

UK public attitudes towards development

How the Aid Attitude Tracker can help make the case
for aid and development



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About Bond

Bond is the civil society network for global change. We bring people together to make the international development sector more effective. bond.org.uk

Acknowledgements

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Bond, Comic Relief, Oxfam, Save the Children, ONE, and VSO. Insights are shared with UK partners via Will Tucker Consulting. Funding is provided by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

In this guide Bond has summarised the key points from the Aid Attitude Tracker research that relate to winning UK public support for aid and development, and added suggested recommendations for the sector.

For more information on Bond's public support programme, visit: bond.org.uk/public-support



1. What is the Aid Attitude Tracker?

The Aid Attitude Tracker (AAT) is a long-term study of UK public attitudes and engagement with global poverty, aid and development.

The tracker has surveyed 8,000 people every six months since 2013 and the majority of people surveyed across each wave are the same. The tracker asks 125 questions to participants and approximately three-quarters of these questions remain the same in each survey.

The AAT also conducts one in-depth focus group study per year and numerous side experiments to explore particular areas of interest.

The aim of this guide is to draw out learning from the AAT to support international development campaigners to effectively make the case for aid and development to the UK public.



**If you only have
1 minute, here's what
you need to know**

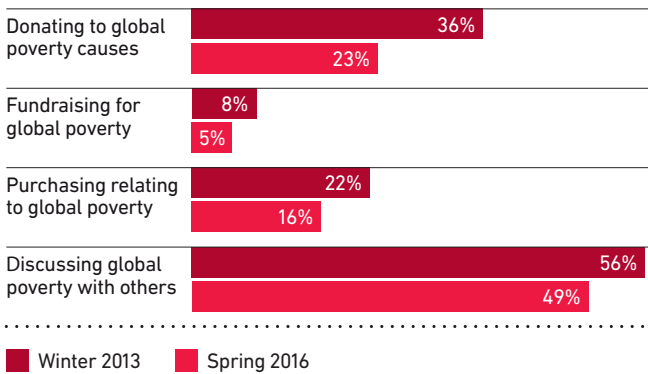
1. The proportion of people taking action on the issue of global poverty is in steady decline
2. Public attitudes towards global poverty remain fairly stable
3. Over half the British public believe UK aid is wasted
4. There are segments of the British public who are not yet taking action, but have supportive or persuadable attitudes towards aid and development
5. Every major Parliamentary party has a constituency of people who:
 - are 'concerned' or 'very concerned' about global poverty
 - are taking some type of action on global poverty
6. We can change people's perceptions to increase engagement with global poverty:
 - Talk about reducing poverty as a moral cause – use language of fairness, justice and responsibility
 - Show how other people 'like them' are participating in activities
 - Show how individuals can make a difference by using realistic and relatable examples
7. Don't ignore or minimise the existence of corruption
8. The British public perceive frontline workers (doctors, nurses, teachers, international staff and local partners) as the warmest and most competent spokespeople used by international development organisations

2. Recent trends in UK public support for aid

Trends in public behaviour

The AAT tracks engagement with 18 different types of actions towards global poverty. This includes actions from donating and fundraising, to sharing a news article, contacting an MP, discussing global poverty with family and friends, and attending a march or rally.

Every single activity has shown declining participation over the past two and a half years:



Trends in public attitudes

The AAT asks a variety of questions about people's attitudes towards global poverty and aid. Since 2013, when asked how they feel about levels of poverty in poor countries, between 43% and 47% of the population have said they are 'concerned' or 'very concerned'.

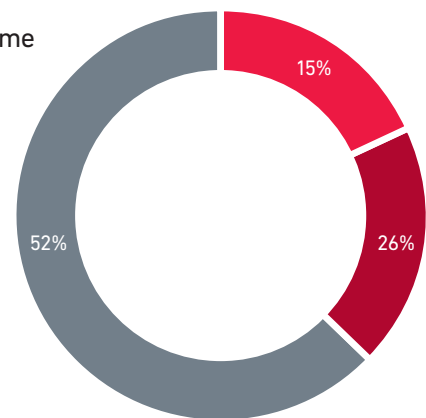
AAT data shows public attitudes towards these issues have remained fairly consistent since the tracker began in 2013. DFID polling between 1997 and 2010 asked the same question but using a different methodology. Analysis of the difference between these methodologies suggests that attitudes may have remained fairly stable back to 1997.

