Engaging with the Public

12 Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews and the
Network of DAC Development Communicators

engaging with
the public

...for greater public
understanding of
global development
challenges and support
for addressing them

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OECD

The OECD is a unique forum where the governments of 34 democracies work together to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalisation. The OECD is also at the forefront of efforts to understand and to help governments respond to new developments and concerns, such as corporate governance, the information economy and the challenges of an ageing population. The Organisation provides a setting where governments can compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practice and work to co-ordinate domestic and international policies.

The OECD member countries are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. The Commission of the European Union takes part in the work of the OECD.

OECD Publishing disseminates widely the results of the Organisation's statistics gathering and research on economic, social and environmental issues, as well as the conventions, guidelines and standards agreed by its members.

In order to achieve its aims the OECD has set up a number of specialised committees. One of these is the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), whose members have agreed to secure an expansion of aggregate volume of resources made available to developing countries and to improve their effectiveness. To this end, members periodically review together both the amount and the nature of their contributions to aid programmes, bilateral and multilateral, and consult each other on all other relevant aspects of their development assistance policies.

The members of the Development Assistance Committee are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANU	Australia National University
BTC	Belgian Technical Co-operation (Agence belge de développement)
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
CSO	Civil society organisation
DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
DevCom	OECD Network of DAC Development Communicators
DIE	The German Development Institute
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EU	European Union
GNI	Gross national income
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
JICA	Japan International Co-operation Agency
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NCDO	Dutch National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PULSE	Belgium Research Platform on Public Support for Development Aid
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development Co-operation
Sida	Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency
UNGA	United Nations Development Group
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YES	Young Enterprise Scheme

As the international community takes stock of its progress in achieving the MDGs and begins implementing the post-2015 development agenda, there is great opportunity to demonstrate positive changes.

PREFACE

The 12 Lessons series pulls together knowledge on good practice in development co-operation from the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), drawing in particular on the findings of the DAC peer reviews. These lessons can help DAC members and other development actors to understand and implement measures that are critical to managing and delivering development co-operation more effectively. This publication also draws on the body of knowledge collected by the OECD's Network of DAC Development Communicators (DevCom), notably its publication *Good Practices in Development Communication* (OECD, 2014).

DAC peer reviews are based on the dual principles of accountability and mutual learning. The reviews are the only international process to regularly examine key bilateral development co-operation systems and offer constructive commentary for their reform. In doing so, peer reviews constitute a yardstick against which the DAC can measure the influence – or lack of it – of its good practice principles on members' behaviour, both in the field and at headquarters.

The ultimate aims of DAC peer reviews are to:

1. help improve the quality and quantity of aid

2. provide credible analyses based on common principles that can be used by both OECD countries and the wider international community

3. enable donors to share experiences, identify good practices and improve co-ordination.

Engaging the public, whether through public information, communication, campaigns or development education, is a core function of most government departments or agencies involved in official development co-operation. All DAC peer reviews analyse how DAC members go about public engagement for accountability and to raise public awareness of global development successes and challenges. Moreover, since the early 1990s, communicators in DAC member agencies and ministries have shared and documented their experiences with public communication, advocacy and engagement through the DevCom, which is hosted by the OECD Development Centre.

This booklet highlights key lessons learned on engaging with the public based on DAC members' practices as documented in peer reviews, DevCom's reports and publications and wider work from across the OECD. It includes examples from DAC members' experiences and sketches out challenges they continue to face as they move toward more strategic, effective and innovative engagement with citizens and taxpayers on development co-operation.

Let's take a cue from these 12 Lessons and use them to communicate about the positive, life-saving results of development co-operation.

FOREWORD

By Erik Solheim, Chair of the OECD Development Assistance Committee and Hans-Jürgen Heimsoeth, Chair of the Governing Board of the OECD Development Centre.

ENGAGING PEOPLE

The financial commitment to development co-operation has never been higher. In 2013, the global total reached USD 135 billion. For the first time ever, the United Kingdom reached the target of 0.7% of national income, and this happened in times of great economic austerity. Turkey – a middle-income country – increased its official development assistance more than any other European country and is now above the OECD average. And Ireland continued its commitment to fighting global hunger – even with a severe economic crisis at home – founded on a strong public and political consensus regarding the importance of helping the world's poorest people.

These extraordinary achievements would not have been possible without leadership and strong public support. People support development co-operation out of solidarity with people who have less. Development co-operation must therefore inspire – and be able to withstand – critical assessment from the public.

This means we must be better at telling people what an enormous success story global development has been. Extreme poverty has been halved in a few decades, bringing more than 600 million people out of poverty in China alone. The mortality rate for children under the age of five has been almost halved, saving 17 000 children every day. Life expectancy will soon pass 70 years.

Success is inspiring. It leads to support. But development partners must also be better at explaining their failures. Why did the international community fail to react at an early stage to the political crisis in South Sudan, which eventually led to ethnic warfare and a humanitarian crisis? Why did we fail to contain Ebola in its early phases in the three most affected West African countries? Public debate should be informed by facts. Criticism is a good thing when it brings the world forward.

Countries also provide official development assistance out of enlightened national interest. It is in everyone's interest to have a planet that is not wrecked by climate change, deforestation and the pollution of our rivers and oceans. Peace and prosperity in one part of the world increase trade and reduce the risk of drug trafficking, conflict and terrorism in others. The effects are felt by developed and developing countries alike. Development co-operation is an opportunity to exert leadership in the world. It should be an integral part of foreign affairs and national strategy.

Leadership is essential. It inspires others and encourages people to take control of the future they want. President Obama's Power Africa initiative brings US companies together to provide clean energy to Sub-Saharan Africa, where 70% of the population is without electricity. Norway is working with Brazil, Indonesia and other rainforest countries to reduce deforestation under the UN-REDD initiative. President Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Republic of the Congo broke ground by announcing a tax-per-barrel on oil to fight childhood malnutrition across the world as part of French-initiated Unitaid financing scheme!

Development co-operation can also be risky. Most people understand this. It is obviously safer to provide loans for hydropower development in China or Brazil than it is to support the government of the Central African Republic in providing basic services. Yet donors have committed to supporting fragile states, following the priorities of recipient governments and using country systems. Providers of development co-operation should not be afraid of explaining risk and helping people understand why it is important to work in difficult places. Working together also reduces risk. It is easier for a minister or an aid agency to explain why development co-operation is supporting the judicial system in Somalia when people know that this is what the Somali government has requested and that the European Union, the United States and Turkey support the same thing.

We welcome and endorse these *12 Lessons for Engaging with the Public*. The lessons are based on evidence and experience from Development Assistance Committee (DAC) peer reviews and from the Network of DAC Development Communicators, which the OECD Development Centre hosts and co-ordinates. The 12 Lessons offer policy makers a timely and important reminder that public support for development co-operation can never be taken for granted. They tell us that we need to be more humble when we engage with citizens and taxpayers to ensure that our efforts speak to what people think and know. As accountable policy makers, we need to share information in a meaningful, timely and accessible way. We need to ensure that development co-operation ministries and agencies enable success by acknowledging the strategic importance of communication, awareness-raising and development education, and that they invest time, money and capacity in these activities.

Public debate around development co-operation needs to be broader and more open to better reflect the new world we live in. At the same time, we must learn to be more positive and engaging. No one has heard of a successful company advertising that the world is going under, their customers are worse off than ever, and that their products often fail!

Let's take a cue from these 12 Lessons and use them to communicate about the positive, life-saving results of development co-operation.

OVERVIEW: THE STATE OF PUBLIC SUPPORT

Politicians and policy makers place great importance on having public support for development co-operation. Yet their understanding of what drives public support and attitudes about global challenges is not always based on evidence. As a result, policy makers may make decisions based on what they *think* people think, rather than what they *know* people think. For example, policy makers and legislators in some countries evoke the concept of 'aid fatigue', although public opinion polling results do not generally provide evidence that such sentiments are prevalent among the public.

