappeared – in some, the small farmers were unable to compete with subsidised agricultural products from overseas and were forced to abandon their farms, in others communities have simply been evicted to make way for soya plantations for the production of bio-fuels.

Pursuing its neo-liberal agenda, the state has abandoned all forms of support for internal food production. Paraguay now imports almost all of its fruit, vegetables, grains, coffee etc despite the fact that we have an ideal climate for the production of a hugely diverse range of foods. Almost 2.5 million hectares of fertile land are now dedicated entirely to soya production which is destroying our biological and agricultural diversity, poisoning our water sources and soil and seriously undermining our food security. While the nation starves, 6.2 million tonnes of soya beans are exported each year from Paraguay by multinational companies for the production of bio-fuel in the North.

It is the companies who profit alongside a small sector of the governing Paraguayan elite. The poor get nothing and as prices of imported foods continue to rise, malnutrition and hunger are becoming the norm. This is particularly serious in the case of young children who are unable to grow and develop properly.

Government repression of social movements, including widespread killing and “disappearances” of activists meant that for decades people were too scared to organize themselves and resist this new form of imperialism. Their political conscience was paralysed by fear and became dormant. However, as the situation becomes more and more desperate, people are beginning to wake up and realise that the only way to survive is to organize and resist. They now have no fear as they no longer have anything to lose.

The system has taken absolutely everything from them, except hope. And there is hope. More and more organizations are forming despite continued Government repression. In CONAMURI we are doing a lot of education work with communities, training women to become leaders. Slowly we are moving towards occupying a political space and ending decades of repression and exclusion.



Roly Escobar
Photo: Fionuala Cregan

**Roly Escobar from the National
Coordination of Marginalised
Communities and Areas of Guatemala,
CONAPAMG**

Neo-liberalism has been a disaster for Latin America. From 1960 to 1980, before our Governments began to adopt neo-liberal policies, the per capita income growth for the region was 82 per cent. From 1980 to 2000, when the policies began, it fell to just 9 per cent, and from 2000 to 2005 it was 4 per cent.

Along with the intense increase in poverty that followed, there has been colossal environmental devastation as multi-national companies move in and, unregulated by the Government, burn down forests, poison water sources, evict communities from their land and hire private security guards who will kill any intruder. Our fundamental human rights are violated to protect the interests of North American corporations which are interested only in making themselves as rich as possible as quickly as possible.

Guatemala is now governed by multi-national corporations. The poor have always been excluded from politics here, but now even more so. As the multi-nationals move in, building motorways and canals to ship their products out of the country, thousands of families are being displaced and the government is happy to use violence to evict them.

Nothing stands in the way of this advance of global capitalism. In the cities, communities are

being evicted to make way for the construction of shopping malls. When the malls are built, you will see that all the shops are international chains, not Guatemalan businesses. And then the question is, who can actually afford to buy anything in those malls?

In the meantime, the evicted communities have to go about re-building their lives elsewhere, far away from schools or hospitals or other essential services. It is fine to say that cheaper food will enter into the market, but as things go we can't even afford to buy it. With arable land becoming more and more scarce, domestic food production is constantly in decline.

Neo-liberal policies were imposed on us. There was never any process of consultation despite the fact we are the ones who suffer the most. Now that we understand the polices better, we have more clarity of vision and as a result are beginning to join forces, nationally and internationally throughout Latin America to fight against neo-liberalism and for our right to life.

Interviews by Fionuala Cregan, Meabh Cryan, Sadhbh Goggins, Mirren Maialen and Nina Sachau

Another history of roads and raids

*Where once Chinese technicians and labourers were dispatched to Africa to demonstrate Third World solidarity, now they come seeking fuel for China's booming economy, writes **Stephen Rigney**.*



In 1983, the “Chinese road” came to Meskel, connecting this village in the northern Ethiopian highlands with the provincial capital Woldiya and the world beyond. Older people can remember the isolation they faced in the days before the road.

