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## **Public Perceptions of International Development and Support for Aid in the UK: Results of a Qualitative Enquiry**

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with Rajendra Mulmi

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## 1. Introduction

Spending on international development is difficult to sustain in the absence of public support. In the UK, the major political parties have all taken positive positions on development spending that do not - yet - mirror the apparently declining interest of the UK general public. All three major parties are publicly committed to realising the pledge of spending 0.7 per cent of national income by 2013. More concretely, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government has ring-fenced the Department for International Development's (DfID) budget.

And yet, the pressure to curtail future increases in development spending, and perhaps even to reduce spending below current levels, can only intensify as the UK government seeks to pay down its national debt during the next four to five years. In this context, what are the most promising things that the development community can do to shore up public support for aid? The answer to this question depends on our understanding of how the general public forms attitudes towards international development, and aid in particular. The last 12 years of strong and increasing support to DfID, led by successive Prime Ministers and against a backdrop of economic growth, have not made the deepening of this understanding a priority. Consequently, our knowledge of how the UK public form their attitudes towards international development and aid is rather shallow.

The past two years of economic downturn and the change of government at the May 2010 general election have presented a new imperative to understand better how the public view development and the role of aid. Results from the tracking surveys undertaken by DfID suggest that there is an established downwards trend in public support for increased action by the UK government towards reducing poverty in developing countries. Thus, only 35 percent of respondents supported increased government action in February 2010, compared to 50 percent in September 2007 (TNS UK, 2010). While 55 percent of respondents were of the view that the government should spend more on aid to developing countries in September 2007, this support had declined to 40 percent by February 2010.

The results of public attitude surveys, as undertaken by DfID and other donors, provide a broad indication of trends in public attitudes towards development assistance, and efforts have been made to compare and contrast attitudes across countries (see for example OECD 2003; McDonnell *et al.* 2003; Chong and Gradstein 2006; Paxton and Knack 2008). They do not, however, dig very deeply into what is driving those trends. Recent revisions to the DfID tracking survey (see for example TNS UK 2009) in response to criticisms by the Select Committee on International Development (House of Commons 2009) have strengthened these surveys in a modest way, but their analytical content remains very weak. A parallel literature, predominantly within social psychology, explores understandings of the causes of poverty in developing countries and links to wider social attitudes, for example concepts of global justice, but does not link up explicitly to the aid agenda (see for example Harper *et al.* 1990; Carr *et al.* 1998; Carr and MacLachlan 1998; Hine and Montiel 1999; Bolitho *et al.* 2007; Panadero and Vazquez 2008).

In total, the current literature presents a rather disparate body of knowledge that predominantly fails to throw significant light on the key drivers of public support (or lack of) for development assistance across the population within donor countries (the limited exceptions include Campbell *et al.* 2001; van Heerde and Hudson 2010). It also provides relatively weak guidance as to how communication efforts might be directed at boosting support for aid to developing countries.

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) sees improved understanding of public attitudes towards international development and support for aid as a key priority for the development community in donor countries. We assume that most aid is potentially useful to developing countries (for example, as indicated by

Riddell 2007). At a time when government expenditure is being restrained, what evidence do we have that the general public would support maintaining and/or enhancing aid to developing countries? Perhaps more importantly, how well equipped are we to ‘sell’ greater aid budgets, whether directed at achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or adaptation to climate change, to sceptical taxpayers? To address these and related questions, IDS is spearheading new research in this area, with the study reported below as the first substantive output. This will include both qualitative (such as the results below) and quantitative studies (further described in Section 5) that aim to explore in depth the ways in which attitudes differ across the population and why, and relations between support for development assistance and personal actions directed at the alleviation of poverty in developing countries.

## 2. Aims of the study

This study, funded by the Wellcome Trust, aims to build on the current body of knowledge on UK public attitudes towards international development and the role of aid, generated predominantly by the tracking studies undertaken by DfID and consumer opinion research undertaken for UK-based NGOs (for a summary see Darnton 2007, 2009). As the first step in a longer-term programme of research, the focus here is on gathering in-depth and nuanced perspectives on public attitudes towards international development and the role of aid. In particular, it focuses on five key questions that are considered critical to understanding public attitudes in this area:

- How well informed do people consider they are about poverty in developing countries and where do they get information on this?
- What are considered the predominant causes of poverty in developing countries?
- To what extent is the alleviation of poverty in developing countries seen as a responsibility for the UK government and personally?
- What support is there for development assistance and what drives this?
- What actions are taken personally towards poverty alleviation in developing countries, notably through donations to charities working in developing countries?

Thus, the mode of enquiry is qualitative in nature, although reference is made to data from previous quantitative studies in places, notably from DfID’s on-going public attitude tracking survey.

## 3. Methods

This paper is based on data derived from the Mass Observation Archive (MOA) through the Mass Observation Project (MOP). The MOA provides an opportunity to derive in-depth perspectives on development and the role of aid from a relatively large number of individuals. Such a qualitative mode of enquiry is appropriate where there is limited prior information on the structure of attitudes and the language employed by individuals in communicating their attitudes. Only then can a valid instrument be constructed that provides reliable and valid measurement of the strength with which particular attitudes are held and the relative importance of factors driving such attitudes, which is the ultimate aim of our research.

The MOP is a unique UK-based writing project which has been running since 1981. It exists to: 1) provide a structured programme within which ‘ordinary’ people can write directly about their lives in the knowledge that what they send in will be archived for posterity and used for social research; and 2) create a resource of qualitative longitudinal social data with an emphasis on subjectivity and self representation which will contribute to our understanding of everyday life in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The MOP

differs from other social investigations because of its historical link to the original Mass Observation<sup>1</sup> and because of its focus on voluntary, self-motivated participation. It revives the early Mass Observation notion that everyone can participate in creating their own history or social science. Over 4,000 people have participated to date, many of whom have corresponded over several years.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.1 The Directive

The material in the MOP is solicited in response to ‘directives’ of discursive and lengthy open-ended questionnaires sent out by post or email three times a year. The directives contain two or three broad themes which cover both personal and wider political and social issues and events. They are often commissioned by external researchers or organisations for a specific purpose and thus tend to vary in content, structure and length. However, directives are designed in collaboration with MOA staff to ensure some level of consistency and to maximise response rates and quality of responses. Since directives cover a wide range of topics and are aimed at a lay audience, they are designed to elicit responses based on personal experiences and opinions, rather than knowledge. They are kept deliberately open-ended and avoid direct questions since it is arguably difficult to use a qualitative instrument of the form taken by the directive to ask explicitly about level of knowledge. Such questions tend to elicit rather brief (and often one word) responses such as ‘well’ or ‘badly’ rather than a more elaborated view on what is/is not understood and why.

The data analysed in this report were solicited from Mass Observers (herein after referred to as ‘respondents’) (n=587) via a directive (Appendix 1). The directive was developed by the authors of this paper in conjunction with the MOA Director, Professor Dorothy Sheridan. The directive had three parts. Part 1 focused on the current financial crisis and part 2 on global poverty and health. The third part was on friendship and completely unrelated to the current project.

The aim of the first part of the directive was to direct respondents to the current political and economic context, before considering the nature of global poverty and related issues, including:

- Causes of poverty in developing countries.
- Direct experience of poverty, through working or travelling overseas.
- Sources of information on global poverty.
- Responsibilities of governments and individuals in industrialised countries towards poverty alleviation in developing countries.
- Role of international development assistance.
- Development charities and their activities.
- Personal actions to reduce poverty in developing countries.
- Implications of health professionals from developing countries being employed in the UK.

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<sup>1</sup> The original Mass Observation Project, which ran from 1937 to 1950, consisted of a national panel of diarists and two writing panels, one in Bolton and one in London. For more information see: [http://www.massobs.org.uk/original\\_massobservation\\_project.htm](http://www.massobs.org.uk/original_massobservation_project.htm).

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.massobs.org.uk/mass\\_observation\\_project.html](http://www.massobs.org.uk/mass_observation_project.html)

## 3.2 Response rate

The directive was sent out in November 2008. As of 7 October 2009, the MOP had received 248 responses for Part 1 (response rate of 45 per cent) and 215 for Part 2 (response rate of 39 per cent). Although the MOP does not record a standard response rate, communication with MOA staff confirm that a response rate between 40 and 50 per cent is relatively standard and that the response rate for Part 1 is generally greater than for later parts. The MOP does not impose a deadline on submission. However, we used 26 May 2009 as the cut-off point and did not include subsequent submissions in the analysis. Thus, the results presented below reflect data from 185 submissions.

## 3.3 Nature of responses

The writing style of the respondents and the format of the submissions tend to vary significantly. Mass Observers could be seen either as auto-biographers or ‘citizen journalists’ who provide a window on their own world. Sheridan (1993) refers to a difference between ‘subjective’ writing and ‘social reportage’. Both styles are actively encouraged and reinforced by the MOA through the way in which directives are designed. ‘Subjective’ writing is self-explicit and focuses on the feelings, opinions and activities of the writer. For instance, in our sample one respondent wrote:

*In 1944, as a 20 year old sailor, I had the lucky experience of visiting many different countries. I was appalled with the amount of poverty I saw and at first it troubled me. (H1806)*

‘Social reportage’, on the other hand, is more objective, with statements delivered as ‘truths’:

*That countries are in poverty is due to many factors; climate (unreliable rain fall for example) natural resources for trading, over population, a history of wars, poor leadership (lack of vision, endemic corruption). (B2240)*

Some observers predominantly use one of these styles, although often their responses are mixed, in particular where the discourse is meant to be ‘objective’ but inadvertent ‘subjectivity’ ‘creeps in’ (Sheridan 1993). This is very much the case with responses to our directive where respondents, as non-experts on the subject of global poverty and international development, tend to justify their statements using the evidence that is most immediately available to them, much of which is based on their own personal experiences or those of their relatives and friends.

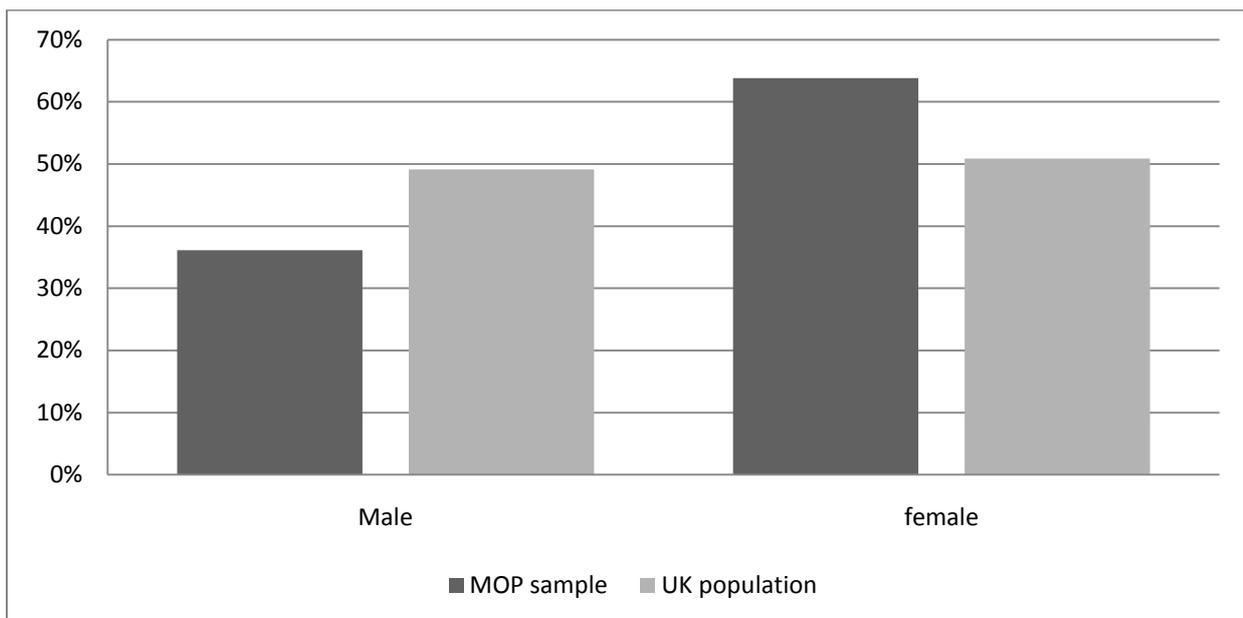
With respect to the format of responses, some Mass Observers follow rigidly the order in which the questions are asked, whilst others write more openly about the topic of the directive, touching on the questions that they see as most interesting or relevant to their own experiences. Sheridan (1993) distinguishes between ‘personal letters’ and ‘school essays’. The former of these styles tends to be more discursive and free-flowing, reflecting more ‘subjective’ writing. The latter is generally more structured and formal without reference to feelings and of the form of ‘social reportage’.

### 3.4 Strengths and weaknesses of the MOP

It is important to note that respondents do not constitute a statistically-representative sample of the UK population. This is an issue that researchers using MOP data have been grappling with for some time (Goot 2008; Shaw 1994). Certainly, the data reflect a bias towards members of the public with the time and/or interest to provide often very detailed responses to the directives they receive. Thus, there is an inherent trade-off between the depth of information provided and the degree to which responses are representative of the view of the population in general.

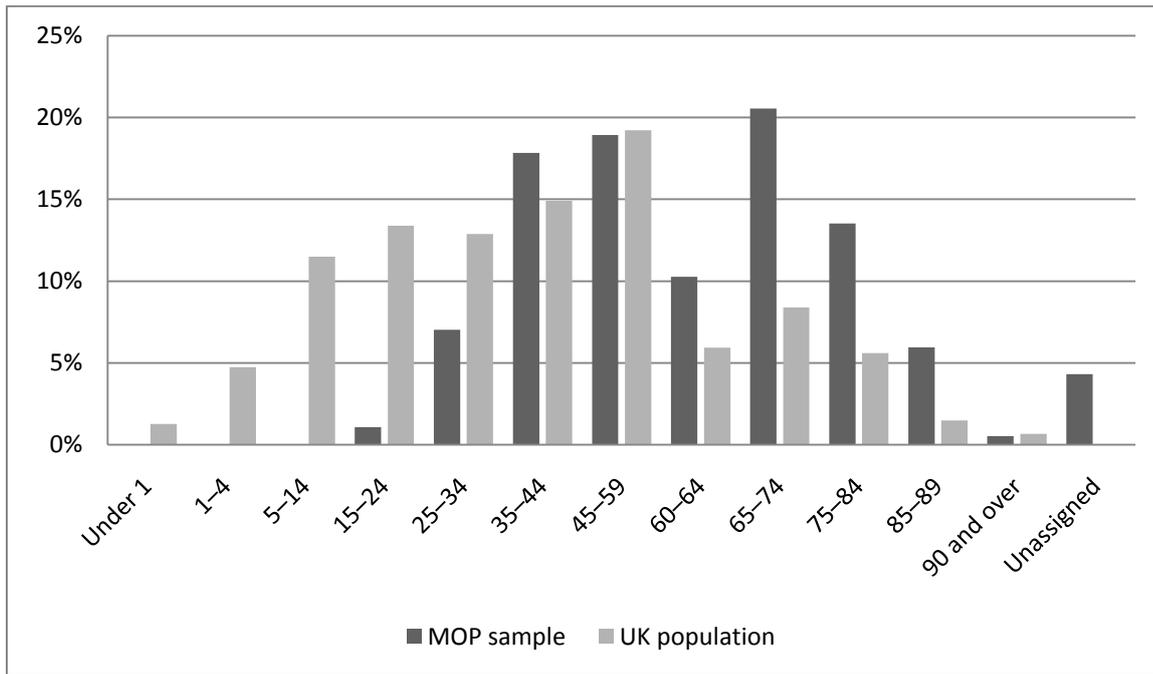
Although anonymous, the submissions in the MOP do contain limited demographic information about the respondents. Thus, we are able to make broad comparisons of the characteristics of our sample of respondents and the demographic profile of the UK population (Figures 1 to 3). Broadly, the respondents to our directive are skewed towards women, older age groups and residents of Southern regions of the UK, and the South East in particular. One important piece of missing information, however, is the level of education of respondents. We can surmise that participants in the MOP have higher than average education levels, although we are not able to validate this, and in this regards are not representative of the population as a whole.

**Figure 1: Distribution by gender of MOP respondents and UK population**



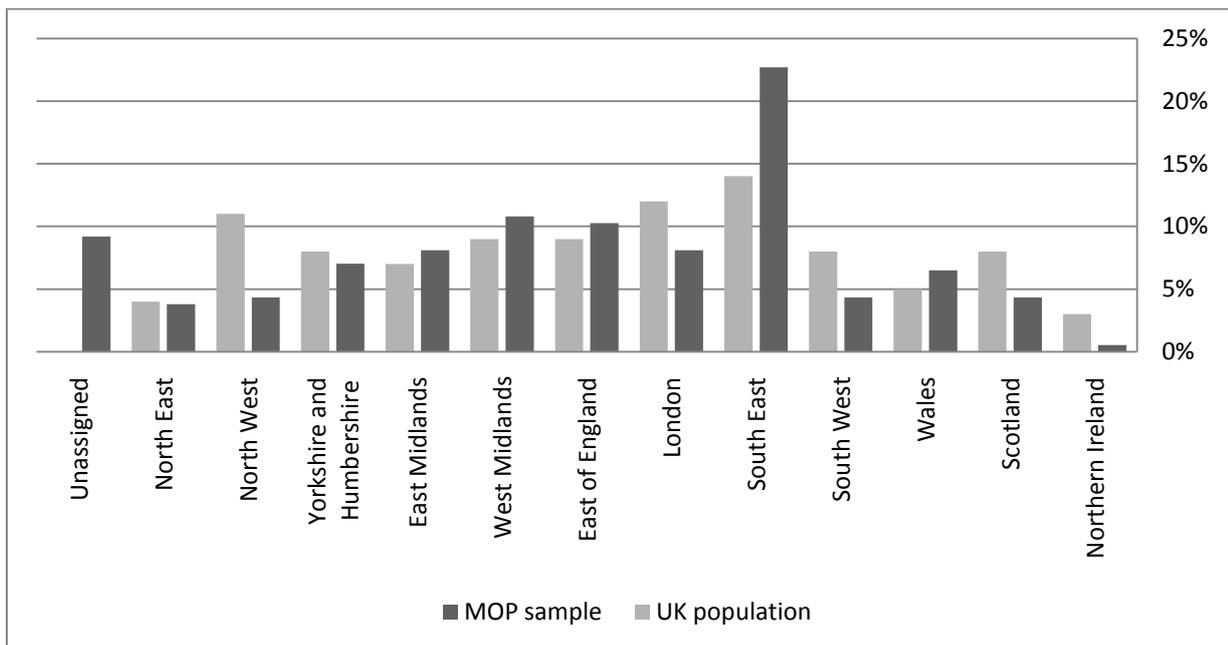
*Note:* Eight respondents are not assigned due to lack of demographic data. UK population data from 2008 (Office of National Statistics).

