

Comhlámh Annual Report 2009

Connects Informs Educates Campaigns



Comhlámh – an introduction

Comhlámh is a dynamic, independent membership organisation working together with development workers, volunteers and activists. We are committed to advocating for a just and equitable world, setting standards and promoting good practice.

Ours is the belief that people acting in solidarity can change the structures of global injustice and poverty. Through awareness raising, research, education and training we empower individuals to take effective action to address global inequality.

As the Irish Association of Development Workers, we protect the interests of people working in development and for human rights. Our work is informed by their experiences.

Comhlámh's mission is to challenge our society on the root causes of global poverty and inequality and empower people to demand equity in global relations.

Comhlámh's vision is of a just, equitable and sustainable world.

Comhlámh commits to a range of values that impact on those that we work with. We believe in partnership and solidarity with the Global South; in justice, equality and empowerment. We advocate for active citizenship and critical engagement, challenging perspectives in a spirit of partnership that respects and promotes diversity and interculturalism. Underlying principles in achieving these are to invest in people, to be accountable and to promote sustainable development and respect for human rights.

As an organisation, Comhlámh's role is to be a critical voice on development and global justice by articulating the case for global equality through challenging public understanding on the root causes of poverty and inequality. Ultimately Comhlámh strives to build the will to change the structures that cause global injustice.

Letter from the Chairperson

For the development community, for the global economy and, most importantly, for the poor and vulnerable both in Ireland and in the Global South, 2009 has been a far from easy year. The meaning of Naomi Klein's phrase, "shock doctrine", struck home when the most severe budget in a generation was inflicted on a shocked and demoralised Irish public in the name of fiscal rectitude. The development community, including Comhlámh, was hit hard by a reduction of almost 20% to Ireland's Official Development Assistance budget. The unfolding financial crisis had an especially severe impact on the Global South, with sharp reductions in donor assistance, export volumes and remittance payments eroding development budgets and undermining the already precarious coping mechanisms of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.

Throughout this difficult period, however, Comhlámh's vision of a just and equitable world remained clear. We continued to open people's eyes to the ways in which unjust financial and trade structures make the poorest pay more than their share - and poked fun at the orthodoxies which seek to defend these structures. At a time of increased interest in international volunteering, our Code of Good Practice for Sending Organisations and Volunteer Charter, are making an enormous contribution to ensuring that the volunteering experience is responsible, responsive and positive for volunteers and host communities alike. Our support for returned development workers became even more valuable last year, when the uncertain jobs market only exacerbated the stress and disorientation of coming back from overseas.

Our call for global justice and equity continues to be carried not only through the enormous dedication shown by the Director and the rest of the staff of Comhlámh but also by our committed members and supporters. As Chair, I am deeply honoured to have worked with such great people over the past year and, as someone who passionately believes in Comhlámh's vision, I thank all of you for inspiring me to believe that it still can be achieved.

Stephen Rigney
Chairperson

Letter from the Director

Having relocated back to Dublin in 2008, I felt quite settled and happy to be back here. I had not anticipated all the challenges that 2009 was going to bring to Comhlámh and the sector as a whole; one of the eternal issues we were faced with was the uncertainty of our funding, interlinked with the overarching threats and eventual cuts in Official Development Assistance. This has had a huge impact not only on Comhlámh, and on all organizations in the sector, but more importantly on the delivery of projects and support to those who most need it in the Global South.

Against this backdrop, Comhlámh tightened its belt and still managed to deliver on its mission in 2009. One position in the organisation was made redundant and another position reduced from full to part time. The team were innovative in their ability to deliver on activity plans in challenging times across all the projects; Volunteering Options continued to provide valuable information and support to Volunteer sending agencies; Membership and Support Services provided returned development workers and volunteers with support in reintegrating into Ireland and the Protection of Interest of Development Workers project ensured that advice, information and entitlements for development workers were provided and maintained. The Operations Team provided excellent on-going support to all staff in their areas of work.

Despite it being a tough year, I have enjoyed it. I am an optimist and do hope that we will have more radiant and flush years into the future! I do want to express my thanks to the team for their dedication to the organization and their ability to respond to the challenges put in their paths during 2009. Another very large vote of thanks to the Board, who were called upon more than usual over the last year to provide support in dealing with many of the challenges that we encountered in the last year. I would also pay tribute to the wonderful support I received from our Chairperson, Stephen Rigney, who is remaining on the Board but stepping down as Chair. Finally, to you, the members, those who have been active in the Working Groups, supporting the work we do and making Comhlámh the organization that it is.

Deirdre Murray
Director

Acknowledgements

Cómhlaímh would like to acknowledge the following funders for supporting our work in 2009;

- Irish Aid
- Trócaire
- VSO Ireland
- Christian Aid
- Community Foundation Ireland
- Leonardo
- Salesforce

Development Education Programme

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION TEAM

Comhlámh's Development Education team is committed to development education, raising awareness around development and global justice issues, drawing on the experience, knowledge and commitment of development workers, volunteers and activists. We believe that their energy and enthusiasm should be channelled into public engagement to promote and advocate for a more just and equitable world.