We also know from peer reviews that development co-operation is rarely the subject of public debate during elections, or during budget discussions in parliament. Constituents tend to be most concerned about the policies and reforms that impact their daily lives, particularly in times of economic hardship. Yet a growing body of research shows that this does not mean that people are indifferent about global issues.

This publication acknowledges that, in terms of the types of public communication and engagement efforts made by government, as well as the priority and resources assigned to these efforts across OECD countries, great heterogeneity exists. Nevertheless, all DAC members acknowledge the importance of securing public support for effective policies while recognising constituents' right to know how their money is spent and what it achieves.

What does the research tell us about public support and attitudes?

A majority of citizens in OECD countries support providing development assistance...

In several OECD countries, government, civil society and think tanks regularly commission opinion surveys to gauge public support for development co-operation (see Figure 1). In general, the findings show that a majority of citizens across OECD countries are supportive of development co-operation expenditure, even when times are hard at home (CFR, 2012). In 2012, for example, respondents from European Union (EU) countries said that European governments should either keep their promise to increase aid to developing countries (49% of respondents) or that they should increase aid beyond what they had already promised (12% of respondents).

Figure 1. Public support in EU member states for aid to developing countries (2009-12)

Legend: Jun-2012, Sep-2011, Jun-2010, May-2009

We should increase aid to developing countries beyond what is already promised.
- Jun-2012: 12%
- Sep-2011: 12%
- Jun-2010: 14%
- May-2009: 24%

We should keep our promise to increase aid to developing countries.
- Jun-2012: 49%
- Sep-2011: 50%
- Jun-2010: 50%
- May-2009: 48%

We should not increase aid to developing countries even though it has been promised.
- Jun-2012: 17%
- Sep-2011: 14%
- Jun-2010: 15%
- May-2009: 8%

We should reduce aid to developing countries as we can no longer afford it.
- Jun-2012: 18%
- Sep-2011: 18%
- Jun-2010: 14%
- May-2009: 11%

Don't know.
- Jun-2012: 4%
- Sep-2011: 6%
- Jun-2010: 7%
- May-2009: 9%

Source: European Commission (2012), *Solidarity that Spans the Globe: Europeans and Development Aid*. Brussels, European Commission.

Note: The question was phrased as follows: "The EU has promised to increase the level of its aid to developing countries. Given the current economic situation, which of the following statements best describes your opinion?"

…yet awareness of the development challenges and opportunities in developing countries is low.

Despite this overall support, however, attitudinal research in Australia, Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom found that there is seemingly little awareness of the realities of people's lives and experiences in poor countries. Findings suggest that this shallow understanding does not reflect a lack of interest – there is a real appetite for a greater understanding of how progress happens. It can, rather, be attributed to the limitations of public discourse and messaging about development (Glennie et al., 2012).

Denmark's most recent opinion poll found a considerable appetite for greater understanding of development, including more complex stories of how change and progress happen, and why development co-operation works – or doesn't (Government of Denmark, 2013). According to analysis of the polling results, Danes receive an oversimplified picture of developing countries and development co-operation, the results achieved through Danish development co-operation are not well known and few Danes know how modern development co-operation is delivered (Government of Denmark, 2013). Opinion polls from other countries yield similar findings.

The public is sceptical about the effectiveness of development assistance in improving the lives of poor people.

At the same time, even when the public recognises that the level of poverty and inequality in the world is both a humanitarian issue and a threat to our collective future, there is widespread scepticism about whether official development co-operation is effective in tackling these issues.

Polls show increasing concerns about waste and inefficiency in the delivery of aid. This has prompted DAC members to focus more on reporting the positive impact development co-operation has had on the lives of poor people (OECD, 2008). According to former UK Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Gillian Merron, "We need to do a better job of explaining to people why development matters, we need to demonstrate that our aid is reaching the right people, and we need to show that it's delivering concrete results" (DFID, 2008).

Images used by government and non-governmental development organisations to communicate and raise funds for development may contribute to this scepticism. The repeated use of images showing people living in desperate need creates the impression that very little has changed over the past decades (Glennie et al., 2012; see Lessons 5 and 6). Yet, global poverty was halved five years ahead of the 2015 deadline established by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the number of children dying before the age of five has been nearly cut in half over the past two decades, which means that the lives of about 17 000 children are saved every day (United Nations, 2014). As the international community takes stock of its progress in achieving the MDGs and begins implementing the post-2015 development agenda, there is great opportunity to demonstrate these positive changes.

On the other hand, contrary to what is often assumed, perceptions of corruption in recipient countries may not necessarily reduce support for development co-operation among the populations of provider countries. Bauhr et al. (2013) found that the effect of perceived corruption

in developing countries on aid fatigue in the EU-15 countries[1] can be diminished if support is motivated by moral reasons for helping poor countries or if the purpose of aid is understood to improve governance.

Moral duty is the main driver of public support for development co-operation.

Analysis of public opinion on economic development and humanitarian assistance shows that moral duty is a strong driver of public support for development. The Council on Foreign Relations found widespread consensus among respondents in a range of OECD countries and emerging economies that developed countries have a moral responsibility to reduce hunger and extreme poverty in the developing world (CFR, 2012). In the United Kingdom, an empirical study by Henson and Lindstrom (2013) found that, even in times of economic austerity and wide-ranging cuts in government spending, the majority of the population felt the moral imperative to provide support to developing countries. A survey by Australia National University in September 2014 found that the public preferred that development spending be directed to humanitarian needs over commercial or political aims (ANU, 2014).

However, as shown in Lesson 5, the manner in which moral arguments are made matters. When arguments reflect an attitude that 'we' are different from, and superior to, 'them', they can be counterproductive. Glennie et al. (2012) concluded that strong moral values underpin public commitment to development, and that policy decisions that argue for strategic 'win-wins' are less appealing to people than those driven by the moral imperative. This highlights the importance of framing and language choices in presenting these arguments (Darnton, 2011).

There is a real appetite for a greater understanding of how progress happens.

1. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

WHY SHOULD POLICY MAKERS CARE ABOUT PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION?

Lesson 1:
Public engagement builds support and makes development policies more effective

WHAT: Evidence from peer reviews and research by the OECD Network of DAC Development Communicators demonstrates that strong public support underpins political and legislative backing for effective and dynamic development co-operation, including cross-party political support and more engaged parliaments (for example, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom).

WHY: Members that have reached the UN target of providing 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) in official development assistance (ODA) demonstrate a good track record in engaging with the public, politicians, opinion leaders and civil society. Factors such as political commitment, the degree of importance that development co-operation has in foreign policy, national interests and the state of public finances are also undoubtedly important in explaining why some DAC members meet this UN target for ODA commitment. Nonetheless, active, long-term public engagement clearly contributes to wide ownership and strong backing of the development policy vision and strategy. Stakeholders who are informed about and engaged in development policy are better equipped to hold the government accountable for its commitments.

Poorly informed citizens are less likely to be effective advocates for development co-operation. A lack of public information contributes to misperceptions about how development funds are used, the results they achieve, or even about the government's rationale for delivering development co-operation the ways it does.

Effective communication – communication that demonstrates impact in an open and transparent way – also builds trust (DFID, 2008). Trust is important for the success of a wide range of public policies that depend on behavioural responses from the public, or on citizen co-operation and compliance. The OECD finds, however, that across its member countries only 40% of citizens trust their government.[2] Putting in place open government policies that concentrate on boosting citizen engagement and access to information are among the six measures the OECD encourages governments to take to win back peoples' trust.