**Figure 2: Distribution by age of MOP respondents and UK population**



Note: UK population data from 2008 (Office of National Statistics).

**Figure 3: Distribution by region of MOP respondents and UK population**



Note: UK population data from 2008 (Office of National Statistics).

Some analysts have argued that the motivation of respondents to contribute to the MOP may be more important to the analysis than whether or not the sample of respondents to a particular directive are statistically representative according to demographic variables. For example:

- The overwhelming motive of respondents appears to be the hope of leaving ‘something of themselves’, either for their own descendants or for the community as a whole (Sheridan 1993; Shaw 1994). As such, writing for the MOP is a kind of autobiographical activity (Sheridan 1993). Some

respondents go further and see the desire to tell the world about one's life as part of an 'existential malaise' and as a way of defying death (Burgos 1988).

- Some respondents write to express indignation at the partiality and bias of media and historical accounts in an attempt to 'put the record straight'. Others write explicitly to be subversive in the face of such 'official accounts' (Shaw 1994).
- Typically, women and older age groups are over-represented among respondents, in the same manner as participation in the voluntary sector (Busby 2000). Thus, it is argued that these individuals contribute their views and experiences from a wish to be 'public-spirited', by adding to the cultural wealth of the community and for the benefit of social research (Sheridan 1993; Shaw 1994). This is a potential source of bias in our analysis, since arguably Mass Observers, due to their 'public-spiritedness', may be more inclined to be supportive of international development and aid. Therefore they could not be seen to represent national opinion.
- Some respondents are writers in other capacities, perhaps by keeping a diary, being a keen letter-writer or even writing their own life story (Sheridan 1993; Shaw 1994).

Given these wide-ranging motivations behind the self selection of the respondents, it could be argued that any attempt to create a demographically-representative sample would be misleading. The opinions of any one respondent might reflect the fact that they are an aspiring writer with a desire to record their life and times for posterity, rather than the fact that they are female, 60 years of age and live in East Anglia. It is difficult to find volunteers who are willing to contribute to a social archive over a numbers of years<sup>3</sup> and, it has been argued, this uniqueness makes the MOP a better (or at least different) form of social research than those based on deriving a statistically-representative sample of respondents.<sup>4</sup>

Broadly, therefore, the nature of the MOP thus enables it to explore the current public opinion and attitudes at a much deeper level, analysing emotional and subjective issues in ways that survey-based approaches, and even more qualitative modes of data collection such as in-depth interviews, cannot (Shaw 1994; Goot 2008). As one researcher using the MOP put it recently in the JISCMail<sup>5</sup> of the MOA:

*By encouraging thoughtful people to write at length about their semi-crystallised feelings and attitudes one can find out a lot more about the complexities and confusions involved in opinion formation than one can by bombarding a representative sample with pre-formed questions demanding unambiguous answers. (James Hinton, personal communication)*

By being able to explain rather than just describe (Goot 2008), the Mass Observation approach lends itself well to our study, providing an opportunity to look in some depth at how members of the general public see the issues of global poverty and international development, and the role of the UK and themselves in addressing these issues.

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<sup>3</sup> The only other instance of an archive that collects similar written material to the MO is based at the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm, Sweden (Sheridan 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Shaw (1994) argues strongly against the positivist strand of social science that assumes that all research should start from and with a random sample of the total population and views subjectivity as a source of bias and error.

<sup>5</sup> The National Academic Mailing List Service, known as 'JISCMail', is a service designed specifically for the further and higher education and research communities in the UK.

## 3.5 Analysis

To analyse submissions in a structured manner the qualitative data analysis software package NVivo 8 was used. This package is widely used for computer assisted qualitative data analysis (Barry 1998) and provided a convenient platform for analysis of the large volume of data provided by the 185 submissions that were included in the analysis. Thus, NVivo was used to classify the responses to the various elements of the directive with the aim of identifying and classifying the underlying themes.

The submissions were initially coded on the basis of the questions in the directive, for example on the causes of poverty in developing countries or sources of information on global poverty. In considering a particular question, the text provided by each respondent was examined in its entirety rather than focusing on the direct response to a particular question. Thus, relevant information was typically provided at various points in the text and in response to an apparently distinct question, while there was frequent cross-referencing across issues. Subsequently, sub-codes were derived in order to identify the themes underlying the responses to each of the questions, for example on specific causes of poverty such as corruption of developing country governments, conflict and the global economic system. This process of sub-coding was continued until the ability to discern distinct themes was exhausted. The end result was a multi-layered tree of codes, with the text related to particular codes allocated to the relevant node in this tree.

Throughout the coding process, attempts were made to minimise the incidence of coding bias. The initial coding was undertaken by one member of the research team. After 10 responses had been coded, all members of the team reviewed the codes to ensure the categorisation of the data was proceeding in an appropriate manner. Some adjustments to the coding framework were made at this time. After all of the responses had been coded, a second member of the research team reviewed the codes. Differences of opinion over the allocation of particular segments of text to a particular code, the subject of specific codes and/or the ability to define further sub-codes were noted and reconciled.

Below we do not attempt to present the entire coding framework<sup>6</sup>. Rather, we focus on the elicited attitudes towards global poverty and international development, and the role of aid. Many respondents also presented their views on the wider political and/or economic context, for example distrust of a particular political party. While such wider views and values evidently influence attitudes towards international development, they are beyond the scope of the analysis we present here.

## 4 Results

This section organises the results around the five aims of the study as outlined in Section 2. Throughout, verbatim quotations are presented to illustrate particular themes and the language employed by respondents to communicate their perspectives on particular development issues<sup>7</sup>. Such quotations should be seen as illustrative rather than being representative of the views of a plurality of respondents. The numbers of respondents that support a certain point are given to show where the gravity of opinion lies. However, due to the nature of the analysis, these data should not be treated as strict frequencies as might be derived, for example, from survey data. Quotes from 117 of the 185 respondents are included in the report<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> A hierarchical representation of the coding framework can be obtained from the authors.

<sup>7</sup>The numbers next to these quotations are the respondents' MOA identification numbers.

<sup>8</sup>Respondents can, if they choose, decide to retain the copyright to their submissions. They may then not be quoted, merely paraphrased. For our sample of 185, we were unable to quote 14.

## 4.1 Knowledge about global poverty and international development

Public attitudes to international development have been shown to be related to knowledge of development, alongside a wide range of socio-political, socio-demographic and wider attitudinal factors (see for example Stern 1998; Harper *et al.* 1990; Harper 1996; Carr and MacLachlan 1998; Hine and Montiel 1999; Bolitho *et al.* 2007). Numerous opinion surveys, suggest that public understanding of international development among the general public tends to be limited (McDonnell *et al.* 2003; TNS UK 2008; Riddell 2007). Indeed, Riddell (2007) in his exhaustive review of whether aid works states:

*...public support for aid appears to be associated with an extremely high degree of ignorance about what it does: most turns out to be support for humanitarian and emergency aid to address immediate problems, rather than long-term development aid.*

As an example, the results of DfID's public attitude tracking survey consistently show that 40 to 50 per cent of people consider they know relatively little about the lives of people in developing countries (see for example Figure 4).<sup>9</sup> Only a very small proportion, typically less than 10 per cent, considers that they are well informed. While there is less evidence on actual knowledge, the information that we do have suggests low levels of awareness, for example of the Millennium Development Goals (see for example TNS UK, 2009) and of aid spending. For example, in a 2006 survey for Action Aid, the average estimate of the UK aid budget as a proportion of total government spending was 18.5 percent (Action Aid, 2006). In reality, the aid budget represents around one percent of government spending.

The directive did not specifically ask respondents about their level of knowledge about causes of poverty in developing countries and broader processes of international development; although as expected we were able to draw conclusions based on responses across the directive as a whole. Thus, many respondents prefaced their written replies to particular questions by indicating the degree to which they were informed or uninformed. Of the respondents, 39 confessed to limited knowledge about the causes and/or solutions of poverty in developing countries. Nevertheless, respondents were able to provide relatively detailed 'pictures' of poverty, often focusing on the failure of interventions aimed at poverty alleviation. Some of these were based on personal experiences of living in poverty.<sup>10</sup> For example:

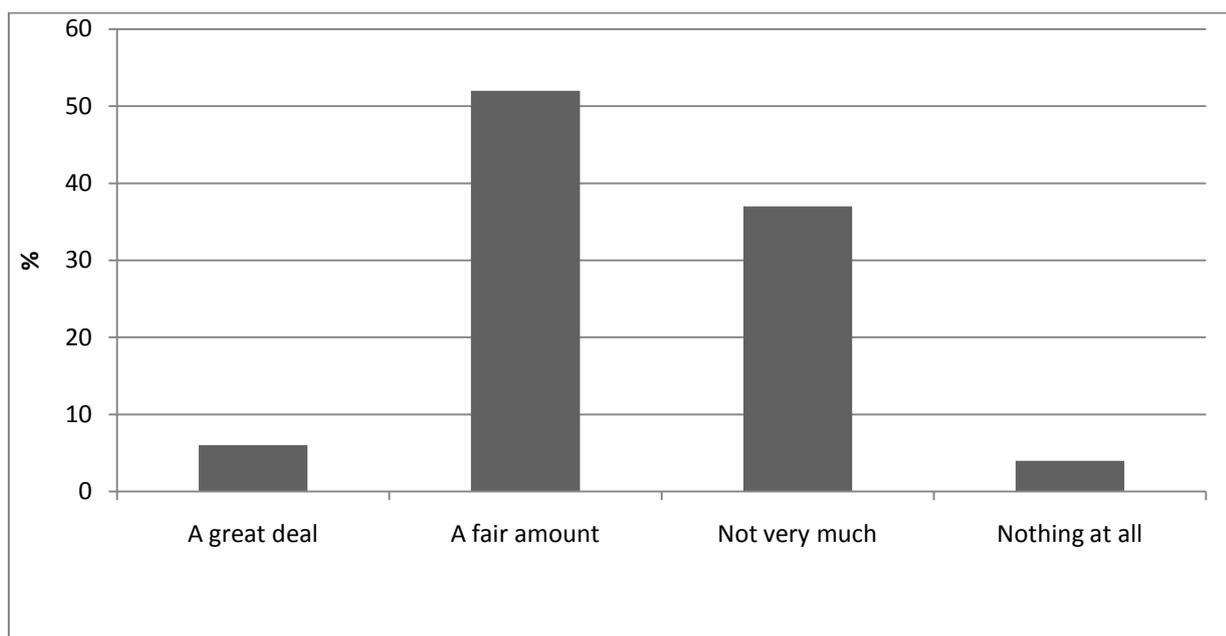
*I am not very well-read on the causes of poverty throughout the world but I think there are probably many reasons for it, for example politicians, wars, dictatorships, famine, crop failures and inequality among other things. Poorer countries are beholden to richer for aid, and when there are power issues the situation just gets worse. (R4100)*

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<sup>9</sup> Note that responses to the question 'How much, if anything, would you say you know about the lives of people in poor countries?' provide a measure of the perceived but not the actual knowledge of respondents.

<sup>10</sup> Respondents from older age groups tended to relate poverty in developing countries to less prosperous times in the UK.

**Figure 4: Perceived knowledge with respect to lives of people in poor countries. Respondents to DfID public attitudes tracking survey, August 2008 (n=2,026)**



Source: TNS UK (2008).

*I'm sure much of the charity was well intentioned and even some of the government aid. The problem is it hasn't worked. Why? Much of the money has gone into the pockets of dictators, corrupt politicians and into buying arms. The remainder came straight back to the government giving it, in the form of contracts. It seems standard practice to give aid to a country only if they spend most of it on things they don't want, made by companies in the country giving the aid. The little that got through, possibly by mistake, was wasted on projects that seemed designed not to work. An example of this is the 'give the man a bag of flour and he'll eat for a day, give a man a bag of seed and he'll eat every day'. Complete rubbish. Most of the places with real food poverty are subject to drought or floods. That's why they have no food. Give a man a bag of seed and watch it die in the field. The most staggering example of this wrong thinking is goats for Africa. Because of cattle grazing and drought there is no grass, so what do they do, buy them a goat and let it eat the trees and bushes. The trees and bushes then die and with nothing to hold it together the soil blows away. Result desert. (G4304)*

*My views about world poverty are very non 'PC'. If you live in a failed state (mostly in Africa) and then have 10 kids and expect white people to pay for them I call that irresponsible, not my blooming burden – people in the so called 'UK' don't owe a living to aids infested African baby machines with bottomless begging bowls. When does it stop? Malthus got it right (just not the time scale). It is coming to fruition soon. Geldoff said 30 years ago that there was famine in Ethiopia. Funny the population of said country is twice what it was then. By contrast the population of Ireland is still only half what it was in 1845 when a real famine was enforced by an alien neighbour (England). The world is full of bulldropiness and most of it comes out of the gobs of these lying African lovers who lie and lie to get kind hearted people in Europe to give them money when all they really need is contraception. We do no favours to Africa with 'aid'. We infantilise, immobilise, paralyse, restrict and hopes of developments in that blighted part of Africa South of the Arab lands. Let them stand on their own feet, work to feed their children (or else don't have them). I've got one grown up child – she has none. We don't go begging to feed 10 unnecessary babies. It's these people who will eventually destroy the whole human race with their sheer postulating [sic] numbers. (C2203)*

*I have to begin with a backward glance to my childhood spent in an environment closely associated with the description of a 'slum', and although my experiences are behind me by many decades, the impressions and memories from that childhood have stayed with me for near on a lifetime, and from that I think I can claim to having some knowledge of poverty. In the 1920's and 30's there were other things besides hunger. Being poor meant a fair chance of contracting diseases related to malnutrition, notably TB. That did tough our family, along with typhoid, diphtheria and scarlet fever but what has stuck in my mind as much as anything is coldness and that is because winter was always the worst of times. And there is something else – poverty has a smell all of its own. I cannot hope to describe this but should I ever come across it again, I would spot it immediately. (R1418)*

Apparently there is a level of disconnect between perceived knowledge and the ability to develop mental pictures of poverty in developing countries and the process of international development. Thus, even the uninformed may have quite elaborate views of what poverty looks like, why poverty exists, how it might be alleviated, and the specific role of aid. Further, while they may recognise their own limited knowledge on development, this does not necessarily stop people from voicing their views on the subject, and from providing detailed 'evidence' in support of these views.

Respondents derived their knowledge about poverty in developing countries mostly from the media, namely television, newspapers, radio and/or the internet (115 out of 185 respondents), predominantly because of the ease of access and availability. Similarly to results of the most recent tracking survey for DfID, television (82 respondents) and newspapers (66 respondents) were the most frequently mentioned sources of information. The DfID survey indicates that 70 per cent of respondents had seen or heard information about global poverty on television news programmes or channels in the previous 12 months, followed by television documentaries (55 per cent) and newspapers (48 per cent) (TNS UK 2009). There was, however, some scepticism about the information provided by the media, and especially television, with concerns expressed at the lack of 'comprehensive' coverage of poverty in developing countries and the focus on humanitarian emergencies that 'make a good story':

*The usual pattern is that a major crisis hits a country. The worlds press turn up and take some pictures of starving children, the reporters go 'oh isn't this terrible' then after a few days they all move on to something else and we never hear a word about the place again until the next crisis. (G4304)*

*Most of my information regarding other countries comes from TV or internet – neither of which I trust to deliver an unbiased account. (A3573)*

*Recently, there has been an enormous public row over the refusal of the BBC to broadcast an appeal by the Disasters Emergency Committee for humanitarian aid for Gaza. The DEC is a much-respected umbrella body representing the intentions and needs of thirteen national and international humanitarian agencies, and it defines targets, appeals for funds and distributes those funds in accordance with the agreed needs of its constituent agencies, [ActionAid, British Red Cross, CAFOD, Care International, Christian Aid, Concern, Help the Aged, Islamic Relief, Merlin, Oxfam, Save the Children, Tearfund and World Vision]. The decision by the BBC seemed wholly perverse, and quite at odds with the background to previous broadcast appeals; it was taken allegedly to protect the BBC's 'impartiality'. Many people appeared to think it suggested, on the contrary, that the BBC may have been responding to external pressures in a prejudiced manner. Disturbingly, it certainly didn't seem likely that the BBC had suddenly become incapable of distinguishing between an humanitarian appeal and a political campaign. It is fair to say that the overwhelming public reaction to the BBC decision was negative, although the BBC Trust, which has replaced the Board of Governors, later confirmed the initial decision by the director-general. In Glasgow, there was an additional row involving the National Union of Journalists when it became apparent that 'orders from above' forbade coverage of public protests against the DEC decision within and outside the new BBC building in Glasgow. Sadly,*

*the entire DEC/Gaza issue has quickly disappeared under the weight of the continual weight of news relating to the financial crisis.....I suppose, like many people, my information about poverty in other countries comes from newspapers, radio and television – but they all have weaknesses, driven by the ‘need’ to serve ‘24-hour news’.* (H1541)

While a number of respondents expressed quite strong dissatisfaction (or even frustration) with the media, there was little evidence that they made efforts to supplement and/or verify the information it provided by consulting other sources.<sup>11</sup> Even those individuals that seemed interested in development issues were evidently not willing to expend significant time and/or effort in searching out additional information. This is in line with the results of a recent focus group-based study of the use of the internet to obtain information about development; although participants generally considered that they were interested but poorly informed about development, they had little inclination to use the internet to find out more (TWRResearch 2009).

