Politics, Humanitarianism & Children's Rights

Report of a conference on the occasion of Save the Children's centenary

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& Political Science

Save the Children[1] is one of the oldest humanitarian NGOs, and it has a uniquely rich archive. Its history demonstrates the complex interplay between humanitarianism, politics and children's rights. As part of the organisation's centenary commemorations, the Politics, Humanitarianism and Children's Rights Conference considered the elements that have shaped the organisation's past, its influence on and contribution to humanitarian action, and where the Save the Children movement might be heading in future.

As well as hearing stories from Save the Children alumni about their work responding to humanitarian crises in such places as Biafra in the 1960/70s, Ethiopia in the 1980s, Rwanda in the 1990s, and Iraq in the present century, the conference provided an opportunity for critical historical reflection, with many contributions from researchers who have studied Save the Children and the topic of humanitarianism more generally.

It provided a rare opportunity for alumni, fellow humanitarians, and academics to come together, not just to celebrate Save the Children's achievements but also to consider its shortcomings: from the colonial attitudes that the organisation demonstrated at times in the past, to allegations of sexual harassment and how they were dealt with between 2012 and 2015.

The conference facilitated a reappraisal of Save the Children's role in a globalised world, with changing priorities from donors, the emergence of other humanitarian players, new developments in technology, and its own growing ambitions as an organisation. How can Save the Children adapt to these new conditions, while remaining true to its values?

Introduction

Introducing the conference, Tim Allen, Director of the London School of Economics (LSE) Firoz Lalji Centre for Africa, spoke of the long connection that the university has had with Save the Children: 'with the archives for some of Save the Children UK's precursor organisations being housed here, and as a major centre for the study of humanitarianism, the LSE is an appropriate place for this centenary conference.'

For Kevin Watkins, Chief Executive of Save the Children UK, 'humanitarianism is about some of the best human values: about our common humanity. At a time in the UK when the dominant political narrative is bringing out the worst in us, a conference like this reminds us of what we share.'

Absent voices: signs of the times?

Despite the best efforts of the conference organisers, a number of speakers from countries in which Save the Children works could not participate, as they were unable to get visas. A reminder that other voices – especially those of people in countries affected by conflict and disaster – also need to be heard as the organisation celebrates its centenary.

1. References to 'Save the Children' throughout this report are usually to the UK organisation. Historically this was known as 'The Save the Children Fund' (SCF) and it still formally bears that name but now, as 'Save the Children UK,' it is one of 30 associated Save the Children organisations who act together as 'Save the Children International' (SCI). SCI is the successor body, through a number of subsequent iterations, to the original 'Save the Children International Union.'

NB. Some of the direct quotes in this report have been edited for clarity/accuracy.

Save the Children's foundation story

Emily Baughan, lecturer in history at the University of Sheffield, discussed the origins of Save the Children and the ideals of its founders. She challenged some of the organisation's institutional myths about its own beginnings, arguing that the organisation was not in fact founded by Eglantyne Jebb, as is commonly believed, but by Jebb's sister, Dorothy Buxton.

In 1919, after the First World War had ended, and before the Treaty of Versailles had been concluded, the British and other allied governments continued to blockade Germany. A group of feminist, socialist and pacifist women, led by Buxton, joined the Fight the Famine Council and campaigned against the blockade and its effects on children in Central Europe; some were arrested for their efforts. Recognising the need for emergency relief they launched a new organisation, which they called the Save the Children Fund (SCF).

When SCF went on to provide aid to children suffering in the Russian famine of 1921-22, it felt the need to downplay its left-wing political connections and place more emphasis on its role as an impartial humanitarian organisation. Buxton therefore stepped back from her public-facing role, and her sister Jebb – who did not have the same radical socialist connections – assumed the role of leader.

Subsequently SCF received the first ever government grant for providing international aid outside the British Empire, making it an accredited agent of the British government: a significant moment for an organisation founded to oppose British government policy.