Attitudes towards aid spending

Increasing someone's knowledge of an issue doesn't lead to increased support for the issue; this is supported by a range of academic evidence beyond the AAT research. As a sector we have often believed that correcting misperceptions of aid, by increasing people's knowledge of the full cost and percentage of government aid spending, will result in increased support for aid and development. The AAT data shows us this is not the case.

When told the full cost and % of government aid spending, respondents believed that it should:

- increase
- stay the same
- be cut



56% of the population believe that most aid is wasted. Even among the most engaged audiences, 34% agree that most aid is wasted.

The AAT asked people to think about government spending on aid and presented them with a list of 11 areas of spending. British prioritise aid spending on education and health, followed by disaster relief, infrastructure, agriculture, and family planning.

Developing a new approach

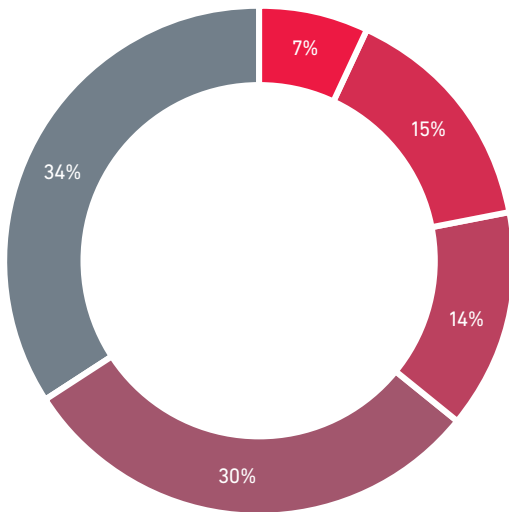
To sustain the UK's leadership role on global poverty, we need to acknowledge the current trends in public attitudes and behaviour and develop a new approach to building support. Civil society organisations can use the AAT insights to decide how and where to effectively target resources to build public and political support for aid and development.

3. Overview of audiences and demographics

The research focuses on understanding and explaining changes in engagement with global poverty through behavioural measurement i.e. looking at the actions people are taking.

The AAT tracks engagement with 18 different types of action towards global poverty.

The British public can be segmented into five categories according to their actions engagement with global poverty:



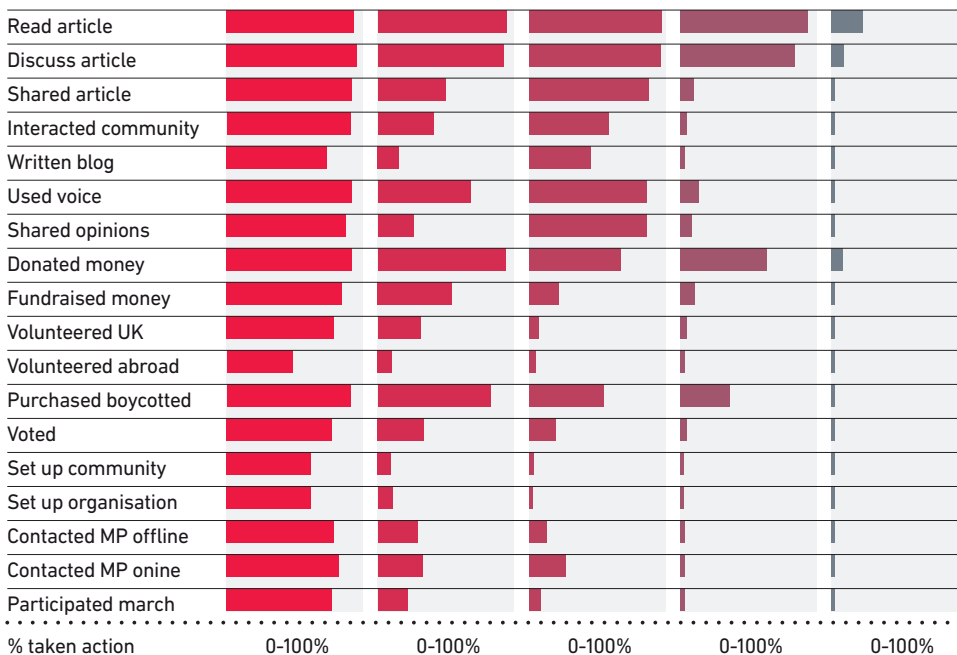
Fully Engaged (7%) people engage in many ways: campaigning, donating, volunteering, sharing their opinions, consuming and sharing media.