Of the respondents, 66 had direct experience of developing countries, predominantly through work or holiday travel and could provide detailed accounts of poverty encountered. Mostly, such experiences were incidental and passive, for example through observing poor people rather than engaging with them, and were the cause of considerable discomfort to some respondents:

*We have in the last fifteen years been fortunate to have travelled abroad and on occasions to third world countries. I have painful memories of what I have witnessed and have been told by local guides when travelling from Port Said to Cairo and whilst driving across the interior of the Dominican Republic and in Africa. The conditions in which people are living are unbelievably basic, and by our standards, unbearable. In Egypt we were told by our local guide that children often fall in the salt marshes, upon which their homes are built, but with possibly a dozen children to a family it is not deemed as disastrous as we would view it, especially if the child was not male. Shocking but realistic.* (L3298)

*The only country I have visited and seen real poverty in was India. The extremes of poverty and wealth were to be seen side by side. It made me feel that if only the rich gave to the poor the whole situation could be much improved.* (M1571)

*In India I saw much poverty, people living in shacks, and always the beggars at one’s side. In Egypt there were fewer beggars, but what struck me, when looking out of the window of our modern hotel, I saw below, people living in hovels, no roof on them. I was told, they build houses and can then not afford to put on a roof, but the tourists live in comparative luxury – not a comfortable thought!* (K0310)

Other respondents (21) admitted to choosing not to travel to a developing country because of the possibility of being confronted with ‘upsetting’ images of poverty. Very few respondents had actively interacted with poor people, however, for example through volunteering or working for a development charity. Indeed, contact with local people as a whole was generally limited to staff at hotels, shopkeepers and road-side sellers of handicrafts, with a number of respondents (31) making references to beggars (and especially children) in the streets:

*My husband and I have travelled extensively and witnesses poverty in Siberia, Russia and many of the Caribbean islands. Very young children and mothers holding babies in their arms, begging for rupees in India was the worst I’ve witnessed as the children seemed to be getting nipped by their mother to make them cry even harder.* (M3469)

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<sup>11</sup> Only three respondents explicitly stated that they had done further research to verify information. As well as the media, a relatively small minority (19 of 185 respondents) derived information on poverty in developing countries and international development from charitable appeals (which were also often delivered through the media).

*The first time I went to a third world country, I was sitting on the beach and this little Cambodian boy came over to me and asked for some money. I shrugged and said that I would give him some money if he went and got me a coke. He ran off with the dollar and I thought that was the last I'd see of him, but he soon returned and gave me the 50 cents change which I let him keep. Then I asked if he wanted to try some coke, to which he nodded. What happened next I will never forget and it really surprised me because after the boy took a sip of the coke his eyes lit up and his tongue spat out like he drank some acid than he handed the can back to me and shook his head. I couldn't believe that this was the first time he had drunk coke, even though he knew what it was, but then I understood why/or how this was because after I was finished he took my can then ran off. (M4390)*

While such experiences might have served to secure the realism of poverty, some respondents recognised that they were of little educational value in terms of understanding the nature of poverty and why it existed:

*I appreciate that holiday travelling does not really enable me to see the real underlying problems of poverty. I have been to Zimbabwe, Kenya, Zambia, India, Nepal, Malaya and parts of South America and have some idea how many of the people in these parts of the world live. (B3323)*

A great deal of credence tended to be given by respondents (37) to the experiences of friends and relatives that had travelled more extensively and/or worked in developing countries. Indeed, these experiences were presented as virtual 'truths' and many respondents could relate them in significant detail:

*My friend worked for the WHO and was involved in crop spraying in various parts of Africa. He witnessed aid being diverted for unscrupulous peoples personal use and not being delivered at all and is very wary of who he gives to and warns people likewise. He was disgusted to see the result of people's hard work collecting the money and that of the donors going to waste. (R1321)*

*I am never too sure, however, about inter-governmental aid. C, a friend of our daughter, is an 'aid auditor' going to third world countries to investigate how and where aid money is spent and hers is an unenviable job. She is unpopular and often obstructed when trying to discover where grants have gone – not into the projects for which they were given, in many case [sic]. I'm not sure how much the UK government gives and even less sure that it is well spent in the country of receipt. (W0633)*

*When my friend Bidy was a young aspiring engineer at Glasgow University, aged 20, from Sierra Leone, we met him and have remained friends ever since, loving his family and now his grand children. Back in Sierra Leone he had an engineering job and of course I had to visit for a month. So I saw him in a different light, in his own country, and was shocked. His standard of living was high as he worked for a German firm, but the abject poverty was disturbing. By this time his children were grown up and 'away'. We argued a lot about the disparity in living conditions but to my gradual understanding it was all of a piece, but on a huge scale. His father was pulled out of the crowd because he was very clever at school and made his way up the 'colonial' ladder. He could afford to educate his family and here was my friend Bidy reaping the benefits. When I objected to the sight of a small boy selling paraffin (for the lights!) in the lane at 10.00 at night, Bidy could say that his Dad did the same, etc. So, just as in most countries, including ours, if you're clever or have a bit of influence, you can succeed. Money helps – private schooling? I was taken to see the villages up in the hills, the so-called hospital, the broken little houses lit by candle and paraffin, all selling pitiful bits of fruit or sweets. I think what shocked me most was the corruption from the moment of landing. Everybody, including the Police, wanted a cut. No wonder that the poverty was endemic. The government 'house' of the President was a palace fit for a king. (F1560)*

In turn, the ability to relay 'real' experiences, whether their own or those of their friends and relatives, was taken by respondents as conferring a degree of legitimacy to their views. This appears to relate not only to the directness of the experience, making it difficult for a second party to refute, and also the detail with which

respondents were able to elaborate instances of the development (or lack of) process. As a result they tended to be more confident (or even assertive) in how they responded to the directive. For example:

*I feel more people would be even more generous if direct links could be drawn between the donor and the recipient. I can cite an example of this, tow [sic] examples in fact. A couple years ago the church in this parish was instrumental in rebuilding a school in Rwanda which had been destroyed in the fighting a few years ago. The amount needed was large and it seemed too big for one parish to tackle. However, with the help of people within the church who had the vision of how this could be achieved, we set about raising tens of thousands of pounds. The sum was raised within the given time, and in fact, the amount required was exceeded. This was due to the generosity of the local people and also the constant updates on how work was progressing and the fact that people from our parish were able to visit and report back on the work development. There was therefore a direct link between the donors and the recipient. The second example, was involving my own church and our link parish in Malawi. Their church was damaged in storms and needed a substantial amount of work. We set about raising money and within a couple of weeks were able to send them sufficient to effect the repairs. Again, I feel this was in part due to people's generosity and the fact that we knew exactly where the money was going and how it was being used. (S4311)*

*My husband is very proud of how the UK delivers aid. It tenders out projects so the best possible people run them and DfID oversee the projects. This makes them efficient and accountable (I should think they could lose a few high paid DfID staff myself – FCO and DfID) from the FCO and de-politicised aid and it has been a big success and applauded [sic]. Not many other countries have followed through. I wonder whether it is not too right on for this world where the Chinese will build you a road for mining rights? (M3055)*

As we discuss below, there was often a tendency to stereotype or over-generalise, extrapolating experiences in a specific context (for example one particular country) to the wider region or even developing countries as a whole.

In summary, while most respondents recognised that their knowledge of poverty in developing countries and international development was limited, many could present quite detailed accounts, for example of what poverty was like and why it existed. While the media was the main source of information on development issues, it was generally recognised to be biased towards crises rather than painting a picture of the state of developing countries more generally. Actual experiences of poverty, whether their own or those of friends and relatives, were seen as being of much greater value, and tended to be the basis of even more detailed accounts of poverty in developing countries more generally.

## 4.2 The causes of poverty

In the literature, a number of attempts have been made to derive a classification of causes of poverty in developing countries, with the aim of understanding how and why attitudes vary across individuals (see for example Harper *et al.* 1990; Carr *et al.* 1998; Carr and MacLachlan 1998; Hine and Montiel 1999; Bolitho *et al.* 2007; Panadero and Vazquez 2008). Broadly, these studies identify four explanatory factors<sup>12</sup>:

- **Poor themselves**, for example laziness or lack of education.
- **Exploitation**, for example by rich countries or the global financial or trading system.

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<sup>12</sup> Some studies (for example Hine and Montiel 1999; Bolitho *et al.* 2007; Panadero and Vazquez 2008) identify war and conflict as an additional and separate factor, while others see war and exploitation as a single factor (for example Campbell *et al.* 2001). Additional factors identified include fate and the level of inequality (Hine and Montiel 1999).

- **Developing country governments**, for example corruption and greed.
- **Natural causes**, for example drought, floods, earthquakes, etc.

The relative emphasis put on these individual factors has been shown to depend on broader attitudes and experience, for example on whether individuals believe that the world is fundamentally just (Campbell *et al.* 2001) and the degree to which they have direct experience of poverty (Carr and Maclachlan 1998; Campbell *et al.* 2001; Bolitho *et al.* 2007). In turn, beliefs about the causes of poverty can have a major influence on the propensity of individuals to behave in ways that are considered to act against poverty (Hine and Montiel 1999). Such actions are more likely to be taken if developing countries and the poor therein are considered to be ‘deserving’; for example because they are the ‘victims’ of natural causes and/or exploitation rather than having brought their poverty ‘onto themselves’.

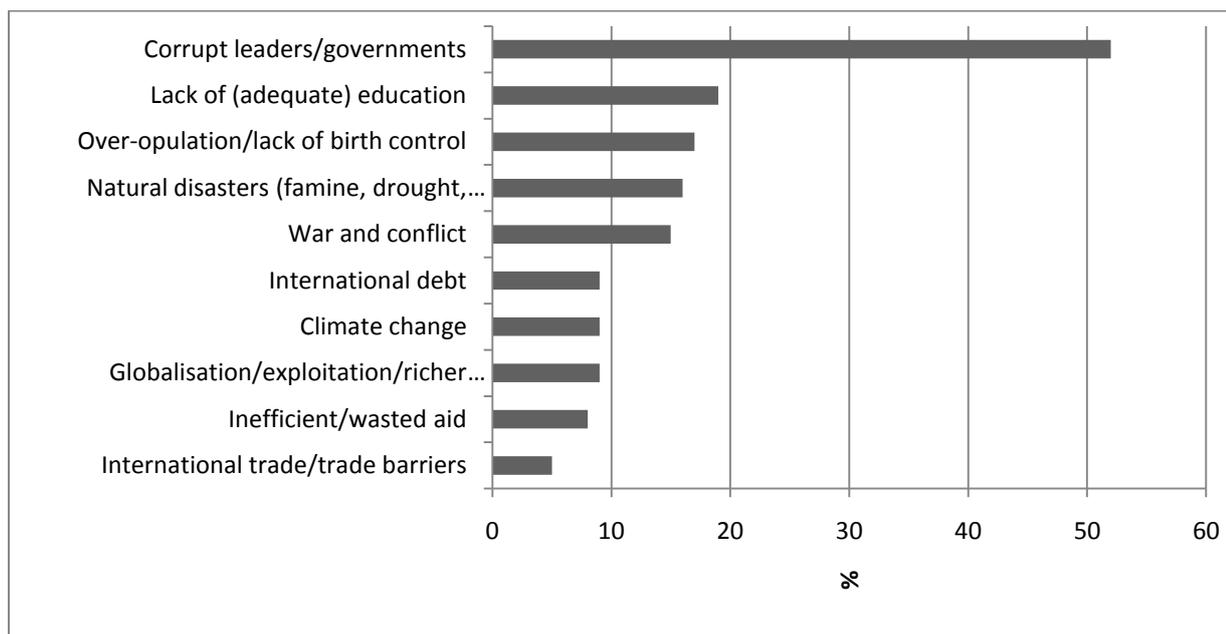
To date, there has been little or no attention in the academic literature to the perceived causes of poverty in developing countries within the UK population. However, DfID’s public attitude tracking survey provides some information in this regard. In the September 2009 survey, respondents were asked what they considered to be the main causes of poverty in poor countries through an open-ended question (Figure 5). By far the most common response, mentioned by 52 per cent of respondents, was corruption in developing countries. This suggests that poverty in developing countries is primarily attributed to the countries themselves (but importantly not to the poor in those countries) rather than natural causes and/or exploitation. There is some evidence, however, that perceptions of the causes of poverty among the UK public are rather sensitive to the way in which the question is framed, perhaps reflecting the weak knowledge base on which they are founded? Thus, the August 2008 tracking survey used a rather different response format for this question; providing respondents with a list of possible causes from which they were asked to select three. While corruption and related issues was indicated to be a cause of poverty in developing countries by 50 per cent of respondents, the most widely cited cause was war and conflict, being chosen by 55 per cent of respondents.

Responses to the directive provide some indication of the relative importance given to differing potential causes of poverty in developing countries.<sup>13</sup> More importantly, however, they highlight how the UK public constructs the issue of poverty in developing countries; why it exists and how they come to highlight particular causal factors, notably in the context of often quite limited personal knowledge and experience. In broad terms, the causes of poverty in developing countries elaborated by respondents fit within the categories defined by the existing literature, as summarised above.

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<sup>13</sup> Responses to the directive with respect to the causes of poverty in developing countries are broadly comparable to the results of DfID’s public attitude tracking survey in September 2009, in that responses to both are unprompted.

**Figure 5: Unprompted perceived causes of poverty in developing countries. Respondents to DfID public attitudes tracking survey, September 2009 (n=2,081)**



Source: TNS UK (2009).

As with DfID’s public attitude tracking survey in September 2009, the most widely cited cause of poverty in developing countries was corruption and greed, generally levelled at government (91 respondents).<sup>14</sup> Respondents frequently made reference to specific country cases to illustrate their reasoning, of which the most frequent was Robert Mugabe and/or Zimbabwe (68 respondents):

*Much of the world’s poverty and inequality is caused by corrupt governments. Just look at Mugabe in Zimbabwe. I am not saying that this is the only cause but given the amount of foreign aid given by the West something should be improving by now. (B1426)*

*Bad government also plays a part – look at Zimbabwe. A classic case of how to ruin a thriving country and destroy the lives of its people. (C2053)*

*Stop Press: I have just been listening to a correspondent on BBC Radio 4 who reports on the situation in Nigeria where the discovery and development of an oil industry has resulted in corruption at all levels. Oil billionaires live in luxury while a large percentage of the country’s inhabitants exist in squalid poverty. Afghanistan, too, is reported to be corrupt ‘from top to bottom’ and the British Government is being urged by some to stop treating its President with kid gloves. (B1654)*

Often respondents admitted to having limited knowledge on the causes of poverty in developing countries and basing their views on what they had read, seen or heard in the media, again often referencing specific cases. In so doing, there was a tendency to generalise from the specific cases they cited to developing countries (and especially sub-Saharan Africa) as a whole, with such generalisations being presented as virtual ‘truths’:

*Consider what has happened to the country called Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) it used to be one of the most prosperous and wealthy countries in Africa. Thanks to its malevolent ruler Robert Mugabe it is now on the verge of famine with the population living a ‘hand to mouth’ existence. In the last few weeks many reports have been coming out of the country, showing the*

<sup>14</sup> Weak governance was mentioned by 15 respondents.

*starving children and many other people dying of Cholera. All these problems are caused by the corrupt government who have grabbed the money to line their own pockets and to do what ever they like, with no thought of how the money can be used wisely to provide education, working sanitation, health resources and employment to build on the agricultural policies that were in place when Mugabe came into power. The same story is repeated in Sudan, Somalia, Congo, Rwanda. (H2639)*

*It [Africa] is of course a continent that abounds with weaponry of every kind. Nor is there any shortage of munitions that make the weapons effective. African rebels fire off ammunition in a manner that would have got me court marshalled as a British Soldier. Still less is there any reluctance to use such munitions. We are all aware of events in Zimbabwe, the Congo, Somalia, Kenya and Rwanda. No shortage of weaponry there. What is in short supply is African leaders prepared to speak out against such abuses of power and influence. The West could bankrupt itself pouring aid into black Africa and it would not change a thing. Because the will to do so is not there. Indeed as I write the West does indeed totter on the verge of bankruptcy. Not, I concede, entirely due to events in Africa and elsewhere, but most certainly due to an almost world wide epidemic of economic lunacy. (H1543)*

Exploitation by industrialised countries, including references to colonisation, world economic system, and lack of concern and/or greed on behalf of rich countries, was also widely cited (77 respondents) as a cause of poverty in developing countries. In many of the responses, there were frequent references to the imbalance of power between rich and poor countries, with subsequent accusations of ‘exploitation’ or ‘manipulation’ on the part of industrialised countries and/or multi-national corporations based in industrialised countries.

