

Executive Summary - Department for International Development

Increasing Levels of Understanding & Support for Development within the UK

October 2003

Summary Findings - Context

The Department for International Development has three particular challenges when trying to encourage the public to engage with international development issues:

- General apathy to international development issues
- Distrust of Government
- Perceptions of involvement

General attitudes to international development issues

International development issues are very remote to respondents; considered as only coming to prominence when the developing world is at crisis point or when the media has little else to report on. Generally, developing world issues are not of interest or concern to those previously not engaged with international development issues and the relationship with the developing world is appreciated little beyond cheap trainers, cheap electrical goods and orange juice. The relationship between the developed and developing world is however considered to be one of dependency from both sides, but the balance of power is considered to rest with the developed world.

Due to the continual focus by the media on crisis the public perceive the situation in the developing world as a cycle which never improves, and therefore query the continual efforts of both charities and government to improve the situation. They are led to conclude that there are too many organisations seeking to achieve the same thing, with little effect and therefore lose faith in the bodies that are seeking to achieve change and the value in making any effort. There is also concern about how developing world governments manage their money.

General attitudes to government / DFID itself

Respondents are generally unaware of the activities of government and exhibit an overwhelming distrust in government, particularly because of the war in Iraq and the on-going Hutton enquiry.

Unlike other government departments, respondents are largely unaware of the existence of DFID and do not have a local frame of reference as they do in the case of the Department of Health through the NHS / their local hospital. This is both positive and negative for the department: positive as they are not tainted by failures in public service reform, however respondents were shocked when they realised that there is a government department that they have not heard of previously. Only a minority of respondents recalled Clare Short, but they did not recall her for her role in relation to the department.

On gaining information on DFID, respondents are predominantly positive desiring further information as to exactly how money is divided between countries and ultimately seeking information as to the efficacy of the spend.

There are particular perceptions as to why the UK gets involved in the developing world. On the positive side many respondents believe that there is a moral obligation for the UK to be involved with the developing world and that it is in our own interests to achieve change there. Others were more cynical as to the reasons and benefits of getting involved.

In the workshops respondents guessed roughly correctly how much the Government spends on international development in relation to other Government departments. There does not currently seem to be a mandate for that amount to be either increased or decreased.

Perception as to those who get involved with international development and ways to get involved

Respondents have particular perceptions as to who gets involved with international development issues. The majority of respondents feel excluded from involvement, as they perceive charities to be only interested in those who can either give their time or their money. Therefore those who get involved are perceived to be at extremes: either very wealthy or unworldly, either young or much older, either impassioned or boring. Respondents very much indicate that 'its not me' who gets involved.

Summary Findings - Response

Having established the particular challenges that DFID faces the workshops then sought to encourage respondents to develop guidelines for DFID in terms of how they might frame their communications and also strategies to deal with particular issues.

Principles

Respondent developed a clear set of principles to underlie any communications by the department:

- Honesty
- Clarity
- Accountability
- Results driven information
- Positive feedback

Strategies

One of the key issues that respondents were asked to devise a strategy for was the Millennium Development Goals. Generally the impact of providing information on these goals is positive as they begin to unravel the problems of the developing world and demonstrate that the government has a clear strategy to deal with the issues. They also aid respondents in seeing links between the different parts of the strategy.

Respondents were also asked to devise strategies in relation to information provided on Aids, Fair Trade and India. The key communications learnings from these exercises for DFID are that communications should:

- Concentrate on the wider issues rather than too much detail
- Keep communication simple and straightforward
- Remain jargon free
- Grab the public attention

- Use television (as the favoured medium) if possible
- Seek to educate, not advertise
- Share in the 'power of endorsement'– either through using celebrities, local beneficiaries or field staff

Conclusions

In summary, the research indicates that there are a number of things that the department can begin to do:

- Clearly demonstrate how the public are already giving to the developing world AND how their money is making a difference, therefore combating apathy about ability to achieve change and perceptions about involvement. Demonstrate that the UK is doing its 'duty'.
- Further to this challenge perceptions as to what 'involvement means', i.e. it can mean just being more informed on the issues, or knowing where to source further information
- Demonstrate that a partnership approach exists. Show that DFID works both with other agencies and 'on the ground' in developing countries.
- Educate on how problems in the developing world impact on the UK.
- Demonstrate change achieved and progress made.

Summary Objectives & Methodology

The primary objectives of the research were to understand both what motivates involvement with international development issues and the barriers to involvement, with a view to helping the Department for International Development develop strategies to engage with 'new audiences'.

A three-stage methodology was implemented:

Stage 1 – Six focus groups were conducted initially, two with each of the different attitudinal groups (campaigners, tacit / indifferent, hostile). This was to enable us to understand the particular viewpoints of those who are both strong advocates for and strong detractors in relation to international development as well as the middle ground. This initial stage helped us to develop hypothesis to be tested in stage two of the research, which was conducted predominantly with those who are tacit and indifferent towards international development issues.

Stage 2 – Three one-day workshops were conducted across the UK, with 14 people attending each. In these workshops respondents were encouraged to be creative, working on their own communication strategies and guidelines for the Department for International Development. Those who are hostile to international development were excluded from this stage of the research.

Stage 3 – This stage involved the final presentation of the research findings, followed by an action-planning workshop with some staff at the Department. The aim of this session was to aid the Department with taking the research forward into a workable scenario particularly in relation to communications.