

Manifesto for ‘culture change’ in the international development sector



Recent press interest has once again revealed the failings of the leadership of international development organisations to address sexual exploitation and abuse issues that we, as workers, have been highlighting for many years. This has brought a renewed commitment to ‘culture change’.

Unite members believe that the funding streams for international development charities profoundly influence the organisational structures and determine the culture in the sector. There is increased competition for funding, short term funding streams and requirements on value for money. This has led to low pay and precarious work across the sector where risk is transferred from government donors to individual workers via organisations in both the private and the non-profit sector all across the globe. This situation has worsened and is getting worse. Donors and regulators need to step up to their responsibility for the workers, partners, volunteers and beneficiaries in their supply chain.

Unite members who work in the international development sector are calling for International development charities to be more inclusive and less hierarchical places to work, where the least powerful have the respect of others and are listened to. We believe that organisations that campaign on issues of inequality and intersectional feminism, should live up those values – at all levels of the organisation, governed by charity boards that have deep experience in the sector, and experience of what it might feel like to be a recipient of aid.

Unite members who work in the international development sector believe that our current leaders must listen and be fully accountable to its workforce and beneficiaries. We do not believe that business as normal is in the best interests of beneficiaries. There must be greater transparency and accountability in the sector. We want radical change.

We believe this ten point plan is essential to create a culture where unacceptable behaviour is not tolerated, where people can report abuse or whistle-blow, and people will be held accountable for their actions and decision.

This focuses on **inequality, power, labour rights** and **diversity**.

1. Funding levels and standards

Funding levels and the standards associated with aid need to be maintained and improved throughout and after Brexit. Unite wants to see a return to secure and long term grant funding and wants to see an end to short term project tendering models which ultimately reduce the amount of funds available for operational organisations to implement humanitarian programming. There should also be a unified definition of aid to prevent diversion of funding towards defence and trade objectives.

2. Short term/fixed contracts

The use of short term / fixed contracts for staff must urgently be reduced to address precarious work. Organisations also need to address how they fund the supplier base to ensure they are not encouraging precarious work in the UK or abroad. Employers in the sector should work with the unions to ensure staff posts provide secure, permanent jobs in the sector and that where temporary contracts are in place, that contract extensions are for a minimum of 6 months or become permanent jobs.

3. Safeguarding procedures

It is vital that staff feel confident that their organisations safeguarding procedure is fair and robust. That means that they must be involved and consulted when developing it. Crucial to this is the involvement of staff trade unions in developing safeguarding procedures, making sure that the correct training is in place and that staff feel confident in the policies and how they are being enforced. While complaints must be dealt with confidentially and provide recompense and justice to victims, whistle-blowers must also be protected from corporate bullying.

4. Protecting jobs and pay

Workers in international aid organisations find life hard to manage in a context of declining wages and rising cost of living. Organisations facing budget cuts must develop a strategy to protect jobs and pay for lowest paid workers.

5. Fair and transparent structures

International development workers deserve a fair and transparent pay progression structure where staff receive annual increments and have routes to progress to higher grades as other professions have.

6. Explicit pay ratios

International development organisations that are committed to fighting inequality should lead by example in having an explicit pay ratio e.g. 4:1. This would mean that no-one could earn more than 4 times the pay of the lowest paid staff member in the UK with similar bench marks in different country settings. Charities would be better run by people who have worked their way up through the organisation and who have knowledge and commitment to the issues we work on.

7. Gender pay gap

International development organisations need to work to close the gender pay gap across the sector with the aim of equal representation in senior management positions. We believe that there is a correlation between male dominated teams and macho cultures that facilitate work place harassment. Actions to improve our *diversity* and *gender equality* must be resourced and monitored by a dedicated trustee with indicators included in the strategic plan of the organisation. Progress against indicators must be reported to union representatives.

8. Extending union recognition

Union recognition must be extended to international organisations where there are dual governance structures and to all field offices and staff if they become members of the Union. International organisations need to recognise the labour rights of all workers in our field offices – and not have different standards or weakened international contracts. We recognise the complexities of employment rights for international aid workers. We demand the right to be consulted on changes to international staff terms and conditions including regular meetings with the leadership of our international umbrella organisation (e.g. Oxfam International, Save the Children International etc.)

9. Improving transparency and building trust

Regular meetings with the Union must directly include the Director / CEO or relevant member of senior management. We demand a separate regular meeting with the Chair of Trustees to ensure the Trustees are living up to their responsibility to hold the leadership to account, to improve transparency and build trust. Actions such as organisational reviews or investigations must include Union consultation.

10. Diverse and representative trustee boards

All trustee boards should include at least one elected staff representative. Trustee Boards should include minimum 30% members that have worked in the International Development Sector for more than 10 years so they understand the needs of our work and our sector. They should also include a diverse membership of stakeholders such as partner organisations, volunteers, beneficiary groups etc.