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## **The Paradoxes of Celebrity Advocacy**



**Dr. Dan Brockington**

**Monday, May 8, 2017. 5:30pm**

**Budapest, Nador 13, 307/A**

In the last 15 years, there has been a sea change in the way in which NGOs, and particularly development NGOs, have interacted with the celebrity industries. Relations between the two have become much more intensive. This talk explores the anatomy of these new interactions to explore some of the paradoxes at work in the representation of development issues and the work of development advocacy. These are, first that celebrity advocacy occupies a significant proportion of the public domain, but does so without always engaging particularly well with much of the public. Celebrity is populist in form, but not always popular in character. Second, that failure to engage the public does not really matter. Celebrity advocacy can be a remarkably effective tool for working with corporate and government elites. Third, it is not just elites who may be deceived as to the nature of celebrities' influence, in the glare of publicity we, the viewers and consumers of celebrity spectacle, are also blinded. We may think that the publicity is the important aspect of celebrity. But publicity can be a sideshow; what matters goes on behind the scenes. My argument therefore is that celebrity advocacy which is now so well organised by NGOs marks, ironically, a disengagement between the public and politics, and particularly between the public and the civil society organisations which try to represent development and humanitarian needs. As such celebrity advocacy is part of the lived practices of post-democracy. In this talk, I present the evidence for these paradoxes, and explore some of its consequences for international development, and democratic practices.

**Dan Brockington** is Director of the Sheffield Institute of International Development at the University of Sheffield. His research covers the social impacts of conservation, relationships between capitalism and conservation, the work of media and celebrity in development and long term livelihood change in East Africa.