

Evaluation of Bond's "More and Better Aid" project

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Executive Summary

This evaluation assesses the effectiveness and outcomes of Bond's work funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation under a 2011-14 grant titled 'Advocacy for More and Better Aid'. The project involved advocacy in support of aid (quantity and quality) at UK and EU levels, alongside work to promote public support for aid and development. Evaluation findings draw on 16 stakeholder interviews, a desk review and input from Bond staff.

UK AID

The government's commitment to the UN target of **ODA spending reaching 0.7% of Gross National Income was achieved** during the course of the project. This is a significant achievement, with the increase in ODA spending secured at a time of considerable real-term reduction in total public expenditure.

It comes after decades of campaigning on aid. The UK Government was committed to meeting this target (as outlined in the Coalition Agreement), but there were some strong counter-pressures to overcome in the period covered by this grant, including vocal opposition from parts of the media. Bond played a **key shepherding role during this last critical stage**, helping to see the policy 'over the line'. Bond has been **tenacious** in following and responding to the evolving political debate, also showing an **ability to operate in different gears** when needed.

Relevant to this workstrand, though outside of the project, Bond played a **central support and coordination role** around NGOs' successful efforts to ensure that recent Private Member's Bill providing for the 0.7% target to be enshrined in law passed its second reading, with 164 MPs voting in favour of the bill and only 6 MPs voting against.

In its advocacy on aid effectiveness/quality, Bond has taken an **insider approach**, maintaining a watchdog role when few members were working on it, and operating as a **'key interlocutor' between civil society and decision makers** at defining moments such as the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, HLF4.

EU AID

At the EU level, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) - setting out the budget for the next 7 years - was agreed in December 2013. In a difficult political and economic context, and **within an overall real-term cut to EU spending ceilings, there was a moderate increase to the EU's ODA budget.**

Bond played a **key sectoral role**, through its own activity and as part of CONCORD, its coordination of UK NGO advocacy responses, and ongoing policy dialogue with DFID and FCO. Its approach was characterised by **continuous engagement** throughout the process and robust reaction when cuts were proposed. Bond **supported wider member involvement in the process**, providing entry points through producing background materials and acting as a

conduit between members and EU institutions during the fast-moving detailed budget negotiation phase.

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR AID

Bond has developed a purposive direction to the 'public support' strand, commissioning research and organising a set of follow-up workshops that have drawn on Bond's own research and that of others in order to **promote informed debate** around current levels of opinion and understanding, and potential sectoral responses.

The task is a complex one - given a range of complicating factors - but Bond is well placed to make an important contribution, through playing **an expert guiding and interpreting role**, as well as **providing more direct support** to members, around testing messaging for example.

BOND'S ROLE IN THE SECTOR

Bond **thinks strategically about its representational role**, giving careful consideration to questions of when and how its involvement can bring added benefit.

Bond works to ensure that **individual and collective NGO contributions operate in complementary ways**, with joint actions bringing extra weight to bear as needed, exploiting the advantages of streamlined channels of engagement with decision makers. In its mode of operating, Bond recognises that **links between networks**, as well as within them, are increasingly important. Its partnership with the UK Aid Network and CONCORD are examples of effective cross-networking.

Bond's **bird's eye vantage point** gives it a view of the sector that others don't have. Drawing on this, Bond plays an **active convening role**, representing members' interests and views while also taking proactive positions itself. Bond has become a **respected broker**, well placed to bridge existing sectoral divisions.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In the full report, we outline a full set of recommendations. Most importantly, Bond should:

1. Maintain in its advocacy work the effective combination of playing a shepherding role alongside the ability to shift gears upwards when needed.
2. Continue to fulfil its watchdog role at the EU level through monitoring the Multiannual Financial Framework budget distribution, framing this approach within a wider vision of the EU's role in development.
3. Set out a longer term vision for the 'public support' programme and establish realistic shorter-term objectives, based on a sound understanding of the diverse motivations for NGOs' communications, and the likely resulting implications for segmenting and targeting audiences.

4. Within the public support programme, prioritise reaching out to wider audiences including key groups beyond the development sector.

1 Introduction

1.1 EVALUATION PURPOSE

This evaluation covers Bond's work funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation under a grant titled 'Advocacy for More and Better Aid'. The grant ran from August 2011 to August 2014 and has supported three areas of Bond's work:

1. Advocacy for UK aid (primarily around the 0.7% aid target).
2. Working towards understanding and increasing the UK public's support for aid and development.
3. Advocacy for EU aid.

This evaluation was commissioned as part of a wider commitment that Bond has to undertake external evaluations of its grant funded work. This is to fulfil dual purposes: ensuring accountability to donors and promoting internal learning.

The Terms of Reference set out that the focus of the evaluation should be on the outcomes of Bond's work in the areas funded, with an emphasis on:

- reviewing how Bond's work is perceived by members and other external stakeholders,
- identifying areas of particular strengths as well as areas for improvement, and
- considering future implications for Bond's role and priorities.

This report is for two primary audiences: Bond internally and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

This evaluation draws on the following main sources:

- a review of project-related planning and reporting documentation,
- a review of other relevant documentation, including evaluations and research,
- initial orientation meeting with core staff,
- interviews with Bond staff, members and external stakeholders.

Emerging headlines were presented to and discussed with a small group of staff at Bond who had been involved in the project. A draft version of this report was then produced and circulated for comment from Bond staff before finalisation.

This has been a relatively small-scale review. We conducted 16 interviews in total, with Bond members, staff at Bond, policy makers, and others with some involvement in the project (including representatives from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation). Most interviewees were knowledgeable, and interviewed, about one of the three areas of the project, with an approximately equal split of interviewees across the three project areas.