*One of the chief causes of world poverty is surely the greed of the affluent nations, including Britain and the United States and their manipulation of the financial system so that their profits are increased whilst the living standards of poorer nations are diminished. Inequalities remain because those in power though they may protest belief in equality do not really believe in it. (B1989)*

*The capitalist system linked with countries hierarchical power systems I believe are the greatest cause of poverty across the world. It involves the exploitation of others either directly through waged labour or by exploitation of materials which can be in this country or abroad controlled by those in power. This exploitation takes place to a lesser or greater degree depending on the system the hierarchical power system takes e.g. Britain or Zimbabwe but it does take place. (H3821)*

*I believe that the poverty we see in our own country and throughout the developing world is a result of aggressive capitalism driven by multinational corporations and also a result of our failure as a society to move away from hierarchical forms of governance. (C3210)*

This presents a rather different picture to the results of DfID’s most recent public attitude tracking survey (see Figure 5), in which only 9 per cent of respondents gave globalisation, exploitation and/or rich countries as a cause of poverty in developing countries. This likely reflects dissimilarities in the demographic make-up of respondents to the two studies, and importantly the more self-selected and less representative nature of participants in the MOP. Perhaps as (if not more) important, however, is the quite different ways in which the studies elicit responses. Thus, the questionnaire-based format of DfID’s tracking survey will tend to elicit ‘top of mind’ responses. In contrast, the MOP provides respondents with the opportunity to provide a more considered and longer response that is less focused on issues that can be readily recalled. In this sense, the current study arguably provides a more reliable picture of how respondents (although not necessarily the UK public as a whole) views poverty in developing countries.

Responses to the directive also made frequent references (76 respondents) to natural factors including famine, disease, climate and natural disasters:

*We all started out the same, but the main thing that has divided us is climate. It is noticeable that the poorest areas of the world are those with extreme temperatures, especially hot areas. These are the areas that are least able to sustain themselves, i.e. grow their own food. That is simplistic because we have the technology to find water to provide for crops, drinking etc. so it is not insurmountable. (F3641)*

*The world relies on nature to maintain a balance to sustain human life. When this balance is upset, by for example, natural disaster, such as earthquake or flood, whole communities and large areas of population can be thrust into immediate profit. Changes in expected patterns of weather can also bring poverty to countries or areas with huge reliance on farming and other agricultural industries. Global warming is also thought by some to affect world climates and in turn could induce poverty. (W4376)*

While such 'natural causes' were largely seen as being outside of human control, reference was often made to the inability of developing countries to offset or cope with their effects due to lack of resources and/or weak infrastructure. As will be seen below, 'victims' of such natural causes were generally seen as 'more deserving' of sympathy and support.

Relatively frequent references were also made to war and conflict (62 respondents), whether between countries or internally:

*I believe that most global poverty and the relevant health problems arising from this is caused in the main by wars. There always seems to be a conflict somewhere in Africa and as a result there are always famines and plagues and death. The terrible problem is the innocent people who get caught up in these wars through no fault of their own. I don't really understand the causes of these conflicts but perhaps where resources are few and money is scarce it's simply a fight for power to own what bit there is to ensure their own survival. (H1703)*

*War impoverishes. Many lands that were treated in this way have never known peace since, as culture has been thrown upon culture and tribe upon tribe. (N3588)*

In many cases, particular country cases were cited; again Zimbabwe was the frequent frame of reference. Predominantly, however, war or conflict was seen as the consequence of authoritarianism and/or self-interest of developing country governments. Thus, many respondents presented instances of war or conflict as examples of how bad governance acts to the detriment of the poor.

Of the 185 respondents, 55 attributed poverty in developing countries to the actions of the poor themselves, notably as individuals. Where reference was made to the actions of the poor, cultural factors such as 'tribalism' or religion were generally cited, seeing the poor as being constrained or driven in their behaviour by the wider social context:

*Global poverty is world wide of course, but let's take the African continent for example. The people are still very tribal even now. Years ago they would have had clubs and spears. Today they have modern automatic weapons. This not only does more damage, but the innocent poor people suffer as usual. (G3655)*

*The interpretation of Islam to the disadvantage of women is a factor in much poverty and death. There are millions of 'missing' women in the world, women who just don't exist due either to female infanticide or a prejudice against them which results in available health care and education being given only to males in situations where a hard choice must be made. Women die because of this, for instance, death in childbirth is far greater where Islam is the main religion. This may be due to less money being spent on women's health or it may be due to lack of basic health education either on the mother's part or on that of the midwife. For certain, it is due to systematic undervaluation of women within Islam. (N3588)*

Where reference was made to ‘inappropriate’ behaviour on the part of the poor, this was generally attributed to a lack of awareness or education. Thus, the poor were seen as perpetuating their own poverty and/or lacking the ability to ‘work their way out of poverty’ due to a simple lack of the necessary knowledge and skills:

*I think that a lack of education plays a major role in a countries [sic] development. If a country has an educated population and educated people in responsible positions, then they have more chance of getting themselves out of bad situations – or more importantly, ensuring they don’t find themselves in those situations in the first place. (W4092)*

*Some countries simply lack knowledge that most of the rest of the world have gathered over the past 100 years. In the UK, we can take for granted the coming of industrial advances, information technology, transport and most other twentieth century successes. Much of this knowledge is yet to spread to third world countries and therefore we often think of these countries as we would of the UK in the early Victorian times. (W4376)*

*Much of the poverty is in Africa where corruption amongst the politicians means that any income from, say oil never gets down to the villages. This means that education is often lacking so those with intelligence and drive never realise their potential. (G4313)*

Predominantly, issues such as over-population and large families were seen as consequences of lack of education (and poverty) rather than being the primary causes of poverty in their own right. Again this provides an interesting contrast to the results of DfID’s public attitudes tracking survey undertaken in September 2009, with over-population/lack of birth control ranked as the third most frequently cited cause of poverty in developing countries.

The lack of attribution of poverty in developing countries to the poor themselves broadly translated into a view that the poor were deserving of help. This was especially manifested with regards to children and the victims of natural disasters and conflict, which were truly considered to be innocent victims:

*The most graphic and heart rending images of African children lying in squalor with flies crawling over them is not only distressing (a pitifully inadequate expression) but an indictment of international responsibility. (P3209)*

*Personally I am not keen to support a country that is making no effort to help itself (or indeed creating the problem internally). That doesn’t mean that I don’t feel a tremendous sympathy for the people of that country – simply that I don’t think my money will be spent on helping them, but will be spent funding a war instead). However, poverty or ill health due to a natural disaster is different in my eyes, and something the world should respond to as quickly and efficiently as possible. (A3573)*

Among respondents that saw poverty in developing countries as being predominantly ‘self inflicted’, there was evidently less sympathy and support for aid:

*If I had 10 kids instead of 1 I would not expect someone better off to pay for them but if I did pay for them and they went on to have 10 kids each should I now pay for 100 kids and 20 years later 1000 kids. This is the madness of the aid culture, the population of Africa is 10 times what it was 50 years ago and will be 10 times more 50 years from now. It has got to stop. I’m not being racist, I’m stating what should be blooming obvious to any sane person. (C2203)*

*The major cause of poverty and inequality in the world is that there are too many people in some parts of the world. It seems to be that countries that have very little in the way of resources have a population that believe that their future lies in producing as many children as possible; there are far too many people to feed with the food available. Whereas, wealthier countries, with many resources, have far fewer children per head of population. I’m afraid I don’t believe that we have any responsibility to alleviate poverty in other countries. We interfere in these matters and ultimately it doesn’t help at all. (R1025)*

While it is possible to discern a number of distinct causal factors, as discussed above, many respondents attributed poverty in developing countries to the complex interaction of multiple factors, often with no obvious ranking of the factors cited. This highlights how poverty in developing countries was recognised to be a complicated issue and where addressing one causal factor alone was unlikely to make an appreciable difference if other causal factors were not simultaneously addressed:

*Poverty throughout the world has many causes. Geographical ones, for a start. Countries subject to extremes of climate, to droughts, floods, soil erosion, are less able to grow what is necessary to feed their people. Ignorance adds to this, especially as ignorance leads to over-population. Poor, exploitative governments, as exemplified by Zimbabwe at the current time, creates poverty. Exploitation by wealthier countries adds to this, encouraging people to grow crops to sell, rather than to feed themselves. Unfair trading rules, favouring the wealthy, powerful nations are another factor. Wars, of course, create poverty. (P2546)*

*I would cite the following as contributory factors to either or both, unemployment, unfair terms of trade, the concentration of the wealth of a country and the ownership of property in too few hands, disease (such as Aids, malaria and TB), overpopulation, the lack of access or opposition to birth control methods, civil war, poor access to health care, climate change, lack of clean water, the lack of proper democracy and a weak rule of law, the poor management of resources and revenue (by individuals or by a government), poor educational facilities, corruption, political factors such as the imperialism colonialism and post communism, war (including civil war and genocide) and, finally, over-intensive farming methods leading to deforestation overgrazing and desertification. (T3686)*

*Poverty, real poverty, is caused by a variety of events. Wars are the obvious cause, since they destroy homes and land and displace people, leaving them with nothing. Famine too has the same effect, as does over-population. (C2053)*

The complexity of poverty in developing countries meant that a minority of respondents were unable to delineate particular causal factors, often recognising their own lack of knowledge on the subject. A number of these respondents provided a rather nuanced understanding of poverty. For example:

*I know that whatever I think are the causes of poverty, the real cause will be far more complicated than I think. It's all very well to say 'greed' or 'poor distribution of food and money' or 'stupidity' is the cause of poverty, but of course it's all those things combined with economics, religion, politics, well every aspect of life can be altered to alleviate poverty. (A1706)*

*No-one understands the causes of poverty and inequality throughout the world, and I think that it is begging the question to phrase it this way. Poverty and inequality have a long and complicated history, predating any present situation. The current pattern of world poverty and inequality is just one stage in a constantly changing process. I want to resist strongly the idea that poverty in some nations is due solely to the rise of Western nations. That would be an unhistorical view – poverty in, for example, India and parts of Africa, have a long history, pre-dating contact with the West. (J3248)*

The directive provided very rich information on what the UK public perceive to be the predominant causes of poverty in developing countries, and further illustrated the quite detailed pictures that individuals can present when asked to think about global poverty and international development, even though they have very little direct experience or knowledge, at least from formal sources. Taken as a whole, the results suggest that poverty in developing countries is seen predominantly as a product of 'bad governments' in the South, with the poor being regarded in turn as the 'victims' of the resultant corruption, conflict and the like. While exploitation by rich countries and natural factors were also seen as important, these were generally considered secondary to the actions of developing country governments. At the same time, many respondents comprehended the complexity of poverty in developing countries, recognising that many factors converge to make and keep people poor.

### 4.3 Responsibility to help the poor in developing countries

Previous research suggests that the two dominant drivers of public support for international development assistance are moral/humanitarian motives and self-interest (Riddell 2007). The evidence of the direction and magnitude of these two competing motives is, however, rather mixed. For example, Lumsdaine (1993) suggests that the main reason people in industrialised countries support the concept of aid is because of a moral duty to help. Van Heerde and Hudson (2010) provide further evidence of a positive relationship between moral duty and concern about poverty in developing countries. However, they also demonstrate that the level of concern is influenced by the degree to which people consider poverty in developing countries affects them personally, suggesting that self-interest is also a driver.

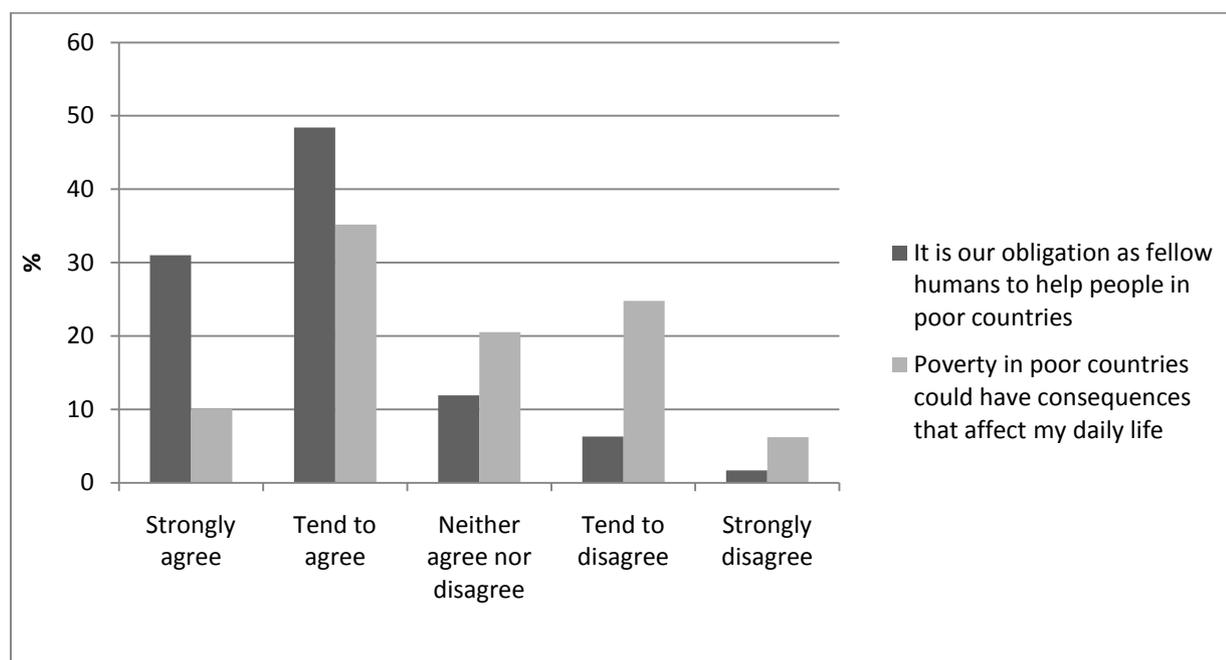
The results of a survey undertaken for DfID in April 2008 with the purpose of defining segments of the UK population according to their attitudes towards international development provides some information on perceived obligation to assist with the alleviation of poverty in developing countries (Figures 6 and 7). Thus, 79 per cent of respondents considered that they had some moral responsibility, as a human being, to help people in poor countries. Only 45 per cent, however, considered that poverty in poor countries had an impact on their daily lives, suggesting a relatively weak self-interest motive. While most respondents were able to cite ways in which the UK more broadly is directly affected by poverty in developing countries, no single issue stands out as being of great concern; while immigration was the single most cited concern, it was only mentioned by 25.2 per cent of respondents.

The directive asked specifically about the responsibilities of individuals and industrialised country governments in tackling poverty in developing countries. An appreciable number of respondents (72) made explicit reference to the obligation of governments in rich countries to assist developing countries in alleviating poverty. Three motives were presented for this. First, the moral duty of industrialised countries to provide assistance given their wealth and global inequalities:

*Britain remains wealthy in global terms and that automatically brings a distinct responsibility for charity towards less fortunate countries. (V3767)*

*We have a responsibility to help those less fortunate, in the country and abroad, simply because they are fellow human beings. For all our difficulties we are amongst the most fortunate in the world and it is easy to take this for granted – we are all guilty of doing that. (B1475)*

**Figure 6: Perceived responsibility to help poor in developing countries. Respondents to DfID segmentation survey, April 2008 (n=2,038)**



Source: TNS UK (2008).

Second, historical ties between industrialised and developing countries, predominantly linked to colonialism that was seen as imparting a moral duty to help:

*We should also remember that as far as Africa at least is concerned, many of the present problems were enhanced and nurtured during our inexcusable occupation and division of the country during the time of 'the greatest empire the world had ever seen'. (W1893)*

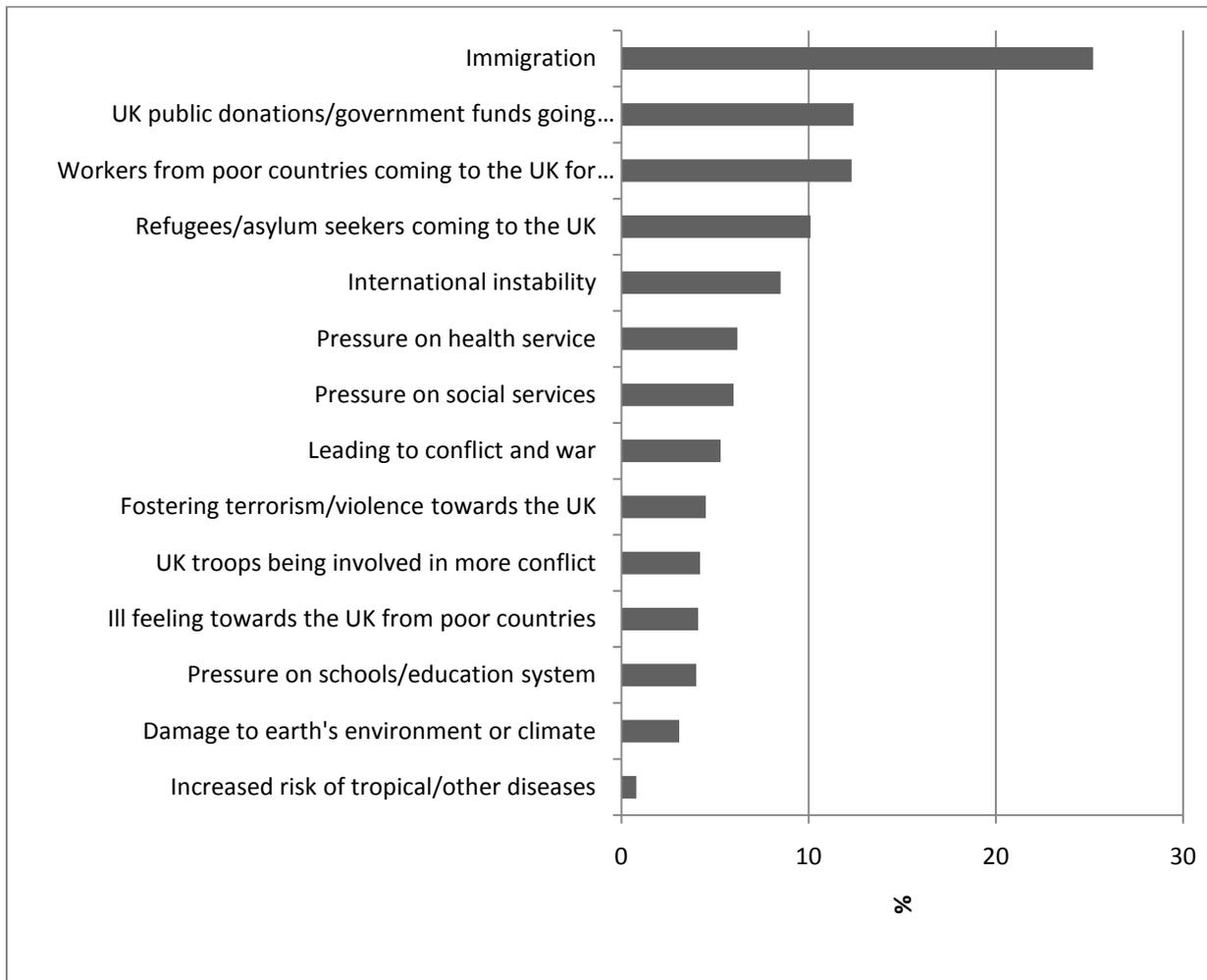
*However, we still have a responsibility to our fellow human beings in the world. Do we want to see destruction on such a grand scale through inaction and neglect? I certainly don't. The mentality of 'colonialism' and 'empire' still permeate a lot of government rhetoric. The UK still has to make amends, as do other European countries, for the pillage of African resources to fuel their own capitalistic coffers. Governments still ally themselves strategically with dictators or offer aid with conditions that benefit the business fat cats who are embedded in politics in this country. (S4845)*

Finally, industrialised countries were considered to have an interest in assisting developing countries to reduce poverty. Key motives here included addressing current and/or future conflicts and reducing flows of (predominantly illegal) migration:

*As a wealthy country the UK has an obligation to aid other countries, apart from anything else, not doing so increases the risk of conflict, migration etc. (S3844)*

*All developed countries have some responsibility, I think, towards less fortunate countries. I once heard Shirley Williams, the Liberal Democrat MP, talking about 'enlightened self-interest' in this regard, and I think this was a good way of putting it. It cannot be a bad thing to foster relations with a poorer country, and give that country help; common humanity says this is so, but there is also the possibility of a future market place being developed, or a future ally in conflict. (F3409)*

**Figure 7: Perceptions of ways in which UK directly affected by poverty in developing countries. Respondents to DfID segmentation survey, April 2008 (n=2,038)**



Source: TNS UK (2008).