Behaviourally Engaged (15%) are more likely than average to have engaged as donors (95%), campaigners or volunteers but are unlikely to have shared information or their own opinions.

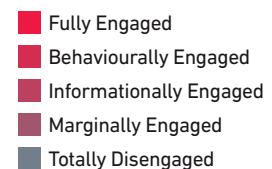
Informationally Engaged (14%) are likely to have done a number of actions which relate to consuming and sharing information about global poverty, 66% have donated at some point. Don't tend to do 'active' actions; fundraising, volunteering, etc.

Marginally Engaged (30%) are fairly likely to have consumed a news article and may have done another action, but not in the last year.

Totally Disengaged (34%) are unlikely to have done anything in the last year or before, only 20% claim to have ever read, watched or listened to a news article about global poverty.



This graph shows a more detailed breakdown of the ways the five different segments are engaging with our issues across the 18 behaviours measured by the research.



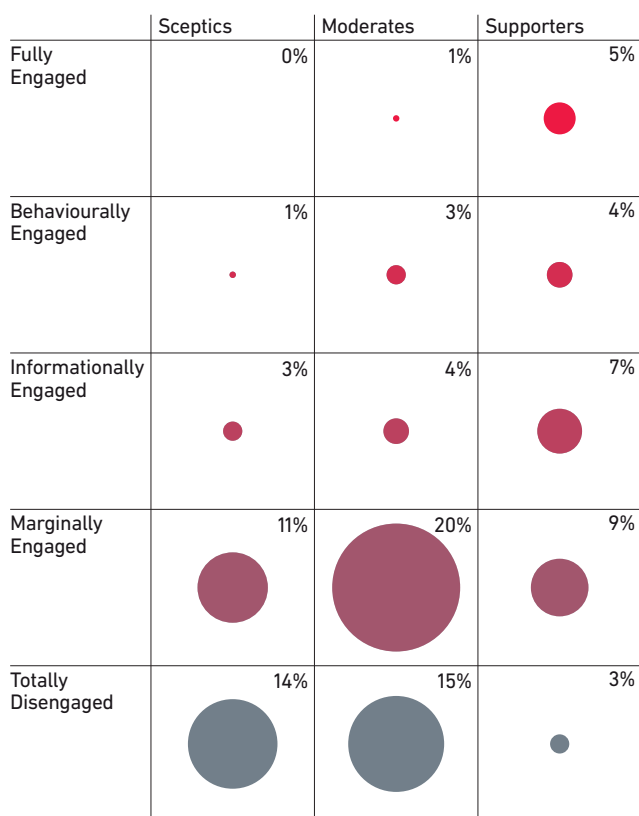
How can we target these audiences?

The number of people actively participating on issues of global poverty is getting smaller. Conversations suggest many organisations focus their campaigning resources on this pool, seeking to engage more of the segment of the population that are already taking action.

The AAT research provides an opportunity for organisations to understand and use the insights to target segments of the population who are not currently actively engaged in order to grow support for aid and development, and consequently increase the pool of people who are taking action.

It is important to recognise the difference between **behaviour** and **attitudes**. The AAT research looks at how people say they feel about global poverty (attitudes) and also the actions people are taking (behaviour).

Attitudes towards global poverty based on levels of engagement



Analysis of AAT data is currently underway which can help us better understand the relationship between people’s attitudes and behaviour towards global poverty. Initial analysis has provided some expected findings:

- The Fully Engaged audience have largely positive attitudes towards aid and development.
- The Totally Disengaged are largely sceptical or undecided about global poverty.