To achieve these aims during 2009, the Development Education Programme worked "to create linkages and pathways for critical and informed engagement in effective active global citizenship, on local and global development" in the following ways.

Supporting development workers, volunteers and activists to advocate for a more equitable world

CONTINUOUS ENGAGEMENT TRAINING

During the year the Development Education Team worked closely with other teams in Comhlámh and other organisations to ensure that development workers and volunteers were provided with information about ways they could remain engaged and active on global development issues while in Ireland. We held workshops on continuous engagement at *Pre-decision Courses* for Comhlámh and EIL, at *Coming Home Weekends* in April and November, and we trained facilitators to deliver workshops on continuous engagement. The session received positive feedback from participants at both weekends and the facilitators who noted "I had not realised what services were out there or even thought of meeting up with other volunteers" and that the session "provoked more of an interest in me for development and made me realise I want to stay involved".

WHAT NEXT COURSE

Those interested in getting involved in this area were then supported with training on a range of skills, including campaigning and media, during workshops and our *What Next* course. Developed in consultation with members and influenced by the findings of research on continuous engagement carried out by Comhlámh during 2008/9, this course was piloted in March 2010 with 12 participants. Participants responded positively to the course commenting that they had gained "higher awareness of what is going on in development", "increased confidence in speaking about issues in development" and had a greater awareness of "organisations to contact regard activism and volunteering".

During 2009 we also delivered workshops on topics such as Trade Justice, Climate Change, Ethical Volunteering,

Campaign Skills and Overseas Development Assistance for organisations including VMM, Suas, Viatores Christi, LASC, and the Waterford One World Centre.

FIRST WEDNESDAY DEBATES SERIES

During 2009 we held eight debates in Bewleys Café Theatre in Dublin to an audience of 30 – 50 people. Experts argued motions including 'Can Ireland still afford ODA?' 'Is the European Union a positive actor for world development?' and 'Fair Trade - solving problems or salving consciences?' Those present then had the opportunity to ask questions and debate these issues.

CAMPAIGNS, ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS RAISING

We remained involved in significant advocacy and lobbying work around important trade policy issues by engaging with policy makers and politicians throughout the year at key moments via face to face meetings and correspondence. We also provided and inputted into numerous policy resources at national and European Union (EU) level, such as the EU-network Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) Briefing Paper and Critical Issues Paper for new MEPs in September 2009 and various national level policy initiatives.

During the year Comhlámh provided its members and supporters with a variety of opportunities to join us in advocating for justice and campaigning. We provided information about the role of the EU and how to influence it. We included information, analysis and lobby role-play activities in many of our internal and external trainings to build participants' capacity to engage as active EU citizens.

We produced press releases and commentary over the year at key moments, such as the European elections in June and the World Trade Organisation talks in November 2009. We took part in a televised discussion on DCTV with other development organisations on an analysis of the G20 talks in May 2009 and spoke on Near FM about the impacts of EPAs on developing countries in September 2009.

TRADE JUSTICE

We continued to be the organisation in Ireland which is most actively campaigning and advocating on trade justice issues in 2009. In particular, we asked our members and supporters to actively engage in the democratic process by raising the issue of trade justice for developing countries with their MEPs, both in advance of EU elections in the summer of 2009 and before the hearings of new commissioners in January 2010. Many of our members took this opportunity to raise concerns regarding EU trade policy with the candidates. The campaign was a great success with 6 of the 12 elected MEPs signing up to our pledge on trade justice. Feedback from those who engaged with their MEPs was very positive, with people indicating they felt more empowered and engaged in the political process, and able to use their overseas experience positively. One campaigner wrote "I truly feel more empowered with regards to "Politics" which hereto was a bit of a scary arena for me!" while another wrote that involvement in the campaign "made me feel more involved in the democratic process".





Cover of MEP Lobby Pack

IRISH AID BUDGET CUTS

The government's decision to once again cut the overseas aid budget by 95 Million Euro in April spurred us and our supporters to express our shock and outrage to the Ministers of Finance and Foreign Affairs, our public representatives, and the media. We asked our members to provide examples of the vital work they have been involved in to strengthen our advocacy in support of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. We will continue to campaign on this issue to prevent further disproportionate cuts and to encourage our government to keep their promise to spend 0.7% of our national income by 2012.

FINANCIAL FOOL'S DAY

On 1 April, Bloom and other campaigners collected a large number of complaint forms from passers-by outside the Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Bank, highlighting public concern regarding the banks and the global financial crisis – comments on the forms included “please do not let the world's poorest people pay for the mistakes of bankers and politicians!” and “please build a moral and just economic system that serves the true good of people, in Ireland and developing countries”. After engaging with the public outside we took our message inside to voice our concerns to individual bank managers. We also presented a letter calling for an audit to ensure that their banks were not implicated in facilitating tax dodging. Customers inside the banks voiced a wide range of concerns on issues ranging from global tax justice, the need for democratic control of financial institutions, the lobbying of banks at EU level looking to enter developing country markets and salary caps for top management.