A very small number of respondents voiced the converse view that industrialised countries had no responsibility to assist developing countries (5 respondents) or that the primary responsibility lies with developing country governments (8 respondents).

*I don't really feel the 'developed' world has a responsibility to the 'developing' beyond seeing that our dealings with them are fair and equitable as with any other country.....I feel that charity begins at home and the government should, therefore, focus on the UK rather than overseas aid. (T4031)*

*I'm afraid I don't believe that we have any responsibility to alleviate poverty in other countries. We interfere in these matters and ultimately it doesn't help at all. (R1025)*

*In general I see aid as putting a sticking plaster on a fractured leg. I would prefer to see the problems being solved by those who are the cause. See them shamed into caring for their people. (W0853)*

The primary reasons given to support this position were that 'interfering' in matters of other countries did more harm than good and it was time for these countries to take responsibility for their own problems.

Individuals in developed countries were also seen (43 respondents) as bearing some responsibility to support and/or take actions directed at alleviating poverty in developing countries. Predominantly, reference was made to the notion of moral duty:

*As citizens of the world I believe we do have responsibilities to others and as a world we are failing if we can't get clean water to all and enough food for all. National boundaries should have no significance if we cannot feed and give clean water to all. Yes we have responsibilities to the rest of the world and that means we have to get involved. (H3821)*

*This is unimaginable to us in the developed world! I am sure that there are many Britons who don't agree with giving overseas aid, but we have an obligation to help those in need – that's what separates us from the animals! (R4100)*

At the same time, there was considerable scepticism about the ability of individuals to have an appreciable impact on poverty in developing countries, in contrast to the much greater economic and political power of industrialised country governments:

*My apparent liberal guilt over the differences in our circumstances is however, overlaid by the knowledge that there is very little I can personally do to make life better for those millions. I can give to charity, I can sign petitions, I can, and do buy as much fair trade as I can, and I can wear the little white rubber band on my wrist to 'Make poverty history', but unlike Bono I'm not in a position to lobby the PM or the G7. I'm a librarian, and I live in Leeds; let's get real. (N3181)*

*I am acutely aware of the disparity in living standards between the west and the third world. And of the difference in health care. I am also aware of personal feelings of helplessness that, I, as a single individual, can do virtually nothing that will make any difference. (C3603)*

*As to long term responsibilities of individuals, there's a sense of powerlessness involved here because of the enormity of the task and, I suspect, the fact that it is a long way away and people in Britain are currently confronted by plenty of their own problems. (T4345)*

Consequently, there was an evident frustration among those respondents citing a duty on the part of individuals to take actions to alleviate poverty in developing countries. While they very much wanted to make a difference, they often felt 'helpless' in the face of the enormity of the problem and their own limited knowledge and resources.

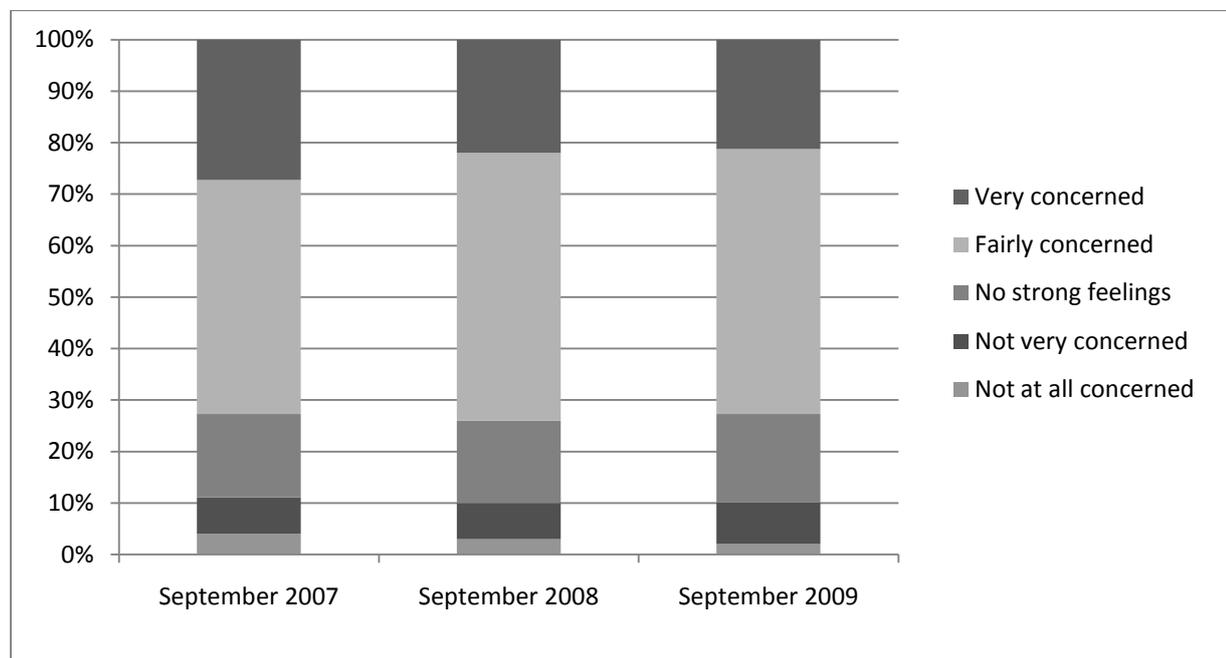
In summary, perceptions of responsibility to help the poor in developing countries have been shown to be a key driver of public support for aid. The results of the current study suggest that governments in industrialised countries are seen as having the primary responsibility, for moral reasons and because of historical (predominantly colonial) ties to particular developing countries. At the same time, it is recognised that industrialised countries have some self-interest in providing aid. While individuals in rich countries were also considered to have a moral duty to help the poor in developing countries, albeit by fewer respondents, there was scepticism about their ability to have any real impact.

## 4.4 Perceptions towards aid and its effectiveness

Arguably the primary motivation behind efforts to gauge public attitudes towards international development is to monitor and/or promote support for international development assistance amongst the populations of industrialised countries. In the UK, responses to the question 'how concerned are you about the level of poverty in poor countries' has been used as the basic metric of support over a number of years. Results from DfID's public attitude tracking survey have consistently shown levels of concern exceeding 70 per cent (Figure 8). The degree to which concern about poverty in developing countries can be correlated with support for international development assistance has, however, been questioned (Riddell 2007; Hudson and van

Heerde 2009; House of Commons 2009). For example, it might be that someone is concerned about the poor in developing countries but does not support aid, perhaps because they do not perceive aid to work.

**Figure 8: Level of concern about level of poverty in poor countries. Respondents to DfID’s public attitude tracking survey, 2007-2009**



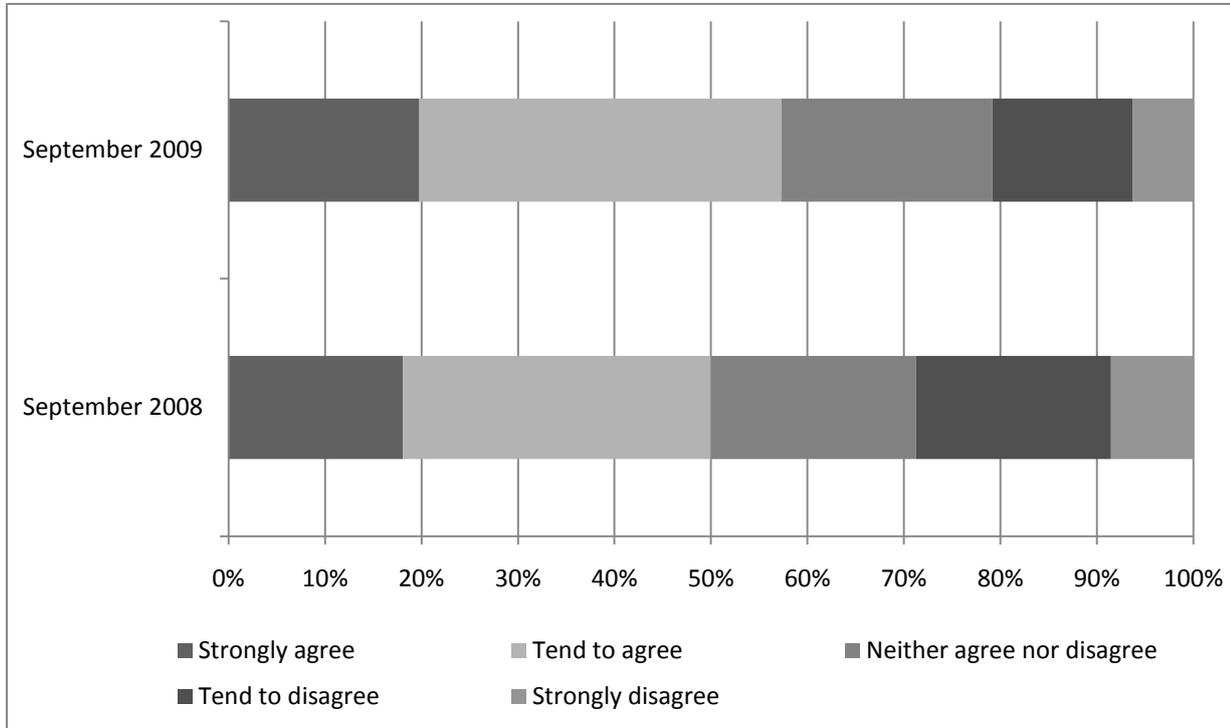
Source: TNS UK (2009).

In its most recent consumer attitude tracking survey, DfID responded to the concerns about its previous attempts to assess consumer support for international development assistance raised by the International Development Committee (House of Commons 2009) by including additional questions that asked respondents to prioritise areas of government spending in the international and domestic contexts. Half of respondents included poverty alleviation among the top five priorities for UK government expenditure on international/global issues, second only to crime (TNS UK 2009). In contrast, only 31 per cent of respondents included support to poor countries in their top three priorities for UK government expenditure focused on domestic issues. Of the six priorities presented to respondents, including support to poor countries, the NHS, police, defence, education and schools and social services, support to poor countries was ranked last.

Critical to public support for international development assistance is not only concern about poverty in poor countries, but also perceptions of whether aid works (Riddell 2007). Results from DfID’s public attitude tracking surveys suggest that a significant proportion of the UK population are of the view that most financial aid to developing countries is wasted (Figure 9). The results also suggest that such attitudes are relatively transient; there was an appreciable change in the proportion of respondents considering most financial aid was wasted between the September 2008 and September 2009 surveys. In the September 2009 survey, the main reason given for considering that aid is wasted was corruption in poor country governments, being cited by 59 per cent of respondents considering that most financial aid was wasted. It is perhaps reasonable to expect that individuals questioning the effectiveness of aid will be less supportive of the assistance provided to developing countries (Hopkins 2000). Indeed this is the rationale for aid agencies to promote stories of aid successes. Riddell (2007), however, suggests that a significant proportion of the population in many industrialised countries who believe aid is not effective, nevertheless are supportive of international development assistance. In the case of DfID’s segmentation study undertaken in April 2008, there is a significant and negative, although relatively weak, statistical correlation ( $\rho = -0.162$ ) between views on

whether the UK government should increase expenditure on aid to poor countries and the view that most financial aid to poor countries is wasted. This suggests that views on the effectiveness of aid matter, but are not necessarily the dominant driver of support for aid.

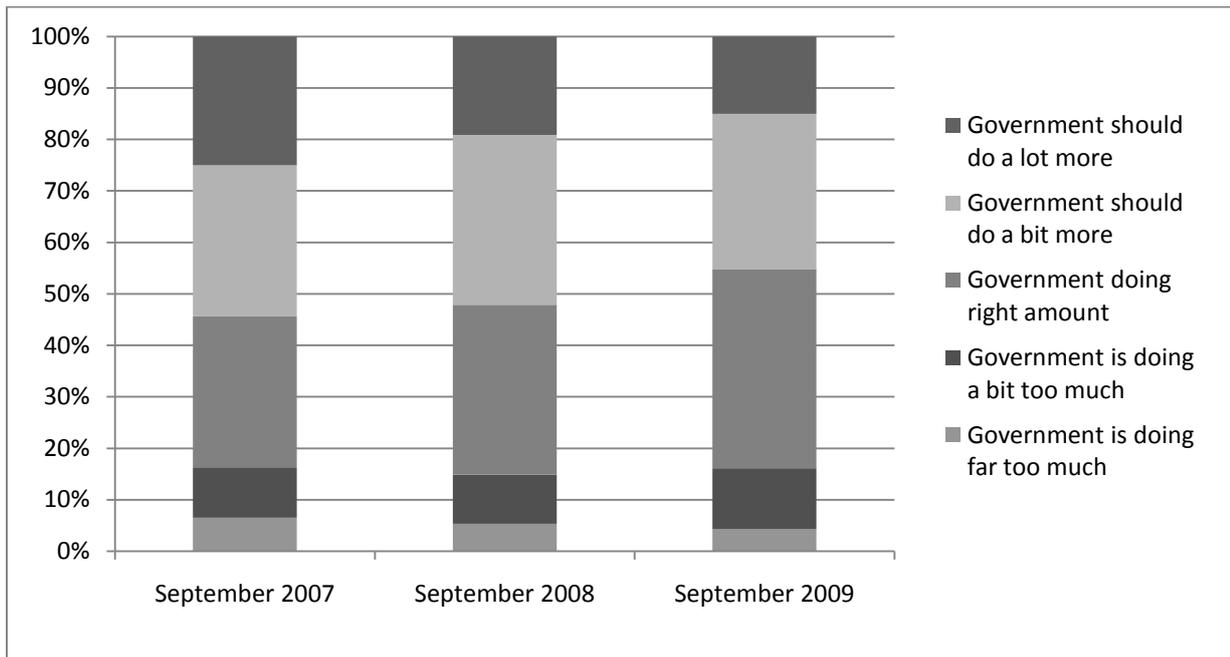
**Figure 9: Level of agreement with statement ‘most financial aid to poor countries is wasted’. Respondents to DfID segmentation survey, 2008 and 2009**



Source: TNS UK (2008; 2009).

Embedded in attitudes towards international development assistance are beliefs on what and where governments spend their aid budget. There is considerable evidence that public support for aid is associated with the belief that most aid is in the form of humanitarian assistance (MacDonnell *et al.* 2003). In reality, less than 15 per cent of industrialised country aid to developing countries is taken up by humanitarian assistance (Riddell 2007). There is also evidence that most people are unaware of the magnitude of government expenditure on aid, typically either being unable to estimate the level of expenditure or vastly overestimating the absolute amount and/or proportion of the government’s budget (Riddell 2007). Thus, while 42 per cent of respondents to DfID’s public attitude tracking survey in September 2009 (down from 50 per cent in September 2007) were of the view that the UK government should do more to reduce poverty in poor countries (Figure 10), it is not evident that this is based on a good grasp of what the UK government does currently.

**Figure 10: Views on UK government’s role in reducing poverty in poor countries. Respondents to DfID’s public attitude tracking survey, 2007-2009**



Source: TNS UK (2009).