But there are other findings that require further thought and exploration:

- Not everyone who takes action has a supportive attitude towards aid and development. This is apparent among the Informationally and Behaviourally Engaged. For example, an Informationally Engaged person may be commenting on aid and global poverty online, but we should not assume they are always sharing positive views. A Behaviourally Engaged person may be donating, perhaps because a friend asked them to sponsor them for a marathon, but they could still be sceptical about the impact of their donation.
- There is a segment of the population who have supportive or moderate attitudes towards aid and development but are not taking action. This applies most significantly to the Marginally Engaged audience.

Implications:

- Recognise the difference between the way people feel about global poverty and the actions they are taking towards the issue.
- Think about how your organisation communicates with people taking action; don’t assume everyone has a supportive or positive attitude towards aid and development.
- The sector should seek to reach Marginally Engaged audiences with supportive attitudes to grow our supporter base and maintain the level of political support needed to sustain the UK’s global leadership role on international development.

What do we know about our audiences and their political identity?

The AAT asks a question to help determine alignment with political parties “generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat or what?”. Party identification is then mapped against other behaviour and attitudinal questions to gain a better understanding of how members of the public could be targeted to consolidate political support for development.

Every major parliamentary party has a constituency of people who:

- a. Identify with the party
- b. are ‘concerned’ or ‘very concerned’ about global poverty
- c. are taking some type of action on global poverty

A closer look at Conservatives

Given the current government and political climate, we’ve taken a closer look at people who think of themselves as Conservative.

Behaviours:

- Although less engaged than other party supporters, 26% of Conservatives fall into the Engaged audience segments (Fully Engaged, Behaviourally Engaged or Informationally Engaged)
- 36% are Marginally Engaged
- 37% are Totally Disengaged

Attitudes:

- 33% are ‘concerned’ or ‘very concerned’ about global poverty, only 23% are not concerned
- 37% don’t want to cut the UK aid budget
- 17% agree that working with others to overcome poverty is worthwhile
- 16% disagree that friends and family think fighting poverty is a waste of time.

Conservative identifiers, engagement and aid spending:

- 32% of those who identify as Conservative who are also Totally Disengaged or Marginally Engaged have supportive attitudes towards current levels or increased spending on aid
- Amongst Engaged Conservatives 52% support current or increased levels of aid spending
- Engaged Conservatives are less likely to be ‘concerned’ or ‘very concerned’ and are more likely to have no strong feelings about the level of poverty in poor countries (30%) compared to those who are Engaged in other parties.

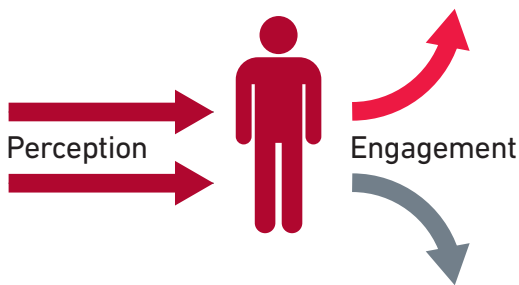
Implications:

- Focus attention on building attitudinal support for aid spending amongst Engaged Conservatives.
- Develop stronger social norms amongst Conservatives who are Engaged, for example, by sharing stories about other Conservatives ‘like them’ who care and who take action
- Another approach could be to reach out to those who identify as Conservative, who are not currently taking action but have supportive attitudes towards levels of aid spending. Engage them by making the case for reducing poverty through talking about ‘fairness’, ‘justice’ and ‘responsibility’ and improving their sense that other Conservatives are taking action.

4. What drives engagement with global poverty?

The AAT data shows that the proportion of the engaged public is declining, but because the AAT is a tracking survey it can also help us to understand the factors which drive this change in engagement.

Analysis shows how underlying perceptions shape engagement and how a change in perceptions creates a change in the level of engagement, both 'up' and 'down'.



Positive drivers of engagement – what perceptions increase engagement with global poverty?