2. See *www.oecd.org/gov/trust-in-government.htm*

Finally, more informed citizens can hold governments accountable for their international commitments. The OECD sees public engagement as a condition for effective governance, placing a strong responsibility on governments to work with their own citizens and other stakeholders to increase understanding of complex global and domestic challenges (OECD, 2009).

HOW: There is no template for public engagement. The lessons in this publication provide a range of ideas and examples of how to engage effectively with the public on development, but any approach must be appropriately designed and context-specific (OECD, 2009). Policy makers seeking to successfully engage the public in development co-operation should keep these general guidelines in mind:

- **Be committed.** Public support for development cannot be taken for granted. It is important to understand both the complexity of engaging with the public and the factors that contribute to success. This means investing in research to understand attitudes, and working closely with key stakeholders and opinion leaders – including parliamentarians, civil society, the media and opinion leaders.

- **Be flexible and proactive.** Communicate about challenges and address negative media coverage.

- **Be bold.** Engaging with the public on development can also involve promoting changes in behaviour, encouraging people to take action to tackle global poverty and become engaged global citizens. The 2005 Make Poverty History campaign mobilised millions of people around the world to take to the streets and call on their governments to fight poverty (Martin et al., 2005).

- **Be honest and respectful.** Do not adopt a defensive, aggressive or argumentative tone. Instead, be persuasive, objective, evidence-based and passionate about what you are communicating. And, respect people's right to their opinions.

Box 1. Why DAC members engage with the public

Australia: To ensure that "Australians are educated and informed about why we give international aid, and see AusAID* as an effective, efficient and transparent deliverer of that aid." (2012-14 Communications Framework). The 2009 Independent Review of Australia's Aid Effectiveness stated that "public communication and public engagement are not peripheral add-ons to the aid programme. They are an investment in a solid, long-term foundation for it, and all the more important as the programme is poised for growth".

Denmark: To promote widespread awareness and understanding among Danes about Danish development co-operation and the challenges faced by developing countries. In this way, communication can contribute to securing continued support for Denmark assuming a global responsibility.

Ireland: "Building on a strong public support […] maintaining our solidarity with the poorest nations in the world at a time of economic hardship […] Demonstrating impact and value for money" Nora Owens, Chair of Ireland's Independent advisory expert board (Government of Ireland, 2013).

Japan: The Ministry for Foreign Affairs launched in 2010 an ODA review to promote public understanding and support for official development assistance and to improve its strategic value and effectiveness. A key driver of this review was a sense that Japan's ODA had not gained sufficient sympathy from the public. This review as well as the practical engagement actions it generated reflect Japan's desire to increase the accountability, visibility and national interest in its development co-operation.

Luxembourg: To respond to citizens' legitimate need to be informed about development co-operation, and its obligation to be accountable for the activities it supports and the results it achieves.

Netherlands: To promote public awareness of international co-operation and of the importance of active Dutch involvement. The Dutch National Committee for International Co-operation and Sustainable Development works from the conviction that a sustainable and just world is everybody's business and that everyone can contribute: by making donations, by consuming 'responsibly', by saving energy, by holding politicians to account, or by becoming actively involved in tackling poverty and underdevelopment.

Norway: To provide Norwegians with a basis for making good choices in development co-operation through information, debate and motivation. To this end, the Norwegian aid agency, Norad, plays an active role in many arenas, creating confidence in and demonstrating the legitimacy of development assistance, as well as promoting critical debate (*Strategy towards 2015: Results in the Fight against Poverty*).

United Kingdom: To demonstrate to the public that UK government support is saving lives and giving the world's poorest countries the chance to lift themselves out of extreme poverty for good; to improve the UK public's understanding that development creates a safer, more stable and more prosperous world for British people and British business; and to demonstrate that the UK government is investing effectively and efficiently to achieve results and progress.

Note: *The former AusAID has been integrated into Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. All of the references to the Australian aid programme from the 2013 peer review relate to the previous government's policies.

Active, long-term public engagement clearly contributes to wide ownership and strong backing of the development policy vision and strategy. Stakeholders who are informed about and engaged in development policy are better equipped to hold the government accountable for its commitments.

Lesson 2: Improving communication increases transparency

WHAT: DAC members have committed internationally and nationally to make more information about their development co-operation activities publicly available so that taxpayers can see where their money is going and what it is achieving. Nonetheless, in terms of being transparent and credible to stakeholders and in publishing information on development co-operation according to the common standard on transparency agreed at the 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, peer reviews find that performance is variable across DAC members. While being transparent and accountable is a priority for most DAC members, many struggle with building – within their development ministries and agencies – a culture that is open to transparency and public scrutiny. It is also a challenge to come up with the resources needed to invest in the technology that can make comprehensive, accessible and timely information readily available.

WHY: Because governments are judged by the impact of their development activities, and because accountability and transparency are critical to delivering results, the discourse about making development co-operation more effective has focused on the need for governments to be held accountable to constituencies both in their home countries and in the countries where they engage in development activities. At the same time, increases in development funding in line with the UN target of 0.7% of GNI – particularly during tough economic times – must be matched by increased transparency and accountability for the way taxpayers' money is spent and of the impact of this spending.

HOW: Increased transparency must be matched by improved communication. Publishing development co-operation data on public websites[3] has been one of the most common steps taken by DAC members to meet their commitments to increase transparency. Publishing development co-operation data is not enough, however; it needs to be made more accessible and timely. And while the availability of data can be seen as providing citizens with the opportunity to enrich development narratives with evidence of results, caution must be taken. The wealth of information available about development co-operation activities is more than the average constituent can digest.

3. For example the DAC's Creditor Reporting System, databases on IATI, as well as the availability of a vast amount of information on DAC members' websites dedicated to development co-operation.

- Open data needs to be framed in a way that adapts information to the consumers: Smart data presentation (including through interactive data visualisation) can help make information easy for the average citizen to understand.

- Answers to questions that the public may ask should be readily available and understandable in order to deepen comprehension of development policy: Why have certain activities been prioritised? Which initiatives and programmes have been successful and why? Why have other projects not had their intended effects? Which partners have been mobilised to support development outcomes?

Publishing development co-operation data is not enough – it needs to be made more accessible and timely.

Box 2. DAC member experiences in communicating transparently

Denmark: Under the rubric of Danida Transparency, Denmark takes a comprehensive approach to transparency on its development co-operation; it has a range of tools including a database, where it publishes project proposals ahead of their approval and offers a space for public consultation (*http://um.dk/en/danida-en/about-danida/danida-transparency/*).

France: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' aid transparency website (*www.transparence-aide.gouv.fr*) makes all documents related to projects in priority countries available and enables citizens to hold the government to account through the *"contrôle citoyen"*, which allows constituents to pose questions on specific projects, provide comments and more.

Sweden: Sweden's Open Government Partnership National Action Plan includes three main components: a reform agenda, a transparency guarantee and the Openaid.se web platform (*www.openaid.se*). Aid transparency features heavily in this user-friendly digital hub, which provides information on Sweden's aid disbursements in an open format, thereby allowing citizens, CSOs and entrepreneurs to use, refine and develop the data provided.

Switzerland: A new project database by the Swiss Agency for Development Co-operation (SDC) provides information on all phases of projects having contributions of more than CHF 0.5 million that have been approved by the SDC since May 2012 (*www.sdc.admin.ch/en/Home/Projects*).

United Kingdom: The Development Tracker website (*http://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk*) and Aid Match scheme (*www.gov.uk/international-development-funding/uk-aid-match*) are two good examples of what the UK is doing to be transparent in an accessible and user-friendly way. Aid Match allows the public to vote on which development co-operation projects should receive financing, while the Development Tracker allows people to find and explore detailed information on international development projects funded by the UK Government.

