

Press release: £2 billion boost set to transform charity and voluntary sector funding

The huge sum has the potential to further transform the charity sector, helping to improve communities and change lives. It was identified by the independent Dormant Assets Commission, which found untapped assets in products such as unclaimed insurance policies and pensions. They include:

- £715 million from investments and wealth management;
- £550 million from the pensions and insurance sectors;
- £150 million from securities;
- £140 million from banks and building societies.

It's expected these estimates could increase once the scheme is operational.

The Independent Dormant Assets Commission was set up in December 2015 to look at whether the current dormant asset scheme, which includes funds in banks and building societies, could be extended to other financial services. These include insurance products, stocks and shares, and pensions that have been classed as dormant.

The current scheme has already distributed £360 million from accounts to go towards supporting good causes. Extending it could deliver lasting change to the way voluntary and charity sectors are funded.

Ministers will now consider the report's findings in detail.

Minister for Civil Society, Rob Wilson, said:

This money could help change millions of lives across the country by helping good causes rather than gathering dust in dormant accounts.

The reason I set up the commission was to unearth new resources that would allow our charities and voluntary groups to become more sustainable and independent. But crucially also to deliver really important local services over the long term.

This is an example of an active government stepping in where it can make things better to the benefit of local communities and all concerned.

I'd like to thank the Commission, which has worked tirelessly with

the financial services sector on this report, and will study its findings closely.

Chair of the Commission Nick O'Donohoe, said:

Our report has found hundreds of millions of pounds lying dormant across a number of financial sectors which could be put to far better use. I am delighted we now have the potential to help good causes even more. I hope the financial sector now supports our ambition by contributing dormant assets benefit to an expanded scheme.

Good causes that have benefitted from the current dormant accounts scheme include Age UK's Reconnections programme in Worcestershire, which works to reduce loneliness and isolation in the area, and London's "Think Forward," which provides disadvantaged young people with opportunities in education, training and employment.

Other good causes include Harrogate Skills 4 Living Centre in Yorkshire, a residential care home for 90 adults with learning disabilities that offers adult education courses, 3SC Capitalise programme in Wales, a social impact bond that supports young people with dyslexia, and Harry Specters in Cambridgeshire, a chocolate maker social enterprise that creates employment for young people with autism.

Some of the other main recommendations of the report are:

- that customers should continue to be able to reclaim lost assets at any time;
- participation by firms in an expanded scheme should continue to be voluntary. However, If participation levels are low, the government should consider the reasons behind this and whether moving to mandatory participation in the scheme in the future would be appropriate; and
- the expanded scheme should retain the core principles of the current scheme but the way the scheme is managed should be revised to allow it to cope with the wider range of assets envisaged.

Notes to Editors

1. The definition of a dormant bank or building society account is in the Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Act. An account is 'dormant' if it has been open throughout a 15 year period but during that period no transactions have been carried out in relation to the account by or on the instructions of the holder.
2. Customers in the current scheme are able to reclaim any lost assets at any time. The Commission recommend this is retained in any expanded scheme.
3. Following the introduction of the Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Act in 2008, Reclaim Fund Ltd (RFL) was established by the Co-operative Banking Group Limited to administer the process of the dormant

assets scheme.

4. Since the Dormant Accounts Scheme started in 2008, almost £1 billion of dormant accounts money has been identified. Of this, more than £360 million has been directed towards good causes across the UK.
5. Membership of the Commission on Dormant Assets: Nick O'Donohoe, Chair
Richard Collier-Keywood Kirsty Cooper Gurpreet Dehal Sean Donovan-Smith
Rachel Hanger Jackie Hunt Mark Makepeace Susan Sternglass Noble Martin
Turner

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[Deputies call for action to stop sexual abuse of minors](#)

Deputies to the NPC and experts attend a seminar on Thursday to call for immediate action against sexual abuse of minors. [Photo by Chen Weisong/China.org.cn]

As the number of child sexual abuse cases has risen in recent years, some deputies to the National People's Congress and various experts held a seminar on Thursday ahead of China's annual two political sessions to call for immediate steps to stop the scourge.

The deputies proposed solutions including making sexual abuse awareness education compulsory in schools, and establishing a proper custody system for minors.

They said children should be taught about what constitutes a "safe touch" and know it is safe to tell teachers or other staff about abuse.

At the seminar, a survey report on child sexual abuse cases in 2016 was released by Girls' Protecting, a charity fund initiated by dozens of female journalists in 2013.

The survey found that 433 cases of sexual abuse involving children under 14 were publicly reported in 2016, equating to an average of 1.21 cases a day, an increase of 30 percent year on year.

Wang Xuemei, co-founder of Girls' Protecting, said the number of reported child sexual abuse cases significantly increased in the past three years, demonstrating it had become quite an acute social issue drawing more attention from society and the media.

However, many cases still go unreported because of the shame that comes with the act and complexity of the cases.

The survey report showed that of 778 victims whose cases were made public in 2016, 719 were girls, making up 92.42 percent, with a small number of boys. The perpetrators were mostly men.

“These figures awaken us to the gravity of the issue,” said Sun Xiaomei, an NPC deputy and a professor at China Women’s University. “The focus should be placed on building a protection net through coordinated efforts from families, schools and society.”

Li Yifei, an NPC deputy and principal of a middle school in Inner Mongolia, stressed the problem should be solved by a combination of law, education, moral and culture building.

According to the survey, in 2016, the youngest victim was aged less than 2, and 125 were under 7.

Girls’ Protecting pointed that children who are sexually molested are mainly aged between 12 and 14, reinforcing the fact that underage girls are easy targets of sexual abuse and there is a severe lack of awareness education for them.

The survey found more cases occurring in rural areas than in cities.