- **Morality** – increasing the sense that reducing poverty is a moral cause
- **Social norms** – increasing perceptions that others are engaging
- **Personal development efficacy** – increasing perception that you personally can make a difference
- **Political efficacy** – increasing perception that you are personally able to influence politics and public affairs
- **Political interest** – increasing interest in political and public affairs

Negative drivers of engagement – what perceptions decrease engagement with global poverty?

- **Economic outlook** – increasing optimism about personal finance and the national economy decreases engagement (this is perhaps the opposite of what we might expect)
- **Immigration** – increased negative feelings towards immigrants and number of immigrants who should 'be allowed in' decreases engagement

Implications:

- Make the moral case for reducing poverty talking about fairness, justice and equality but don't preach. Making the moral case for support is particularly important for getting disengaged audiences to take action
- Show audiences that engagement is normal and is respected and celebrated by others
- Improve perceptions that engagement makes a difference

5. Messages and language for increasing engagement in campaigning

The AAT qualitative focus groups built on the analysis of the drivers of engagement and looked at specific charity communications and the language that could effectively communicate drivers across the different audiences.

The three drivers of focus were moral cause, social norms and personal efficacy.

Moral cause – it's about fairness, justice and responsibility

Key findings

1. Marginally Engaged audiences feel a push/pull – whilst they may feel a sense of injustice or unfairness they are pulled away by fears of waste and corruption or drawn towards UK causes
2. Moral arguments that focus on broad topics such as 'ending global poverty' can fail to engage with marginally engaged as the topics are 'too big' and they often have 'arguments against' in mind
3. Moral cause communications that focus on specific topics, such as recent news stories, can be more successful at engaging across segments
4. Younger audiences (18-24) identify more strongly with moral cause communications
5. Marginally engaged need to find a way to agree with a specific moral issue without having to re-evaluate their whole belief system
6. Moral cause arguments that attribute blame/guilt towards individuals are largely rejected

Dos and Don'ts

- ✓ Do use a single / topical issue to convey a moral issue to the Marginally Engaged
- ✓ Do make a moral case by using words like fairness, justice and equality
- ✓ Do speak plainly
- ✓ Do use the moral cause driver for campaigning
- ✓ Do provide a call to action for more engaged audiences (when campaigning)
- ✗ Don't focus on making individuals feel guilty / to blame
- ✗ Don't preach and tell people what their morals should be

Social norms – people like me are engaging with the issues

Key findings

1. Social norms is powerful across all segments – positive and uplifting social norms show what can be achieved by ordinary “people like me”
2. Social norms drivers also cut across both age groups – with 25-55s slightly more positive to these communication messages than the 18-24 younger group
3. Many people spontaneously talk about ‘social norm’ based campaign activity that they have engaged with for international and UK based charities. They tend to focus less on the issue and more about the act of being involved
4. Marginally Engaged are unlikely to be the first to get involved in social norm campaigns on development issues, but if they feel that their friends / family / peers are involved issues become more acceptable and accessible to them
5. Informationally Engaged love to be able to discuss, share and interact with people on causes they believe in, therefore social norms are really important drivers for them
6. Fully engaged are also mobilised by social norms but they want to be clear on what the action will achieve and how effective it will be

Dos and Don'ts

- ✓ Do use social norms to appeal and motivate across all audience segments
- ✓ Do show that engagement is normal and is respected and celebrated by others
- ✓ Do show ordinary people demonstrating their achievements
- ✓ Do use for campaigning and awareness building
- ✓ Do use tools to show how many other people are sharing / acting
- ✗ Be aware that fully engaged are constantly taking action, so are selective based on the credibility of the campaign

Personal efficacy - individuals can make a difference

Key findings

1. Marginally Engaged audiences respond well to people they recognise and trust making a difference. They don't want to do things themselves but they do take on board and feel positive about the achievement of others
2. Marginally Engaged audiences react positively to specific case studies and personal examples showing success stories
3. Informationally Engaged respond well to facts, clearly laid out and informative – things they can share and talk about on social media
4. Behaviourally and Fully engaged can be motivated to act with personal efficacy arguments – knowing they can make a difference is the key to maintaining involvement from this audience
5. Personal efficacy messages are also engaging for older audiences who can feel jaded after seeing negative messages for many years
6. Most audiences don't want personal efficacy arguments to be too emotive, "sentimental" or patronising – this is particularly true for the more engaged segments. They like to be told when they have contributed to a success in clear and straightforward language