The message hits the road ! Financial Fool's Day

CLIMATE COUNTDOWN

During 2009 climate activists focused on encouraging our government to lobby for a strong, fair global deal on climate change at the Copenhagen summit in December in 2009. In June Comhlámh encouraged members to join an event on Sandymount Beach organized by Stop Climate Chaos Coalition to demonstrate that time is running out to agree a new global treaty on climate change. In the week before the December UN summit Comhlámh members dressed in blue and joined other activists for “The Wave”, a fun march from Custom House Key Dublin to the Department of a Taoiseach in Merrion Square.



Hands-on “Wave” activist

STOP THE EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS (EPAs) DAY 2009

On September 25th we urged our members to join more than 80 organisations in 30 countries in Europe, Africa and the Pacific to participate in Stop EPA Day. A fax action took place, reminding our national negotiators that EPAs are supposed to promote development and not result in economic hardship for the countries involved. We also spoke on Near FM about the impacts of EPAs on developing countries, and campaigned and lobbied throughout the year on this issue. Members' actions over the years have encouraged our government to adopt a progressive stance on EPAs.



Location of EU EPA negotiations

U2 CAN BELIEVE IN TAX JUSTICE

In February 2009, Irish Global Justice campaigners highlighted the millions of euro denied to impoverished governments through tax avoidance and evasion by multinational companies shifting their profits abroad to avoid any tax liabilities. In 2006, U2 moved one of its companies from Ireland to the Netherlands to minimize their tax bill. This is depriving the Irish government of badly needed revenue, which could be used to fund social services and development aid to needy countries. To coincide with the launch of the new album the rock band U2 were challenged to put their money where their mouth is and support global justice.

Providing pathways for volunteers and development workers to be continuously engaged with global justice issues

We highlighted information about the work Comhlámh carries out to enable people to be engaged and active on development and global justice issues using our *Courses, Events, and Activities* leaflet, and by organising stands and sessions at conferences and at events such as information days at teacher training colleges.

GLOBAL TRADE JUSTICE COURSE

During 2009 we held this five evening course twice, in the spring and the autumn. The course was run by Comhlámh staff in co-operation with the Trade Justice Group and aimed at informing participants about key issues, perspectives and debates around trade and the developing world.

Participants commented that it provided “a brilliant overview” and that they felt “satisfaction in the knowledge that I have learned a lot about trade justice”. They intended to use the training “to try to get more involved” and to “keep questioning, promote trade justice awareness” and to “continue to educate myself and inform family and friends”.

VOLUNTEER GROUPS

In general our volunteer groups provide a way for our supporters to deepen their understanding of development issues, get active and involved, meet like-minded people, to develop skills and gain confidence to take action for global justice.

TRADE JUSTICE GROUP

The Trade Justice Group is a space for people interested in global trade justice to learn more and get involved in raising awareness about this vital development issue. During 2009 group members attended training, assisted in the co-ordination and delivery of two Trade Justice courses co-facilitated external sessions on trade justice, and engaged in various policy, campaigns and advocacy activities (including writing to and engaging with appropriate Ministers and MEPs, and inputting into the EU consultation regarding the EU2020 strategy).

FOCUS MAGAZINE GROUP

This group is made up of a variety of activists, volunteers and development workers. During the year the group planned, produced and disseminated two issues of *Focus: Action for Global Justice Magazine*. Focus continues to be Ireland's leading magazine covering development issues, and its content is informed by the interests and overseas experiences of those who are active in the group. Volunteers in the group have the opportunity to hone their analysis and understanding of global justice issues, while working on the whole production cycle of the magazine, from

initial conceptualisation, through writing and research, to proof-reading and distribution. In late 2009 we recruited a volunteer to act as lead coordinator of the editorial committee.

Enhancing capacity and information provision for development education

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION RESOURCES

The *INDEX Contacts* list provides activists and educators with information on the variety of organisations actively engaged in global justice work in Ireland and their area of expertise. During 2009 we updated the popular *Images of the Global South*, guidelines for primary educators for working with photographs from around the world. We also developed the *Diversity through the Arts Resource Pack* for primary school teachers which looked at ways to use the arts to explore diversity and intercultural issues with children.

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION TRAINING

We provided three development education training opportunities for NGO development educators, community group facilitators, teachers, youth workers and activists. During 2009 we carried out an external evaluation of all our development education courses. In addition, we surveyed participants 6 months after each course to identify how they had used the learning and impacts on learner's behaviour, values, and attitudes.