The results of the Mass Observation study suggest that there is support for the concept of aid to developing countries, at least as a general principle. However, this support appears to be rather more nuanced than is apparent from public attitude survey data. Thus, support for aid tended to be mitigated by beliefs that industrialised countries have ‘something to give’:

*I think as long as the Western world has wealth and knowledge, we should continue to help those in poverty. (I1610)*

*As a country with more of a history of education, technology, democracy and equality than some others (although are by no means perfect) we should offer that experience to help the governments of developing countries who wish to feed and educate the people of those countries. (V3773)*

*I have some friends who have worked to improve the conditions of people in developing countries and applaud this, although to be honest, I couldn’t do this myself. I see it as a way of helping those in need in the short term, and in the longer term by the visitor having been involved is much better able to ‘sell’ the need for help through personal involvement. As a country we should promote this more. We have many people with skills that would prove beneficial to those in the poverty trap. (S4311)*

Also by perceptions of how aid is (and should) be delivered:

*It is usually the practicalities of helping which cause the problems. We are well aware of the problems of getting aid to those needing it, without it falling into the hands of local gangsters – they always seem to come out of the woodwork when they are not needed. I suppose the attitudes of the gangsters are as much a part of human nature as the desire to help, they will always need to be dealt with. However, they must never be an excuse for not helping, they must never be allowed to win. It is sad to hear people use the gangsters as an excuse for not putting their hands in their pocket. (B1475)*

*Clearly, as indicated above, there is a need for all countries who are able, to assist those less fortunate. At the present time with capital in short supply governments will have to think*

*carefully about how much they can allow to go overseas. Aid should certainly not stop. Britain is as far as I can tell generous with its overseas aid. Thinking more widely it is often clear that other countries who pledge aid at international meetings often renege on their promises. I am far from sure that all the money donated gets used for the task envisaged. Corruption in government does not help. Checks should be made on whether or not the money granted is being used correctly. (G4313)*

*I do not know the figures but I feel that the UK is quite good at channelling aid to the developing world. I think we may have learned from the past and aid is less likely to come in the form of money and more in the form of tangible aid such as food and water, human resources (such as the excellent work done by VSO), or grants targeted at specific targets such as for the building of roads, bridges, dams housing etc. Much less often than previously, it is no longer given without any strings attached. (T3686)*

*One of the most important policy shifts in recent years, has been Gordon Brown's insistence on wiping out debt from poverty-stricken countries. It has had varied success, but the principle is surely in everyone's interests. (T4345)*

*You can see from stories you read in the press that ordinary people doing very small local projects can make a huge difference to a local community. This perhaps shows the way forward globally. Instead of throwing huge amounts of money at Governments or Agencies, the money is given to small local groups for small local projects that will gradually spread to a greater community. (A1706)*

The MOP data provide further evidence of scepticism of the effectiveness of aid to developing countries in general. The predominant driver of this scepticism appears to be perceptions of corruption and/or mismanagement on the part of developing country governments (77 respondents), in line with the results of DfID's public attitude tracking survey in September 2009 (see above):

*Some dictators have sidelined the cash into their own coffers which they place into Swiss bank accounts after building lavish palaces for themselves; none of it reaching the people for whom it was intended. (B1771)*

*I think that donors have every right and every responsibility to surround that aid with provisos and conditions. This is important, given the finding that 80% of donor cash to African countries is stolen by officials. (J3248)*

Thus, aid was seen by respondents as not reaching the poor, but as being 'held up' or 'siphoned off' by politicians and/or government officials, and in this way as having little or no impact on poverty. This finding reiterates the fact that poor governments in developing countries were seen by respondents as the predominant cause of poverty.

Some respondents held even stronger views, believing that current forms of aid do not work even when properly managed, failing to address local needs and breeding dependency (37 respondents). This perspective was often supported by the view that aid had achieved little in terms of real development despite significant expenditures over long periods of time (31 respondents):

*I think in general people do have suspicions about where their money will actually end up. After all, millions of pounds of money is raised each year for countries riven with poverty yet these countries never seem to end up any better so what has this money actually done? (H1703)*

*Obviously I don't know what help is being given at grass roots level, but from the poverty that is shown in TV ads asking for donations and news footage of droughts etc things do not appear to have moved on. Band Aid, Live Aid, Comic Relief must have raised millions of pounds yet they still need more. (N3396)*

*Today in the Guardian there is a 5 page article about a book called 'Dead Aid' by Dambisa Moyo, a highly educated young woman and an African. She says (in a long, very detailed*

*explanation) why aid 'continues to be an unmitigated political, economic and humanitarian disaster for most parts of the developing world!' Harsh words for all of us who plunge hands into our pockets and give money to the 'deserving poor' of Africa? Personally, I began to question this on my own one evening when I watched a large bag of flour (with UNICEF in huge letters on it) being sold over the counter in a small shop. UNICEF? I've been a contributor for about 50 years as it's my favourite charity and I was the first person I ever knew who bought their Xmas cards!! I shall continue to support them, but how did that bag of flour become involved in commerce (corruption) when it was supposed to be free? A tiny example of the corruption which is highlighted in the book on a grand scale, and a perfect window into African corruption, easily understood. (F1560)*

Broadly, respondents were unable to provide much evidence, and even specific examples, of aid working. Conversely respondents could provide quite detailed accounts of wastage and/or failed development programmes as well as general statements of the failure of aid:

*Finally I am quoting from an article in the paper today by an undercover reporter in Zimbabwe who has said apropos the foreign aid being given to that country 'the charities hand out aid to the local tribal chiefs (often in positions of power because of their allegiance to Zanu-PF) for distribution. Time and again the food is then given exclusively to party henchmen for their own use or for sale on the black market'. Meanwhile the population are standing and dying of cholera and I don't think that overseas aid or voluntary service will make the slightest difference to that. (G2134)*

*Jim, my husband, helped build a school in the Gambia as part of an oil company team building exercise about 5 years ago and this is exactly what happened! The elders had taken the children's t-shirts from the children and forced their heads through the tops, stretching them out of all shape!! It must have been like the tale of Cinderella when she tried on the shoe that didn't fit!! In my opinion, the infrastructure in the third world doesn't enable charitable donations to be helpfully re-distributed and tends to bow to the culture of the country. In Gambia, had the oil company known that children weren't valued as highly as elsewhere, they maybe wouldn't have brought clothing but instead built a water pump which could've benefited the whole village. This leads me to believe that aid may not be provided in the right form to suit the culture and ethos of the area and therefore directly providing money is almost a pointless exercise. (M3469)*

*In the past organisations like The World Bank and the I.M.F. have spent large sums imposing academic 'solutions' which have done more harm than good, insisting, for example, on 'free trade' where embryonic local enterprises need tariff protection to survive. In most cases they have done more harm than good. The same money spent at local level by people who know the local problems will create wealth from the bottom up and everyone will feel that the changes 'belong to them'. For example, in Bangladesh local women have set up their own local 'bank' so that their neighbours and people they know and trust can borrow money to set up small businesses. (B2240)*

*Unfortunately aid can go into the wrong hands and one finds the top people riding around in cars paid for by money that should have been used for the poorer people of the country concerned. I read that reserves of grain in Malawi were sold and the money used for that purpose. There was a famine later. (L1625)*

Predominantly, the cited examples had been gleaned from the media, and especially television news programmes and documentaries. Thus, either the media fails to present stories of aid successes or the public has a greater tendency to attend to negative news. Analysis of responses to the directive presented evidence of the former. Indeed, we observed some scepticism about the media, which was often seen as focusing inordinately on 'crises' and/or negative stories, and in turn undermining public confidence in aid to developing countries:

*However, the media are quick to exploit instances of the misuse of aid money and of corruption in developing countries and I think this has discouraged many people from giving. (H2637)*

*I see the mighty scenes of deprivation of all types shown on our televisions as having a deadening affect on our public. They do not see any lasting good emanating from the monies and goods raised for relief. (S2083)*

These findings are arguably at the core of scepticism over aid ineffectiveness; why would anyone believe that aid works if they lack evidence of positive outcomes but can easily ‘conjure up’ instances of failure. Indeed, those respondents that could cite positive experiences of development programmes (whether their own or those of their friends or family) generally held more positive attitudes towards aid:

*From 1992 – 1998, my brother and sister-in-law used their skills and experience as a civil engineer and nurse to work as VSO volunteers in Namibia. At the end of their two year term my brother then worked for another NGO on various water projects in Namibia before they moved to Zimbabwe where he was a VSO Field Officer based in Harare. My sister-in-law was unable to continue to work for VSO when she became pregnant but did some work for UNICEF’s small local healthcare projects when she could. I admire them a lot for what they did and was lucky enough to spend some time with them in Namibia. I really enjoyed the opportunity to go to work with my brother. I went with him and his team of local men to villages where their water project worked with the local people to install wells and water pumps for a clean water supply (and latrines if suitable). I learnt to weld and how to pour concrete at their workshop base to try to help out when I could in the production of concrete well rings. Although I’m sure the men thought it was a bit strange for a woman from the UK to spend her holiday in this way, I’m pretty hopeful they took it with a good heart, despite a few rye (sic) smiles! (W4382)*

*Aid is important. If home nations cannot provide for people, then people must travel to find work. Why would people risk their lives to travel to unfriendly places if they didn’t feel they had to, that there was no other way to support their family or to find opportunities to make a living for themselves. I hope the recession does not cause a backlash against such desperate people. I do not know how much aid we give. I know my husband works very hard to make sure nothing is misspent and that it is all accounted for and used usefully on the project he manages. It is not easy to achieve things here. He was interviewed by some American students the other day, he said that one of the biggest issues are that what you believe you can achieve in an office in Washington and what you actually can achieve on the ground, is very different. You cannot conceive the particular (and for each situation they are unique) stresses on the system. (M3055)*

In some instances reference was made to charitable appeals or stories through the media of the work of particular charities (for example Comic Relief) that showed beneficial impacts, often from rather small expenditures:

*I have no experience of charitable gift tokens other than a film on TV which showed how the gift of a cow benefited not just one family but a whole area. I was amazed how it changed families – the husbands no longer beat the wives because the money the wives earned was paid direct to them. (B0786)*

*It never ceases to amaze me though just how much money is raised each year from the TV charity appeals, like Children in Need or Red Nose Day. Maybe it is because here people actually see where the money has gone to, and some of it is to needy in the UK, as well as specific projects overseas. These projects will often involve building a water pump for example for a village and by doing this fresh water is available not only for drinking but also for watering crops. This then helps the people to grow their own food and to become more self sufficient. (P1796)*

Critically, all of the positive instances of aid presented by respondents related to projects at the micro level, focused on individuals and/or communities and the provision of particular resources (for example schools or

access to water). Not a single respondent cited examples of aid working at the broader regional or country level, for example through trade-related assistance.

While there were numerous sceptics among the respondents in our study, very few argued for aid to developing countries to be abandoned altogether. Rather the focus of the criticisms of these individuals was on the need for greater transparency and monitoring and evaluation to ensure that aid did not end up in a proverbial ‘Swiss bank account’ and ‘really worked’:

*We must thoroughly examine whether aid will reach its intended target or slither into the pocket of the middle-man. (N1592)*

*How well spent is the aid? Do we ever really know? The right-wing press loves to pick up on stories of high-jacked goods and criminal gangs stealing but it is difficult to know just what proportion of goods go this way. It does not mean we stop, but it shows how the methodology has to be under constant review. (B1475)*

*Do we in the so-called developed world have responsibilities for those in the developing world? Yes, I suppose we do. As a matter of fact I half-heard a radio broadcast the other day which reported that Gordon Brown had pledged so many millions to overseas aid – an amount far larger than any other country. I marvel at this for two reasons; firstly, that we are already borrowing billions to help us survive the present economic crises and, secondly, are we sure Britain’s aid isn’t going directly into the pockets of corrupt leaders and their cohorts? And here’s a thought, why don’t we see television programmes showing where and how this financial aid is being used? At least with Blue Peter you got to see the wells that had been dug, the cow or the goats bought by the efforts of young viewers. (B1654)*

*We do see reports of people going to other countries to give aid and help to make life easier for the people, but we never hear if the improvement is permanent or, if the people just revert to their own way of life once the aid workers have left. (R1468)*

There also appeared to be a demand for better communication about the UK’s aid to developing countries:

*I feel that the misnomer of overseas aid should be explained to the wider population. This is not a lottery win but comes with strings attached and sometimes support for some of the most corrupt regimes in the world provided they support the west’s political and economic agendas. (L3298)*

*Maybe we need to be very specific about what we are providing money for – perhaps specific projects need to be named and paid – evidence needs to be seen that communities have benefited. However, I appreciate that persuading politicians to do it that way, and appearing not to trust them, requires a huge amount of diplomacy. (V3773)*

This again emphasises the degree to which respondents considered themselves uninformed about the issues explored in the directive, and provides some evidence that lack of knowledge tends to breed scepticism rather than indifference towards aid. At the same time, of course, it is evident that much support for aid is based on tenuous beliefs about how and where it is provided. It is possible therefore, that promoting greater knowledge of the UK’s aid programme, for example, could conversely erode support.

While respondents recognised that they knew relatively little about the UK’s programme of aid to developing countries, they nevertheless tended to have strong views on where the aid budget *should* be spent. Many respondents (38) recognised the importance of humanitarian assistance, and indeed some were of the view that this should form a large part (or even the entirety) of the UK’s assistance to developing countries:

*Only temporary help in crisis of national disaster is justified! (B1442)*

*Whilst I think we should try to assist poorer countries with any surplus wealth, to alleviate problems caused by natural disasters, such as food shortages due to drought, I do not think that aid should be given as a matter of course, because it becomes relied on, and stunts the natural development of the recipient country. (S3035)*

*I think there is a worry about countries being dependent on aid, though if it is for clear development projects or in emergencies I think this is OK. Long running refugee situations need political solutions, but I don't think on humanitarian grounds you can just shut off supplies. (S3844)*

Conversely, others (37) emphasised the need to focus on longer-term processes of development through larger-scale and longer-term projects rather than short-term assistance to help developing countries get over 'yet another crisis':

*However, when so much effort has to fo [sic] into 'first aid' to relieve the effects of war and natural disasters, too often the sort of aid that would make a long-term difference is overlooked or cut back. (R3032)*

*If money was spent on education, infrastructure and help to help themselves, I actually wouldn't mind, just giving is wrong, and sends the wrong signals. Help the countries to gain stable governments who look after the people and not just themselves, and I think a lot of people would be quite happy to contribute. (T3775)*

*I do feel strongly that the best way to help these people is not to give them money but instead to give them goods, such as chickens, so they can feed their families and sell the eggs for extra income. (F2949)*

Indeed, emphasis was placed on building capacity to enable developing countries, and the poor therein, 'to help themselves'. Evidently, there are widely differing views of what forms of aid are justified and/or are perceived to work.

On the subject of aid, respondents were finally asked to reflect on the impact of the global economic crisis on support for aid to developing countries and the scale of aid budgets. Many respondents (51) both predicted that levels of aid would diminish and argued that a refocusing towards domestic priorities was appropriate in a time of austerity.

*Whilst people in Britain are losing homes, jobs and livelihoods, whilst manufacturers are having to close their doors and banks foreclose, it is unacceptable to continue sending funds to other parts of the worlds. Charity, at this extreme time of crisis, must begin at home. (H4123)*

*It seems logical that any country which is going through a financial crisis of its own may have to cut back on foreign assistance. I can't see anything wrong with that, although I am talking here about long-term assistance (e.g. a building project) rather than short-term crisis aid such as tents or food following an earthquake, say. (F3409)*

However, other respondents (40) stated that reducing aid budgets in a time of global economic crisis, when the needs of developing countries were greater, was morally unjust. These individuals argued for the need to balance domestic and international commitments on the part of the UK:

*We must, despite the credit crunch still give overseas aid. The huge problem is to make certain that the aid goes to the people who really require it. (G3655)*

*The Government should certainly continue to give overseas aid, as people in the Third World Countries have so much less than here – their expectations are not great. However, it is important not to neglect our own communities. More money should be spent here on education – extra teachers and social workers to target the potential problems in families before they develop. We are talking about a different sort of poverty in the UK, a poverty of opportunity and care rather than material and physical poverty. Most people here, for example, have food, unlike Africa. (D0826)*

*Even in a financial crisis we are stinking rich compared with the majority of our fellow humans in third world countries. (R2144)*

The results of the Mass Observations study contribute to on-going debates about the attitudes of the public towards international development assistance. The broad picture is of support for aid to developing countries in principle, but of considerable scepticism about the effectiveness of aid in practice. Such scepticism appears to relate to the inability to picture aid actually working, and the perception that little has improved in developing countries despite a long history of aid. The chief culprit in the perceived ineffectiveness of aid is weak (and even corrupt) governments in developing countries.

## 4.5 Support for international development charities

The results of DfID's public attitude tracking survey suggest that the majority of people make regular donations to charities; in the September 2009 survey, 72 per cent had made a charitable donation in the last six months (UK TNS, 2009). While 38 per cent of respondents to the survey claimed ever to make donations to charities fighting global poverty and/or providing humanitarian assistance, only 20 per cent had actually made a donation in the last six months. Thus, while charitable donations were the most frequently cited action taken by individuals aimed at reducing poverty in developing countries, this was evidently a rather 'shallow' commitment on the part of many people in that the general intention to make a donation was only rarely expressed in action.

A majority of respondents (102) in our study claimed to give money to international development charities, for example Oxfam, Save the Children, UNICEF, Medecins Sans Frontiers, Red Cross and Christian Aid, with a large number (60) making regular donations. Respondents that made regular donations to development charities evidently selected organisations that they 'trusted', both not to waste money and to have a 'real impact on the ground':

*I give to Oxfam because it seems to me that they focus well on supportive and developmental aid, and there are no religious strings attached. (Z2276)*

*We contribute annually to Oxfam, Christian Aid, Water Aid and Book Aid – organisations which seem to have a good record in the 'third world', and in the case of the first two an outstanding campaigning stance. (B2710)*

*Each year I collect for and give to the Red Cross, I see them as a recognisable aid giver, worldwide. Many prisoners of war live to tell the joy afforded by the arrival of Red Cross parcels. (M1571)*

This appears to underline the importance of development charities having a feedback mechanism through which success stories from their actions 'on the ground' is provided to their supporters. While some of the larger charities are evidently able to do this it is likely to be beyond the means of smaller NGOs.

