



Wales Overseas Agencies Group: Priorities for the Culture, Communications, Sport, Welsh language and International Relations Committee – August 2021

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Wales Overseas Agencies Group (WOAG) is an alliance of international development agencies in Wales that are committed to using their expertise and knowledge to support Wales in becoming a globally responsible nation. We strongly believe that there is much more Wales could deliver in terms of international development, and that supporting a society of active global citizens here in Wales has significant benefits for both Welsh communities and partners overseas.

2. What is the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your sector, and what further support is needed from the Welsh and UK Governments both to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and enable the post-pandemic recovery?

2.1 A combination of the COVID-19 pandemic (including extended periods on furlough) and the implication of UK Government cuts to the overseas aid budget, have had a significant impact on the capacity of the international NGO sector in Wales and the support we are able to offer our overseas partners.

2.2 Many charities operating with partners overseas have seen budget cuts of up to 60%, forcing some to consider closure and for others they have been unable to exit their programme responsibly, leaving partners in Africa suffering the consequences of programmes to alleviate poverty and pulling back from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

2.3 We congratulate Welsh Government, the Welsh NHS and their partners in Wales on their collaborative effort to build the infrastructure to deliver a world leading mass vaccination programme and the support provided to Namibia in terms of PPE provision. However, as global citizens, we know that in a global pandemic, we are not safe until everyone is safe and are desperately concerned that many low-income countries are suffering devastating impacts from COVID-19. Our partners in Uganda for example have told us that cases increased by 1,000% in June 2021 and that the vaccinations they have been supplied with are only enough to fully vaccinate approximately 1.3% of a population of 45 million. We are also

particularly concerned about the worrying impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous People and the need to ensure that they are specially included in economic and social recovery plans and policies.

3. What issues should the committee prioritise in planning our work programme for the immediate and longer term?

3.1 Despite over 5 years since the passing of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, WOAG members remain concerned about the lack of understanding around delivery of the globally responsible Wales goal. We are encouraged that global responsibility is a central theme within the Welsh Government's International Strategy but there remains a significant gap in policy coherence across Welsh Government and the wider public sector.

3.2 We would like the Committee to look at Welsh Government's approach to International Development, including:

- **Welsh Government's vision for Wales' International Development role, how this is being achieved and funded?**
- **How Wales' international development work contributes to the globally responsible Wales goal under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act?**
- **How does Wales' role in international development empower women and girls?**
- **How does Wales' role in international development to protect the rights of Indigenous People?**
- **What work is being undertaken to raise public awareness of Wales' contribution to international development?**
- **What is the relationship between Welsh Government and the Foreign Commonwealth and Department Office?**

4. How does Brexit and the new UK-EU relationship affect you or your organisation? What support have you received to respond to the changes? What further support, if any, is needed from Welsh and UK Governments?

4.1. WOAG members are concerned that a drive for inward investment to create jobs and prosperity here in Wales will ignore fundamental issues such as the human rights track record of inward investors and how we can push for ethical employment in global supply chains as well as those here in Wales. We have some way to go to build understanding of what global responsibility looks like. It is not just about tokenistic gestures but systematically ensuring that actions taken here in Wales do not harm the planet or people anywhere and have positive impacts where possible.

4.2. Wales must work with the UK Government to ensure that new trade agreements guarantee high environmental and human rights standards, accompanied by strict enforcement measures. For example, new trading arrangements could see an increase in forest risk commodities coming into Wales, such as beef, soy, palm oil, coffee and cacao, thereby driving deforestation even higher. These imports could also undermine local economies in Wales, such as cattle farming with the influx of cheaper imports.

4.3. Welsh Government has prioritised the Social Partnerships and Procurement Bill as part of the legislative programme for year one of the Senedd term. More needs to be done to better understand Wales' performance as a globally responsible nation and how this could be improved through the Procurement Bill. This could be undertaken in collaboration with the Economy, Trade & Rural Affairs Committee.

4.4. We would like the Committee to look at the global impact of Welsh Government supply chains, grants and investments including but not limited to:

- **ethical screening systems used**
- **human rights due diligence**
- **fair work**
- **overseas deforestation**
- **consumption emissions of greenhouse gases**