Emily Baughan brought to light some other tensions in Save the Children's history, which also tend not to be discussed in official accounts. 'In the Thirties, SCF had to decide how to deal with emergent fascism. When in 1933 the German member of the Save the Children International Union came under the control of the Nazis, who expelled its Jewish members, SCF didn't expel it from the international union. SCF worked hard to preserve its ties to Save the Children societies in Italy and Germany, but this affected its ability to speak out against the treatment of Jewish children in Germany.'

'Then during the Second World War, SCF became further embedded in British national politics, playing a role in the war effort (running nurseries for munitions workers for example). It did not challenge another British blockade of Germany and German-occupied territory, whereas Oxfam, founded in 1942, did.'

'After the War, SCF ran schools in Malaya and Kenya to counter anti-colonial and communist influences. It saw no conflict, in other words, between being an internationalist movement and supporting British imperialism. It was not unique in this: many humanitarian organisations sanitised the imperial project.'

What can we take from this history? For Emily Baughan, 'SCF was founded to be explicitly political: humanitarianism was not seen as being separate from politics.'

'Then we see a problem that comes round in a circular fashion for humanitarian organisations: proximity to power enables organisations to undertake operations, but it also curtails autonomy. For long periods SCF was funded by the British government and was therefore constrained in what it could do or say. It was that relationship, though, which explains why it wasn't one of the many humanitarian organisations, founded after the First World War, which eventually withered and died. In the Thirties it was running projects that made up for a lack of government funding in the UK.'

'Lastly, the organisation's history shows that it has benefitted from the input of critics: internal dissent is an asset.'

Imperialism, decolonisation & development

How did Save the Children, along with several other humanitarian organisations, negotiate the period of decolonisation following the Second World War?

Matthew Hilton, Professor of Social History at Queen Mary, University of London, focused on the question: 'in relation to welfare, where does the State stop, and charities and NGOs step in?' In the period after the Second World War, many humanitarian organisations (SCF among them) found themselves entering the gap that was left by retreating colonial states. But 'what we find, in relation to Save the Children, Oxfam, Christian Aid and others, is no co-ordinated plan of action, and little sense of the effectiveness of relief.'

For Matthew Hilton, 'with decolonisation, NGOs redefined the meaning of humanitarianism, to incorporate long-term aid and development as well as immediate relief in times of emergency. This set a precedent for charitable intervention to alleviate poverty, and paved the way for the massive expansion in NGOs in the 1970s.'

'But when charities got involved in the mixed economies of welfare in post-colonial states, they faced great complexities. And precisely because NGOs' roles were not defined, and the results of their actions not fully known, they were open to attack for their well-intentioned efforts: they were frequently criticised for the lack of communication and co-ordination between agencies, for their lack of technical skills, for their paternalistic attitudes, and for their unwillingness to report failures.'

Anna Bocking-Welch, lecturer in British Imperial History at the University of Liverpool, described the way that Christian Aid, in common with other humanitarian organisations, presented itself to the British public in the period of decolonisation.

'Christian Aid was founded to provide relief in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, but it found itself increasingly supporting development projects in the 1950s. With Christian Aid's explicitly religious foundation, relating to a long tradition of missionary work, it was seen by some as being a survivor of empire: a product of cultural or spiritual imperialism. It was therefore cautious about engaging with this side of its origin story. Christian Aid wasn't always very reflective or critical of its role, but wanted to present itself in the 60s as being valuable in the post-colonial era, supporting its move away from earlier power relations.'

According to Andrew Thompson, Professor of Global and Imperial History at the University of Oxford, decolonisation was 'a huge challenge to existing notions of humanitarianism and human rights. Time and again, conflicts that led to decolonisation exposed weaknesses in international humanitarian law, especially regarding new, unconventional, and asymmetrical kinds of conflict. Armed conflict of a non-international character was uncharted territory for many humanitarians. Guerrilla warfare and liberation movements raised questions: should the rules around treatment of prisoners of war extend to anti-colonial liberation movements? Should those fleeing conflicts be treated as refugees if they'd been fighters, and might become fighters again?'