SKILLS IN DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

Held in spring 2009, this nine session course was again oversubscribed and provided 23 educators with an opportunity to develop their Development Education skills. Comments received from participants include:

"It was very interesting and thought provoking and engaged me in discussions with issues I wouldn't have openly talked about otherwise. I love the way it's an open space for people of similar mindsets to discuss global issues", "Exceeded expectations. Challenging, informative, and fun"

Participants found the course highly relevant and gained an increase in skills and knowledge, including different approaches to facilitation and ways to apply new knowledge to existing work.

GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

We continued to work with DCU on their Graduate Certificate in Development Education. In the spring we delivered a Development Education module to students, who welcomed the "great interaction", "global issues discussed in a practical way", and commented that methodologies were "very helpful in getting us think about possibilities". During 2009 we reviewed our involvement with this course based on DCU's decision to develop it into an optional module within their MA in Development Studies course, and in the future we will work through IDEA's Advisory Committee.

INTERCULTURAL TRAINING

We held this two day course in cooperation with Partners, Training for Transformation in June 2009 with 17 participants. It focused on how to effectively use the new resource, an Intercultural Companion to Training for Transformation. Participants appreciated the time and space to reflect, the participatory approach and methodologies, and gained a deeper understanding of culture. Comhlámh staff also benefited from this opportunity to critically reflect on their own intercultural training activities and enhance their skills.

Providing critical spaces through continued networking

FOCUS MAGAZINE

We produced two issues of Ireland's leading magazine on global development issues. Since 1978 *Focus* has been making links between the situation in Ireland and in the majority world with a view to challenging assumptions, and promoting understanding, interest in and action on development issues among a broad public. In particular, it provides alternative views to those expressed in mainstream media.

Focus is produced by a volunteer group open to all Comhlámh members and recently returned development workers. We distribute 4,000 copies of each issue across the country in pubs, bookshops, universities, classrooms, community groups and other interesting spaces and places. Topics this year included barriers to girls' education, ethical consumerism, the impact of the recession and ODA and remittances.



Volunteering Options Programme

Throughout 2009, the Volunteering Options Programme focused on three key areas:

- Promoting high quality volunteering opportunities;
- Informed, responsible and responsive volunteering;
- Highlighting host project and community perspectives on international volunteering.

HIGH QUALITY VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

In 2009, we focused on promoting and disseminating the *Code of Good Practice (CoP)* and *Volunteer Charter*, building relevant networks of support for sending organisations to enable them to implement the CoP, and developing the auditing strategies for the CoP.

In order to build public awareness of the CoP, a new supporter category to the CoP was launched in early 2009, with seven organisations signing up. We hope to further develop this category in 2010 to maximise synergies with these organisations and ensure that potential volunteers are aware of the issues to consider in selecting a sending organisation. The Volunteering Options Team also met individually with several new sending organisations and twenty existing signatories to brief them on the CoP and encourage them to fully engage – new signatory organisations in 2009 were A-Z Children’s Charity, Global Schoolroom, Habitat for Humanity NI, USIT and Progressio. At the end of 2009, the following organisations were listed as signatories and supporters:

SIGNATORIES

1. A-Z Children’s Charity
2. Camara
3. Chernobyl Children’s Project International
4. EIL Intercultural Learning
5. Friends of Londiani
6. Friends from Ireland
7. Global Schoolroom
8. Goal
9. Habitat for Humanity
10. Habitat for Humanity Northern Ireland
11. Health Action Overseas
12. Hope Foundation
13. International Service Ireland
14. Link Community Development
15. Medical Missionaries of Mary
16. Niall Mellon Township Trust
17. Progressio
18. SERVE
19. Skillshare
20. Slí Eile
21. SUAS

22. To Russia With Love
23. UCD Volunteers Overseas
24. USIT
25. Viatores Christi
26. Vincentian Lay Missionaries
27. Voluntary Service International
28. Voluntary Services Overseas
29. Volunteer Missionary Movement

SUPPORTERS

1. Concern
2. Dóchas
3. Trócaire
4. One World Centre Galway
5. Dtalk
6. Volunteering Ireland
7. Volunteer Centres Ireland

A key element of the CoP implementation strategy since 2007 has been the active facilitation of peer support among signatory organisations. This strategy has been utilised in recognition of the huge range of experience that already exists within the sector, and the benefits that can be obtained by organisations sharing ideas, examples of policies and practices and tackling issues of common concern together. In 2009, the VO Team held two peer support meetings and a regional meeting in Cork to facilitate this sharing and learning amongst organisations, with strong attendance at each. Topics discussed included updates to the CoP signatory process, guidance on completing a self-audit, the Safeguard Programme and revisions to the CoP Child Protection indicators, among other issues. In addition, two capacity building workshops were held as part of the peer support meetings focusing on ‘Impact Assessment’ and ‘Developing a Child Protection Policy’. Positive evaluation feedback was obtained at each meeting including one comment by a signatory representative: *“Every time I attend a Comhlámh meeting I go away with new ideas and energy”*.

