

Make Poverty History – 5 years on

Exactly five years ago, 225,000 people marched through Edinburgh, tens of thousands attended the Live Eight concert in London and millions wore white bands to demand a better and fairer world.

The charity said five years on, the campaign had brought about many positive changes, and despite recent setbacks, had made campaigners out of many thousands of people who continued to support international development agencies. It believes this groundswell of support has added momentum to positive change in developing countries.

Jenny Ricks, head of campaigns at ActionAid, said: “By backing the campaign’s call for more and better aid, drop the debt and trade justice, the public showed they understood that tackling poverty means confronting its underlying causes.”

ActionAid pointed out that the developing world had reaped the benefit of Make Poverty History and that many people’s lives had been improved.

Since the launch of the campaign debt has been cancelled in more than 20 poor countries, most of which are in Africa. The charity also believed that the quality of aid had risen, benefiting individual countries.

It said that in Sierra Leone, British aid had helped the anti-corruption agency increase its power and recover £660,000 of government money. In Rwanda, aid had supported the tax authority. A total investment of £20 million had enabled Rwanda to collect this same amount every four weeks. Consequently poverty is decreasing and almost all children in the country now go to primary school.

ActionAid said Make Poverty History’s emphasis on the

importance of aid was also an important contributory factor in getting more children into school globally and that there were now 33 million more children in the classroom than a decade ago. Even more striking, it said, was the 10-fold rise in the availability of anti-Aids drugs over the past five years.

Ms Ricks added: "Global poverty cannot be ended by a single event, politician or country. But that was never the point of Make Poverty History.

"It was about building understanding, creating a movement for change and underlining the importance of fixing systems.

"Real change comes from local people demanding their rights – from a women's group in a village standing up against domestic violence, to thousands of farmers demanding better support from their governments.

"Above all, making poverty history is about supporting developing countries to make their own choices in the best interests of their people. It is about helping, not hindering."

ActionAid aims to increase partnership between people in rich and poor countries, to end poverty and injustice. It works with local people to fight hunger and disease, seek justice and education for women, hold companies and governments accountable and cope with emergencies in over 40 countries. For more information go to www.actionaid.org.uk.