For Andrew Thompson, this period raises more fundamental questions about the legitimate scope of humanitarian aid. 'It gets politicised in the decades of decolonisation. After 1945, cash-strapped colonial states were compelled to draw increasingly on the resources of voluntary, charitable, and humanitarian organisations. They were hoping to use welfare and development as a way of combating anti-colonial sentiment. The distribution of relief and the giving or denying of aid were used to serve the purposes of the late colonial state. This raises the question of whether humanitarian organisations can ever set conditions regarding their presence in conflict zones. Constraints are a constant, a condition of the very existence of aid.'

'This period also raises fundamental questions about whether there are standards of humanity that can be applied at all times in conflict. Then as now, the emotive power of humanitarian narratives, designed to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of human beings, run up against narratives of terror designed to do the opposite, directing sympathies to certain categories of victim, and denying them to others. If there is a lesson here, it is that it's vital for every generation of humanitarians to pay renewed attention to the essential and inspirational principle of shared humanity.'

Biafra: the 1960s & 1970s

Among the crises that were increasingly visible to a western audience in the 1960s, the war and famine in Biafra are seen by many as a watershed.

Marie-Luce Desgrandchamps, Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Geneva, provided some context: 'in the late 60s, a colonial culture was still very much present within humanitarian agencies. It's important to emphasise, too, that in this period most agencies didn't have strong operational capacities, which explains some of the difficulties they were to face in Biafra. Finally, there was no effective co-ordination mechanism among the different humanitarian organisations: the International Red Cross Movement, to which other organisations looked to play a co-ordinating role, had its own internal tensions between different actors.'

As former Save the Children UK Chief Executive Mike Aaronson, who was a relief worker in the Biafran conflict, pointed out: 'at the outset of the Biafra-Nigerian war in 1968 SCF tried to work on both sides of the line, with a relief team inside the Biafran enclave. But as the Nigerian army advanced, that part of the enclave was overrun. The SCF team was evacuated, and we were left working solely on the Nigerian side. Much of the history of the relief operation is about relief into the enclave, but there were also major operations into areas that the Nigerian army had taken, where a terrified population had run off into the bush, and were cut off from food supplies and health services.' SCF had medical teams operating in areas where there was no infrastructure left: it was also running feeding programmes until and after the war ended in January 1970.

For John Seaman, who led one such team and was subsequently Head of Policy Development at Save the Children UK, 'being faced with thousands of hungry people, in a situation that was new to us, raised questions about how you do even apparently simple things, such as sorting people on the basis of need in feeding stations. The subject was being developed technically – the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, for example, was bringing in new, quick, ways of assessing malnutrition. The sense was that SCF was out of its depth in terms of technical expertise, but that it was an open organisation, and that innovation was possible. Later in Bangladesh also, SCF funded some of the research that was being carried out on what was best to feed people who are starving. This is a curious organisation: for all its faults, it can be surprisingly open-minded and innovative.'

Sami Kent is a journalist and radio producer whose radio documentaries include 'Britain and Biafra 50 Years On.' He described the early years of the Biafran conflict as featuring very little in British media coverage. 'But then came Michael Leapman's feature in the Sun in June 1968, "The Land of No Hope." It included photos – the story would have made no sense without pictures. It gave birth to a new, visceral style of reporting, picture-heavy and focused on suffering. The political context in Biafra was highly complex, but the humanitarian story was easy to see. All you needed was a picture, and you evoked a response.' A consequence of this was that images of starving babies and foreign relief workers dominated the story, to the exclusion of the voices of local people and how they experienced the conflict.

'With Biafra, journalism moved from reporting on suffering to campaigning to make it stop, and relief agencies were the medium for that. Biafra and Vietnam were a watershed in media coverage, being beamed into British homes every night. The Biafran conflict had unprecedented penetration: parents would say to their children "you need to eat your dinner because of the starving children in Biafra."'