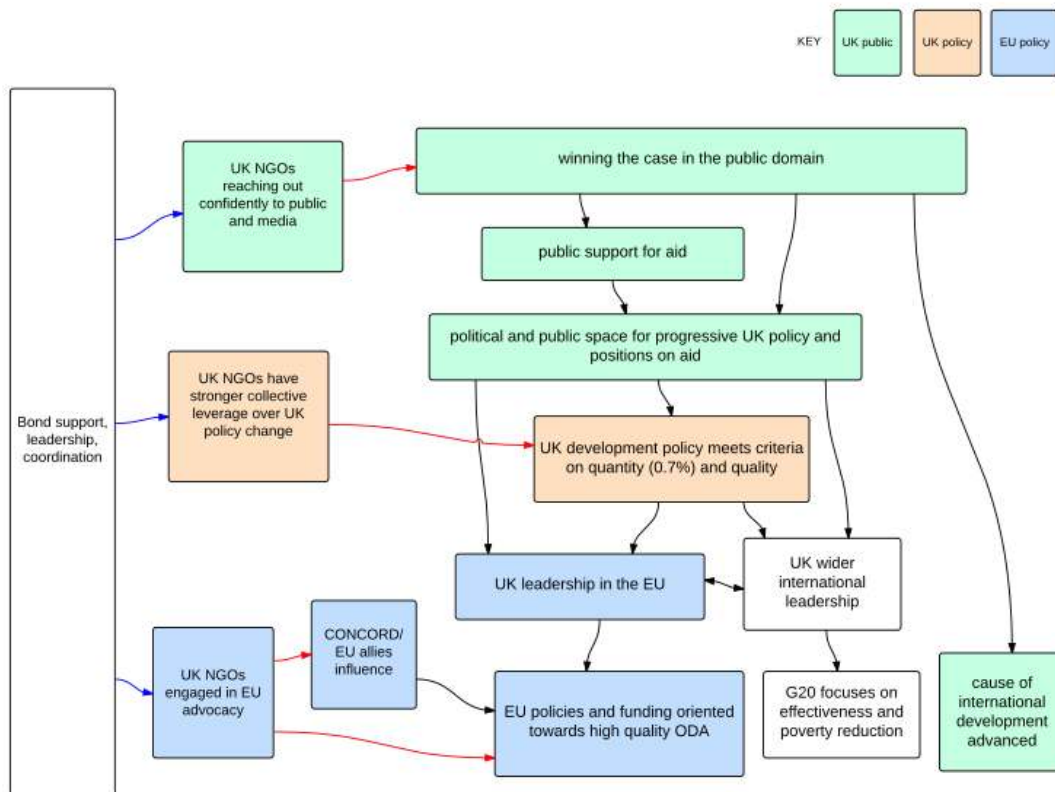
2 Project objectives and planning

2.1 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Project objectives were set out in the grant proposal as:

1. To provide UK NGOs with leadership, support and coordination to increase the effectiveness of their common advocacy, asks and messaging towards the UK Government on UK development policies, international positioning and aid (both quantity and quality).
2. To build positive UK political and public support for aid and development in the lead up to the projected increases in UK ODA in 2013.
3. To influence, and strengthen NGO advocacy towards the European Union (EU), Council, Commission, European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Parliament to deliver positive policies and practice on international development, particularly robust and high quality EU development assistance.

Based on the outcomes set out in the narrative grant proposal, a reasonable reconstruction of the overall logic of change underlying the project reveals the following:



This schematic highlights that the initial logic of change underpinning the project was based on an implied link between the public support and policy strands of the project, the inference being that shifts in public support would create space for positive political developments.

The relevant outcome (in the grant proposal) sets out the anticipated result of, "*A climate in which ... public support for aid is such that the space exists for the UK to reach the projected increases in UK ODA in 2013 ... inroads made on building public support and winning the case in the public domain on aid and development*".

This was clearly a highly ambitious aspiration, based as it was on the premise that within the space of only a couple of years the sector could make meaningful inroads in shifting public support, or at least politicians' understanding of it.

A more staged, and more realistic, approach was reflected in some of the other project outcomes. These focus more on changes in understanding and practice *amongst NGOs*, as interim stages towards a longer-term goal. And it was this more pragmatic, more strategically sound, approach that has characterised the actual work, with current staff at Bond clear that efforts to influence NGOs' public engagement and communications approaches represent a long-term undertaking, and shaping the approach accordingly.

The fact that there were some inconsistencies in the defined project outcomes suggests that some aspects of the project logic - and how the different elements fitted together to deliver change - were not fully worked through in the design phase. A lack of clarity in planning tends to make it harder to track progress, and can make project success more difficult to achieve. It will be important for Bond to give sufficient attention to the underlying logic of change for any future project of this nature.

2.2 PROJECT MONITORING

The majority of Bond's staff currently involved in the project were not at the organisation in the project's early stage. Available information about these earlier phases was, in some areas, fairly limited, which means that some of our commentary on the earlier phase of grant implementation is a little speculative.

We understand that, since the inception of this project, Bond has invested effort in ensuring that more systematic project monitoring takes place, and it will be important that this continues to be embedded in future projects, to allow for information, and learning from it, to be better institutionalised.

Linked to this, there is scope for more formal review of relevance of strategies and progress towards project objectives and outcomes during project implementation. Adapting to changes in context is a common requirement for advocacy plans, and so an element of flexibility is vital, and this should be reflected in reporting and ongoing planning in the future.

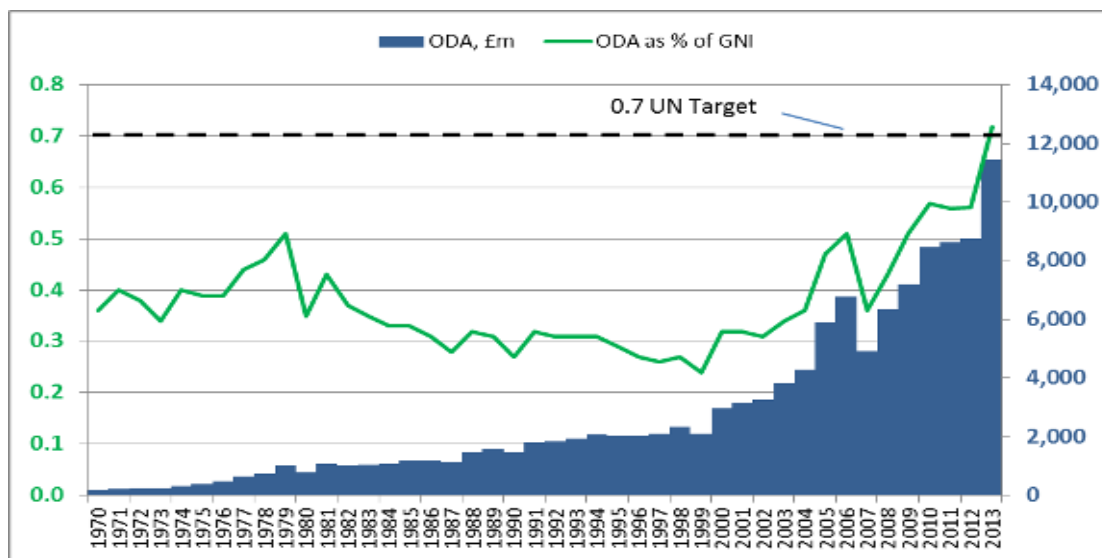
3 Advocacy for UK aid

3.1 UK AID SPENDING

The government's commitment to achieving the UN target of development aid [ODA] spending reaching 0.7% of Gross National Income was achieved during the course of the project, as confirmed by data released in April 2014.

This is a significant achievement, secured at a time of considerable real-term reductions in total public expenditure. In contrast to wider government spending, ODA expenditure rose by 30% year on year (an increase of £2.7bn) in 2013.¹ The government additionally committed to maintain this 0.7% level in 2014.²

UK ODA levels since 1970³



This achievement comes after decades of campaigning on aid. Cross party consensus had been achieved on the commitment, as illustrated by the 2010 manifesto pledges by the major parties and its inclusion in the Coalition Agreement.

A strong campaigning background had created this positive trajectory at the inception of the 'More and Better Aid' project, with commitments firmly in place at the time that the project was initiated. But there were also some strong counter-pressures, from parts of the media, and from some Conservative MP backbenchers, as well as from some outflanking the Conservatives from the right.