United States: The US Agency for International Development (USAID), together with the US Department of State, launched the Foreign Assistance Dashboard (*www. foreignassistance.gov*) in 2010 to respond to the transparency requirements of the government's Open Government Initiative. Now in its second iteration, the Dashboard will eventually catalogue budget, financial and programme data from all 22 government agencies implementing foreign assistance or dispersing humanitarian and development funds.

Comprehensive and effective strategies for engaging with the public in development co-operation need to be based on knowledge of what the public thinks and knows.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE

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Lesson 3:
Understand your audience

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WHAT: Comprehensive and effective strategies for engaging with the public in development co-operation need to be based on knowledge of what the public thinks and knows (or does not know). However, peer reviews find that too often, DAC members design communication strategies based on perceptions and assumptions about public opinion (see Overview). In reality, very few DAC members commission research and analysis before developing their strategies, either because this is costly or simply because they are not approaching communication from a strategic perspective. This results in poorly targeted, ineffective communication.

WHY: Public opinion and other market research help identify knowledge gaps, information needs, potential target groups and how people react to messages. Members that base their communication on research (e.g. Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) are able to segment the population into audiences or target groups. Targeted messaging, in turn, enables communication teams to deliver stronger messages, which ultimately increase the impact of their work (DFID, 2008).

Surveys can also be used to test the relevance of communication products among key audiences. In addition, regular, representative surveys of public opinion allow comparative analysis of attitudes over time, as well as tracking changes in levels of support. They can also help communication professionals identify peoples' main sources of information, enabling them to communicate with each target group via the most appropriate channel.

Engagement also provides insight into the reasons behind scepticism and helps to craft counter arguments and anticipate criticisms in the future. Furthermore, if you manage to 'convert' sceptics, or at least successfully challenge their views, you will have a cadre of powerful allies and advocates. Pro-active engagement not only contributes in a meaningful way to transparency (Lesson 2); it also allows you to choose the time and place for engagement and to come prepared with powerful arguments.

HOW: Because of the limited resources generally available to them for public communication and engagement, many DAC members are not in a position to commission research on public opinion. In these cases, some cost-effective approaches can help:

- Partner, for instance with universities and NGOs that are also interested in understanding public attitudes.

- Consult with the public when developing or updating development co-operation policies (see Box 3).

- Share knowledge – through communities of practice, for example – about public opinion and effective tools for engaging people and building awareness. This is one of the core objectives of the Network of DAC Development Communicators (DevCom).

More comprehensive market research can be commissioned and justified before embarking on a new strategy or awareness-raising campaign. When commissioning surveys, however, it is important to ensure that the design of questionnaires follows function, asking meaningful questions that will elicit relevant information. Research shows that polling results are not reliable enough to draw conclusions when questions are general, leading and/or hypothetical, rather than prompting respondents to give an informed response (Henson and Lindstrom, 2012; North-South Centre of the Council of Europe/OECD, 2003).

Some DAC members (see Box 3) complement the findings from opinion surveys with focus group research in order to explore attitudes further and to test messages. Empirical research can provide deeper insights on attitudes and evaluations of communication can also help identify what works and why (see Lesson 12).

Box 3. DAC member experiences in understanding their audience

Belgium supported a multi-disciplinary study on public support for and attitudes towards development co-operation (PULSE, 2012). The research findings fed into the Ministry's communication and development education policy. Two opinion surveys were conducted: one for the general public and another for targeted groups such as politicians, the private sector and students. Awareness-raising projects and activities were mapped by target groups, comparing the supply of and the demand for information.

Denmark uses an annual representative survey on Danes' attitudes towards and knowledge of development assistance to identify target groups for communication. It has segmented the population into five core target groups. While the majority of Danida's communication activities target all Danes via large-scale activities/campaigns, this research helps ensure that messages and delivery tools are adapted to them.

The **European Commission** has conducted the Eurobarometer poll on development co-operation since 1984. This poll has consistently shown that over eight out of ten respondents believe that it is important to help people in developing countries (from 89% in 2010 to 83% in 2013). In EU member states, at least two-thirds of respondents believe that development co-operation is important. In 2013, more than six out of ten respondents indicated that aid to developing countries should be increased, despite the difficult economic situation in Europe.

In 2011, **Ireland** undertook consultations on the future of Ireland's development co-operation. The extensive consultation process involved:

- contact with over 1 000 people in Ireland

- meetings with parliamentary committees, development NGOs, the private sector, migrant communities and others

- significant use of social media

- consultations in key partner countries and a regional consultation for Africa

- internal discussions in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and across government.

Public engagement strategies encompass a range of communication efforts and are tailored to engage a variety of stakeholders.

Lesson 4:
Have a clear, strategic vision

WHAT: Peer reviews have found that while most DAC members have policies for informing and communicating with the public, and for building public awareness of global development opportunities and challenges, including through development education, there is a general need for such efforts to be more strategically designed and implemented.

WHY: DAC members can strengthen communication and engagement with parliament, civil society and the public on development and development co-operation by formulating and implementing a communication strategy to guide them in reaching key audiences. The existence of a clear, strategic vision – endorsed by the government – gives the communication team a clear mandate for implementation, allowing them to develop and use appropriate tools for reaching each audience. To maximise impact, the rationale and objectives should be well defined from the outset, based on evidence about public perceptions, attitudes and information needs (see Lesson 3).

A high-level vision and policy for engaging with the public on development gives a mandate to ministries and agencies to invest in communication. When more than one communication team is involved, this also ensures consistent and complementary messaging to the public. In addition, development policy is increasingly being integrated into foreign and trade policy, serving national interests more explicitly (Malhotra, 2014). Peer reviews find that there is a risk that communication about development co-operation can be diluted by other communication priorities within the wider media relations and public relations-type communication work of ministries.

HOW: It is important to ensure that public engagement strategies encompass a range of communication efforts and are tailored to engage a variety of stakeholders (e.g. internal colleagues, taxpayers, volunteers and civil society, policy makers and parliamentarians, developing country citizens). Here are some steps that can help:

- Aim to have medium-term strategies with clear overall objectives for engaging and communicating with the public and building awareness about development issues. Translate these objectives and the hoped-for results into operational plans with prioritised actions and sufficient resources (Lesson 11).

- Ensure coherence among the range of activities for public engagement, including information, communication and consultation, and development education activities.

- Integrate the strategy into the development co-operation programme so that communication considerations can be taken into account in planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting.

- When several official bodies are engaged in development co-operation and communicate about it domestically, a joint strategic vision focusing on how each body can contribute is essential.

An effective communication strategy should include (see Box 4 for examples):

- clear and measurable objectives/expected results for each target audience

- an action plan for implementation, based on selection of the most effective communication channel and tools for reaching priority target groups

- prioritised actions and objectives

- a clear indication of required human and financial resources

- evaluation of impact and ongoing adjustment of the strategy based on the evaluations (Lesson 12).

Box 4. DAC member experiences with communication strategies

The 2013 DAC peer review of **Australia** praised its strategic approach to communication and public awareness, which:

- is evidence-based, informed by public opinion research

- has a clear overall objective

- is targeted to three general audiences: the general public; the informed public and parliamentarians; and professionals in development

- uses social media based on a well-developed social media strategy

- reinforces the long-term nature of development and builds understanding of the more complex story of national interest

- has three communication pillars – domestic, overseas and internal (within AusAID) – each implemented through separate two-year strategies and annual work plans

- uses a monitoring and evaluation plan and carries out six-monthly reporting to the Executive Committee.

In **Ireland,** the government works in partnership with governmental bodies and a broad range of CSOs, including diaspora organisations and trade unions, to build public awareness. This work is guided by a comprehensive, multidimensional, long-term strategy.

Italy has a communication strategy that aims to maintain broad consensus on Italian development co-operation, increase political support and raise public awareness. The strategy identifies key messages and audiences, as well as actors and tools for communicating.