“When I was a child I have travelled on foot to Kaskes in Delanta,” recalls Ayichesh. “People carried food for themselves and for their animals and travelled for a week or a month through the forest and the desert in those days. Some even died on the road.”

For Hamza, the benefits of the road do not need much elaboration. “One used to travel for eight days on foot,” he says. “Now you can reach your destination in a day and a half by travelling on the Chinese-built road. So what is more useful than that?”

A quarter century later - 23 April 2007 to be exact - nine Chinese oil workers were gunned down alongside 65 Ethiopians in a raid by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) on an oil installation in the south-eastern province of Ogaden.

ONLF spokesman Abdirahman Mahdihehe justified the attack by accusing the Ethiopian army of forcing local nomads out of the area around the oilfield and depriving them of their grazing rights. “We have warned the Chinese government and the Ethiopian government that they don’t have a right to drill there,” he told the BBC. “Unfortunately nobody heeds our warning and we have to defend our territorial integrity. Nothing good will come of oil for the Ogaden.”

Ethiopia’s prime minister, Meles Zenawi, who has said in the past that the Chinese are not forcing anyone to be undemocratic, held a press conference to express his anger and avow his revenge. “This is an outrage,” he said. “I can assure you that those responsible for this act will pay in full for what they did.” Meanwhile, the Chinese employer of the slain oil workers, Sinopec, has suspended its operations but continues to press its claims and Ethiopia’s energy minister, Sinknesh Ejigu, promised Sinopec that “full security would be undertaken.”

These two events in Ethiopia, the road and the raid, are emblematic of the changing role of China throughout Africa. Where once Chinese technicians and labourers were dispatched to Africa to demonstrate Third World solidarity, now they seek fuel for China’s booming economy. And the same companies that once built high-profile infrastructure like the Tanzania-Zambia railway or the road through Meskel are coming back to Africa to make money.

Seldom does a Chinese politician visit an African capital these days without making generous offers for preferential contracts. Chinese banks are awash with funds to invest, thanks largely to our seemingly insatiable demand for

hundred companies which are growing strong enough to compete with the big European and American multinational players. And Africa, with its vast resources, urgent need for infrastructure and welcoming government elites, is a great practice ground for the Chinese.

The ONLF raid was one, albeit extreme, example of growing anger at the price ordinary Africans are having to pay for China’s so-called largesse. In Nigeria, where Sinopec has won access to offshore oil fields, a number of Chinese have been kidnapped. In Mozambique, environmentalist groups have blamed a deforestation crisis on abuse by Chinese investors of timber concessions.

And in Zambia, where during the 1970s Chinese workers built the Tanzania-

“Seldom does a Chinese politician visit an African capital these days without making generous offers for preferential contracts.”

Chinese-made goods. Last year, for example, the EU imported some €130 billion more goods from China than it exported. In Ireland alone, imports from China grew nearly ten-fold between 2000 and 2005, from €260 million to €2.5 billion. To make these goods, Chinese manufacturers need raw materials - metals, timber and, above all, oil.

The Chinese government paves the way for resource companies like Sinopec by offering cheap loans for some seriously big infrastructure projects. Ethiopia, for example, has been offered €1.1 billion to rebuild its telecommunications infrastructure, while both Nigeria and the Congo have been offered €3.6 billion deals for rehabilitating roads, railways and telecommunications infrastructure.

The loans are by no means simple displays of altruism by Beijing because, as well as buying access to raw materials, the small print requires the infrastructure to be built by Chinese construction companies. This is China’s national team - around a

Zambia railroad so that the country would not have to export its copper through apartheid South Africa, trade unions bitterly criticise the deterioration in working conditions in the copper mines since their take over by Chinese companies.

Back in Ogaden, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has reported a sharp increase in killings by both the Ethiopian army and the ONLF since the attack on the oil installation. As Sinopec makes its play in Ethiopia for the Chinese team, the people of Ogaden seem to be the ones paying the price for “full security.”