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-on-international-development>

²https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/293759/37630_Budget_2014_Web_Accessible.pdf [para 2.12]

³https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/300084/Prov-ODA-GNI-2013a.pdf

We have not conducted a systematic review of all the factors at play in reaching the 0.7% target. However, it's important to recognise that there is a tendency in campaigns to accept a target's commitment to a particular campaign goal as representing a 'job done', and for campaigning attention to go elsewhere too soon as a result. In the case of the 0.7% commitment, it was important that Bond actively saw the policy 'over the line', playing a key shepherding and watchdog role during a critical phase, and making interventions to keep the policy on track. This is a good example of 'better safe than sorry' advocacy, a sensible investment of relatively modest resources, especially given the figures involved on the upside (several billion pounds per annum).

Over the period of the project, Bond took a tenacious approach to securing the 0.7% commitment. Political momentum ebbed and flowed but Bond "*responded to every aid statement & media angle, whether positive or negative ... maintained focus until we were over the line*".

At its outset, this was anticipated to be primarily a high-level 'insider' campaign. Bond and the UK Aid Network [UKAN, a coalition of development NGOs working together to advocate for aid quantity and quality] co-produced a briefing providing short snapshots of why aid works alongside statistics, which one interviewee said "*allowed easy conversations with MPs*". A Bond member described how Bond's analysis in "*identifying how 0.7% was a rational rather than arbitrary figure*" helped provide a unified starting point for sector advocacy.

Key political moments were a fixed part of the Parliamentary calendar (the annual Spring Budgets, Queen's Speeches & Autumn Statements), providing a series of advocacy opportunities and milestones against which to track progress.

This insider advocacy approach held until around mid-2012, when growing media hostility - and the desire to do more to publically celebrate the 0.7% commitment while letting politicians know they were being watched - encouraged an analysis in the sector that the campaign should go further into the public domain. This led to the 2013 launch of the sectoral 'Enough Food for Everyone IF' campaign [the IF campaign].

The launch of the IF campaign provided additional opportunities to advocate for 0.7%. In particular, there was a key campaign moment to 'celebrate' the 0.7% commitment around the 2013 Spring Budget, designed to act as a useful pressure point (along with the promise of the later campaign mobilisation in Hyde Park), reminding politicians that the NGO sector could mobilise, either in opposition or support.

During this more public phase of the advocacy work, Bond responded directly to a series of negative media stories and a think-tank call for aid to be diverted to defence spending. Its role was to refocus the 0.7% debate on "*facts not conjecture*", releasing a facts-based rebuttal statement in response to such attacks.

After the conclusion of the IF campaign, Bond kept up the pressure throughout 2013, showing an ability to operate different gears in 'shepherding' the result home. The Chancellor finally

reconfirmed that the UK would meet the 0.7% commitment in December 2013. In response, Bond described this statement as securing "*the totemic commitment to development*".

Relevant to this review, but not funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Bond played a distinct role alongside its members in the September 2014 campaign to ensure the passage of a Private Member's Bill providing for the 0.7% target to be enshrined in law through its second reading. An interviewee describes how Bond played a pivotal coordination role in that campaign:

"Bond wasn't mandated to lead on the Private Member's Bill, but once the membership decided to act, Bond brought them on board in a 'light-touch' way, providing a centralised secretariat support function to coordinate media messaging, intelligence on MPs etc, to 'get the right result'".

164 MPs voted in favour of the Bill when it was introduced on 12 September

Although this initiative falls outside the work funded by the grant, it provides further evidence of Bond's ability to play flexible roles in response to advocacy opportunity.

3.2 AID QUALITY

The 4th High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness [HLF4] in Busan in 2011 represented a shift in focus to 'development effectiveness', with the beginning of the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty.

In the lead up to the HLF4, Bond coordinated the development of a sector-wide policy position and undertook high-level engagement with DFID, including with the Secretary of State. As one member described it,

"Bond and the UK Aid Network kept the attention on aid quality – bringing up accountability continually with DFID. Keeping pressure up was important to avoid fudging the figures. We were protecting not just the [aid] target but the value of poverty-focused aid".

Another member described Bond as playing a tactical game, "*understanding that it's counter-productive to bite the hand that feeds you, but also knowing when to call them out*". In addition, Parliament's International Development Committee and the Independent Commission on Aid Impact were brought in to "*add weight when we hit a brick wall*".

During Busan, Bond coordinated member activity and produced an analysis of the HLF4 outcomes. The result was described by Bond as "*a good but not brilliant outcome. When negotiations were crumbling, we put pressure on decision makers. Afterwards, negotiations got complex and the space got crowded around post-2015 issues*".

After Busan, there was a 2-year gap during which there were no major global meetings at which aid effectiveness was discussed. During that time, Bond's role was effectively one of a watching brief as *"only 2 or 3 members continued working on it"*. In this period, Bond maintained high-level engagement with DFID and the Secretary of State, who was particularly important due to her role as a co-chair of the Steering Group on the new Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation [GPEDC]. Bond was also involved in tracking implementation of the Busan agreement.

In 2013, Bond focused specifically on the issue of 'country ownership', producing a policy paper that was presented to the GPEDC Steering Group at their July 2013 meeting in Ethiopia. Bond continued its two-way policy dialogue with DFID and producing a joint sector policy paper entitled 'Where Now for Development Effectiveness?' in the lead-up to the 1st High-Level meeting of the GPEDC in Mexico in April 2014.

One stakeholder referred to Bond as the *"key interlocutor"* in this period, working closely in this role alongside CONCORD and others: *"The knowledge and expertise Bond put on the table was crucial. Aid was dropping off the agenda for member states and Bond was in the driving seat"*.

A series of new initiatives were launched by governments, private sector, private foundations and civil society at the meeting in Mexico, to push forward effective development cooperation and anchor the Global Partnership in a post-2015 framework. However, as one Bond member said, *"there was a lot of talk about effectiveness, but not a huge sense of high-level commitment. There's almost a sense of aid quantity and quality competing for space – with quantity first in the queue"*.

Overall, there is less concrete evidence of Bond's added value on aid quality. However, the UK parliamentary International Development Committee recently held a 'formal evidence session' on the private sector report highlighting country ownership and results-based language – this shows that there are signs of progress, even if commitments aren't been enacted by decision makers as quickly as Bond and others would like.

Although Bond played an active role at the G20 meetings in the first half of this grant, there was an emerging awareness of the limited opportunities for progress through the G20 on Bond's key priority issues later on.

At the France and Mexico G20 summits (2011 & 2012 respectively), Bond played a coordination role with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation on its report on innovative financing for development. Over the second half of the grant (during the 2013 Russian and 2014 Australian Presidencies of the G20), there was a growing recognition that the opportunities to influence the sector's priority issues within the G20's Development Working Group and wider agenda were limited. As a result, many Bond members have reduced their focus on the G20 as a target.