Korea's development communication strategy is aligned with its legal and policy framework. The Public Awareness Enhancement Plan (Prime Minister's Office, Korea, 2012) oversees the implementation of activities in development communication and education led by development co-operation ministries and agencies. In line with the plan, a joint communication task force meets quarterly to support co-ordination and avoid fragmentation.

Luxembourg's communication strategy, which was updated in 2012, is accompanied by an annual action plan that lists activities to be carried out as well as events that offer opportunities for communication. The 2013 peer review suggested that in consultation with its development co-operation agency (LuxDev) the Ministry should also identify the messages that it wishes to communicate to each target audience.

Sweden takes a strategic approach to development communication and education. In 2009, the strategies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida) were combined into a single communication framework, including guidelines for civil society participation in communication and public education. The common strategy enables Sida and its partners to link up and complement each other in carrying out development communication and education. An evaluation conducted in 2012 confirmed that the integrated strategy helps Sida work with stakeholders.

Note: *The former AusAID has been integrated into Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. All of the references to the Australian aid programme from the 2013 peer review relate to the previous government's policies.

Effective public engagement requires clear, coherent messages that go beyond isolated events, facts or statistics to communicate long-term progress and effectiveness.

Lesson 5: Develop and deliver a coherent narrative

WHAT: Effective public engagement requires clear, coherent messages that go beyond isolated events, facts or statistics to communicate long-term progress and effectiveness.

WHY: Time-bound messages (e.g. "Act now to end the famine in X country.") can be helpful to quickly mobilise public support for urgent causes. Such messages can foster complacency and scepticism, however, when they oversimplify the complex challenges that contribute to crises, when they fail to take into account messages being received from other sources (e.g. the media, NGOs), or when they capitalise on the misperception that development challenges come in neat 'problem-solution' binaries. The reality is that such binaries are in fact quite rare. Communication during humanitarian disasters, in particular, can also give the impression that the solution has been identified and that the problem can be solved with money and good co-ordination. Yet as shown by the response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, for instance, public mistrust grows when progress is not made despite large-scale public mobilisation in response to urgent appeals for support. This type of messaging may also sacrifice medium- and long-term public commitment to development co-operation in favour of short-term (or even one-time) engagement.

Campaigns that are built on short-term goals also too often fail to take into account the cumulative effect of the messaging being conveyed to the public. The fact is that the manner in which the everyday lives of people in developing countries are represented through images and words can have a profoundly negative effect on public perceptions of whether development co-operation works. For example, while dramatic or even shocking imagery of abject poverty and desperate need may be effective in mobilising public opinion (i.e. pulling on heartstrings), repeating such images over time may have the cumulative effect of suggesting that development co-operation is not working.

HOW: When crafting the narrative, it is important to ensure that messages and campaigns neither alienate the public nor skew the development debate.

Make an honest assessment of the dominant discourse regarding development among target populations. What motivates people to support development? What is their level of awareness about the long-term objectives of development co-operation? Such an assessment is essential in order to meet constituents' information needs, to tackle misconceptions and to counter misinformation.

LESSON 5

Balance the tension between popular demand for simple 'aid works' messages and a more complex narrative that elucidates how and why it works or does not (see Lesson 6). Effective approaches go beyond recounting inputs (money spent) or outputs (number of children educated) to provide process and progress stories about how development happens. Coherent narratives also lend themselves to tailored messages for the range of constituents, including taxpayers, parliament, civil society, development institutions, scholars and stakeholders in partner countries. Take care to:

- Use plain language, rather than technical jargon.

- Limit misperception by delivering selected information aimed at improving the understanding of target audiences.

- Tailor messages to the interests and realities of the audience; ensure that messages resonate with them by testing core messages in focus groups.

- Identify what are the current concerns of sceptical audiences, and find a 'connecting narrative' that picks out the kind of information that will directly be of interest to them;

- Identify opportunities to amplify messages (e.g. international days, joint campaigns with other development actors including DAC members).

- When crafting the narrative, take into account other possible sources of development messages (e.g. media, civil society).

- Ideally, development narratives are crafted as part of a consultative process with other development actors to ensure coherence, minimise the possibility of contradictory messages and enhance the chances for success (see Lesson 7).

Box 5. DAC member experiences in developing and delivering the development narrative

As part of its outreach efforts for the first-ever European Year for Development (EYD), the **European Commission** launched a number of online initiatives at the end of 2014 to foster a coherent development narrative around the event. Co-branded content and crowd-sourced 'Stories of the Week' reinforce key messages to: raise awareness of European development co-operation; highlight results achieved; and encourage direct involvement, critical thinking and active interest of European Union citizens in development co-operation. By bringing together a diverse range of partners under the common theme of European development co-operation, the Commission has helped ensure that the public receives consistent messages from a number of sources.

In the **United Kingdom,** research into public attitudes on development co-operation (Glennie et al., 2012) found that, while views toward development tend to be driven by moral values and opinions, the manner in which moral arguments are made also matters. Messages must avoid advancing a moral high ground based on the 'us' versus 'them' dualism; this can backfire in times of economic hardship, when the spirit of 'charity should begin at home' can place significant pressure on development co-operation agencies to overcome public perceptions of waste and inefficiency in development assistance.

People need to know more about what development is and how it is delivered, why things work or do not work and how DAC members have learned from their failures.

PUT THE RIGHT TOOLS INTO ACTION

WHAT: Public dialogue about development co-operation is shifting away from an emphasis on simple visibility through branding (Lesson 9) and from a focus on funding to understanding the actual results. In particular, public scrutiny of results increases when development co-operation budgets increase or when government departments need to defend the budget during times of economic crisis and cutbacks in public finance. Yet peer reviews show that communicating results is proving to be a challenge for DAC members. At the same time, communications and monitoring and evaluations teams face internal pressure to stick to corporately defined 'positive' messages and to avoid exposing ministries and implementing agencies to public scrutiny for 'failed' development interventions.

WHY: To build and sustain public support for development, it is important to communicate the positive results of development co-operation. Yet at the same time, focusing exclusively on positive results can create the type of simplistic narrative that makes it difficult to sustain long-term public engagement and support (see Lesson 5). People need to know more about what development is and how it is delivered (see Overview); why things work or do not work and how DAC members have learned from their failures. In addition, expectations need to be managed because development results will take longer to achieve than domestic political cycles. A clear advantage of taking the time to explain why a project did not have the desired result puts governments in control of the message, rather than having to react to scandals made public by the media.

In addition, the emergence of new development co-operation providers puts additional pressure on DAC members to demonstrate to their constituents that their expenditure on official development assistance is still valid and effective.

HOW: As stated in Lesson 2, the increasing accessibility of aid data makes communication about failures as important as communication about successes. Accountable providers take the time to show what went wrong and how they have learned from their experiences. Particularly in the context of fragile and conflict-affected countries, and in the wake of humanitarian crises, helping the public to understand that development actors take risks that others cannot take can increase the public's willingness to accept less than positive results (Keeley, 2012).

LESSON 6

Policy makers should keep the following in mind:

- Enable effective communication about results by managing for development results. This requires close collaboration between monitoring, evaluation and communication teams (see also Lesson 12).

- In line with the principles for making development co-operation effective – ownership, alignment, harmonisation and mutual accountability – focus on the contribution of development assistance to partner country development results. Do not seek individual attribution.

- Create a culture of communication about development priorities, challenges, results and impact.

- Acknowledge the complexity and risk associated with development activities, while being transparent and accountable. This requires strategic and well-crafted messages.

- Recognise criticism. Messages about failure can be powerful when managed strategically, focusing on the lessons learnt from projects and programmes that did not achieve the desired results. In addition, development co-operation ministries and agencies will come across as more credible and honest since a key feature of public opinion in OECD countries is doubt about its effectiveness (see Overview).