Dos and Don'ts

- ✓ Do use balanced factual information that demonstrates impact
- ✓ Do show micro rather than macro examples (e.g. what £3 can do)
- ✓ Do show tangible examples that participants can visualise and relate to
- ✓ Do use *real people* in real settings both in the UK and overseas to show clearly what is being achieved *now*
- ✓ Do use social media to convey achievements and progress, particularly for Informationally Engaged audiences
- ✗ Don't over-claim what individuals have achieved
- ✗ Don't over-complicate messages – be clear and get to the point
- ✗ Don't be ambivalent when dealing with efficacy, avoid could/might

6. Acknowledging concerns

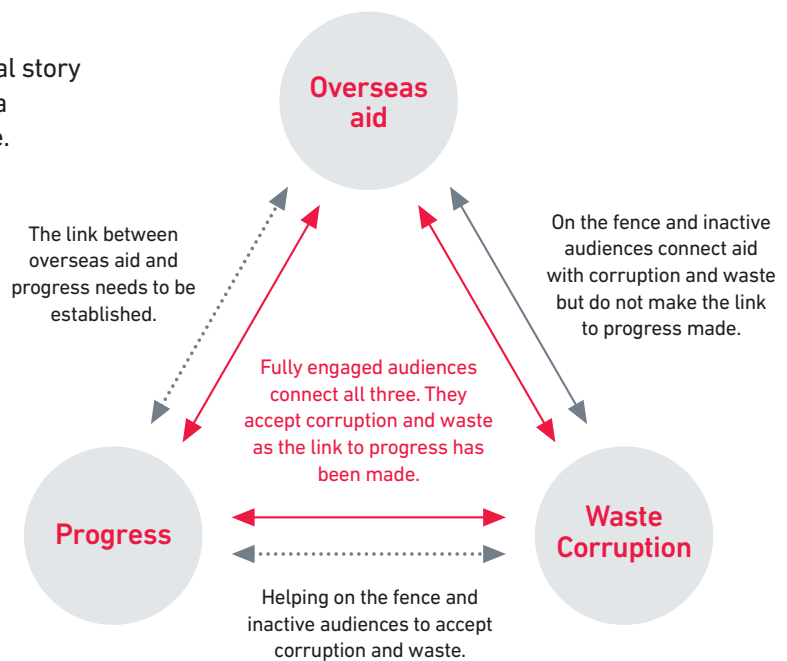
We know that much of the negative public debate is focused on waste and corruption. 56% of the population believe that most aid is wasted. Even among the most engaged audiences, 34% agree that most aid is wasted.

59% say that donating to poor countries is pointless due to corruption. However, it is best not to ignore or downplay the existence of corruption in international development. If advocates for aid stay outside the conversation on corruption, the opposing media will continue to fill the void, and the public will not get to hear the full story.

Evidence from the AAT, and UCL research in particular, show it is possible to speak out about corruption and waste without reducing support for aid and development.

The best way to overcome these concerns is to:

- Use messages which show progress despite corruption
- Highlight that development organisations go to great lengths to minimise corruption in their work through tracking how money is spent
- Speak about corruption through a personal story of someone experiencing it, compared to a completely statistical or political message.