Based on this analysis and understanding, Bond's role switched focus to more of a monitoring brief, while also continuing to coordinate interested member engagement with DFID's G20 team and the UK's and EU's G20 Sherpas. Bond maintained its outreach role with civil society platforms and networks in other G20 countries, with a particular focus on EU presidency countries, to support their engagement efforts and ensure civil society participation in G20's processes (including through accreditation to the summits).

4 Advocacy for EU aid

The Council of the European Union formally adopted the regulation laying down the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework [MFF] for the next 7 years in December 2013.

Within an overall real-term cut of around 3.7% to spending ceilings for the EU over the forthcoming period, the budget for Heading 4 on 'Global Europe' (which included Official Development Aid) was slightly increased by 3.3% to €1.9 bn.

This result represented a significant achievement at the end of two and a half years of complex negotiations, taking place in a climate of austerity, during which 11 EU leaders had written to the European Commission to request a real-term reduction in ODA spending, and when the protection of future spending levels of EU development was not, for many, a priority.

A good proportion of Bond's and CONCORD's more detailed policy positions were met, or partly met, in the final budget decisions. For example, whilst the EU did not support the proposed earmarking of 20% of the Development Cooperation Instrument specifically to health and education, there was agreement, as the text states, that "*At least 20% of the allocated assistance ... should be allocated to basic social services*". It remains to be determined, and it will be important to remain vigilant around, how this broader definition of 'basic social services' will be interpreted in practice.

Throughout the negotiations, Bond was a key player, in its own right in the UK and as part of CONCORD in Europe, playing both a lead role on advocacy with UK stakeholders and a support role on policy development, while CONCORD was the primary interlocutor with the EU institutions.

EU advocacy is a relatively low priority for most Bond members, resulting in a 'niche gap' that Bond is well placed to fill, given its convening role in the UK and relationship with the DFID Europe team. A small Bond member identified how "*it makes sense for us to engage with Bond where we have limited capacity*", citing Bond as "*credible in the eyes of DFID, so it's much easier for them to get meetings*". Bond was described by another interviewee as "*persistent*" in its efforts to convene regular meetings with DFID's Europe Team over the period of the negotiations.

In the UK, Bond's advocacy interventions ranged from giving evidence to the parliamentary International Development Committee in Spring 2012, to coordinating a letter from 25

members to David Cameron asking him to protect EU aid at the 2013 Leaders' Summit. One policy maker noted that "*NGO views were definitely taken on board*" by the Prime Minister (who supported an overall EU budget reduction, but - within that broader picture - a larger share for ODA spending).

Bond also produced background materials - such as a widely disseminated 10-point information sheet on EU aid - and provided "*straightforward summary updates, template letters and draft media op-eds for other national platforms to use*". This was an important contribution to what one interviewee valued as Bond's - and CONCORD's - ability to produce "*hands-on, clear tools on quite a complex process*".

In Brussels, Bond and CONCORD delivered a series of interventions during the 20-month EU budget negotiation process (as detailed in Appendix 1). A policy maker interviewee described how this "*continuum of effort*" ultimately helped safeguard the budget.

In the initial stages of the proposal negotiations, the advocacy primarily involved an 'insider' approach, with Bond a regular part of CONCORD delegations in discussions with the Commission, contributing what was described as its "*specialist expertise*".

CONCORD and its members became more vocal in autumn 2012 when the President of the European Council proposed substantial cuts to the EU ODA budget. Key decision makers were described as "*wanting to use development as a gambling chip, thinking no one would cry too much if development aid was cut. But they didn't account for how vocal international NGOs were*". A series of coordinated activities before and during the EU Heads of State Summit in November 2012 took the campaign into the public domain. These included:

- A media release from CONCORD, the ONE Campaign and others accusing the EU of "*balancing its books on the backs of the poor*",
- A group of UK MEPs publically describing the cuts as "*simply unacceptable*", and
- CONCORD helping to mobilise 2000 NGOs to write to Member State governments, calling on them to take a lead in standing up for aid commitments.

This public-facing stance was maintained through 2013, whilst discussions were in deadlock, before switching to a 'rapid policy response' approach during the detailed Trialogue negotiation phase [between the Parliament, the Council and the Commission], when the specific allocation to aid was being debated.

In this period, the NGO community demonstrated a swift approach, with Bond operating as a conduit between members and the negotiation team: "*we got regular updates of progress and proactively helped provide evidence ... We appealed directly to members for case studies and fed these back*". Bond was described by a stakeholder as being "*very involved*" in the development of messaging as part of the process and pro-actively gathering relevant information from its members.

One official noted that Bond, CONCORD and their allies had "*got it exactly right to go in on a multi-platform approach*", enabling NGOs to maximise their impact at key moments during the negotiations.

As a member put it, "*CONCORD is a force to be reckoned with in Brussels. Everyone knows them*". CONCORD, with Bond in support, was identified as "*covering all fronts – not just the European Parliament but talking to Member States, banging on the Commission's door*". The President of the European Parliament at the time was amongst the senior political figures who came out in support of development aid in the budget deadlock phase. He directly referred to CONCORD research in his speech to the EU Heads of State Summit:

"As CONCORD reminded me, European development cooperation costs only €1.87 per EU citizen per month, but saves millions of lives".

Bond's role within CONCORD was described as "*providing very clear messages*" and "*convincing the relevant players in the UK whose [standing] priority was to reduce the overall EU budget*", in essence "*fine tuning work with Parliament and the UK DCI [Development Cooperation Instrument] Rapporteur, which fed into the initial draft instrument*".

Overall, Bond's approach was a persistent one and its influence was identified as playing out over time "*rather than any single intervention that made the difference*".

5 Public support for aid

The dynamics around public support for aid and development is an area where - beyond a small number of engaged individuals and organisations - there are significant gaps in sectoral knowledge and understanding.

Particularly in the campaigning field, understanding around how best to engage with wider audiences (through expertise around marketing approaches, or the complex inter-relationships between knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, for example) has been historically low. And so Bond's work to open up the space for such discussions has provided a useful service to the sector.

Through its research and the set of follow-up workshops that it organised, Bond has delivered a package of interventions that has introduced and promoted debate, around the subjects of (a) public opinion around aid and development (b) how development is portrayed in the media and the impact that this has on public understanding and (c) current and potential sectoral responses.

In doing so, the project has drawn on, and helped stimulate, interest in moving forward in addressing questions around public engagement, and framing and messaging, providing a springboard for future work in this area.

As a result, there is evidence of interest in developing new approaches, alongside signs of willingness to adapt (or at least to consider adapting), as well as some early signs of changes in practice. As one contributor noted, "*we are starting to see some of that messaging [drawing on the evidence] coming through more*".

However, at least as far as we are able to tell from the information available, it took some time for the 'public support' workstrand to alight on a clear strategic direction. Early project reports described how Bond had organised a "*messaging and strategy session*"⁴ and a "*workshop on public opinion and communications*"⁵ for example. But it has only been in the last 18 months or so that a clearer, more purposive direction to the approach to the 'public support' strand has more obviously emerged.

It appears that, initially, progress may have been inhibited by an early reliance on the '*Finding Frames*' report and analysis⁶ as a foundational resource for the 'public support' strand of the project.