- Evaluation results and lessons should be disseminated systematically. However, evaluation teams also need to have the competencies and budgets to do this effectively.

- Consultation with communicators while results frameworks are designed and before evaluations are conducted can help to ensure that both will provide useful content for communication.

Box 6. DAC member experiences in communicating results

Belgium: The Belgian Technical Co-operation (BTC) sees monitoring, evaluation and communication as key steps along a results information continuum. This comprehensive perspective provides a good basis for the different teams to collaborate. Before any data is gathered, there is joint discussion between the monitoring and evaluation team and the communication team about what the data should be used for. Results monitoring and evaluation templates are tailored to the needs of specific users and updated with input from both teams. Both consider evidence to be critical to effective results communication, and both are engaged from the outset in defining the data needed to tell BTC's story, developing hard and soft indicators, and articulating theories of change to frame analysis. In addition, the monitoring and evaluation team organises writing workshops for field staff in major partner countries to help them draft reports, identifying results that can be communicated strategically by Brussels.

Denmark has redoubled its efforts to disseminate information on results and the challenges facing developing countries. Messages are designed to clearly inform the public on what Danish development co-operation supports, how such support is provided, and how poverty reduction and human rights determine the direction of Denmark's development co-operation policies.

Sweden: The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency takes the People First approach to communicating results. This approach gives a voice to people in the partner countries, letting them tell their story of how their life has changed without interpretation, comments or explanation from outsiders. The People First initiative has five content building blocks that can be combined and used differently depending on context, media and audience: a basic human interest story, facts and figures, a two-minute video clip, some strong quotes, and a set of high-quality photos. The different blocks can easily be built in to any channel of communication and the direct personal approach is exceptionally suitable for social media. As no reference is made to any specific donor but rather to developments in the person's life or changes in his/her country the stories are first and foremost owned by our partner countries and can be spread by them as well as the donor community. In this way the People First approach is communicating about results as well as communicating for results (IDB/DevCom, 2012).

The **United Kingdom's** 2011 strategy "UK Aid: Changing lives, delivering results" commits the Department for International Development to publishing detailed information about all development co-operation programmes under the UK Aid Transparency Guarantee, "so that anyone, anywhere, can hold it to account for the work we do" (DFID, 2011).

The **United States** published a joint summary of performance information in 2014, bringing together indicators from the Department of State and USAID (*www.usaid.gov/results-and-data*). The purpose of the summary was to provide a "brief, user-friendly format to promote greater accountability and accessibility to Congress, the American public and other key stakeholders", providing a 'snapshot' of how effective the State Department and USAID have been at achieving US foreign policy goals.

Civil society can help 'translate' policy challenges into local solutions, thereby empowering constituents to take an active role in development.

Lesson 7: Leverage partnerships to achieve objectives

WHAT: With the number of information channels multiplying, DAC members are experiencing a paradigm shift away from doing it alone to engaging with a diverse range of partners to convey development messages. In particular, civil society organisations can function as strategic partners, both in partner countries and at home. The private sector, especially those companies that prioritise corporate social responsibility, can also be important allies (see Box 7).

WHY: By leveraging the messaging power of partners, DAC members can achieve three important objectives: they can access audiences that may otherwise be out of reach; partners may be seen as being more 'credible', facilitating the uptake of messages; and smart partnerships can be a way of doing more with less, particularly when communication offices face resource constraints. In contrast, by withholding information or insisting on a centralised approach to public engagement, governments may open themselves up to misperception and scepticism.

Strategic partnerships, whether with individuals, organisations or businesses, can therefore be essential for development communication strategies to achieve their goals. Civil society, for instance, provides an important platform for the type of dialogue that may simply not be possible for government, and can afford to engage in the kind of nuanced, in-depth communication that may be too cumbersome or unrealistic for centralised campaigns. Because of its role in consultative and policy making processes, civil society can also help 'translate' policy challenges into local solutions, thereby empowering constituents to take an active role in development.

HOW: Typical civil society partners include trade, farmers' and nurses' unions, as well as diaspora organisations. Other interest groups may also function as communication partners, including the media, universities, opinion leaders, parliamentarians and the private sector. When selecting the most appropriate partners:

- Prioritise and categorise possible partners according to targeted audiences (Lesson 3), key messages and communication objectives (Lesson 5).

- Strategically identify partners that can add value and increase the impact of communication efforts.

- Build relationships around commonalities, agreeing to disagree where these do not exist.

Box 7. DAC member experiences with communication partnerships

In **France,** the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD) initiated a campaign called *Huit Fois Oui* (eight times yes) with the aim of raising awareness, particularly among children and youth, about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The campaign was implemented in close co-operation with the Ministry of Education, under its international solidarity initiative. The campaign included a toolkit for teachers, as well as an 'exposition kit' designed to help schools, local councils, businesses and associations organise awareness-raising events. Because of its multifaceted approach based on wide partnerships, the campaign was successful in broadening public participation in the MDG debate.

As part of its efforts to make international co-operation part of the Japanese Culture, **Japan** engages the public in partnership with civil society, development workers and returned overseas co-operation volunteers. The Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) has 15 local branches throughout the county. It includes the JICA Global Plaza in Tokyo and the Nagoya Global Plaza in Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture as a hub for "citizen participation in international co-operation" with the aim of improving public awareness. These branches provide space and opportunities for Japanese citizens to become involved in international co-operation. JICA's officers also work with returning Japan Overseas Co-operation Volunteers (JOCVs) and development education programme specialists to link them with Japanese communities at the local level. They hold events and seminars where ex-volunteers share stories about their experience in JICA's development programmes. JICA organises approximately 2 000 lectures per year.*

In **Luxembourg**, broad public support for development co-operation has been maintained through strategic engagement with non-governmental partners. Discussion forums have been held annually since 2006. At these sessions, parliamentarians, ambassadors to international institutions, development practitioners, partner country representatives, NGOs and others meet to discuss matters of Luxembourg development co-operation.

In the **Netherlands,** NCDO launched MDG Scan (*www.mdgscan.com/*) to engage the private sector in discussions about the MDGs. This tool proposes 77 measurable indicators relevant to multinational companies with significant activity in middle- or low-income countries. Companies can assess their progress in support of the MDGs against these indicators and then use the results to communicate with the public. By helping companies evaluate their positive impact on the lives of people in developing countries, and by using the MDGs as the lens through which this impact is measured, NCDO accomplished two important objectives: engaging the private sector in development communication; and contributing to a coherent, MDG-based narrative.

Note: * For more information: *http://www.jica.go.jp/english/publications/reports/annual/2013/ c8h0vm00008m8edo-att/37.pdf*

*Social media is also a great place
to listen to your audience before
you actually join in the debate.*

Lesson 8: Make room for creativity and innovation

WHAT: DAC members that have embraced social media have seen a corresponding rise in the level of engagement by their constituents, for instance through emergency campaigns that mobilise support in response to humanitarian crises. As with all forms of communication, today's development messages must contend with increasingly discriminatory audiences that consume information through an array of media and have become accustomed to engaging in conversations on issues, rather than being fed information (Lesson 3).

WHY: One-way approaches such as annual reports, glossy brochures and public service announcements no longer suffice for a viable development communication strategy. By recognising the importance of creativity and fostering innovation within their agencies, decision makers can ensure that development messages reach their intended audiences – in particular through the inclusive, broad-based, real-time engagement offered by less traditional media. Additionally, social media offers the possibility of immediate, personalised feedback and allows agencies to build strong networks of engaged and committed constituents.

Innovation can also help agencies to make the most of limited resources. Thanks to multiplier effects, a blog or online campaign can reach millions while costing substantially less than quarterly magazines or print advertisements.