In order to strengthen the auditing process linked to the CoP, each signatory organisation was required to submit a completed self-audit of their CoP implementation in 2009. In addition, six signatory organisations participated in external audits between September and November. These audits identified both strengths and weaknesses in programme approaches using the CoP audit tool principles and indicators, as the basis for analysis. Recommendations regarding relevant capacity building supports were also outlined by the auditor to improve the implementation and mainstreaming of the CoP in each organisation. The reports were reviewed by Comhlámh and an independent panel, in order to assess whether small capacity building grants should be awarded based on the audit report recommendations and proposals submitted by organisations. All of the proposals were approved following some clarifications and funds disbursed in January 2010 to begin tackling the issues raised.

The Volunteering Options Working Group remained in place during 2009, to support the development of the CoP. The group primarily focused on revising the child protection indicators, with the relevant updates being presented to all signatories at the November peer support meeting. These updates will be enacted in 2010.

Informed, Responsible, Responsive Volunteering

INFORMATION PROVISION

As part of our 2009/10 media strategy we continued to raise the profile of the Volunteering Options Programme through a number of regular press releases. This resulted in articles promoting the programme and volunteering good practice appearing in three Irish national media outlets. In addition, the VO Programme also received some valuable airtime on a number of national and local radio stations.

Regular information and advice was provided to members of the public about overseas volunteering. In March, the Volunteering Options Training and Information Project Officer started monthly advisory sessions in the Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre on O'Connell Street, Dublin. This service proved to be very popular and highly successful. Our Volunteering Options Team also participated in a large number of events aimed at raising awareness in relation to overseas volunteering.

The Volunteering Options website has continued to provide a forum for volunteer sending organisations to advertise their future opportunities via the organisation's database and a new "latest news feed" to the home page. In addition, organisations that have signed up to the CoP can access information on the CoP as well as share sample policies and ideas via the restricted member's area. The website received 37,610 visits in 2009. Interestingly 77% of all these visits were new visitors.



Sinana Shifte, a Konso tribeswoman farming the land in Ethiopia.

During 2009, we dispatched over three thousand copies of the Volunteer Charter (VC) to sending organisations. In addition, over 600 copies were distributed to potential volunteers during pre-decision courses and information

events.

TRAINING

In 2009, Comhlámh provided training courses and workshops for volunteers and sending organisations, at each stage of the volunteer cycle.

A series of pre-decision making courses (*Options and Issues in Global Development*) were run during the year to help individuals considering volunteering abroad to make an informed decision. Three one-day courses were held in Limerick, Galway and Carrick on Shannon and two weekend courses were provided in the Irish Aid Volunteer Centre on O'Connell Street, Dublin. In addition, seven sessions on *Ethical Volunteering* were also developed and provided for Suas as part of their public Global Issues Programme in March and November. In total 189 people participated in these workshops. One participant commented that the programme "gave a good insight into what to expect as a volunteer and also opened up things to consider before going abroad, for example, the effect it will have on the host community".

Throughout 2009, Comhlámh continued to meet the demand for relevant pre-departure training for volunteers undertaking short-term voluntary placements i.e. up to three months. We offered a wide range of tailored pre-departure training programmes to various organisations and groups upon request, on themes such as the *Volunteers Role in Development, Exploring Motivations and Expectations for a placement, the Use of Images in Development, Intercultural Learning and Health & Safety*. A participant commented that "I enjoyed the participatory activities and thought it was great preparation for overseas voluntary work". Two of these courses were jointly organised and delivered with Dtalk for Camara and UCDVO. A total of 340 volunteers undertook this training.



Pre-departure Training with UCDVO

To complete the volunteer cycle, post placement support was also provided for a number of organisations' volunteers. A one-day "Moving Forward" course was run in September for 49 of the UCD Volunteers Overseas. The aim of the course was to provide time and space for participants to reflect on their overseas volunteering experience and to consider ways in which they could engage with development issues on an ongoing basis now that they have returned home. We also

provided post placement support to Friends of Londiani, Haven and VLM via presentations and resources in relation to continuous engagement of their volunteers and debriefing.



Moving Forward Day UCDO

RESEARCH ON THE CONTINUOUS ENGAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

In 2009, research was conducted to identify the barriers to continuous engagement, experienced by returned volunteers and development workers. The report was widely circulated to volunteer sending organisations and other interested parties and is available for download from the Volunteering Options website. The findings will assist Comhlámh and other organisations in identifying relevant supports to channel volunteers more effectively in the post placement environment and to formulate relevant methods of support.

Host project and community perspectives

INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING

Throughout 2009, Comhlámh continued to promote internationally key aspects of the Volunteer Options Programme. In May, staff actively contributed to discussions regarding mainstreaming gender as part of good practice in volunteering and possible future research in this area during the United Nations Volunteer (UNV) Gender in Volunteering Conference in Bonn. The conference also presented us with an opportunity to promote and share information about the CoP and Volunteer Charter, and to disseminate relevant publications to the assembled delegates. In October staff attended the International Volunteer Cooperation Conference “Volunteers as Catalysts for Social Change” in Budapest. Here they presented an Irish perspective in discussions and workshops on shared learning and best practice. Staff also took part in the UNV Consultative Meeting in Germany in October, contributing to the “International Year of Volunteers+10 Global Plan of Action”. Links with other countries working on developing good practice standards were also continued, including participation in a steering group, set up to guide the development of a Code of Practice (CoP) and Volunteer Charter in the United Kingdom.

