

# European and External Affairs Committee

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## Views on the Wales for Africa program

### 1. What is the Wales for Africa Health Links Network?

The Network was formed in 2007, bringing together Health Links from across Wales. Currently, over 20 health links are represented. These Links are working with partner organizations in 13 countries across Africa, making a difference in the lives of thousands of people. Our principle objective is to maximise the impact of such links through networking and sharing of good practice.

Health links also provide benefits to Wales through the development of additional knowledge and skills for our own healthcare staff and opportunities to learn about new cultures and practices. In addition they are part of the evidence that Wales is becoming a country of global citizens that recognises the need for looking outside the country and offering assistance when it is most needed.

The Wales for Africa Health Links Group is made up of representatives from existing links, the Public Health Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government, the Tropical Health and Education Trust and members of several Welsh NGOs. It represents a unique response to addressing the Millennium Development Goals by harnessing the expertise and commitment that exists within the NHS in Wales to support delivery of healthcare to disadvantaged communities in Africa.

### 2. Are Welsh Health Links making a difference?

Wales has a thriving health links movement (more than 20% of Health Links in UK are based in Wales now). Links are driven by the energies of the volunteers in Wales and their partners in Africa. The number of Links has significantly increased over the last three years: we believe this has been due to the positive policy environment in Wales. They are encouraged by the moral support and small amount of financial support from the Welsh Assembly Government, and administrative support from Public Health Wales.

Wales leads particularly in supporting primary health care in rural communities in Africa which is vital in the developing world to support them to reach their MDGs, as 80% of the people live in rural areas (eg Gwent Ethiopia, PONT. Hay on Wye Timbaktu). Wales has also got the best examples in the UK of primary care sector involvement (eg PONT, Hay on Wye, Brecon Molo)

We have published an Annual Report last year<sup>1</sup>, launched by Edwina Hart AM, Minister for Health and Social Care. This gives a vivid picture of the activities of our partnerships in health. Many Links are involved in training front-line health care workers which cascades expertise to countries where there is a severe shortage of skilled health workers. A major focus for many Links has been targeting maternal and child mortality, which can be addressed with some simple interventions. We have no doubt that there are large numbers of mothers and babies who have been saved by the work that a Health Link Partnership has done but it is sometimes difficult to measure - training a community health worker in safe childbirth will affect many pregnant women that we may never be able to count.

### 3. Benefits to Wales

Several Links are based in Universities and hospitals, and have successfully engaged their staff in contributing to the Links. Several Health Links are embedded in Community Links, working with education, environmental and faith-based groups in Africa and in Wales. Professor Steve Tomlinson, Chairman of the Tropical Health and Education Trust (THET) and Provost of Cardiff University, says:

'... I strongly believe we have a duty to help the developing world. However, the benefits are not all one way - links also bring with them many benefits to Wales and the UK in terms of improved professional skills, personal development and understanding of different cultures. They increase self-confidence, self-reliance and a willingness to try fresh approaches to tackling challenges back in the UK. In addition they encourage people to develop leadership, team working skills and a willingness to take responsibility, especially working in an environment with extremely limited resources...I believe this is one of those areas where Wales leads the way and is possibly unique - we are a small, clever country where like-minded people are pulling together to make a difference'

### 4. Civil Society and University support

Many Health Links have a University as the Welsh partner. Swansea and Cardiff Universities have been very active, mainly through training, curriculum development and distance learning for key health care workers in Africa. In addition, several Welsh NGOs that receive support from the Wales For Africa Program have been invaluable for some health Links and for the work of the Network, such as Wales Africa Community Links, SMIDOS and THET. A lot of this is about sharing information and expertise.

### 5. NHS Health Board support

All seven Health Boards in Wales have senior managers and clinicians who are involved personally in a Health Link and several have been active in encouraging their organisations to support Health Links, through allowing staff time and through funding. Two Health Board Chairs are strong supporters, Win Griffiths, and David Francis. However, we have found that there is considerable variation in Human Resources policies with regard to supporting staff.

### 6. Welsh Assembly Government support

We understand that there are limits to the Wales for Africa International Sustainable Development Framework, because of the nature of devolution and the level of resources available for this area. However, we support the approach that the NAW has taken and believe that it is having an impact on our partners in Africa, but also bringing benefits to NHS workers, universities and communities in Wales.

## 1. Wales for Africa Program

Many Health Links have received support, both financial and advisory, from the Wales for Africa Program team. The Health Links Network, in addition, has benefited considerably from the Program's support. We believe that it has been effective in helping us to increase the number and strength of Health Links and in promoting good governance and good practice.

## 2. WAG NHS Department

From 2006, the NHS has provided an annual grant scheme of £50,000 through a bidding process. This has benefited many Links through small grants which often acted as a catalyst for moving activities forward. Most Links do not rely on these grants and all have other sources of income, notably local fund raising in their own communities.

Health Links were also encouraged by the Welsh Health Circular in 2006, NHS Wales Health Links with Sub-Saharan Africa and other Developing Health Systems<sup>2</sup>. This gave clear direction on how NHS bodies could support Health Links and other international development activity. The progress in Wales has been noted by the UK Government and influenced the Framework for NHS involvement in International Development<sup>3</sup>, published in March this year.

## 7. Key messages

1. We understand that foreign policy and international development are not devolved functions - however health policy is completely devolved. So, although we appreciate the Wales for Africa Program, we are also receiving support in kind and in funding from NHS sources and the sustainability of this is a major concern. We believe that there should be greater internal coherence across departments in WAG when developing the Wales for Africa Strategy, so that it has cross-government support.
2. This is a source of some tension within the UK system, in that as Health Links we find ourselves sometimes excluded from Health Links support, resources and activities in England without having an equivalent in Wales. There is a lack of mechanisms between governments and NHS organisations in England and counterparts in Wales. People in Wales cannot easily get to the table and into the conversation.
3. The funding from the NHS Department has been very welcome, but has not increased since it began in 2006, even though there are now many more Links. It can be an effective catalyst for leveraging funding from other sources, such as in-country through partners in Africa. The NHS and University staff involved in Links often add great value to their own organisations, and we feel this may be a good investment. In particular, they learn how to operate in resource-poor settings (which are skills we will need in the NHS in Wales). A small amount of money goes a very long way with a Health Link!

Further information: [www.walesforafricahealthlinks.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.walesforafricahealthlinks.wales.nhs.uk)

1. Wales for Africa Health Links Annual Report 2008 <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/page.cfm?orgid=834&pid=42088>
2. WHC (2006) 070 [http://www.wales.nhs.uk/documents/WHC\(2006\)070.pdf](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/documents/WHC(2006)070.pdf)
3. Published on the International Health Links Centre website: <http://www.ihlc.org.uk/news/framework.htm>