With the Nigerian army blockading Biafra, relief organisations had to decide whether to breach the blockade, or work with the permission of the Nigerian government. Relief was also instrumentalised by the Biafran authorities, who charged for landing rights for relief flights for example, to gain foreign currency. Neutrality was a further issue – Médecins Sans Frontières was created around this time, partly from a sense that the International Committee of the Red Cross (who had been co-ordinating the relief operation in Nigeria) hadn't spoken out about the suffering experienced by non-combatants.

For Mike Aaronson 'SCF's position, working only on the Nigerian side, clearly raised issues of neutrality. It was not a conscious choice, but one born of necessity: nevertheless, we were bound to be perceived as being partial. It didn't help that the organisation was comfortable being seen as closely aligned to the British government. We accepted their funding, and even used British government flights.'

'It's important to say of the conflict that it was a complete failure of diplomacy and mediation. The relief operation undoubtedly helped to prolong the conflict, but nothing was being done politically to bring the two sides together. The relief operation became the response of the international community. It bears out the famous saying of Sadako Ogata, the former UN High Commissioner for Refugees: "there are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems." All the aid agencies did what we could, and we're proud of what we did. But it was not what was most needed.'

Ethiopia & Sudan: the 1980s

The 1983-5 famines in the Horn of Africa saw Save the Children involved in large-scale logistical and food distribution operations, and having to negotiate a complex political situation.

Wendy Fenton, Co-ordinator of the Humanitarian Practice Network at the Overseas Institute in London, was involved in SCF's massive logistical operation in response to the crisis in Darfur: 'SCF had no prior experience of transport at scale, but by the end of the operation we were using 200 vehicles, including 150 lorries, and had 500 Sudanese and 50 international staff.'

'Still, not enough food reached people. The distribution really needed to be targeted better: the Sudanese government's allocations were based on the idea of equity, but this meant that they were spread too thinly.'

'In Darfur it was important for us to have a mix of experience and skills. Some people were technical experts, while others knew the local context and could interact with local people. What became clear was the importance of telling the story of how people survive in these situations. It's important to understand that, and to have an evidence-based approach, marrying the quantitative and qualitative.'

Rae McGrath, subsequently founder of the Mines Advisory Group, was involved in the nuts and bolts of running the distribution operation in Darfur, moving 150,000 tonnes of bagged sorghum from Port Sudan out to villages in an area the size of France, with one tarmac road to use. 'I remember the need to make decisions on a constant basis, and the complexity even of buying fuel (since the fuel needs of the relief operation affected prices throughout Darfur). And again, we saw the value of local knowledge: knowing for example not to deliver food to people in one area before those in another, because otherwise the latter would simply raid the former, as they had done historically.'

The situation in Ethiopia in the Eighties was also highly complex. Writer and journalist Angela Penrose, a former Director of Policy at Save the Children UK, stated that, while the Ethiopian famine was aggravated by an inaccessible landscape, poor communications and soil erosion, 'the main factor was political. Ethiopia had a Marxist government, and the UK and US had suspended aid in the late Seventies, concerned that it would be used to prop up the government.'

"All hell broke loose. It was like a dam bursting."

David Alexander

SCF's programme in Ethiopia in the Eighties evolved out of its earlier famine response in the late Seventies. Its staff were mostly Ethiopian. But the response to the Ethiopian crisis was slow, largely due to political reluctance in the US and UK. 'There were adverse reports saying that food aid in Ethiopia was going to the army, and claims that Ethiopia was "crying wolf," having warned of food shortages for years. There was also a prevailing attitude among agencies following the 1974 Ethiopian famine that development and agricultural improvements were the way to combat food shortages: the agencies had their "heads down" in development projects. But being long established in Ethiopia, SCF was well placed to monitor and report on the growing crisis.'