HOW: When devising strategies for communicating about development (Lesson 4), care should be taken to ensure that the methods being considered and put into place are appropriate within today's communication environment. This can be done by employing staff with skills in new media, training staff in using innovative media and/or entering into strategic partnerships (Lesson 7) that can help in using creativity and innovation to reach specific target audiences (Lesson 3). To communicate effectively on results (Lesson 6), it can be helpful to explore opportunities for field staff to share their stories in a decentralised, informal manner, for instance through blogs or social media. Finally, experimenting with microsites, online gaming, 'pop-up' campaigns in urban centres and participatory videos can allow beneficiaries to tell development stories in their own words.

Social media is also a great place to listen to your audience before you actually join in the debate, and to test out some of your messaging on sympathetic 'communities of practice'.

Box 8. DAC member experiences with innovation in communication

Norway's development co-operation agency funded a campaign called *RadiAid: Africa for Norway* (*africafornorway.no*)*,* organised by a Norwegian student organisation. The campaign went viral, spreading through YouTube, the BBC, *Le Monde* and *The New York Times*. A music video on the campaign website humorously appealed to Africans to send radiators to Norway to help Norwegians survive the harsh winter. The campaign's main objective was to challenge stereotypes about Africa, shaping the public's perceptions in a more nuanced way. The campaign was billed a success by Norad because it incorporated humour and creativity, used a variety of engaging media and appealed to a broad audience.

In **New Zealand,** the Young Enterprise Scheme (YES) has helped bring innovative development ideas to light since 2011. YES is nationwide competition among secondary school students aimed at encouraging students to think about how business can have a positive impact on the lives of people in developing countries. Students are invited to develop and implement a business plan, set up a company, create products or services, make profits or losses, and complete an annual report. Through YES, not only are innovative business solutions for development given a platform, but young thinkers are engaged with development challenges in a unique way that empowers them to articulate potential solutions.

Sweden's People First approach was designed to allow beneficiaries in partner countries tell the story of how their lives have changed without interpretation, comment or explanation from outsiders. Depending on the context, media and audience, the initiative uses human interest stories; facts and figures; video clips; quotes; and high-quality photos. These components can easily be built in to any channel of communication and are especially suited to social media.

Lesson 9:
Ensure branding is appropriate

WHAT: Visibility should not be confused with popularity. Indeed, while corporate visibility guidelines have been established by most DAC member agencies and ministries, the brandishing of logos can, in some contexts, seriously undermine development objectives. DAC peer reviews recommend that donors carefully manage how they brand their projects so that they do not undermine the partner country ownership of development results.

WHY: Public engagement is often strengthened by visual cues (logos or brands) that tie investment in development (e.g. taxes) to positive results in developing countries. Indeed, as an accountability tool, branding can justify and legitimise expenditure on development co-operation. At the same time, however, flag-raising for the purpose of donor visibility and attribution can be inconsistent with international good practice in development assistance.

Nonetheless, few have analysed the potential effects of branding on audiences in the provider country. Some experiences from DAC members indicate that when messages are presented convincingly (see Lesson 5), constituents do not expect or need to see their national flag on projects.

HOW: To the extent possible, members must balance the need to demonstrate results with the imperative to support partner country priorities. A public engagement strategy that takes the lessons explored in this publication into consideration can reduce the need to rely on branding to strengthen accountability. A collective communication culture that moves away from an emphasis on individual visibility to an emphasis on priorities, challenges and impacts can help to resolve branding issues. In this way, members also acknowledge that their contribution is more important than public attribution based on branding. Finally, a pragmatic branding strategy can provide the basis for evaluating branding approaches on a case-by-case basis, empowering staff to make good judgement calls: When is it appropriate to brand? When not? What will it help to achieve?

Contribution is more important than public attribution based on branding.

Box 9. DAC member experiences with branding

The **German** Development Institute (DIE) conducted a study of the relationship between visibility and effectiveness. The study found that pursuing visibility can actually undermine development effectiveness; these principles are especially threatened if visibility is oriented individualistically (e.g. "cherry picking" attractive projects, sectors, modalities or countries; pursuing "quick wins" that are immediately presentable and attributable) and communicating only particular results achieved rather than whole efforts and jointly achieved outcomes.

In the **United Kingdom,** branding was harmonised across implementing agencies so that development co-operation activities would grouped under a single visual identity. DFID's "UKaid" branding strategy includes many of the same branding exceptions as USAID, but also allows branding to be omitted when it "obstructs, detracts from or slows down humanitarian operations."

The **United Nations** system as part of its *Communicating as One* initiative calls on UN country teams to use a number of approaches to communicate in a cohesive manner, including by leveraging the United Nations identity rather than the brands of individual UN agencies (see UNDG, 2014).

United States: USAID's comprehensive *Branding and Marking Guidelines* (ADS 320) were established in response to a congressional requirement that all programmes under the Foreign Assistance Act (including USAID) be identified appropriately overseas as "from the American People". Importantly, USAID's strategy allows country offices to provide exceptions to branding when it would, *inter alia:*

- compromise the intrinsic independence or neutrality of a programme or materials

- diminish the credibility of audits, reports, analyses, studies or policy recommendations whose data or findings must be seen as independent

- undercut partner country government ownership

- offend local culture or social norms, or be considered inappropriate

- conflict with international law, such as the internationally recognised neutrality of the International Red Cross or other organisations.

ENABLE SUCCESS

WHAT: Peer reviews show that it is not uncommon for public communication and engagement to be treated as an administrative function even if having public support, being transparent and accountable is fundamental to effective development co-operation. In addition, communication staff are often cut off from the rest of the organisation. In such cases, there is scope for members to improve how they manage communication within their development co-operation ministries and agencies

WHY: When public engagement and communication is managed strategically and communication staff have a clear mandate to communicate, they can work more effectively to raise awareness of development co-operation and the results it achieves (Lesson 6). If communication is effectively integrated into the policy work and has an ear to the ground, it can serve as a reality check on public attitudes about development policy. When done effectively, this can increase ownership of the development co-operation policy and thus increase the probability of stronger support for implementing it. When several bodies in a country are responsible for development co-operation, there is a need for cross-government co-ordination of communication. Such integration also sends an important signal across the organisation that communication, engagement and transparency are strategic priorities.

The strategic importance given to communication, engagement and awareness raising in DAC member countries is often evidenced by where the strategic communication team sits in the organisation. In some countries it is in the office of the director, and the communication director is a member of senior management. In others, however, the minister's press office is responsible for communication, while in others the communication unit sits under corporate services and communication is considered an administrative function. Still in other cases, communication units that once focused solely on development co-operation have been integrated into central communication units of Ministries for Foreign Affairs; this can cause them to lose autonomy in defining and implementing strategies that are relevant to development co-operation, as well as the flexibility to communicate about development co-operation results and risks.

Other organisational structure challenges development agencies face have to do with creating an environment that facilitates interaction among communication staff and development professionals. Staff in development ministries and/or development agencies are often experts in development co-operation, but not in communicating about it. On the other hand, communication

professionals in these agencies – or those that engage in development-related activities in other government departments or ministries – may be specialised in communication but lack in-depth understanding of the challenges around development co-operation.

HOW: There are many steps that policy makers can take to make the institutional role of communication more strategic:

- Manage and resource communication as a policy priority.

- Avoid treating communication as a corporate service, and integrate it into strategic planning.

- Co-ordinate and ensure coherent and complementary communication when numerous actors are involved in development co-operation.

- Ensure that the leading development communication team is influential.

- Share expertise systematically and effectively: provide training for development experts in basic communication skills and encourage them to use them; ensure that communicators have access to experts and that experts are aware of the importance of communicators' work.

- Provide incentives for mainstreaming communication into development co-operation, for example by including communication objectives in business planning and staff performance plans.

Communicators also play an important role in demonstrating the added value of engaging with the public and in allocating resources to it, for example:

- Because effective engagement takes time, they should find and communicate early signs of success with communication strategies – however small or anecdotal – within the organisation.