RESEARCH

In 2009, Comhlámh liaised with Volunteer Service Enquiry for Southern Africa (VOSESA) regarding research on the impact of volunteering on host projects and the volunteer in the SADC region. However, due to budget cutbacks the commencement of the research has been postponed until 2011. In the meantime, Volunteer Service Enquiry for Africa (VOSECA) is undertaking the relatively inexpensive volunteer impact element of the study.

Support Services to Volunteers and Development Workers

Supporting development workers and volunteers who have returned from work overseas and who in turn have sought to promote effective global development from home has been core to the work of Comhlámh since its inception in 1975. In 2009 we continued to play a lead role in the sector in terms of providing high quality support services to returned development workers and volunteers in line with good practice. The services offered in 2009 included *Coming Home Weekends*, individual and group personal debriefing, the counselling service, a careers advisory and information service, information and support on protecting social welfare rights while overseas and networking events. The support and information we provided has greatly assisted individuals returning to reflect more deeply on their overseas experiences and to overcome the challenges of resettling to life in Ireland. These supports also better equipped individuals to continue to work towards global justice and development issues from home. Additionally we continued to strengthen fruitful relationships with sending organisations and promoted and supported good practice in the sector.

REORIENTATION

We held 3 *Coming Home Weekends* in 2009 for returned volunteers and development workers from all over the country. The participants had engaged in a diverse range of assignments in various developing countries. The weekends provided a relaxed space in which participants reflected on and shared their overseas experience and gained tips and support from their peers on the coming home process. The residential weekends are a form of group debriefing and offer many benefits, such as reducing symptoms of ‘reverse culture shock’, isolation and stress. They also serve as an important entry point to the organisation as many participants go on to engage further in Comhlámh activities.

The Coming Home Weekends represent an invaluable opportunity to encourage and support the continuous engagement of development workers and volunteers in development issues. In 2009 we piloted a Development Education module towards the end of the November *Coming Home Weekend* to assist participants to reflect on how they can stay actively involved in development work from home. This session was highly successful and will continue to be included in future weekends.



Memorabilia at a Coming Home Weekend

When asked to describe how they feel at the end of the weekend in just one word participants have said they felt:

“Energised”, “enthused”, “focused”, “comforted”, “supported”, “encouraged”, “refreshed”, “relaxed”, “enlightened”, “relieved”, “motivated”, “optimistic”, “positive” and “empowered”.

We also ran two ‘training of trainer’ workshops in March and November 2009 to train and up-skill *Coming Home Weekend* facilitators, who are themselves returned development workers.

DEBRIEFING SERVICE

In 2009 we continued to develop our expertise and capacity in order to offer a high quality, professional debriefing service to returned development workers and volunteers. We conducted 11 individual personal debriefing sessions and one group session with 20 in attendance.

A personal debriefing session is a good opportunity to reflect on both the challenging and positive aspects of the overseas experience and the coming home process. They can help people to come to terms with difficult experiences and to move on with enhanced positivity and enthusiasm. Personal debriefings are distinguishable from ‘operational debriefings’ or ‘exit interviews’, which generally focus on the work done and are conducted by someone who was involved in managing or organising the overseas assignment.

It is good practice for individuals who have worked overseas to receive both an operational and personal debriefing on their return. The majority of development workers and volunteers are not offered a personal debriefing from their sending or host organisation. Comhlámh have the added value that we do not send volunteers overseas and are therefore seen as neutral and independent from sending agencies.

“I am better equipped at accepting that some things didn’t go so well and tend not to dwell on them as much at a personal level. The debriefing process is helping me to ‘move on’ from my overseas experience all the while incorporating it in my ‘new’ life back in Ireland.” - comment from a debriefing participant.

COUNSELLING SERVICE

The counselling service is useful for those who would like additional, professional support beyond the remit of debriefing or Comhlámh’s other support services. The period after the return home from an overseas assignment can be a fruitful time to engage in counselling. It provides an opportunity to work through some ‘old’ issues which may have come to the fore while overseas, or to talk out issues relating to the assignment, such as security problems, stress, trauma or illness.

In 2009 demand for our service increased. We received 49 requests for counselling information from returned development workers and volunteers and 29 of these availed of sessions. Comhlámh provides a financial subsidy towards the cost of up to 10 sessions for anyone who has been overseas for three months or more, with the majority of users accessing the full session complement.

“It is an excellent service and both needed and appreciated by those who use it” – comment from one of our approved counsellors.