David Alexander, a former Field Director for SCF in Ethiopia, and subsequently International Director of the British Red Cross, commented: 'working in Ethiopia was a huge challenge for us, but we did have a strong presence and good reputation on the ground, following the Seventies famine. We had continuity, and a close acquaintance with local communities: we had their respect and affection. Also, in John Seaman and Mark Bowden in London, we had people with first-hand experience, and deep knowledge of the country.'

'We'd known what was coming, but couldn't get people to listen. Then in October 1984 Michael Buerck filed his story for the BBC, and all hell broke loose. It was like a dam bursting. We hadn't foreseen Band Aid, let alone Live Aid. It unleashed an insane theatre, a procession of celebrities and heads of state and religious leaders. It was mayhem. It was fantastic that we got a response, but it was also distracting and time-consuming. Huge quantities of food were arriving in port, but the onward logistics were hopelessly inadequate, with very few roads.'

'We scaled-up massively, increasing our Ethiopian staff over 300-fold, to over 2,000 people. This reflects a wider change in SCF, in terms of willingness to employ national staff. Though media coverage didn't show them, they did an amazing job.'

'Beyond our feeding programme, we also reunited unaccompanied children. This included protecting them from well-meaning organisations and individuals who were keen to adopt them.'

'Because of our involvement, and especially our presence in transit camps, we were constantly being accused of complicity with the deeply unpleasant Ethiopian regime. There's a wider debate here about how far you should work with corrupt or repressive governments: MSF's expulsion from Ethiopia exposed us to the charge of being too fearful to speak out against the regime. But speaking on behalf of all our colleagues in London, I never saw the slightest hint of timidity. There was always the sense that our humanitarian approach was paramount, even if that put us on the wrong side of the headlines.'

'Finally, while communications were very different then, when you did get through, decisions were made very quickly. These days, issues of risk management and compliance often slow things down.'

Peter Poore worked as a clinician during the famine in Ethiopia, running an immunisation programme. He recalled: 'when I joined SCF, I found an organisation with clear competencies, strong management in London and in the field, and an ability to do things that other agencies couldn't. An independent funding base meant that we could do what we thought was appropriate.'

'Through our immunisation programme we were able to sit in with government officials and reflect back to them the experiences of the people we were trying to reach. It's vital to be able to add something to the debate and expose the reality of life and choices of people in crisis situations.'

Rwanda, Bosnia & Somalia: the 1990s

As Save the Children organisations became increasingly rights-based in the Nineties, how did the UK section respond to major crises? And how did it situate itself in an increasingly competitive humanitarian 'marketplace'?

Hussain Mursal is a medical doctor and a specialist in programme management and policy development. Of his time working with Save the Children UK in Somalia in the 1990s, he recalled: 'at the time, we didn't have the robust security system we have now. We were getting security services from freelance groups, to protect our staff and resources.

But also, because we'd had a presence there working with the community, they worked hard to keep us safe. Having our national staff was an asset in many ways: it meant that we were a source of information for other humanitarian agencies in the area.'

Lizzy Berryman, now Senior Health Adviser at Save the Children UK, was working in Somalia as a nurse and midwife during the crisis there. 'We were warned before we left that security was poor,' she said, 'and that our safety couldn't be guaranteed. I almost felt superfluous in relation to our national staff. We all had our Somali counterparts: mine took care of me, telling me where to go and what to do. We travelled with armed guards. It was a very difficult place to work in, but you felt that whatever you were dealing with, the national staff were dealing with ten times more. We lived in protected compounds: they had to get home.'

'We followed our security guidance and we were well briefed. Nevertheless, I was hit in the arm by a stray bullet, and a number of other members of our team were shot. When the UN security situation changed, we went from taking our chances in crossfire, to being the target of assassinations: nurses were shot deliberately. Somalia was a precedent for thinking about the proximity of NGOs to the UN security situation, and what that does to your perceived neutrality.'