Comments on the “Chinese road” were taken from Panos’ Mountain Voices project, part of its ongoing recording of oral testimonies of marginalised communities.

The oral testimony project can be accessed at http://www.panos.org.uk/global/program_news.asp?ID=1004

Woman Power, North and South



A group of Irish women from Banulacht went to Tanzania last summer to meet and learn from their counterparts, writes Aoife Cooke

Huddling in the translation marquee of the thousands-strong gender festival in Tanzania, we were eight Irish women alongside the Tanzanian women and men gathered to debate and discuss African feminist struggles in the context of globalisation.

Each speech of the conference was interspersed with Tanzanian-style energiser activities. The music was pumped up and slowly, hundreds of swinging hips and tapping feet joined together in a circle dance in the large communal space in the centre of the conference area.

In the workshop I attended on building feminist movements, all could relate to the difficulty of speaking out against oppression. An elderly woman from a rural community spoke in quiet tones to the group.

“My mother told me that to talk in front of man is to be naked, and against god,” she said. “And so I stayed quiet my whole life. This is the first time I have ever talked in such a group.” The cheers and hugs in response were, I hope, the encouragement she needed to speak again.

There was, at first, disbelief that Irish women could experience any sort of disadvantage. The experiences we had of community work in Ireland helped us all to realise that gender-based problems are unfortunately relevant

both north and south of the equator.

With no control over the family budget, many women are forced to feed the men first, and then they and their children eat the leftovers – if there are any. Economic empowerment projects were therefore the most fundamental issue tackled by most of the women’s groups we met.

Husbands are educated to be allies in these projects, and to allow the earnings remain in the hands of the women. As well as raising extra money for the family, financial empowerment also tackles prejudice and creates acceptance of women as earners.

One energetic and inspiring woman we met showed us her small chicken farm at the side of her house. We investigated the mechanics of the new steam incubator she had purchased with her loan from the Mwanza Women’s Development. Realising the profits to be made in breeding chickens as well as selling them as food, she has a furry squawking flock made up of chickens of different ages and very different futures.

My work in Dublin centres on integration and anti-racism, so I was impressed by how the women’s groups we met united different religions and ethnicities. During lunch with the Kisawere Women’s Network we sat with women with Catholic crosses who blessed themselves before the meal and women

in headscarves fasting for Ramadan who sat but did not eat with us.

I was excited and enthused by such joyous women, and uplifted by their harmonious singing as we walked through the village, again on the bus to their centre, and finally as a goodbye. We, though slightly less spirited and possibly out of tune, sang about Grainne Mhaol, the 16th Century female queen and pirate from the west of Ireland. A resounding cheer of laughter accompanied the ballad where the dynamic pirate-queen demands return of her dowry from her wayward husband.

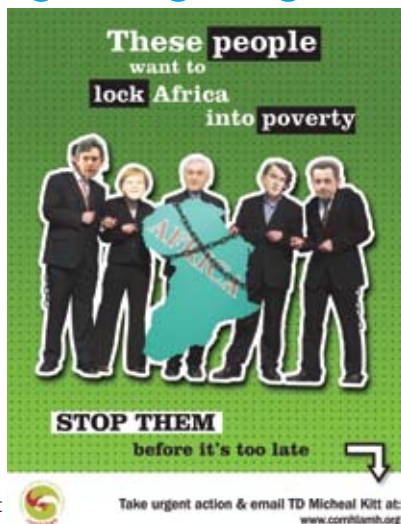
In June 2008, four Tanzanian women will make the return visit to Ireland, working with Irish women’s community development groups and attending the Banulacht Human Rights conference.

*For more information visit the following websites:
www.banulacht.ie, www.tgnp.org,
connect.southdublin.ie/tia*

Have also a look at Comhlámh’s Code of Good Practise for Volunteer Sending Organisations on www.volunteeringoptions.org and at a paper on ‘Linking and Immersion: Developing Good Practise’ on www.ideaonline.ie.