7. Messengers

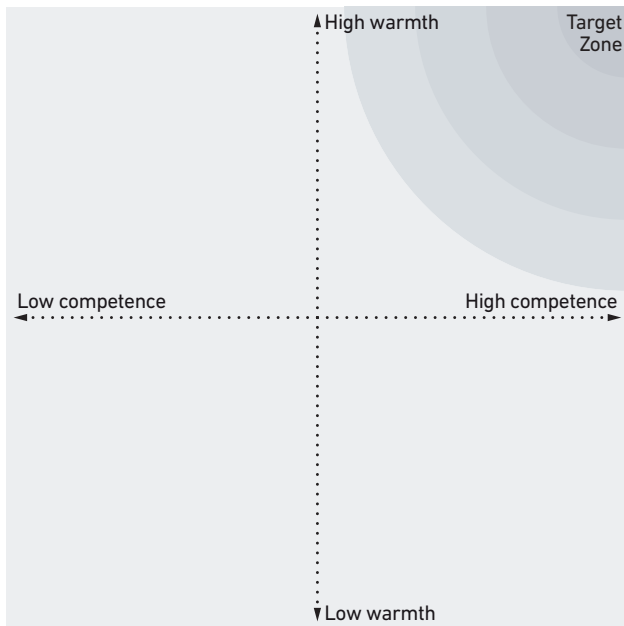
Psychologist Susan Fiske has shown that when judging another person, people first consider their intentions, whether they are friend or enemy, and then consider their competence whether they have the ability to deliver or not.

The AAT tested this with a large range of spokespeople and messengers who are commonly used in aid and charity communications.

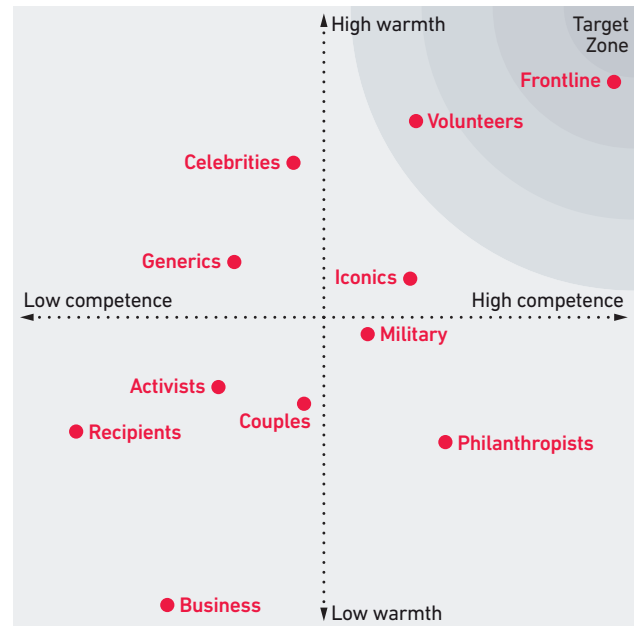
The most engaging spokespeople are perceived as both warm and competent.

The AAT tested 42 messengers across 11 messenger 'groups' – frontline workers, volunteers, iconic spokespeople (such as Malala), celebrities, generics, military, philanthropists, couples (pairings of spokespeople) activists, and aid recipients.

Fiske's warmth /competence stereotype model



Messengers in the competence / warmth space



Emotions, messengers and messages

AAT focus groups looked in more depth at ways to craft strong messages using different emotions. Emotions were found to touch the various audiences in different ways. The research demonstrates the need to consider how each audience group can respond very differently to messengers and messages – and a reminder that few messages will effectively cut across all audience groups.

- Positive passive messages were more likely to be well received across all audience types than more intense activating emotional messages which could be polarising.
- **Marginally and Informationally Engaged audiences on the centre / right of the political spectrum** were activated by messages that show action in real time with a sense of Britishness. Pride and surprise were important for this audience. Military messengers and frontline workers are strong messengers for this audience.
- **Marginally and Informationally Engaged audiences, politically focused and often to the left of the political spectrum**, were activated by optimistic messages that gave them a reason to continue to support and believe in international development.
- **Marginally and Informationally Engaged youth audiences** were activated by strong emotions of anger, confrontation and excitement – messages that provoke can be extremely activating amongst this audience. Strong youth voices and relevant online media sources play a role in reaching this group.
- **Fully Engaged audiences** are hard to activate further as they are tired of pity based sector messages and sentimentality. However, they are activated by strong iconic messengers giving hard hitting, informative messages in an adult tone of voice (Hans Rosling, Malala Yousafazi) who they see as credible and experienced.
- Not all celebrity messengers are the same. Some score much better on competence and warmth than others. Coupling celebrity messengers with official voices can work very well to bring awareness, warmth and activation to an issue. Fully Engaged audiences are the most resistant to celebrities.