In its project proposal, Bond signalled the intention that: "*UK NGOs adopt changes to practice designed to improve public engagement on global poverty based on Bond programme following the publication of 'Finding Frames'*". But - as Bond has recognised during the course of implementation - '*Finding Frames*' has not proved an ideal basis on which to build a sectoral response to the challenges that the report itself identifies. Thus, from 2013, a different response and direction was being highlighted by Bond on the basis that the "*Finding Frames analysis ... was felt to be less well suited to providing practical direction on how to operationalise an alternative strategy*".⁷

Reorienting the project in its latter phase, Bond devised an approach comprising the following elements:

- (a) Conducting research (as well as drawing on existing available evidence).
- (b) Bringing key people in the sector to discuss the evidence and its implications.
- (c) Presenting the evidence, pulling together responses, and drawing out some conclusions around next steps.

As well as collating relevant published research on its website, Bond itself produced two major pieces of research in 2013:

- Research looking at how aid and development are covered in the UK media and how these narratives are reflected in UK public opinion (through media analysis and qualitative audience research).
- A desk review of relevant published research on public attitudes to global poverty, aid and development.

⁴ Project Progress Report, April 2012

⁵ Project Progress Report, April 2013

⁶ Andrew Darnton with Martin Kirk, *Finding Frames: New Ways to Engage the UK Public on Global Poverty* (2011)

⁷ Project Progress Report, April 2014

Whilst some interviewees felt that this research helpfully investigated previously under-explored areas, others did not feel that it had substantively added to sectoral knowledge about public opinion and media messages around aid and development, given what already existed.

This feedback could, to some extent, reflect that interviewees (selected because of their interest in this area) were already particularly well informed. And even for those with existing knowledge, restatement or reinforcement can itself be useful; as an interviewee already well acquainted with the area noted, it was "*fascinating to hear the results*".

It's also worth noting that interviews took place prior to Bond's synthesis of the findings and proposed next steps being published (the '*Change the Record*' report). When available, this report should help give a fuller picture of the usefulness of the research, as well as how the work could be taken forward.⁸

In any case, the consensus from interviews was that the research that Bond commissioned has proved valuable as a way to open up space, and stimulate discussion. And Bond has been effective in using this opportunity to convene around, and develop, the agenda.

The series of workshops that took place in 2014 received very positive feedback at the time, with one participant for example identifying the session as "*the most productive NGO workshop I have ever been to*". And from the vantage point of looking back at the workshops, interviewees corroborated this positive view, with one for example noting that "*the workshops in spring were very positive events, people were very engaged*". Another interviewee stressed Bond's skilful facilitation and management, citing its ability to navigate complex and sometimes controversial content - "*[it was a] high quality event, chaired in way that created opportunities to move forward*".

Some have been frustrated by the pace of development in this strand of the project. But speed of progress partly reflects how this is a deceptively complicated undertaking, requiring very careful stewardship. Sensitivities involved and barriers to swift progress include that:

- Questions about wider public engagement essentially fall into a high importance/low urgency category, given that it is naturally difficult to find the space to create progress at this more strategic/conceptual level when faced with day-to-day priorities. One interviewee for example noted how, "*There's a lot of interest, but very low capacity [in the sector] to deal with it*".
- It is a difficult and sometimes contentious issue in the sector: as one interviewee put it, "*It's an impassioned debate, people can lose rationality, and breadth of vision*". There are divergent perspectives both within and across organisations - and these differences around communications are in some cases themselves symptomatic of (deeper) inter-disciplinary and inter-organisational differences/conflicts (about the role of NGOs, how change happens, etc).

⁸ Now available at www.bond.org.uk/public-support

- Power dynamics within the sector come into play too. A member described how "*the big NGOs - they have such a huge amount of sway, it makes it more difficult for people to coordinate; when you have such big, powerful, sophisticated organisations, trying to bring coherence to that group is very difficult*".
- There is a 'tragedy of the commons' element to the question as well, given the imbalance between what kind of communications might be considered desirable taking a long-term perspective against what is known to generate short-term results. One implication from this is that the more the sector as a whole adopts a more 'responsible' outlook in its messaging, the more that leaves the field open for 'rogue' NGOs to communicate in ways that perpetuate stereotypes for their comparative short term advantage.
- On top of all this, it is in any case, at the best of times, a highly complicated programme area, not least because the available evidence and research, however expertly conducted, is ultimately fundamentally interpretative. Understanding (a) what the research really does tell us, and then (b) what the right response to that should be is far from straightforward, and these are potentially (and generally actually) highly contested areas.

Delay also reflects that the direction of the project was to some extent overtaken by, and needed to adjust to, and accommodate, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's expansion of its own direct work in this area, in particular through the Narrative Project. This project has as its goal building public awareness and support for global development in the UK as well as in the US, France and Germany - and so has clear overlap with Bond's 'public support' work.

In this field, as in others, the Foundation is both a funder and an active player. In this case, the latter more active role was developed later on in the lifetime of Bond's project, was accommodated within it, and has been beneficial to its direction. However, it appears that this integration was not planned in, in the way that it ideally would have been. In drawing lessons from this, there may be steps that the Foundation could take to increase internal coordination in ways that would better enable grantees to take maximum advantage of the Foundation's role as a partner as well as funder.

Linking the two initiatives, Bond has helped to roll out the Narrative Project findings and analysis. It was said that "*Bond's partnering with the Narrative Project is strong*", even to the extent that some interviewees did not distinguish between The Foundation's research and analysis and Bond's own work in the area.

In thinking about Bond's role in producing primary research, interviewees noted how the bigger NGOs (along with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation itself) have research capacities and resources that Bond is not in a position to match. This suggests that investing in research should not be a primary area of Bond's focus. But - as part of a wider 'stewardship' role - there may still be some scope for Bond to commission, or at least play a proactive role in pointing to the need for, discrete research, where evidence is lacking, or where further specific exploration would be helpful.

Interviewee feedback is clear that, in this area, Bond has established itself as a 'respected broker', well placed to bridge divisions and to offer a proactive steer: "*not an empty vessel*" but also not seen as "*selling an agenda*":

"Bond got it about right, they are putting the information out there, shaping discussions, letting people take it back into their own organisations"

"Positions [within and between NGOs] are strongly held, and there's a sense that the different sides of the argument aren't listening to each other. But there are a group of agencies, with Bond amongst them, who are genuinely trying to reflect a centre of gravity between extremes"

"It's a stretched congregation and Bond reaches out to it ... Bond correctly points to the common ground".

In retaining this reputation, it is clearly important for Bond to be seen as independent. This means Bond having the space to set out its own agenda in any future partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, drawing on the Foundation's expertise and resources, but always making clear that Bond is supported by, but not 'working for', the Foundation.

There were also indications from interviewees that Bond could have taken - and certainly could in the future take - a strategic leadership role, based on a more confident notion of what needs to happen. An organisational commitment to this programme area could involve continuing Bond's clear facilitation function and also developing its marketing research capacity and expertise (in an interpretation if not a commissioning function).

