

RESETTING THE AID RELATIONSHIP

WHAT UK AID CAN LEARN FROM PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN SCIENCE

Summary paper

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While the debate about the engagement of UK citizens in international aid policy is not new, the last few years have witnessed a growing interest in the area.

Critics argue that meaningful public engagement strategies in the international aid policy are either non-existent or superficial. The government has placed its emphasis on the 'Results Agenda' in order to ensure value for money. The Results Agenda requires DFID to report against a series of easily measurable outcome indicators, such as 'the number of people with access to financial services as a result of DFID support'.

The focus on positive stories and 'simple' outcomes obscures the ethical trade-offs and practical complexities involved in delivering international aid. It reduces the scope for public debate and deliberation about the choices that DFID is making.

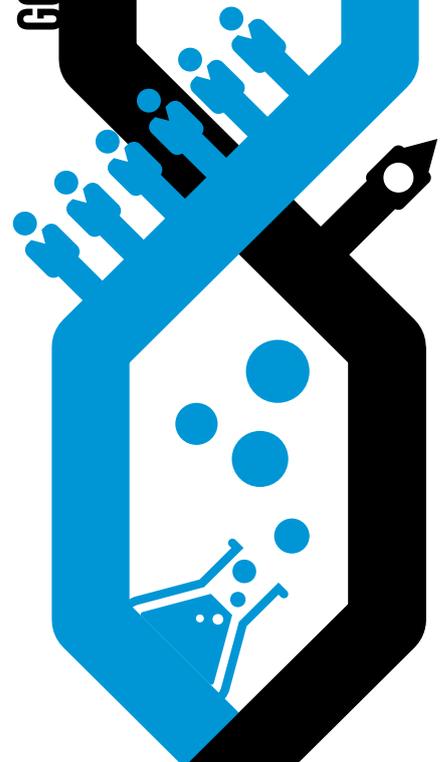
Despite the long-standing and well-known tradition of support for aid among the British public, it can be characterised as 'broad but shallow.'

Recent reports show a real demand for a different form of engagement. More meaningful engagement with the UK taxpaying public should be a priority for the following reasons:

- Greater public engagement in international aid will allow policy makers to better reflect the values and principles of the British public, leading to more stable and sustainable aid commitments that are less vulnerable to crises;
- Improved public engagement in international aid will allow policy makers to develop more focussed and less costly accountability processes; and
- Public engagement in international aid will enhance democratic control and ensure decisions more meaningfully reflect the public's perspective in UK's aid spending.

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Better public engagement implies a degree of collaboration, debate and consensus building between government and its citizens, rather than simply the transmission of information or collection of feedback. This kind of engagement can, in ideal-type, create a more accountable and transparent policy, and a stronger government mandate.

In the field of science and technology, it is exactly this kind of approach towards citizen engagement that has become a growing force in recent years. Basing its analysis on the lessons learnt in science and technology, this paper identifies some important and practical insights about how British citizens could be better engaged in the development of aid policy.

Inevitably, there are differences between the two areas of policy making. However, as two taxpayer funded sectors, with similar ethical

and practical complexities, which enjoy high levels of support as well as frequent crises of confidence, they share many fundamental characteristics. Most importantly, they share the same stakeholder: the British public.

Through a brief comparison of the two fields, this paper identifies the increasingly effective engagement strategies in public policy development involving science and technology which are lacking in the international aid field.

Controversy in the sciences around, for example, genetically modified crops has spurred the government into investing in wider and deeper public engagement. However, similar controversies within international aid, for example about corruption, have not fundamentally changed the way in which the UK public is engaged with the debates about aid delivery and development.

Taking this as its starting point, the paper explores public perceptions and governmental responses to them. It analyses the policies developed in response to such controversies; specifically the Sciencewise programme in public policy involving science and technology, and the 'results agenda' in international aid. The paper highlights the direct and indirect outcomes of the two policies, drawing out the implications of the engagement shortfall for the international aid sector and government more generally.

If DFID wants the trust of the British public, the department will need to demonstrate it has trust in the public too. It will need to listen to their concerns and aspirations for the future of international aid and development as it makes its plans for the future.



WHAT DOES BETTER ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?

The use of hybrid and chimera embryos for research has the potential to lead to new treatments for diseases. However, it raises significant ethical concerns. The regulatory body responsible, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, was keen to explore how the public 'balanced the ethics, risks and benefits of mixing human and animal genetic material.' The overall consultation process included four ways of eliciting public views: an

open public meeting, an opinion poll, a formal written consultation and a deliberative dialogue.

Sciencewise supported dialogue process involved small discussion groups of public participants. Participants in these groups were introduced to the subject area and initial reactions were gathered. The second stage of the dialogue process involved a full-day workshop which brought public participants together

again, this time with a diverse set of expert speakers who illustrated the different issues and arguments.

Prior to the consultation process, and specifically the deliberative dialogue, there was significant unease within government about authorising such research. The dialogue enabled the HFEA to better understand public hopes and fears, and to authorise such experiments with appropriate safeguards.

The full version of this paper can be downloaded from <http://www.involve.org.uk/?p=4505>

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