“The sessions have helped me very much, in terms of my adjusting to life after my return home, and also to identifying certain deeper elements of life...I think it will help me be able to regain my confidence in my skills, develop them where I have been wanting to, and to return to the field refreshed and more confident” – comment from a returned development worker who availed of counselling.

CAREER SERVICE

In 2009, Comhlámh offered subsidised access to a quality, professional career guidance service for returned development workers and volunteers with a total of 26 people availing of career guidance sessions. This is a unique service in Ireland as the career guidance professional that we work with has extensive knowledge of the development and voluntary sectors and a great deal of experience of working with returned development workers. The sessions assisted individuals to articulate the transferable skills that they gained while overseas, choosing appropriate further studies, improving CVs and job applications, and gaining clarity and focus in their personal career objectives.

Comments made in the evaluation of the service include:

“The most useful outcome is that I am now completing a course which I enjoy and is beneficial to me and to the community and voluntary sector...Thanks for the service and keep it for future development workers who need the guidance and support, otherwise the development sector may lose talented people back to the For Profit sector.”

In addition to the professional career guidance service we provided information and resources to returned development workers and volunteers on job hunting in the sector and continued to update the job’s noticeboard on our website. Our career service has been particularly useful for first-time job seekers in the development sector and those thinking of a career change into the sector.

SUPPORTING CONTINUOUS ENGAGEMENT WITH GLOBAL JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Cutting across all of the work of the support services team is the active promotion of continued engagement in working towards a just world upon return home. By supporting returned development workers and volunteers in the reintegration process we are assisting them to overcome some of the potential barriers to staying engaged and we are better equipping individuals to move forward with enhanced passion and commitment. We provide spaces for individuals to reflect on how they can channel their commitment and use their first hand experience of poverty and injustice now that they are home.

We make use of all available opportunities to ensure volunteers and development workers are encouraged to remain involved and are aware of the broad range of opportunities and pathways to continuous engagement available to them, whether over email when they first get in touch with us, on eLink, in our publications, on our website and through our services and events. In 2009, 72 returned development workers and volunteers availed of free membership (open to anyone overseas for 2 months or more). Each received regular copies of *Focus* and *Index* magazines in addition to the *Coming Home Book* and *What Next?* book, which provide a wealth of information on various ways to continue working on development issues from home. Our events and *Coming Home Weekends* also present an invaluable opportunity to meet like-minded people, to network and establish links with the sector in Ireland.

We worked closely with the Development Education Team to strengthen this aspect to our work and will continue to improve on this into 2010.

"It provoked more of an interest in me for development and made me realise I want to stay involved" – comment made by a Coming Home Weekend participant.



The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Cllr Emer Costello hosted the Christmas celebration in the Mansion House

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

Comhlámh, in association with Volunteer Centres Ireland, hosted a successful event for over 70 people in the Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre in Dublin to celebrate International Volunteer Day on 5th December. The purpose of

the event was to celebrate and honour the contribution made by volunteers towards creating better societies both at home and overseas, to increase awareness of this contribution and to inspire and motivate others to become involved. Justin Kilcullen of Trócaire gave an inspiring talk about volunteering for international development while Dr Yvonne Mc Kenna of Volunteer Centres Ireland engaged the audience with a highly topical speech about volunteering at the local level.



Dr Yvonne McKenna of Volunteer Centres Ireland

Comhlámh registered an increase in the number of critical incidents relating to volunteers and development workers in 2009 (the death of Robert Stringer, Camara volunteer in Tanzania, the death of Father Jeremiah Roche with the Kiltegan Fathers while working in Kenya, the kidnapping of Father Michael Sinnott in the Philippines, and the kidnapping of GOAL workers Hilda Kawuki and Sharon Commins in Sudan). A number of agencies came together in 2009 to look at common strategies and support mechanisms that could be developed to support organisations when a critical incident occurs.

Comhlámh organised a Service of Solidarity with the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin for the release of Sharon Commins and Hilda Kawuki in October 2009. Due to the delicacy of the situation, family, friends and other development workers felt a huge level of sympathy and support for Sharon and Hilda but had no means of expressing of it. The Service, led by Bishop Eamonn Walsh gave us an opportunity to stand together in support. With great joy, Hilda and Sharon were released a few days later.

Comhlámh was approached by Bill Jackson, one of the founders of Comhlámh and a long term Director of APSO, to organise an APSO reunion to coincide with Bill's 70th birthday. A lot of networking was carried out in order to try and track down former APSO colleagues; the "bush telegraph" worked though as a crowd of approx eighty gathered in April to reminisce and celebrate. It was a good opportunity for Comhlámh to rediscover some of its original members.

COMHLÁMH AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In 2009 Comhlámh established a presence on a number of social media platforms. New profiles were created on Twitter - a micro-blogging tool, Flickr – a multimedia tool that

enables photo sharing and LinkedIn – a network that targets career minded professionals. Comhlámh’s Facebook profile was transferred to a new page customized for non-profit organisations. Updates, which are posted on these networks on a daily basis, inform about Comhlámh work and promote Comhlámh’s events, courses and publications to the wider public. We also update our followers on general development issues and thus contribute to a greater understanding of Development.