- Look inwards and sideways for tactical inspiration: what communication tactics convinced your own organisation/department to change their views/working practices/policies? What techniques have been successfully used in domestic advocacy that you can analyse, critique and deploy where appropriate?

- Share learning with others who face similar challenges – you may be surprised what you learn in return (DevCom, 2011).

Box 10. DAC member experiences in promoting communication institutionally

Belgium's development co-operation agency created an institutional system to support the communication strategy by establishing communication focal points in Belgium's 18 partner countries. Support to the Belgian Development Agency's (BTC) communication experts in headquarters includes a regular flow of content from people on the ground.

In **Denmark,** the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' emphasis on becoming a proactive, open, transparent and trustworthy communicator was behind efforts to build staff capacity in communication and media relations. These efforts – including training in communication and contact with the media – have made staff more open to engaging with the media.

In **Finland,** the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) took the lead in formulating the National Strategy of Global Education in 2007, with participation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Cross-government co-ordination helped to raise the profile of global education across government.

In 2008, **Switzerland** made a move to put the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation's (SDC) formerly external communication unit closer to decision-making by integrating the unit centrally within the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (FDFA). The 2013 peer review found, however, that communication about development became lost within the wider information and media relations work of the FDFA. The communication unit, which formerly had a good track record in strategic communication, had fewer resources and less authority and flexibility to communicate with the media and other audiences about Switzerland's vision for development co-operation, its programmes, results, and the challenges it faces.

Operational communication is an integral part of the **World Bank**'s project cycle. Staff are responsible for devising communication strategies that support project design, implementation, and review phases, notably to mitigate risk and ensure that project aims are supported and advanced by communication. Under the World Bank's internal reorganisation in 2014, communication was further strengthened through the creation of a dedicated operational communication department.

The awareness-building activities that will build public support for development and ownership of development co-operation policy require skilled human resources and investment.

Lesson 11:
Match resources and expertise with ambition

WHAT: DAC peer reviews find that resources available for communicating about development co-operation and building better awareness of the related issues tend to be limited and volatile. While the awareness-building activities that will build public support for development and ownership of development co-operation policy require skilled human resources and investment, few DAC members have staff with the right competencies for this work.

WHY: Development co-operation is less tangible for the general population than most other areas of public policy, simply because it is delivered overseas. Yet the public wants to know how development co-operation works and what it achieves (see Overview and Lesson 6), coupled with a drive to increase transparency (Lesson 2). This increasing demand justifies efforts to engage with the public. Because DAC members are increasingly communicating in a space where there is a lot of information and competition for attention, this requires both a budget and diverse professional expertise.

HOW: Peer reviews regularly recommend that members increase specialist capacity in development communication and maintain dedicated resources to communicate results. In the light of increasingly tight budgets, it is important to review the approach to implementing communication strategies, which does not necessarily mean allocating a bigger budget; there are ways to communicate well even if resources are limited, for example:

- Be sure the institutional culture recognises the *why* of communication as well as the *how* – this is a fundamental first step.

- Build in-house expertise in the strategic areas identified as most central to the communication plan (Lesson 4); bring in other specific communication skills on an as-needed basis.

- When building communication teams, look for skills in cost-effective means of reaching audiences, such as blogging and social media (Lesson 8).

- Invite experts from media, marketing, research, the education sector and/or civil society to participate – in a personal capacity – in an informal expert group that advises on the communication strategy (Lesson 7).

- Communicate with and through partners (Lesson 7) to widen the reach, improve credibility and make the most of resources available.

Box 11. DAC member experiences in resourcing communication

In **Australia,** the Branch Manager of the central communication unit is a member of the senior management team and other units and country offices are also recruiting communication specialists. An annual workshop and a 'community/network of practitioners' keeps staff informed of communication policy and strategic priorities.

In 2013, **Italy** established a communication unit with two seconded staff and six contracted staff, allocating EUR 1 million to communication. Five staff in the Ministry of Foreign Affair's press office were also involved in communicating development issues. With these resources, the Directorate General of Development Co-operation has been able to develop closer relations with the media and make greater use of new communication tools, including social media.

Spain has protected its budget for development education despite the ODA cuts. In order to maintain public support for development co-operation, Spain will launch a development co-operation website – *www.cooperacionespanola.es* – that will include information on all Spanish development actors, national and sub-national.

In the **United Kingdom** 2013 review of communication capabilities found that communication teams were 'making best use of partnership – working with stakeholders to increase efficiency and effectiveness and were functioning at maximum potential.

Lesson 12: Evaluate and learn from experience

WHAT: Some DAC members are starting to directly monitor and evaluate their communication with a view to identifying good practice and effective tools. However, evaluating public engagement and communication activities is not yet standard practice for DAC members. While it may be relatively easy to monitor the output-level aspects of communication and engagement – e.g. number of people attending a public event, media articles, or visitors to a website – attributing growth in awareness to specific activities is more difficult.

WHY: A systematic approach to monitoring the implementation of communication policies and strategies, and to evaluating their efficiency and effectiveness, helps track whether progress is being made toward stated objectives, learn from experience and build accountability around investments of ODA in public engagement; this is particularly important in the face of tightening budgets (Scheunpflug and Mc Donnell, 2008). With a better understanding of what works and why, DAC members can adjust their communication strategies to get the best value for money and pave the way for achieving the sought-after long-term 'impact' from public awareness activities.

HOW: DAC members, along with their partners, can work together to strengthen evaluation of and learning about public awareness by:

- sharing perspectives, experiences and results from evaluation (e.g. through a website)

- pooling resources for scientific research on the long-term impact of public awareness raising activities

- building a stronger knowledge base of what works and what doesn't work

- working together to develop minimum standards for the evaluation of communication, advocacy and education about global development

- making communication part of agencies evaluation plans.

To enable successful evaluations:

- Have clear communication objectives; make them SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound).

- Develop indicators from the beginning to show progress towards the stated objectives.

- Create a baseline at the start of any initiative against which to measure progress.

- Be realistic about the attitudinal and behavioural changes that can be achieved through communication and engagement activities: focus on contribution rather than direct attribution.

A systematic approach to monitoring the implementation of communication policies and strategies, and to evaluating their efficiency and effectiveness, helps track whether progress is being made toward stated objectives, learn from experience and build accountability.

Box 12. DAC member experiences with communication evaluation

Denmark measures and evaluates all communication activities to document their effects and to learn from them. Goals and indicators must be set for all significant communication activities, including ongoing activities such as the web, social media and regular publications.

The Make Poverty History Campaign Evaluation was presented at a DevCom Workshop in Bonn in 2007. The evaluation was commissioned to answer three questions: 1) What progress did the **Make Poverty History** coalition make against its objectives in 2005? 2) What were the strengths and weaknesses of the approach and set-up of the campaign? 3) What lessons can be learned for the future? While the evaluation was not built into the campaign from the start, it focused on the content of the campaign and identified lessons for future campaigns. A key challenge faced by the evaluators was the pressure they incurred to demonstrate an impact in terms of what the public learnt. However, demonstrating this impact was not an objective of the evaluation. The evaluators concluded that more detailed evaluation of public awareness was necessary to access the long-term impact, if any, of the campaign in changing attitudes to poverty (Martin et al., 2005; Martin, 2007).

As demonstrated by the **United Kingdom**'s Communications Capability Review of DFID in 2013, communication is promoted as an institutional priority. This review, which was one of a series across Whitehall, evaluated communication capability against business requirements, notably the strategy, campaigning, resources, knowing and targeting the audience, dealing with negative press head on and measuring and evaluation.

Providers of development co-operation should not be afraid of explaining risk and helping people understand why it is important to work in difficult places.

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We must be better at telling people what an enormous success story global development has been.