



VOLUNTARY ACTION HISTORY SEMINARS

VAHS seminar series at the Institute of Historical Research

SEMINAR ABSTRACT

27th October 2014

Don Harrison, University of Bristol

Learning from Britain's development NGOs: a case study of Oxfam's Education Department during the Development Decades 1960-1980

This paper will explore how the field of learning about the Third World changed in Britain during the second half of the twentieth century, particularly through the role played by development NGOs.

As terminologies shifted from 'colonial development' to 'third world aid', British NGOs like Christian Aid, the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (Oxfam) and the Save the Children Fund expanded their programmes. These included both the use of the press for fundraising advertisements and the employment of teachers to work with schools, training colleges and the production of learning materials.

Drawing primarily on the history of Oxfam's Education Department, this seminar offers an assessment of the education role played by British development NGOs in seeking to broaden the sometimes negative impressions created by fundraising appeals. The impact of pictures of African children staring at western cameras has been lasting – and to some extent explored by historians of the development NGO field. The effect of compensatory learning programmes has been less examined. The extent to which NGO educational initiatives were carried out in separation or through collaborative networks of common interest will also be featured.

The researcher has worked for both Oxfam and Save the Children and more recently completed a PhD at the University of London Institute of Education in this field. This seminar is part of on-going post-doctoral research, focused especially on the UN Development Decades of the 1960s and 1970s.