APSO event April 2009, Joan Burton, Kevin Farrell, Bill Jackson

PROTECTION OF INTERESTS OF DEVELOPMENT WORKERS

The Protection of Interests of Development Workers (PIDW) Project within Comhlámh aims to ensure that development workers protect their social welfare and pension rights while overseas. Comhlámh administers the Volunteer Development Worker (PRSI) Scheme and the Public Service Pension Scheme for Volunteer Development Workers. We also provide information about all options that may be open to development workers including Voluntary Contributions and being retained on the Irish system under national legislation, and ensure that all sending agencies are aware of the options and inform their volunteers.

In May 2009 we held our annual information seminar *Social Insurance and Pensions for Development Workers*. The seminar brought together 15 sending agencies to update them on the operation of the Schemes and was an opportunity to share experience, discuss scenarios, and feed into the planning process with experts from the Special Collection Section of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Planning Section. Also in May, we held our annual *Money Doctor* seminar specifically tailored for development workers with John Lowe about financial planning which was practical, jargon free and interactive.

“A very useful seminar. It was like a wake up call. It hadn’t crossed my mind to look at my financial interests as a prospective development worker. Very valuable”.

In 2009, Comhlámh delivered 5 information sessions as part of Dtalk’s *Initial Preparation Course*, reaching an audience of 103 development workers. As well as providing information about protecting rights to social welfare, these sessions focused on how development workers can protect their own interests before, during and after assignment and are designed to be practical and participatory and share advice

that we ourselves have heard from returned development workers.

The PIDW Project is also responsible for validating eligibility of development workers for the Free Fees Initiative for Higher Education grants, Local Authority grants and allowances, maternity benefit, and validating service overseas and issuing supporting letters. We also monitor developments that might impact on development workers such as the Student Support Bill which was published in 2008.

“I wanted to write to thank you for all your advice and help in relation to my maternity benefit application. It came through...thanks so much, it made a real difference”.

Governance and Organisational Development

Comhlámh, as a member of Dóchas strives to achieve compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance. Comhlámh’s Board of Directors is made up of a number of ongoing and newly elected members. Training for the Board around governance responsibilities was carried out in January 2009 with all attending. This was particularly useful in developing ongoing M & E tools for the Board. Following the AGM in May a number of new members were elected; an induction programme was carried out at the first meeting with regard to the organisation, staff, policies and practices. A Governance Manual has been developed and will be available into the future. The Board has undertaken a Risk Management Assessment looking to ensure long term sustainability of the organisation and to prepare for compliance with the new Charity Act.

In 2009, Comhlámh, IDEA, Dóchas and Dtalk (CIDD) commenced working together to reinforce our commitment to building capacity in the Irish Development sector, in order to ensure that Ireland’s development cooperation efforts have the most effective long-term impact possible. Whilst each organisation has a distinct organisational structure, mission and target groups, we are united in efforts to strengthen Irish society’s engagement with development and the quality of Ireland’s overseas aid programme. This will be an important area of collaboration in 2010.

Comhlámh adheres to the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, and makes every attempt to proof all use of images against the Code.

Comhlámh Development Workers in Global Solidarity

(A company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital)

Detailed Income and Expenditure Account and Expenses Schedule for the year ended 31 December 2009

	2009		2008	
Income	€	€	€	€
Irish Aid – DEU		184,377		250,642
Irish Aid – CSU – Support to RDWs and Members' Engagement		219,470		289,822
NGO Funding		17,223		14,988
Irish Aid – CSU – Volunteering Options		210,562		247,233
Dormant Accounts		-		2,000
European Commission		-		11,250
Philanthropic Foundations & Trusts		-		3,167
Protection of Interest for RDWs (Including Contributions Payments)		136,665		198,757
<u>Total Domestically Generated Voluntary Income</u>				
AGM Income and Members' Weekend	625		645	
Courses Income	6,554		3,487	
Membership	9,551		16,452	
Donations	27,317		1,103	
Sale of Resources	4,785		1,582	
Administration Income	1,097		4,198	
Services	8,624		13,209	
Bank Interest Received	4,988		14,227	
	-----	63,541	-----	54,903
		-----		-----
		(831,838)		(1,072,771)
Expenditure				
RDWs Support	220,797		248,668	
Membership Engagement	40,312		63,503	
Volunteering Options	216,280		258,309	
Anti-Racism & Intercultural Education	-		3,238	
Development Education	222,990		280,638	
Campaigning & Research	16,192		23,022	
Protection of Interests of RDWs	130,392		179,161	
	-----	(846,963)	-----	(1,056,539)
Other Deductions				
Provision for dilapidation on previous offices at 10 Camden Street, Dublin 2				
	45,000		20,000	
	-----	(45,000)	-----	(20,000)
		-----		-----
(Deficit) For the year		(60,125)		(3,768)
		=====		===