Other respondents gave to development charities at the time of a humanitarian crisis and in response to a specific appeal, when 'someone shakes a collection tin in your face' or supported charities through the use of charity shops:

*The only time I have ever given money for charity abroad was the Tsunami Appeal which I gave via telephone as I felt my emotions were heightened over Christmas that year, and I have also sent a one-off cheque, via the Guardian to Medicine san Frontiers, as I truly believe they do a wonderful job in usually appalling circumstances with the object of saving lives. (G0226)*

*I rarely give to any charity unless confronted by a collector because I never can get round to making the effort. (G3988)*

Key to charitable donations was the ability to make personal choices over whether to give and who to give to:

*Individually, it is entirely up to each person to decide what they give and to whom and they should not have to justify their decisions if they are content with them. (M3408)*

*I give a small donation to War on Want each month, my choice of this particular charity having been made after a considerable amount of soul searching over how the money was going to be used. That, I think, is the most important consideration in making any kind of charitable donation, how the money is going to be used and what are the long term aims of the people using it, addressing a short term problem is all well and good, but to do real good longer term and more complicated problems have to be met head on, something an emotionally driven charity sector is sometimes less than adept at doing. (C3167)*

Indeed, negative attitudes towards a number of international development charities had been created and/or exacerbated by what were seen to be ‘aggressive’ methods of fundraising:

*I don't often give directly to charitable collectors. I find many of them quite intimidating. They pounce on you in a very robust way shoving some collecting box into your face and virtually demanding cash for one cause or another. It seems more like legal robbery sometimes. (D3906)*

*I do personally reject the somewhat controversial technique employed by many mainstream charities of using paid street agents (or ‘charity muggers’ as they are sometimes called) whose sole aim is to try to persuade people ‘on the hoof’ to sign up as donors. I wouldn't buy anything in such circumstances, and I suspect that it generates a degree of antipathy that the charities could well do without – although it is claimed to be a lucrative means of fund raising. (H1541)*

As with aid, there was considerable scepticism about the effectiveness of the work of charities in developing countries. Respondents referred to ‘wastage’, usually with reference to the costs of administration and high salaries for staff, and lack of evidence of positive impacts:

*I don't give money to charities that provide overseas aid unless I am particularly moved by an appeal. The reason being that I've heard some bad stories about how much money is actually getting through to the needy. (F2949)*

*My wife used to be more charitable until she discovered the Chief Executive of her favourite charity was being paid £50,000 a year! (H1543)*

Some respondents offset this inherent scepticism through donations that were tied to particular actions. Notable here were adoption-type schemes and gifts of tangible items such as goats and school books:

*I sponsor a child in Indonesia through Plan International, and I started this because I didn't have any children of my own and wanted to do something to help a child in a poorer country. (C3691)*

*I do sponsor a child in Togo. The money I give provides education for this child and funds initiatives in her village. I think this is a worthwhile thing to do. I get a lot from knowing I am helping and the child I sponsor and her village gain education and a better quality of life. Ultimately education is the one of the few long term ways to help these countries out of the dire straits they face. (M4269)*

*I have been involved in the charity gift scheme of buying a goat etc for a family in developing countries. Again, I tend to want to know exactly where this is going and how it will be used. Most of the good charities are very informative about how this works. Also we are involved in sponsorship of a child in Malawi and again, it is the direct involvement which means so much to the donor. You can see exactly where the money is going and how it is being used. (S4311)*

*I was once given a voucher for a goat (in India, I think) as a birthday present. Amusing, a bit gimmicky, but nevertheless worthwhile for the recipients – although I remain sceptical about whether there is a real attributed goat, or just a big fund which does all sorts of things, including the provision of goats. My wife once sponsored a named Peruvian child, but withdrew from the scheme when it became clear that her money was actually going into a bigger pot funding all sorts of other things. The personal link – being able to see where your money is being spent – is quite important. (G4374)*

In such instances, respondents were satisfied that they had tangible evidence of impacts, in the extreme through direct feedback from beneficiaries, as in the case of some child adoption schemes.

In summary, the results of the current study show that a majority of respondents give regular donations to development charities and that such donations are made to organisations that respondents feel they can trust or where they can see tangible benefits of their giving. Respondents also appreciate the ability to make personal choices in deciding which charity to support. There is, however, widespread scepticism about the effectiveness of the work of some charities and some hold negative views of the more ‘aggressive’ fundraising methods that some employ.

## 5 Implications for the UK development community

There are two sets of implications of this study. The first set, around communication strategies, are hypotheses in the form of recommendations. The second set, around knowledge gaps, are our ‘best guesses’ as to the knowledge gaps that need to be filled to continually support better communication of the effectiveness of aid. It is important to note that this evidence is important to keep the communication strategy balanced – the communication must inform on what works, but also on what does not.

### 5.1 A new communication strategy

The results of this study suggest that the development community in the UK is not very effective in turning pounds spent into domestic commitment. Broadly, the general public recognises the responsibility that the UK has to assist developing countries in alleviating poverty, but they are highly sceptical about the effectiveness of current aid programmes, with widely held images of wastage and corruption.<sup>15</sup> Such images are rarely based on ‘hard evidence’, but often on media images that accentuate the negative rather than the positive impacts of UK overseas aid. While recognising the difficulties faced in attempts to measure public attitudes towards aid, there is some evidence from our study and from DfID data to suggest that public support is eroding, notably in the context of the economic crisis. If the UK is to maintain and enhance its current levels of international development assistance, especially at a time when hard choices have to be made between public expenditure priorities, the case for aid needs to be made more effectively. Sooner or later the gap between what voters think and what their parliamentary representatives will fight for will become too great to bridge.

The challenge of bolstering public support for development assistance is recognised in the previous government’s White Paper (DfID 2009a) and in the Conservative Party’s Green Paper on international development (Conservative Party, 2009). Existing approaches to communicating with the general public on international development issues do not seem adequate; we find little evidence in our research that they are strong enough to counter the generalisation of negative impressions generated by often isolated incidences.<sup>16</sup> In this regard the Coalition Government’s immediate cuts to a number of development awareness projects is a

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<sup>15</sup> More recent quantitative data from surveys using the UK Public Opinion Monitor support these broad conclusions, although suggest that support for aid spending is significantly related to perceptions of aid wastage but not of corruption in developing countries (see Henson and Lindstrom, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> For example, there may be a need to focus on broader-based engagement on global issues that positions the UK in the wider global context (DEA, 2010).

risk<sup>17</sup> The Conservative Party’s Green Paper on international development and the Draft Structural Reform Plan suggest the use of ‘My Aid’ – a voting scheme whereby the public can prioritise existing DfID projects and programmes - to engage with the public, but is this likely to be enough to encourage sustained public support, particularly at a time when the aid budget is ‘ring fenced’? Means need to be found to ensure a steady flow of credible images of development, and the role played by aid, to the general public. This is a tall undertaking!

The research has very clear implications for communication efforts, as organised in Table 1. We discuss these below, making reference to evolving DfID policy and strategy on public engagement, particularly the previous government’s White Paper on international development (DfID 2009a), DfID’s Communications Strategy (DfID 2008), DfID’s Building Support for Development Strategy (BSDS) (DfID 1999) and its review by Thornton *et al.* (2009), DfID policy on evaluation for international development (DfID 2009b), Conservative Party Green Paper on international development (Conservative Party 2009) and the recent DfID Draft Structural Reform Plan (DfID 2010). Now is the time to evolve the strategy, while development budgets are reasonably safe in the UK. While we do not focus on the communications strategy of international non-government organisations (INGOs), it is noteworthy from our results that these organisations development work is perceived more favourably than DfID’s. While this raises important questions for DfID, it is important to recognise that DfID provides considerable support to the activities of many INGOs. Perhaps DfID needs to make more of this fact.

**Table 1: Recommendations for a new communication strategy**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Current Situation</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Comments</b>
The nature of the evidence	Only focuses on the positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be honest about success and failure</li> <li>• Emphasise what has been learned from failure</li> <li>• Learning from failure may be the easiest thing to visualise and a means to breed trust and confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risky – people will latch onto negatives, but we detected a yearning for people to be treated as adults – this is a real chance to recalibrate what success looks like and to make it clear that for every Zimbabwe there are loads of Ghanas, Tanzanias, Malawis and Botswanas</li> </ul>
	Focused on inputs or outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on inputs, outcomes and impacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is beginning to happen and will provide much needed evidence</li> </ul>

<sup>17</sup> On 17 May, DfID announced an immediate freeze on a number of development awareness projects. See <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Media-Room/News-Stories/2010/Mitchell-Immediate-freeze-on-DfID-UK-based-awareness-projects/> [accessed 7 September 2010]

The organisation of the evidence	Haphazard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs to be organised and aggregated into a coherent body</li> <li>Coordinate the evidence between those who produce it and those who will use it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This will make evidence harder to challenge, harder to cherry pick from, and will identify gaps where we need to know more. Again this makes it harder to globalise about one bad (or good) experience</li> <li>Ensuring that evaluations are designed with communications plans in mind will ensure that messages are more suited to audiences</li> </ul>
Who generates the evidence	Not ultimate beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More involvement from ultimate beneficiaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This makes the stories first hand, less manufactured, more authentic</li> </ul>
The communication of the evidence	Treats media as passive conduit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs to treat media as development player</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media are clearly important. This develops media sense of responsibility for its own actions, makes it more accountable as a development actor</li> </ul>
The audience for communication	Focus on younger people, with audience segmentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on all groups, make more of audience segmentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The older generation still has an important role as voters and as educators of the young.</li> <li>Engaging with sceptics</li> </ul>
Evaluating the communication strategy	External consultants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involve your audience in how to improve the communication and whether it has improved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ordinary people have good ideas about how to communicate development to ordinary people</li> </ul>

## The nature of the evidence

The concerns and perceptions of the UK general public must be met head-on. There needs to be balanced evidence of success and failure, improving accountability and enabling a sceptical public to visualise the ‘successes’ and as well as the ‘failures’. As Riddell (2007) argues, donor communication efforts can take three approaches: a) trying to convince the public that some aid does work; b) trying to convince the public that steps are being taken to enhance the impact of aid; and c) taking a more long-term strategy to ‘nurture, extend and deepen support for aid’, acknowledging failure as well as successes, and being more open about what aid can achieve and what it cannot. To date most donor communication strategies have focused on the first two options, arguably because of fears that being honest about failure will lead to reduced support for aid (Riddell 2007).

However, as our research suggests that support for aid, at least in principle, remains relatively strong despite a widespread perception that aid is not particularly effective. Indeed, while there is a tendency to ‘fixate’ on the decline in support for increased government action to reduce poverty in developing countries in DfID’s tracking surveys (as described above), agreement with the principle of aid seems to be more robust. This suggests scope for a more thoughtful approach to communications, not only on the part of DfID but also INGOs; especially where existing efforts aimed at building support for aid tend to rely on ‘feel good vignettes’ that risk breeding cynicism.

Such a strategy should include being clear and upfront about what development assistance can achieve and what it cannot and about the difficulties faced in working in developing countries. For example, journalist Rageh Omar points out that, rather than reacting with horror at the BBC’s audacity to criticise the Band Aid famine relief effort in Tigray during the famine in Ethiopia, a more considered response would be to acknowledge that humanitarian agencies were operating under very difficult conditions and that it is inevitable that some aid is politicised and misused in conflict situations<sup>18</sup>. Similarly, in response to reports that 50 per cent of World Food Programme funds to Somalia may have been siphoned off, Duncan Green, Head of Research for Oxfam GB, states<sup>19</sup>:

*The thing you have remember is that although aid has a huge impact, saves lives, gets kids into schools, transforms people’s lives, it is not easy and the more chaotic the situation, the harder it gets. But the chaotic situations are exactly those cases where people are in most need of aid...So what you have to do is try and design the aid to minimise that kind of loss. But there is likely [sic] in the chaotic situations that you have to accept some degree of loss.*

Thus, there needs to be the courage to share evidence of success and failure. Admitting to failure might be considered a risky thing to do, as this will give people an opportunity to latch on to negatives. However, our research seems to indicate a yearning for people to be ‘treated as adults’, providing a real chance to recalibrate what success looks like and to make clear that, for every Zimbabwe, there are many Ghanas, Tanzanias, Malawis and Botswanas. The aim should be to describe what we have learned from past failures and to explain why risks were taken in the first place. By ‘being honest’ we may actually enhance support for development programmes, especially among those segments of the population that believe most aid is wasted. This is only a hypothesis for now, but initial work done by Global Giving<sup>20</sup> suggests that, when organisations

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/mar/08/rageh-omaar-live-aid-geldof> [accessed 7 September 2010]

<sup>19</sup> Duncan Green interviewed on the BBC4 Today programme, 12 March 2010, available [http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_8563000/8563773.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_8563000/8563773.stm) [accessed 7 September 2010]

<sup>20</sup> Global Giving ([www.globalgiving.org](http://www.globalgiving.org)) is an initiative that individual donors partner with community projects that need support. Donors get regular updates on progress of these projects.

are brave enough to admit to mistakes, these see an increase in giving, rather than the expected reduction. GlobalGiving's CEO Dennis Whittle attributes this to public scepticism about aid and relief that someone is finally 'telling the truth'<sup>21</sup>.

In terms of specific issues, our research has shown that people care about the governance of development aid and want more long-term development programmes. This is, of course, a major focus of DfID's work; apparently greater and more effective efforts are needed to communicate this to the UK public. 'Bad governments' are seen as a major cause of poverty, suggesting that more attention should be given to highlighting DfID's efforts to improve governance in developing countries. Because our research has shown that people are reluctant to support the provision of aid directly to developing country governments, DfID must provide evidence of how direct budget support, for instance, has strengthened state capacity and improved governance. People tend to see aid as support primarily to humanitarian crises. More attention is needed to recalibrating beliefs to draw more attention to long-term development programmes that show the impacts of aid over a longer period of time.

In order to have evidence of such success and failure, there needs to be more systematic evaluation of development programmes, providing evidence of outcomes and impacts as well as communicating inputs and outputs. This is beginning to happen. Thus, the DfID communications strategy (2008) highlights the need to communicate impacts rather than just money spent, the new DfID evaluation strategy focuses on generating more evidence of impacts of DfID programmes (2009b), the recent International Development Committee report stresses the need for DfID to focus its evaluation on outcomes rather than funding (House of Commons 2009), and the Conservative Green Paper makes a strong case for performance-based aid delivery (2009). These plans are made concrete in the Draft Structural Reform Plan, where 'value for money' is one of the main priorities and plans are presented to establish an independent aid watchdog and strengthen evaluation throughout DfID by undertaking systematic reviews of evidence, reorienting DfID's programmes to focus on results and piloting results-based aid and cash on delivery contracts (2010).

While this new focus is welcomed, care needs to be taken to avoid a results and value for money focus acting to redirect aid towards items for which it is easy to demonstrate delivery. Take the example of historical declines in UK maternal mortality that is a focus in the Draft Structural Reform Plan (2010). Research shows that those declines were attributable to the quality of care from midwives for home birth deliveries. Where deliveries were by physicians in hospitals, often using chloroform and forceps in otherwise uncomplicated births, maternal mortality was much higher (Loudon 2000). So high maternal mortality was less about knowledge per se but about whose knowledge counted, and that is about power structures within the health system. The Prime Minister acknowledges that in the UK these vested interests had to be challenged by the creation of a powerful midwifery service<sup>22</sup>. It will be troublesome to evaluate UK aid investments designed to, for example, rebalance power structures in health systems in the currency of 'lives saved or improved' and may inadvertently direct resources to lower hanging fruit.

## The organisation of evidence

Where positive stories about aid are provided by our research, these mainly focus on the success of small-scale projects at the local/micro level. Instances of failure were mostly related to large-scale interventions at the macro level, often with sweeping statements of endemic corruption. This indicates that there is a need to

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<sup>21</sup> Personal communication with David Bonbright of Keystone Accountability who are working with GlobalGiving to enhance direct feedback from beneficiaries of Global Giving programmes.

<sup>22</sup> David Cameron in the Guardian, Thursday 3 June, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jun/03/aid-developing-world-targeted-money> [accessed 14 September 2010]

communicate better the success of large-scale and long-term development programmes within a country, region and/or a sector and to ensure that evidence of success is organised and aggregated into a coherent body. For instance, there is plenty of evidence in the literature about previous large-scale aid successes about which the public seem to know little (Riddell 2007); for example the eradication of small pox, anti-retroviral drugs (Levine 2007), the green revolution (Spielman and Pandya-Lorch 2009) and the eradication of polio.<sup>23</sup> Through the collection and organisation of evidence, it will be harder to challenge such successes and to ‘cherry pick’ instances of failure. It will also help identify gaps in the evidence of development impacts, where we need to know more.

In pursuit of this recommendation, there needs to be closer collaboration between the communications and evaluation departments of DfID to ensure that communication efforts can make full use of the available evidence of positive impacts of UK aid. The new evaluation policy does not specifically focus on linking its work to that of the communications department, while the communications strategy does not even mention where it would source stories of impacts to communicate. For successful ‘utilisation-based’ evaluation (evaluation that is based on its utility), communication strategies (as well as other potential uses of evaluation findings) need to be considered in the evaluation design phase (Patton and Horton 2009).