Mark Bowden is a former UN Assistant Secretary General, who worked for Save the Children UK as Africa Director. For him, 'In Somalia we were seeing humanitarianism being instrumentalised, both by the US and other countries. Fearing that Somalia would become a failed state, America was looking for an opportunity to get the UN to restore law and order. In that context, the issue of acceptance by the local community was very important, and remains so for NGOs. The issue from the head office perspective was how you manage your image, to maintain confidence. But the fact that we had been working previously in Somalia, and had stayed, gave us credit in the community.'

'Secondly, concepts of duty of care were only just being developed. Save the Children UK in the Nineties was first among NGOs in developing a staff security manual: in the DRC we were even giving security advice to the UN.'

'Rwanda by contrast was a country where we hadn't previously worked: we arrived just after the genocide, helping with the influx of refugees into the camps. We were moving into a highly politicised environment: in the Nineties, to run a humanitarian operation you had to be politically savvy.'

'We were also developing ideas of professional competence within the organisation. How you carry out family tracing for example: our family tracing programme in Rwanda became one of the largest since World War II. Over time we've developed a greater sense of our areas of expertise, and are more prepared to bring expertise in from outside, including through the work of academics who study humanitarianism.'

In the Nineties there was also the issue of government funding, with a Labour government with funding targets for overseas aid and, through DFID, a Cabinet role for humanitarian and development assistance. For Mark Bowden, this meant not just a general increase in accountability for the expenditure of humanitarian funds, but 'more strings being attached from the beginning, stipulating in detail the way money should be spent.'

"We went from taking our chances in crossfire, to being the target of assassinations."

Lizzy Berryman

Iraq to Yemen: the present century

The last two decades have seen important changes in the humanitarian system, and new challenges for humanitarian organisations, especially around the War on Terror in Afghanistan and Iraq.

For Toby Porter, who was Save the Children UK's Emergencies Director between 2004 and 2007, 'there is a sense that western humanitarian agencies had never been so challenged in terms of neutrality as they were in Iraq and Afghanistan, when they were working in countries where their national governments were involved as belligerents.'

Save the Children UK's current Humanitarian Director, Gareth Owen, also experienced this blurring of lines: 'just before the Iraq war many humanitarian organisations, including ourselves, had to decide whether to take British government money. Many people in Iraq didn't really distinguish between us and the military: it was very uncomfortable.'

The burgeoning number of humanitarian actors has also been an issue. Carolyn Miller, formerly Director of Global Programmes at Save the Children UK, and now Chair of INTRAC, recalls that with the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, and the huge public response that it led to, 'there was an explosion in the number of organisations involved, and competition between them. At the same time the larger NGOs, including Save the Children, had their own organisational ambitions, and they became larger. Collaboration suffered.'

Rachael Cummings, current Director of the Humanitarian Public Health Team at SCUK, was also 'astonished at how many actors were involved with the tsunami, and the pecking order between them. There were more than 200 in Bandar Aceh: there was literally a flag-raising mentality.'

The Ebola epidemic of 2014-5 was also a turning point for humanitarian organisations. Miatta Gbanya, a Fund Manager at the Ministry of Health in Liberia, spent two years co-ordinating the country's response to the disease. She remembers: 'everyone wanted to help. You were overstretched already but forced to deal with all of the organisations and individuals who came. We struggled to keep control.'

'But Ebola was not unique this century: we've also seen H5N1, SARS and the Zika virus. This is an era of new emerging diseases and increasing microbial resistance. Ebola especially affected countries where health systems were fragile, having been affected by war. But Ebola taught the world that when your neighbour's house is on fire, you'd better watch out.'

'With no vaccine and no cure, fear was also a major problem among the people who were trying to deal with Ebola. The outbreak turned into a wider humanitarian crisis, with a breakdown in economies and law and order. What was crucial was to have a co-ordinated response: we worked with many international organisations as key technical partners.'

Most recently, the issue of safeguarding has blown up as a major concern within the humanitarian sector, and for Save the Children in particular, which despite for many years having played a leading role in highlighting the problem, in 2018 found itself at the centre of controversy for the way it had handled allegations of sexual harassment internally.

"You can't help but feel that you're standing on the shoulders of giants."