One anticipated element of the 'public support' element of the project was the creation of a 'media rebuttal unit'. Several interviewees expressed disappointment that a more formalised infrastructure is not yet in place to support this, although Bond staff, reasonably, point to extenuating circumstances: "*Pushing the media coordination side wouldn't have worked at the time that the IF campaign was being developed and then delivered*".⁹

This remains a potentially important component of an overall 'public support' response and it's important to get it right. Bond is suitably clear that (notwithstanding some limited direct media engagement the course of this project) its role is primarily as facilitator of others' responses, rather than setting itself up as spokesperson for the sector.

6 Bond's role and added value

Looking across the areas of work delivered through this project, it is possible to draw out some cross-cutting observations about the pivotal role that Bond plays in the sector.

⁹ See Appendix 3 for a more detailed anatomisation of the different impacts of IF on the project.

Bond has a remit to support as well as represent its members, and on that basis the organisation has a potentially integral role in all areas of sector-wide significance. However, to its credit, Bond recognises this position as the starting point, rather than the final word, and - embracing the need to think strategically about its representational role - gives careful consideration to questions of when and how its involvement can bring added benefit.

This level of thoughtfulness about its place in the sector seems to be recognised by interviewees. As one put it, *"Bond have completely flourished over last few years ... I'm really pleased with the way that they are engaging on topics important to the sector"*.

Roles that Bond is well placed to play, in supporting and complementing individual members' activities, include the following:

Embracing collective and individual contributions

Bond recognises that sometimes it is not collective action in isolation that creates the impact: *"we absolutely believe in some cases, the weight of our membership creates a better end impact, but tactically, sometimes a combination of collective and individual pieces carries weight"*. This was true in the case of the 0.7% campaign and in the MFF negotiations, with big members in both cases carrying out their own lobbying activity whilst undertaking joint actions to add weight at key political moments.

Where short-term campaigns develop around key political moments, Bond aims to be flexible enough to step in and provide a centralised secretariat function, as with the IF campaign and the advocacy around the Private Members Bill.

On the public support side, the bigger agencies have significant communication capacity and reach, and so there is a school of thought that suggests that a more targeted approach, engaging mainly with and through NGOs with the biggest communication clout would generate best results. However, we heard a fairly strong current of opinion along the lines that questions of public support represent a sector-wide challenge and a common response is required. As one interviewee noted, it is *"important to act collectively, we all need to tell the stories. Our reputation exists as a sector. Our critics are sufficiently organised, so we need to defend the case [collectively]"*.

Some pointed to the value of cross-fertilisation between diverse groups. One interviewee described how, *"the most valuable thing is coming together, convening, discussing ideas, forming connections"*. Bond is best placed to facilitate these kinds of interactions, and to encourage interchange amongst mixed groups, in line with the interviewee who commented, *"it's fantastic to mix big and small, hear a variety of perspectives - [in a big NGO] it's too easy to get into your own bubble"*.

Active convening and bridging

From the feedback, Bond stands outside divisions in the sector, and is widely seen as trusted interlocutor: *"Bond, if anyone, can operate outside the debates [i.e. the divisions]"*.

In playing this bridging role, Bond naturally doesn't have 'power over' its members, but it does have influence, which, judiciously used, can be highly effective: *"Bond can't hold people to account, but they can take a strong role in identifying issues and convening people, to try and drive consensus ... Though it's tricky for a fairly disparate sector"*.

In its public support work, there is space for Bond to be an active convenor, when this is possible and appropriate - representing members' interests and views, but also taking proactive positions and actions, playing more of an 'expert agency' role, *"operating in a 'neutral' way but still driving things forward, forcing hard conversations"*.

On the advocacy side, Bond assembles thoughtful, collective positions - acknowledging that this can take time. But in doing so Bond isn't merely a passive player: as a member put it, *"Bond walk a tight line between push and pull. They have it right most of the time – consulting on policy and getting the strategic bent right"*.

Giving voice to members

One member described how Bond *"strike[s] a good balance between listening to the sector and acting on their behalf"*.

Bond is able to support members' involvement in policy processes, for example, by holding a *"well organised and well attended"* MFF member briefing event at which Bond *"explained a very complex process well"*. A follow-on consultative process resulted in the development of a member-led manifesto. In this way, Bond, as a collective, fashioned a proposition from multiple stakeholders, in effect carrying out a consultation that decision makers then didn't need to conduct. Bond can create streamlined channels of engagement with decision makers who, unsurprisingly, prefer direct conversations through one membership network, as one said, *"one submission rather than 50 is more efficient"*.

On the public support side, Bond's reach is such that it represents different constituencies, who may have access to or understanding of particular audiences, such as diaspora and faith-based groups, and who can therefore bring specialist perspectives to the table.

Encouraging and supporting experimentation

Small NGOs are typically more nimble and flexible, and they can be more willing to initiate more disruptive approaches. This allows different approaches to be tested and replicated - something that is likely to be an increasingly important feature of the sector's developing

approaches to communications and public engagement. Working with a diverse range of partners to take this initiative forward is an important role that Bond is well positioned to play.

Meta-networking

In an increasingly networked sector, and world, the links *between* networks, as well as within them, become increasingly important. At a UK policy level, Bond's partnership with the UK Aid Network is based on complementary skill sets - broadly speaking, the former leads on network advocacy whilst the latter focuses on technical research. At a European level, Bond plays a multi-dimensional role within CONCORD including a lead role on advocacy with UK stakeholders and a support role on policy development, while CONCORD is the lead interlocutor with EU institutions. In addition, Bond supports other national platforms on country level approaches.

Providing a bird's eye view

Bond's vantage point gives it a view of the sector that others don't have. Being able to draw on this intelligence is important in navigating the various policy and programme complexities the sector faces, based on an understanding of the desirability of promoting alignment whilst allowing for (and encouraging) an element of diversity.

On the public support side, for example, this is about helping to bring into practical effect the principle that "*different organisations need to pursue things in different ways. And we can agree to have that disagreement - but there still can be more alignment around messaging*".

7 Recommendations

REC 1. Maintain effective policy advocacy approaches highlighted by this evaluation

This would include

- Engaging in the advocacy process over time, from an early stage (this proved successful on both UK and EU aid - through the UK sector lobbying to ensure pre-election consensus on 0.7% and Bond's contributions to the 2010 EU 'Agenda for Change' consultation phase).
- Developing impactful advocacy engagement tools for use by Bond members and other national platforms.
- Maintaining strong monitoring of the political context and ensuring capacity remains to be adaptive to shifting political circumstances.

REC 2. Continue a programme on advocacy for EU aid, and as part of this:

- Conduct annual monitoring of the Multiannual Financial Framework budget distribution.

- Undertake a scoping exercise across all relevant headings - including Heading 5, covering 'Administration' - allocated to the Development Cooperation Instrument on EU aid.
- Ensure engagement with a broad range of UK government departments (including the Treasury & Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

REC 3. Consider engaging directly as a UK network in Europe

This could provide an opportunity for engaging more actively with large members by developing them as key advocates with close access to EU stakeholders. It would present an enhanced opportunity for Bond to speak directly to the Permanent Representative from a UK perspective, for example.

