

News



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Charity Alone Will Never Change the World

Comhlámh (pronounced 'co-law-ve', Irish for 'solidarity') is a member and supporter organisation open to anyone interested in social justice, human rights and global development issues. Marking its 33rd year in 2008, it connects, informs, educates and campaigns on these matters.

Over the past three decades, Comhlámh members have pursued their objectives through:

- campaigning for global justice and human rights at home and worldwide.
- promoting understanding of global issues and the cultures of the South through courses, public meetings, the media.
- providing opportunities for returned development workers and volunteers to meet each other, to put their overseas experience in context and to consider issues in returning to Ireland and staying involved in development work.

Within these broad areas, Comhlámh's work varies from time to time depending on the priorities and interests of members.

Volunteering Options Programme

Comhlámh's Volunteering Options Programme was set up in 2004, with funding from Irish Aid, to promote responsible, responsive international volunteering. The programme aims to ensure that the interests of the host community and of the volunteer are at the heart of any volunteer-sending initiative, so that Ireland can have a first-class volunteering programme. Key elements of the programme are based on promoting:

- Informed decision-making among potential volunteers;
- Good practice by volunteer sending organisations;
- The understanding of the volunteer about their role within 'development'; and
- Supporting volunteers on their return to internalise their experience and to use the experience gained to positive effect at home.

As part of the programme several resources have been developed to support volunteers in making a decision about volun-



Comhlámh International Volunteer Day Seminar, 5th Dec 2007. From left to right: Nathaniel Ty, (Akap Bata, Philippines), Peter Isingoma (Link Community Development, Uganda), Paulomi Pal, (Development Action Society, India) Fr. Joseph Ssekyaewa, (Kiyinda Mityana Diocese, Uganda) Banasree Mitra (Development Action Society, India), Nadia Tagoe (Habitat for Humanity, Ghana).

teering overseas. These include:

- The recently revised publication Working for a Better World: A Guide to Volunteering in Global Development (2007), which contains comprehensive information on all aspects of arranging an overseas placement, as well as a directory of over 115 organisations offering placements;
- A website, www.volunteeringoptions.org, which includes a searchable database of these organisations; and
- A Code of Good Practice for Sending Organisations and a Volunteer Charter.

Comhlámh also offers a range of complementary courses for individuals and groups pre-decision, pre-departure and upon return from volunteering overseas.

Comhlámh was delighted to host a seminar for International Volunteer Day on 5th December 2008, where speakers from organisations in Uganda, the Philippines, India and Ghana were represented. Their inputs were invaluable in raising some of

the key issues that host communities face in receiving volunteers from Ireland. Interviews with the speakers will shortly be available to view on the Comhlámh website, so remember to take a look! For more information about the programme, and upcoming volunteer events please contact info@volunteeringoptions.org.

Services to Returned Development Workers and Volunteers

Established as the Irish Association of Development Workers in 1975, one of Comhlámh's primary aims since foundation has been the support of volunteers, development workers and missionaries upon their return to Ireland.

Free support, information, advice and guidance are available for anyone who has spent two months or more volunteering overseas. Comhlámh works to facilitate volunteers, development workers and missionaries in their return back to Ireland, in dealing with 'reverse culture shock' and also assists them in settling back in. Comhlámh's support services include social events, "Coming

Home Weekends", careers advice, counseling sessions and information on social insurance, pensions & health. Support is also provided to returnees in their continuous engagement in development work in Ireland.

Common thread

Underpinning all of Comhlámh's activities, be it campaigning or assisting overseas development workers, is Development Education, which is essentially about exploring development issues through participatory learning approaches with the aim of changing attitudes and promoting positive changes in society, locally and globally.

Comhlámh runs regular training courses for the public and development workers alike linked to our development education and campaigning work, including: Graduate Certificate for Training in Development Education (in partnership with DCU); Media Skills; Lobby Skills; Skills in Development Education; Trade Justice; Introduction to Development Education; and, an Introduction to the Irish Political

System. All of these are announced and updated on Comhlámh's website, www.comhlamh.org.

If you become a member of Comhlámh, you are welcome to take part in any of the campaign areas and Comhlámh working groups. It has active groups and initiatives made up of volunteers from the public in the areas of Trade Justice, Anti-Racism, Focus - Action for Global Justice magazine and Options and Issues in Development.

In addition, as a member you will receive all issues of its quarterly Focus Magazine (Ireland's premier magazine on development issues); Comhlámh's regular e-Link email newsletter (on membership activities and a range of upcoming events, courses, etc); the INDEX newsletter (networking among development education organisations); and, great discounts on Comhlámh courses and events (indeed, just the discounts on courses alone could cover the cost of your outlay for membership!!)

To learn more about Comhlámh and how to become a supporter and member, visit www.comhlamh.org.