Stop EPAS Campaign is going on

On November 14th 2007, representatives from Comhlámh, Trocaire, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Oxfam met the Irish Minister for Overseas Development, Michael Kitt TD, in order to urge him to take seriously our concerns about unfair trade rules. The EU is putting enormous pressure on former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific to sign so-called Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). As the rules stand, they will undermine the fight against poverty and favour European businesses and investors. The Comhlámh Trade Justice Group is campaigning for global trade rules that are just and sustainable. Support the Campaign - SEND AN EMAIL TO MINISTER KITT about your concerns from the Comhlámh Website.



Unprecedented cross-party support for Stop Climate Chaos Call to Action

On November 13th over 90 TDs and Senators from across the political spectrum met their local constituents and Stop Climate Chaos supporters to discuss climate change and measures that must be taken to address it.

Constituents from across Ireland urged their local TDs to support and

implement the Stop Climate Chaos Call to Action. A commitment was also made by TDs to support developing countries to cope with the impacts of climate change that we have already caused. *Comhlámh is part of the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition. Find out more: www.stopclimatechaos.ie*

World Bank in Dublin: Paying for Poverty

A World Bank meeting held in Dublin in November brought together the richest members of the World Bank to decide how much money to give to the International Development Association, the arm of the World Bank that lends to the poorest countries over the next three years. At the same time activists dressed up as Finance Minister Cowen to send the message: "Brian, bin the bank! Ireland should not be supporting the World Bank while it continues to impose harmful



policies on developing countries." On October 13th the issue was discussed on a conference organised by Comhlámh, Debt and Development Coalition and the Africa Centre. The speakers from North and South talked about possible ways and challenges to reclaim power against the institutions WTO, IMF and World Bank. Among many others speakers were Aileen Kwa (Focus on the Global South) and Gonzalo Salgado (Consumer Defense Network Nicaragua).

Halloween

Friends, Strangers and creatures of the night all mingled together at the Comhlámh Halloween Ball! The beautiful 300 year old Tailors Hall provided a suitably sinister setting for an eclectic night of music and performance from Si Schroder, Unseen Guest, Bryan Quinn and Que Pezon and others while the giddy sounds of the Gramophone Disco made for wild dancing and much tentacle waving in the dungeons beneath.

A magically illuminated courtyard, spooky projections and the work of many volunteers all contributed to a very special atmosphere. However, the true stars of the night, which raised much needed funds for Comhlámh's Anti-Racism Project, were undoubtedly the guests!

Flaunting feathers and fins, dripping glitter and gore, fiendish, friendly and in fancy dress - it was they who made the night truly fabulous.



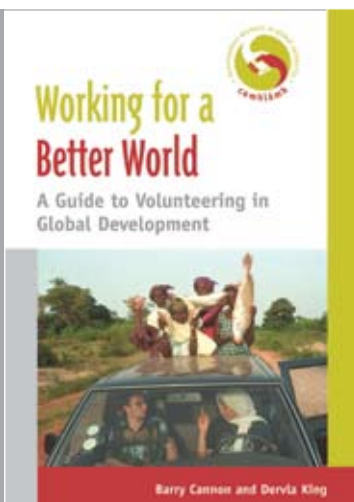
Farewell to Thomas

Comhlámh says farewell to Thomas Geoghegan, who's heading off to fresh pastures at TASC. Thomas started off as an intern in Comhlámh in 2004 and very quickly became indispensable, thanks to his research and design skills and his ability to think way way outside the box. The editorial collective at Focus Action will especially miss him because he has been one of the chief gurus for the magazine's design and content over the past few years. Though we'll miss him, we wish him the best in his new role.

Interested in volunteering in a developing country?



Working for a Better World: a Guide to Volunteering in Overseas Development



Available in shops now!

You can also order copies
from the Volunteering Options
website

www.volunteeringoptions.org