Better ways also need to be found to enable the general public to access evidence on the impacts of the aid given by the UK to developing countries. For instance, currently the DfID website does not provide very clear information about DfID’s influence and impacts, at least from the perspective of a lay person.<sup>24</sup> There used to be a ‘Key Achievements’ section and, although this presented only inputs and outputs, it was easy to find. As the International Development Committee recommends, DfID should ensure that messages are easily accessible and available in plain language that avoids technical jargon (House of Commons 2009). The Draft Structural Reform Plan includes mention of a new Aid Transparency Guarantee that will publish full information on DfID spending, but there is no detail about how the new focus on value for money, results and evaluation will be presented and communicated to the public.

### Who generates the evidence?

One way to engage better with the public is to provide more ‘human interest’ stories about poor people climbing out of poverty. In general, members of the public find it easier to relate to improvements in the lives of poor people that they can ‘visualise’. Further, our research shows that a number of respondents had been ‘touched’ at a personal level by experiences of meeting poor people (see for instance quotes on page 14). The downside of this approach however is that it risks only accentuating the positive.

The Coalition Government is suggesting two interesting ideas in this area. First is MyAid; a new mechanism to give the UK public a direct say in how an element of the aid budget is spent and that is meant to engage the public in a more personal way with intended beneficiaries of aid programmes. Care is needed in order to prevent this from ‘backfiring’ (Evans 2009). Will the general public engage or will it be the aid industry who votes? Will it make aid seem more fractured and less coherent? Will it reduce aid to the status of a game show? No-one knows and it needs to be piloted and rigorously evaluated. Second, the Draft Structural Reform Plan emphasises action to give poor people a say in how the aid budget is spent. We suggest that this

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<sup>23</sup> As mentioned in the recent Conservative Party Green Paper on international development (Conservative Party 2009).

<sup>24</sup> There is a section on aid statistics, which explains spending; a section on evaluation, which contains a list of evaluation studies, although without any overall easily accessible findings; and a section on aid effectiveness, which states: ‘DfID’s aid helps lift at least 3 million people permanently out of poverty every year’, without explaining this figure further. See <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/About-Dfid/Finance-and-performance/> [accessed 14 September 2010]

involvement of beneficiaries should be extended to evaluation of aid programmes as a way of engaging the public.

By allowing intended beneficiaries to define success or failure of the policies and interventions to which they are exposed, beneficiaries of aid and members of the UK public would be involved in the generation of evidence on impacts.

The aim here is to make stories of development impacts ‘first hand’ and less manufactured, such that they are seen as more ‘authentic’. In turn, this could provide accessible and valued evidence of the work that DfID is doing in developing countries, that the UK public can be proud of, provides a check on DfID’s performance and empowers the very people that aid is meant to benefit. Thus, our research found some evidence of an appetite for more people-centred development that asks communities what they need:

*I do not know much about the way aid is distributed, but I know that Oxfam encourages communities to choose what kind of aid they think necessary and to be involved in putting it in place; this has been shown to be more effective than imposing aid on them without consultation. Goats etc donated through the Unwrapped scheme, are only given when communities have asked for them. (L1691)*

The greater involvement of beneficiaries could act to close the ‘broken feedback loop’ in the aid system that is manifested in the geographical and political separation between donors and beneficiaries. Currently, citizens in donor countries have no direct knowledge of aid programmes, and indeed find it difficult to gather information on what DfID is actually doing in developing countries, while intended beneficiaries have no political leverage over politicians in donor countries who approve aid programmes (Barder 2009). By involving beneficiaries in generating evidence of success or failure, a more direct link between tax payers, donors and beneficiaries can be created, giving tax payers better information and providing greater accountability to beneficiaries of aid programmes (Haddad *et al* 2010). Our research shows that respondents appreciated more direct connections of this type, for example as indicated by a preference for charitable giving where tangible benefits on individuals were observed, sometimes with direct feedback from beneficiaries.

However, for specific instances of success to breed greater support for aid, these need to be taken as indicators of broader success. There are promising developments in this area, combining participatory and quantitative methods to aggregate results of development programmes. This work combines human interest stories with data on performance and impact that can be tracked and compared over time and/or across organisations, allowing for more than ‘feel good vignettes’ (Chambers 2007; Jupp and Ali 2010; Jacobs 2010).

## Communication of the evidence

Our research found that people get information about international development primarily from the media. Further, whereas most of the negative stories retold about aid were primarily from the media, any instances of positive development impacts came primarily from direct or indirect personal experiences. The media is clearly critical to any efforts to communicate with the public and there is an evident need for more constructive engagement on the part of the development community. This is particularly important in an era where the media is changing rapidly and online sources are becoming ever more prevalent.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Although television, newspapers and radio were the most mentioned in our research, 24 respondents mentioned the internet as a source of information.

DfID has been putting efforts into engagement with the media through its Building Support for Development Strategy. Indeed, there are some examples of more positive news stories about aid in the mainstream press,<sup>26</sup> while the review of the BSDS noted that the strategy had made some headway in making journalists more aware of poverty and development efforts (Thornton *et al.* 2009). However, the review of the BSDS also noted that there was no evidence that information communicated via media sources had been translated into greater awareness of development issues amongst the UK public. Clearly, more innovative approaches are needed.

We recommend that, instead of treating the media as a passive conduit of information, DfID and other parts of the development community need to start viewing it as a development player, with a sense of responsibility for its own actions and that is more accountable for what it communicates. This means moving from a ‘media about development’ to a ‘media for development’ perspective (Beckett 2008; 2009). Good examples of how this might look are the Guardian’s Katine project<sup>27</sup> and new Global Development portal.<sup>28</sup> Thus, we need to work with journalists to promote examples of development and to encourage the inclusion of development perspectives in news stories. This could be encouraged, for example, through development education for journalists, but also the involvement of the media in defining measures of success, in the collection of evidence on impacts, etc. We must also move beyond the mainstream media to introduce development into new arenas, such as sports and entertainment, and via new social media.

### The audience for communication

DfID has made much progress in segmenting the UK public as an audience for its communications efforts and in targeting messages accordingly. Such initiatives are critical if a more long-term and courageous approach to communication is to be taken forward; for example, trying to communicate the complexity of development will require different approaches for distinct population segments. Both the BSDS and DfID’s communications efforts in practice focus predominantly on young people and those that are perceived to be more or less supportive of aid and development. What about the older generation (Thornton *et al.* 2009) and the sceptics (House of Commons 2009)? DfID should develop a clearer strategy for engaging with audience segments that are more sceptical, rather than continuing to further awareness amongst those that are broadly supportive of what it does. This suggests that communications efforts need to face issues around corruption ‘head on’, as recommended by the International Development Committee (House of Commons 2009), and take an honest, more considered approach to what and how messages are delivered. Further, the audience itself should be engaged in defining how communications can most effectively be undertaken, rather than the testing of concepts that have been predefined. Ordinary people have good ideas about how what best speaks to them:

*I’ve seen so many reports on famines in Africa that all looked so identical that it could be the same reports being shown over and over. We never learn what caused the crisis or what happened after the press got bored with it and moved on. What we never seem to get is clear, simply presented documentary that gives us the whole picture in an un-sensationalist style. I don’t need to see dying babies, I want to know why they are dying. (G4304)*

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<sup>26</sup> The recent report of the International Development Committee (House of Commons 2009) mentions recent stories in the Sun and the Mirror.

<sup>27</sup> The Guardian, in collaboration with Barclays, are sponsoring an Amref and Farm-Africa project in Uganda. The project is being followed closely and reported on by the Guardian to give a more authentic view of the development process. For further information visit <http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development>

A lot more could also be done around working with community groups that people put their trust in. Indeed, our research has shown that people put great faith in the experiences and activities of personal networks in building their own views and images of development. Thus, there is scope for further work with students, faith-based groups, trade unions and business organisations, albeit by focusing communication messages around their particular interests (Thornton *et al.* 2009). Indeed, the review of the BSDS argues for a more ‘balanced approach’ where efforts to educate the young are paired more equally with engagement with the adult population directly and through civil society organisations.

## Evaluating the communications strategy

The current communications strategy is primarily evaluated through DfID’s public attitude tracking, as well as focus group-based research. The review of the BSDS was critical of the fact that a direct impact assessment of DfID’s communications strategy, or systematic monitoring and evaluation of specific objectives, had not been undertaken since its inception. We recommend that more systematic monitoring and evaluation of development communications efforts is undertaken to provide concrete evidence of ‘what works and what doesn’t’. Indeed, this will be critical if a good case is to be made for the resources required for a more active and wide-scale process of engagement with the general public.

## 5.2 Knowledge gaps

The preceding section highlighted many knowledge gaps in communication. Other knowledge gaps are in our understanding of how public attitudes towards international development and the role of aid are formed. Arguably, DfID has also put more effort into understanding and tracking public opinion of international development than most donor country governments. However, the uncomfortable fact is that we still know relatively little about the factors determining public support for aid to developing countries, and even how we might reliably monitor such attitudes over time. Indeed, there is mounting concern with DfID’s approach to tracking of public opinion, for example as recently expressed by the International Development Select Committee (House of Commons 2009):

*If DfID is to build public support for international development effectively it needs first to establish what people’s attitudes are. This requires the collection of information that truly reflects public opinion. We do not believe that DfID’s surveys as they are currently designed achieve this.*

In part, this reflects a relative paucity of academic research in this area, both in the UK and internationally. The programme of research on public attitudes to international development that IDS is pursuing aims to fill this void.

The results of the MOP-based study we report above provide a starting point to a better understanding of public attitudes to international development. In particular, they present a rich picture of the complex ways in which the general public construct the concept of international development and in this context view aid, albeit from an arguably non-representative sample of people. These results are, however, just a starting point; there is a need to unravel the complexity they uncover and examine the consequences for UK development policy. Thus, key research questions include:

- What is the nature of the relationship between perceptions of aid effectiveness and support for aid to developing countries? What factors derive perceptions as to when and where aid works (or does not work) and to what extent does this translate into support (or lack of) for aid?

- How do the attitudes of individuals towards international development and support for aid change over time and what drives such changes? In this context, what is the qualitative and quantitative influence of the media?
- How does the framing and forms of messages affect attitude formation relating to international development? In particular, how do distinct messages, framings and emphases impact the influence of the media on public attitudes towards international development?
- What priority is put by the public on aid versus other elements of government expenditure, taking account of the inevitable trade-offs between these? What drives these priorities?
- How do the life experiences and wider values of individuals influence their attitudes towards international development and support for aid? To what extent are such differences captured by DfID's audience segmentation?
- Which communications approaches work best at promoting public support for aid to developing countries? In this context, do the recommendations presented above actually work?
- What drives UK international development policy? How far can public support for aid deviate from government policy towards aid before policy has to change?
- How can we better map people's behaviour when it comes to actions that promote development and poverty alleviation? What factors influence the degree to which individuals convert their attitudes into behaviour?

These are complex questions that require the use of sophisticated consumer research methods. Certainly, the relatively simple attitudinal surveys employed by DfID will not suffice. Thus, there is a need to obtain a more comprehensive picture of how people see the world in which they live, and how international development fits within this world. The unit of our analysis also needs to be refocused, towards individuals and the monitoring of their attitudes over time, rather than the comparison of statistically-matched population samples. In such context it would be possible to use experimental approaches, for example to assess the impact of messages framed in alternative ways on attitudes towards international development in the context of prevailing values and attitudes. Towards this end, IDS is taking a leadership role in driving this research agenda, for example through the establishment of a longitudinal consumer panel, entitled the UK Public Opinion Monitor.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See the UK Public Opinion Monitor, [www.ukpublicmonitor.org](http://www.ukpublicmonitor.org) or [www.ids.ac.uk/index.cfm?objectid=CDA7E6E7-E50E-2DD7-8E11F8636166AC01](http://www.ids.ac.uk/index.cfm?objectid=CDA7E6E7-E50E-2DD7-8E11F8636166AC01). Initial results are available in Henson and Lindstrom (2010)

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<sup>30</sup> Nudist was the previous name for NVivo.

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# The Mass Observation Project Winter 2008 Directive

*The weeks leading up to the design of this directive have been dominated by two key issues (if you leave aside the Russell Brand/Jonathan Ross affair and the BBC!). I mean of course the financial recession - also known as the credit crunch - and the US elections.*

*Part 1 relates to how you are experiencing the present financial crisis. Part 2 is about your views and experiences about the rest of the world – poverty abroad, health problems and overseas aid.*

*As always you must feel free to pick and choose the questions you*

*answer but of course, the more you write and the more detail you give, the more valuable your account will be to people in the future trying to understand what life was like in 2008.*

As usual, please start each part of your directive reply on a new sheet of paper with your MO number (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, the town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember not to identify yourself or other people inadvertently within your reply.

## Part 1: The world financial crisis

### How you are affected

*A few weeks ago the Guardian asked 100 people how they were being affected by the financial crisis and I thought it might be useful to ask you some of the same questions:*

How do you feel about the present financial crisis?

How worried are you about your job (or the jobs of those near to you)?

If you have a pension, how worried are you about it?

Has the crisis affected your shopping habits? If so, how?

Have you changed your behaviour in any other ways? For example, are your plans for Christmas/New year affected?

If you have a mortgage are you concerned about keeping up payments?

Do you have savings? If so, have you moved them recently?

How impressed are you by Gordon Brown's and Alistair Darling's handling of the crisis?

Who do you feel is most to blame for the crisis (the *Guardian* poll suggests: Thatcher, Brown, Bush, UK Banks, International financial system and 'we are all to blame')

PTO

## Part 2: Global poverty and health

*In this section of the directive, we'd like you to write about poverty and health in other countries and your views on the ways in which we in the UK, as both individuals and within organisations (including the government) offer support.*

### **Your views in general**

Most of the questions below are about responding to humanitarian crises in the developing world. However, it would be useful if you could start your reply to this section by saying what your understanding is of the causes of poverty and inequalities throughout the world. What longer term responsibilities do we have as individuals living in the developed world or through our governments for the developing world?

### **Government overseas aid**

During the US election campaigns, candidates from both the major parties referred to overseas aid and the possibility that it can't be as generous because of the financial crisis. For example the new US Vice President, Joe Biden said:

*Well, the one thing we might have to slow down is a commitment we made to double foreign assistance. We'll probably have to slow that down.*

What do you think? Do you feel that we can tackle poverty in our own communities at the same time as supporting overseas aid or do you feel we should concentrate on problems in the UK? Do you think the UK gives enough aid to developing countries? Do you think that the aid that is given is well spent?

### **Giving to charities which provide overseas aid – or not?**

Do you contribute to any charities that provide overseas aid such as Oxfam or Save the Children? Not everyone feels that giving to charity is worthwhile and many people cannot afford to do so. Please describe your own position on this. If you do contribute, please list and say why you have chosen those charities.

Do you contribute specifically to medical charities (such as the Red Cross)?

### **Charitable gift tokens**

Have you ever given or been given a present in the form of a charity gift token (like an Oxfam voucher for a goat, or a contribution to a school)? What are your views on these tokens?

### **Travelling abroad**

Have you visited any countries where you have seen poverty first hand? Please tell us about those experiences.

When you choose a holiday, does the level of poverty in a country affect your decision? If so, how? What concerns have you about disease in other countries and the health risks to you and your family/friends when you travel abroad?

### **Working abroad: gap years and other projects**

Did you, or anyone you know, have a 'Gap year' which involved working to improve working to improve the conditions of people in other countries? Please describe.

## Part 2 continued

What do you think about gap years in principle? It is not only young people who work abroad but older people who join with organisations like VSO. What do you think about this as a way of contributing to fighting poverty. Would you do it?

### Policies on ethical practices

Are you aware of any policies on overseas aid or ethical trade held by organisations you are connected with (eg your employer, your school or college, your trade union, your religious association or any political groups you belong to). Do you support any such policies?

### Information about poverty in other countries

Where do you get most of your information? (eg TV, radio, Internet,) Do you have much direct personal experience, either from your own travelling or from direct contact with people who have come to this country from developing countries?

### Health professionals from abroad

Should we in the UK continue to recruit doctors and other health professionals from countries which have very serious health problems?

## Part 3: The Ups & Downs of Friendship

*Much is written and said about love affairs and marriages when they go wrong but much less on friendship when it turns sour or difficult. In this part of the directive, we would like to hear about your experience of the ups and downs of friendship.*

### Ideas about friendship

Would you start by talking about how you define a 'friend'?

**Please clearly state your age at the start of this section as well as your usual other biographical information.**

### Difficult friendships

Friendships can often face stresses and strains or can be difficult to keep going. Sometimes people fall out and make up regularly, or simply endure relationships out of duty or necessity. We could suggest examples from public life – Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, or John Lennon and Paul McCartney for example had to continue working together even after their friendships became tense. If you follow the friendships of celebrities you might have noticed that they often seem to have lots of ups and downs. Madonna for example seems to have very on-off friendships with women.

**PTO**

### **Part 3 continued**

Have you had any experiences of difficult or up and down friendships in your life? For example, have you ever kept going with friends who you actually find a drain, or who irritate, upset or bore you?

If so can you describe your experiences and why you still maintain these friendships?

### **When friendship ends**

Have you had important friendships where there was a falling out? Can you describe what happened and why?

How did you feel at the time? Or perhaps there was a drifting apart for no very obvious reason.

If so, did you feel regret, relief or simply that this is the natural course for some friendships? Do you think these friendships are permanently lost to you?

Have you changed the way you think about or approach friendship over the years?

### **Old friends**

What about meeting up with friends from the past? Have you re-contacted former friends e.g. through websites like Friends Reunited or Facebook or through school and college reunions?

If you've been through any experiences like this, please tell us about them.

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Please post your response to: **The Mass Observation Archive**  
**FREEPOST BR 2112**  
**The Library**  
**University of Sussex**  
**Brighton BN1 1ZX**

Or by email to: [moa@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:moa@sussex.ac.uk)

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