REC 4. Ensure that advocacy for EU aid is clearly situated within a wider vision of the development role of the EU

This would involve setting out clearly where the specific programme objectives and outcomes fit within a wider vision of the EU's role in development and how individual instruments and regulations help meet that vision.

REC 5. Prioritise the involvement of a wide and diverse group of NGO 'communicators' in the continuing public support work

Campaigns form a relatively small part of NGO communications. The wider cut-through comes primarily from paid-for advertising, high profile events (such as Comic Relief), and mainstream news coverage (typically linked to emergencies/humanitarian assistance). Recognising this, Bond has made efforts to bring more fundraising and marketing staff into the conversations, and it is important that these efforts are prioritised in future.

REC 6. Set out a longer-term vision for the 'public support' programme and establish realistic shorter and medium-term objectives within the broader aims.

Our clear experience is that development NGOs' efforts to think about public attitudes and opinion often suffer from a tendency to set over-ambitious objectives (and then to fail to meet them).¹⁰ There are compelling reasons to be pragmatic about what can be achieved and it's important for the overall effectiveness of the programme that this recognition is locked into project objectives. As one interviewee put it, "*this is a long-term piece of work, and in 3 years you can only go so far*". Bond rightly recognises that progress will be most likely made through taking, and then assessing, iterative steps forward, towards a longer-term goal. It will be important to bolt this understanding into objectives and plans.

REC 7. Work with 'public engagement' experts from beyond the sector

¹⁰ As evaluators, we see this countless times in campaign objectives, for example; and 'social marketing' more generally is notoriously an area where "*extravagant expectations*" tend to prevail [quoted from Kotler & Andreason: *Strategic Marketing for Non-Profit Organizations*, 5th Edition, Prentice Hall, 1996]

NGOs themselves are small players in terms of shaping and influencing public discourse, and this points to the importance of anchoring the work outside the 'development sector' bubble. This could be done, as Bond has sought to do, by connecting with others with a stake and expertise in this area, such as journalists, pollsters, and professionals with for-profit advertising and marketing backgrounds. There could be scope to build on work to date by establishing more ongoing engagement with such experts, for example.

REC 8. Forge links to others in the voluntary sector exploring themes around framing and long-term change in narratives

Another element in reaching out could be to form more active cross-sectoral partnerships, linking with others working with 'negatively regarded' beneficiary groups. In many such fields, comparative initiatives around public understanding and attitudes are being taken forward - for example, in relation to refugees and migrants,¹¹ people supported by working age benefits,¹² and disabled people.¹³ There is potential commonality in these parallel attempts to understand and address negative public attitudes, and opportunities for sectors to learn from each other's experiences.

REC 9. Position work on framing within a wider understanding of factors shaping public support

Considerations around how NGOs are framing their communications have dominated the sector's response to the challenges around limited public support for, and understanding of, aid and development. But this represents only one possible strategic response of many. Bond could usefully do more to explore the range of factors affecting public attitudes and understanding in this area, in order to stimulate wider sectoral thinking about the barriers to progress and different ways that they might be overcome.

REC 10. Conduct more detailed working untangling the diverse communications motivations & goals

'*Finding Frames*' was a compelling call to arms around 'public engagement' but there have been concerns that the analysis did not factor NGOs' more immediate internal goals fully into account. What is needed is an approach that takes into account and accommodates the full range of NGO motivations in public communications including internal goals - around income, support, advocacy influence, positioning and brand for example - alongside goals related to wider public support. As one interviewee suggested, these differing drivers, and possible tensions arising, could helpfully be brought out more clearly and made more explicit: "*tensions [between disciplines] can be surfaced more, in a thematic way - it could help everybody, to understand there are tensions, but that there are good practices in terms of managing them*".

¹¹<http://www.barrowcadbury.org.uk/migration/the-changing-minds-initiative/>

¹²<http://www.whobenefits.org.uk/page/content/front>

¹³<http://blog.scope.org.uk/campaign-background/>

REC 11. Support more detailed thinking about segmentation and targeting

There is a concern widely expressed by people in the sector that "*the public doesn't have a good sense of what the sector is about, why it does what it does, how it works*". On the face of it, it goes without saying that this should be a concern. However, it is relevant to note that the flagship 0.7% goal (for example) has been achieved in the absence of strong public support for, or even understanding of, aid. This is an illustration of how, in policy terms, general public opinion is one factor at play, but sometimes only a crude one (opinion amongst particular key segments of the voting public being more relevant for example).

It might be helpful to surface these kinds of nuances a little bit more and with greater precision in defining and segmenting audiences (along with the different purposes in targeting them and engaging with them). Judging from the headline presentation of the Narrative Project initiative findings, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has very helpfully focused attention on a segment of the public likely to be most susceptible to messaging, but this is perhaps only one of the many dimensions to consider in targeting. By digging further into the detail, a fuller picture could emerge.