“Sexual abuse is a special topic when it comes to children’s protection,” said Tong Xiaojun, dean of the Institute of Children Studies at China Youth University of Political Studies. “There is currently no system in place to address the issue, certainly not in rural areas.”

He added that whether left-behind children in rural areas are more prone to sexual abuse is yet to be determined.

Lan Chuntao, an NPC deputy and a teacher at a high school in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, said: “The government should boost investment in rural areas. Moreover, I hope rural children can live with their parents who work in cities, thus reducing their vulnerabilities to sexual abuse.”

A more shocking fact revealed by the report is that offenders are largely people close to victims, with teachers making up 29.33 percent, neighbors 24.33 percent, relatives and friends 12 percent, family members 10 percent.

Girls’ Protecting has provided sexual abuse awareness education to more than 1,400,000 children along with more than 400,000 parents in 28 provinces in China by the end of last year.

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sexual abuse of minors

Deputies to the NPC and experts attend a seminar on Thursday to call for immediate action against sexual abuse of minors. [Photo by Chen Weisong/China.org.cn]

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[White Paper on the future of Europe](#) [\(sic- they mean EU\)](#)

The EU this week issued a White Paper on its future. As many of us argued before the referendum, and as the EU’s 5 Presidents Report argued, the Commission sees the future of the EU as one of far more integration. This new White Paper complements the 5 Presidents Report which I explained at the time of its first publication, and goes beyond it. The Paper starts by reciting favourably the Spinelli/Rossi vision of a united Europe in their “Il Manifesto di Ventotene” published at the end of the 2nd World War.

As the authors of the White Paper say, “The Lisbon Treaty and the decade long debate that preceded it, has opened a new chapter of European integration that still holds unfulfilled potential.”

It is true that this latest White Paper does contain five possible pathways forward for the EU, including one which envisages less integration than they currently enjoy. The Paper also makes clear that the Commission thinks that a bad option. They seem to strongly favour the fifth option, the one that entails “doing more together across all policy areas”. The President of the

Commission in his foreword urges the EU to be radical and to opt for much more integration.

Option 2 is the only option that allows less EU control. It is based on doing nothing but the single market, fairly widely defined. The Paper raises the possibility of more border controls and some limitations on freedom of movement under this scenario which they dislike.

Option 1, the carrying on option, envisages slower and piecemeal progress to more integration, highlighting possible advances on more integrated border and asylum policies, more EU defence and some stronger controls over the Euro and economic policy. Again, this is not a favoured proposal.

Option 3, coalitions of the willing to drive ahead much more integration in various areas, and Option 4, doing less more efficiently by targeting areas like counter terrorism for more common action, are also not preferred. Option 4 does not seem to involve scrapping areas of competence in any meaningful way and still entails more integration in selected areas.

The proposal the EU wants its members to sign up to is Option 5, "Doing more together across all policy areas". They envisage the EU having just one seat on each international body, with a common foreign policy on all main issues. They will make defence a priority for more integration. They will lead the global fight against climate change, and have the largest world overseas aid budget. They will turn the European Stability Mechanism into the European Monetary Fund and get it to raise money to finance investment programmes. The Euro area will need more controls and a fiscal stability function, entailing more EU involvement in taxation and doubtless more "own resource" EU tax revenue.

I welcome their launch of this important debate. The 60th birthday of the EU is a fitting moment for its remaining members to take stock and ask themselves what next. The document reminds us just how central the Euro is to the whole project, and how much more they need to do to back their currency and tackle the high unemployment they have in many parts of its area. The UK being out will make it easier for them to use their institution in the way many of them wish to. A successful single currency needs a powerful central government with tax raising powers to stand behind it. As the 5 Presidents Report made clear, a single currency needs a Euro Treasury.

UN urges Sri Lanka not to miss opportunity to advance justice and reconciliation

lack of a comprehensive strategy to address accountability for past crimes risk derailing the momentum towards lasting peace, reconciliation and stability, a United Nations report said today.

Seventeen months ago, when we published a detailed report on the grave human rights violations committed during the conflict in Sri Lanka, I urged the Government and all the people of Sri Lanka to ensure that this historic opportunity for truly fundamental change should not be squandered, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a news release on the report.

He noted that in many ways, Sri Lanka appears to be turning a corner on the promotion and protection of human rights, but he stressed that hard-won gains could prove illusory if they are not tethered to a comprehensive, robust strategy.

This critical opportunity in Sri Lankan history cannot be missed, he said, urging the Government and people of Sri Lanka once again to prioritize justice alongside reconciliation to ensure that the horrors of the past are firmly dealt with, never to recur.

The report, issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), assesses progress made in tackling the legacy of grave violations in Sri Lanka between 2002 and 2011 and acknowledges that there have been positive advances on human rights and constitutional reform.

However, the report notes that the structures set up and measures taken until now have been inadequate, lacked coordination and a sense of urgency.

Party politics, including the balancing of power between the different constituencies of the coalition in the run-up to constitutional reforms, have contributed to a reluctance to address difficult issues regarding accountability or to clearly articulate a unified position by all parts of Government, the report states.

The report makes a number of concrete recommendations, including calling on the Government to embrace the report of the Consultation Task Force, to formulate a communications campaign to inform the public about details of the reconciliation agenda, to invite the UN human rights office to establish a presence in Sri Lanka, to give the highest priority to the restitution of all private land that has been occupied by the military, and to adopt legislation establishing a hybrid court.

The report also highlights a number of serious human rights violations that are reportedly continuing to occur in Sri Lanka, including the harassment or surveillance of human rights defenders and victims of violations, police abuse and excessive use of force, and the use of torture.

The High Commissioner will present the report to the Human Rights Council on 22 March in Geneva.