Gareth Owen

For Gareth Owen, 'The safeguarding scandal had a devastating effect on staff morale. There's something in this about why we're here today: showing why critical reflection is important. With our all-star panels at this conference, you can't help but feel that you're standing on the shoulders of giants. But if you don't have this sense of your heritage, it becomes easier for damaging cultures to take hold.'

Reflections & looking ahead

What can we learn from Save the Children's first hundred years, and where are humanitarian organisations heading?

Reflecting on the lessons of the conference, Shaheed Fatima, a barrister at Blackstone Chambers specialising in international law, spoke about the volatility of the interface between politics, humanitarianism and children's rights.

'I've been thinking about the consequences of that volatility: in relation to international humanitarian law and human rights law, it means that we have a fragmented, complex framework. It's often difficult to identify which norms should apply in a conflict and to whom they should apply – states, non-state armed actors, or others such as humanitarian actors. And even when the substance of the law is clear, we often find that there are large gaps in accountability. For example, there is a lack of an international civil mechanism that victims have recourse to, to claim redress. We need to have a more consolidated legal instrument that sets out in one place the relevant provisions protecting children, specifically in armed conflict.'

'We've also talked about the tension there can be between the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality, and the politicisation involved in campaigning and the promotion of children's rights. There is also a tension between providing immediate succour and stimulating long-lasting change in a system through advocacy and campaigning. But Save the Children's expertise in protecting children means that it's uniquely well placed to advocate and campaign in this area. It is as a result of its critical role in making interventions that it has credibility (based on first-hand knowledge). It should take whatever opportunities it has, to campaign.'

For retired Brazilian diplomat Milton Rondó Filho, an important lesson of the conference is that 'dialogue between civil society and states is fundamental. Similarly, there is a need for NGOs to work in networks. And finally, we need to remember the principles of impartiality, neutrality and humanity – only under this umbrella will we have real humanitarian co-operation.'

Laura Hammond, Professor of Development Studies at SOAS, spoke about every generation of aid workers having 'its key moment – whether that's in Biafra, Darfur, or Rwanda. We need to learn from these moments, and learn quickly. Researchers can help to bring out those lessons. Work with us academics: we have the next generation of NGO workers right now in our classrooms. Some things you can only learn in the field, but others you can learn in the classroom: come and speak to our students and engage with them.'

Save Children's Youth Ambassador Karim Albrem spoke of his hope that, in future, children's voices will be brought out more in events such as the centenary conference, and that children will have more of a platform for talking to decision-makers. 'I would also like to see Save the Children doing more to define its areas of expertise and doing more to coach others in championing children's rights.'

Lewis Sida, Director of the Humanitarian Learning Centre at the Institute of Development Studies, is a former Emergencies Director at Save the Children UK. 'Those of us who are involved in humanitarianism know, of course, that it's all about politics. They're inseparable. And it's very easy to criticise humanitarian actors, because we do stuff. We have to make decisions, and it's very easy to deconstruct them after the fact. Your political interpretations are also loaded; they come with cultural biases, and that also affects how we view the past.'

'Humanitarians are gloomy by nature. In the space of about fifteen years, the global humanitarian sector has grown from about $4 billion to $28 billion. That's not necessarily a good thing. This is a time of development failure and protracted crises: most places we're working in today, we were working in fifteen years ago. There are moments when we're pure humanitarians, but often we're providing substitute service provision in long-term broken places, and development crises are now exacerbated by climate change. I'm not particularly optimistic about these places: they will continue to be the badlands, and they're where we as humanitarians will continue to find ourselves.'

'We're also working increasingly in a situation that goes beyond instrumentalisation and the blurring of lines. We have payment by results, and funders essentially telling agencies exactly what to do.'

'So where's the optimism? What this conference has shown is that we've been in bad times before. What Save the Children has been good at is keeping the flame of hope alive: believing that there is a better world, and it's worth fighting for. So the theme for the next hundred years is: keep believing.'