REC 12. Consider conducting more detailed work looking at key issues

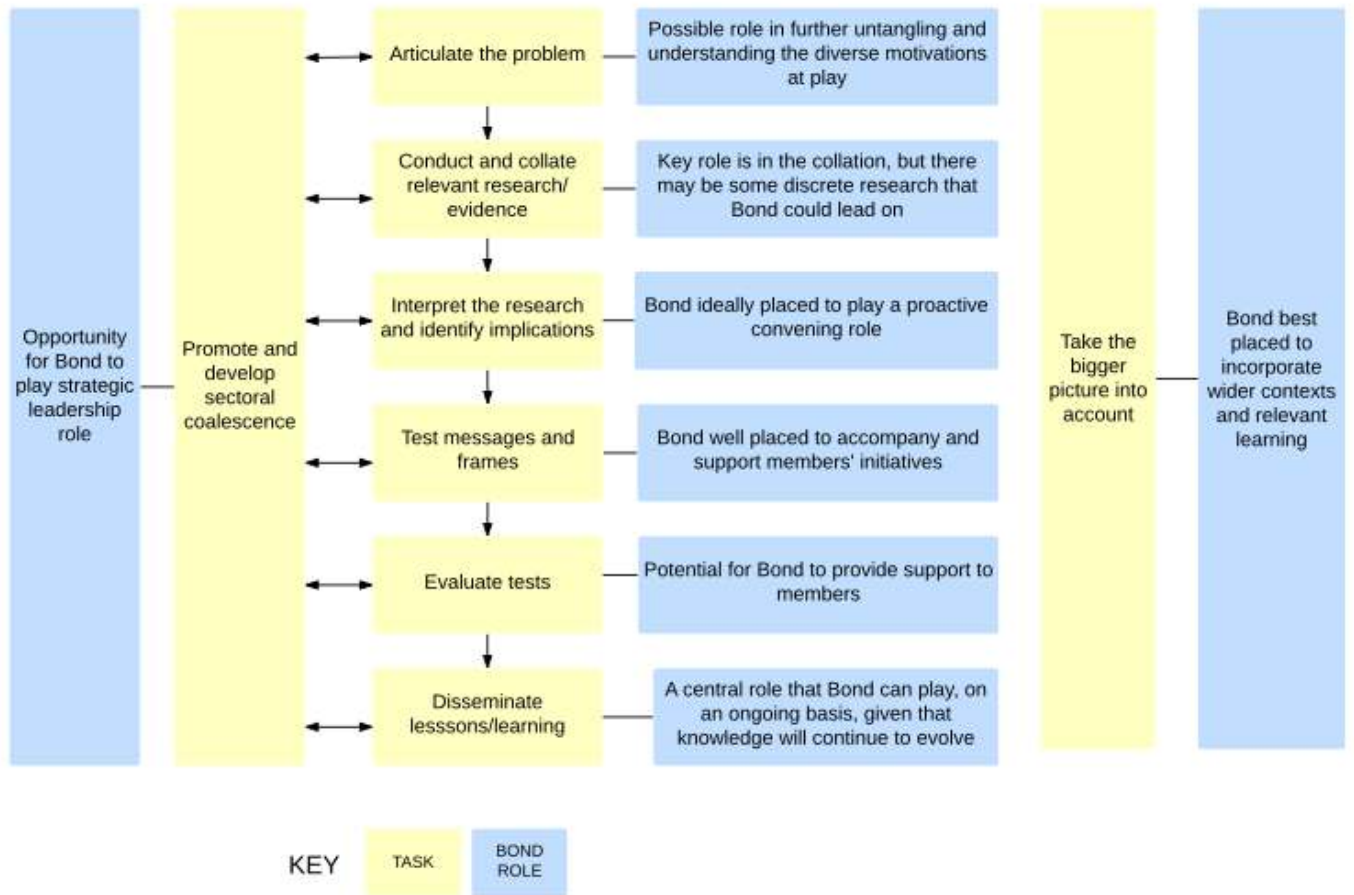
There is scope to continue to explore specific issue narratives more closely. For example, how the case for aid fits with the more multi-polar, and more structural, view of poverty and marginalisation that the sector is increasingly moving towards. Specific consideration of possible routes forward on addressing 'corruption' perceptions could also provide useful intelligence to the sector. Also, public relative receptivity to gender messages, and the possibilities that opens up, could warrant further exploration.

Appendix 1: Bond's role in the EU Multiannual Financial Framework budget process

	Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) Events	Bond/CONCORD response
2011		
Jan		CONCORD release 2 papers on forthcoming EU MFF process setting out guiding principles & overview for members
June	EC MFF Proposals made public	
July		Bond members MFF briefing event
Sept		Bond & CONCORD MFF position paper
2012		
April		Bond evidence to UK IDC Committee on EU Development Assistance; CONCORD Future of EU Development Budget paper
June		Bond release 'Future of EU Development Budget' position paper Bond & CONCORD proposed DCI amendments
Oct		Bond 'EU Aid: the Facts' 10-point Q&A information sheet produced & disseminated
Mid Nov	Herman Van Rompuy (EC President) proposes substantial cuts to EU aid in new budget deal	
Nov 21	Jose Manuel Barroso (previous EC President) defends EU aid, saying cuts will cost lives	CONCORD, ONE, Oxfam & Plan media release on risk of EU 'balancing its books on the backs of the poor'
Nov 22-23	EU leaders meet in Brussels to decide 2014-2020 budget	4 British MEPs statement describing potential budget cuts as 'simply unacceptable'
		CONCORD help mobilise 2000 NGOs to write to 4 countries taking lead in standing up for aid commitments
Nov 23	EU budget summit ends with no agreement (aid cuts still on table)	CONCORD letter to Martin Schulz (EP President) is quoted in his Nov 23 budget summit speech
2013		
Jan 31		Bond letter to PM asking him to protect EU aid at EU leaders' meeting signed by 25 members
Feb 6	EU budget deadlock	CONCORD press release (supported by Martin Schulz, EP President) warns EU against cutting aid
Feb 7-8	EU Heads of State Summit. Agreement on budget size reached	Bond analysis of outcome of Heads of State meeting on EU budget
March	EU overall budget agreed	
Sept	DCI Trialogue negotiations on specific allocation to development & humanitarian aid	CONCORD themed policy papers on allocation to health & education, & on country differentiation
Nov		CONCORD: EU Budget 2014-2020 'Fit for the Fight Against Global Poverty?' analysis
Dec		Analysis of CONCORD's 'Red Lines in Final DCI Instrument'

Appendix 2: Public support: Tasks and Bond's role

This simplified flowchart outlines one possible way of thinking about the stages involved in moving from 'problem' to 'solution' on public engagement, with associated suggestions around how well Bond is placed to play a role in these different areas:



Appendix 3: The IF Campaign and More and Better Aid

The IF Campaign was a significant unanticipated event that occurred during the course of the 'More and Better Aid' project. This campaign - given its focus on aid amongst other issues, and in light of its sectoral significance - impacted on the project in a variety of ways.

Our intention here is not to comment on the IF Campaign per se, but to address the narrow question of its effect on this project. And in relation to that, it's clear that IF helped advance certain goals but also altered the dynamics in ways that were not always helpful to the project in other areas. Its impacts on 'More & Better Aid' objectives could be summarised as follows:

Area	Impact of IF	Comments
UK policy commitments on aid	Solidly positive, helping to keep government on track	The IF evaluation is not definitive on the influence of the campaign on securing the 0.7% commitment, but it does suggest that " <i>the campaign – while not able to claim attribution of a long running campaign to secure this target – certainly contributed to the final stages of delivery and ensure that no backsliding happened at the last minute</i> ". ¹⁴
EU policy commitments on aid	Marginally helpful	To the extent that the IF campaign contributed to bolstering the UK government's position on aid, this could have had a potential spin off in the positions the UK government then took at the EU, allowing the UK government to champion its own position in arguing for a European response, for example.
Public support for aid	Unhelpful, on balance	The 'public support' side of IF seems not to have been strongly articulated in planning, and appears to be an area of relatively weak delivery. As the IF evaluation identifies, " <i>the objectives on public and supporter mobilisation were considered to be highly ambitious as were the objectives on public awareness and engagement</i> ". More practically, the timing and fallout of IF was in some ways disruptive to this strand of the project, making it difficult to take forward ideas around coordination (e.g. around media) in the run up to, and during IF (given that attention was elsewhere) and to some extent afterwards too (see next point).
Bond's coordination role	Mixed	The IF campaign evaluation notes the " <i>sometimes strained relationships</i> " within the campaign. This is very much in line with feedback to this evaluation. It appears that IF exposed and exacerbated sectoral tensions and, for some, has created some disincentives to future joint working, making Bond's coordination role less straightforward to fulfil. However, criticisms are not directed at Bond, which is widely seen as a trusted partner, able to bridge divisions. So arguably, the need for Bond as a bridge builder has been increased by IF.

¹⁴ This and other quotes from Steve Tibbett and Chris Stalker, *Enough Food For Everyone IF: Campaign Evaluation*