Implications:

- Use frontline workers as your key messengers
- Choose spokespeople who come across as warm, relatable and competent to boost engagement across campaign actions
- Consider pairing spokespeople for a balance of competence and warmth

Who are the best messengers?

- The most engaging spokespeople are perceived as both warm and competent.
- The British public perceive frontline workers (especially doctors, teachers, nurses) as the warmest and most competent spokespeople used by global poverty organisations.
- Overseas volunteers and iconic spokespeople (e.g. Malala) are also seen as both warm and competent.
- Celebrities are generally seen as warm but less competent, philanthropists as competent but not warm.
- Businesspeople score badly on both warmth and competence.
- Interestingly, recipients of aid also score badly on both warmth and competence. This suggests that the British public see aid recipients as passive rather than active participants in development.

Pete Lewis / DFID



The British public perceive frontline workers (especially doctors, teachers, nurses) as the warmest and most competent spokespeople used by global poverty organisations

Southbank Centre



Iconic spokespeople (e.g. Malala) are seen as both warm and competent.

VSO



Overseas volunteers are also seen as both warm and competent.

8. Sources of information

The AAT looked into the different media sources which used by the British public to get their information about development and global poverty.

The data shows BBC and ITV are the predominant sources of information for news on development and global poverty, however local and free papers are a valuable resource that could be used more in campaigning given the large number of people across all audiences who say they follow development issues through these channels.

9. Recommendations for winning the argument on aid

1. Target our audiences. Use AAT insights to shift underlying perceptions and boost engagement.
2. Develop campaigners at a local level. Reach Fully and Behaviourally Engaged by showing others 'like them' are participating and using relatable examples of how their individual actions can make a difference.
3. Build power and interest. Seek to engage people who are not currently engaged. Reach Marginally Engaged audiences by working through engaged audiences at a local level.
4. Talk about justice, fairness and responsibility to persuade Marginally Engaged audiences that supporting aid and development is the 'right thing to do'.
5. Don't ignore or downplay concerns of corruption. Address these concerns by talking about progress despite corruption and highlighting how development organisations go to great lengths to minimise corruption in their work.
6. Build a more diverse group of messengers – including frontline workers, international staff and in-country partners, returned volunteers, and iconic spokespeople who display both warmth and expertise.

Further information

Public Support Hub. Available from: my.bond.org.uk/workspace/building-public-support-hub

Aid Attitude Tracker (2016) Wave 1-5 analysis. Available from: my.bond.org.uk/resource/wave-5-aat-results

Aid Attitude Tracker (2015) Wave 4 Drivers of Engagement analysis. Available from: my.bond.org.uk/resource/aat-wave-4-results-september-2015

Aid Attitude Tracker (2016) Wave 3 qualitative analysis. Available from: my.bond.org.uk/resource/aat-qualitative-wave-3

Aid Attitude Tracker (2016) Messenger Experiment. Available from: my.bond.org.uk/resource/ucl-messenger-experiment-june-2016

Bond guide (2016) UK Public Attitudes towards Corruption. Available from: www.bond.org.uk/resources/uk-public-attitudes-towards-corruption

Hudson, D, vanHeerde-Hudson, J (2015) Anti-corruption messaging and comms? Available from: my.bond.org.uk/resource/ucl-corruptionmessaging

Support

Would you like to present these findings to others in your organisation?

We can support you to:

- Access the Bond Public Support Group where you can find the latest research
- Deliver presentations on the research and the implications for your organisation
- Facilitate a discussion within your organisation about using the evidence

Contact

Alice Delemare, Campaigns Adviser
adelemare@bond.org.uk
+44 (0)20 7520 2705

Bond
Society Building
8 All Saints Street
London
N1 9RL, UK

+44 (0)20 7837 8344
bond.org.uk

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Company registration No. 3395681 (England and Wales)

