'A Mile Wide and an Inch Deep': Surveys of Public Attitudes towards Development Aid

David Hudson and Jennifer vanHeerde-Hudson

University College, London, UK

Abstract

In this article we argue that existing survey instruments used to examine public attitudes to global poverty are not fit for purpose. Surveys need to be redesigned to successfully support the threefold purpose of development education and public engagement. The core of our critique is that existing measures suffer from poor measurement validity, and fail to control for knowledge-levels or perceptions of aid effectiveness, both of which are thought to limit support. Researchers also lack understanding of the factors that motivate support for development aid in the first place. We conclude by making recommendations for future surveys of public attitudes and suggest that building support for development may require speaking to many publics as opposed the public.

Keywords: public opinion, development assistance, measurement validity, perceptions of aid, motivations for support for aid

Introduction

Public support for development has been famously described as a mile wide and an inch deep (Smillie, 1996). Recent events have suggested the enduring truth of this characterisation. Following years of growing optimism about public support for development – based on survey evidence showing high levels of public concern for global poverty – the recent economic downturn has seen the sudden rise of 'home first' sentiments within the traditional donor countries. Hard times at home have meant that public support appears to have turned against international development efforts (Henson and Lindstrom, 2010). This has caused concern among those seeking to promote development efforts. For example the link between public opinion and development efforts was restated in the January 2009 UK House of Commons' International Development Committee's (IDC) inquiry, 'Aid Under Pressure,' assessing the impact of the current economic downturn on support for

development assistance. The IDC (2009) noted, in particular, that 'public support is essential to an effective development policy'. In this article we develop a constructive critique of existing survey-based research into public support for development and, in doing so, draw out some implications for current efforts to re-engage the public with global poverty and development education.

Efforts to engage the public with development emerged in the 1970s as an attempt by donor governments and NGOs to foster greater understanding, and thus support, for development issues (Bourn, 2008). A key aspect of this agenda has included an expressed commitment to monitoring public attitudes by international development organisations and governments. This is nicely captured by the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Office of Development Studies: 'the system of international development cooperation – whether we think of the current existing one or a new, expanded one – cannot exist without broad-based political support. Building such support, of course, requires a basic understanding of the nature of people's – the public's – attitudes toward international development co-operation' (Stern, 1998:v). Consequently monitoring public support has become common practice for most donor countries and major international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Centre (Fransman and Solignac Lacomte, 2004; McDonnell *et al*, 2003), the European Union (EU) Eurobarometer surveys, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the World Bank (Paxton and Knack, 2008).

We argue here that existing survey instruments are not fit for purpose because they are driven by a narrow prioritisation of measuring aggregate levels of public support rather than understanding the variation and determinants of individual support. In the following, we offer a critical review of current surveys of public support for development assistance. Monitoring and measuring public opinion is important; however it is not only public support for development which can be characterised as 'a mile wide and an inch deep', but also our knowledge of public support for development (Hudson and vanHeerde, 2009). This is not to suggest that survey research into public attitudes towards development should be abandoned; survey tools are and should continue to be a central part of monitoring and informing public engagement efforts. However, survey instruments need to be better designed and the subsequent data needs to be better analysed.

We make three arguments about the state of monitoring public support for development: (1) headline figures showing the levels of public support are probably, and always have been, misleading. This is because existing surveys are of poor measurement validity: in other words, they fail to measure the concepts they intend to; (2) we do not know enough about individual-level motivations and whether certain motivations, attitudes, and values correlate with different levels or types of support; (3) surveys are not used to gauge levels of knowledge and understanding

about development issues; plus not enough work has been done on unpacking how knowledge and levels of support interact.

Surveying the surveys: How valid are existing surveys of public support for aid?

Since the early 1980s, a growing number of government agencies and aid organisations have sponsored surveys to measure public knowledge of, and support for, development aid. Early efforts were coordinated by the Development Assistance Committee – a member state based organisation of the OECD – which in 1983 convened representatives from donor countries to develop an explicit strategy to measure and monitor 'Public Opinion and Development Assistance.' A decade later, the OECD Development Centre sponsored a meeting of policymakers, academics, parliamentarians and journalists to consult on 'Public Knowledge and Public Attitudes to International Development Co-operation'. In addition, two collaborative working groups, 'Public Opinion Polling' (POP, 2002-03) and 'POP Plus' (2003-04), were established with the aim to improve the quality and consistency of survey measures across OECD countries.

As a consequence of the Centre's lead, much of the empirical evidence on public opinion/attitudes comes from single-country surveys commissioned by aid agencies in member countries; there is however, significant variation in number and scope. One of the longest running single-country surveys is that of DFID UK, which has sponsored annual country surveys since 1999. A smaller number of multi-country surveys are available, most notably those for European Union member states (conducted regularly by Eurobarometer), and from World/European Values surveys. Table 1 overleaf shows some of the major surveys commissioned since 1999.

Whilst the population of surveys exhibits significant variation in question wording, length, sample size, and sampling procedures, collectively they demonstrate a remarkable degree of consistency in their findings. Our analysis draws on four unique surveys, two of which are conducted annually or in multi-year waves, yielding a total of seven surveys from which we explicate our general findings: (1) World Opinion on Addressing Hunger and Poverty (PIPA, 2008); (2) Public Attitudes towards Development (UK Department for International Development, 2009, 2008, 2005); (3) Europeans and Development Aid (European Commission Eurobarometer 2007, 2005, 1999); and (4) Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger (PIPA, 2001). The choice of surveys reflects the two dominant approaches to monitoring public attitudes: multi-state/pooled cross-sections (eg. Eurobarometer, World Values Survey) and within-state cross-sectional (eg. DFID UK) studies of public opinion and development aid. We analyse the surveys across three categories: the validity of measures of public support for development assistance; motivations or determinants of support for development aid and concern for poverty; and knowledge and perceptions of aid (effectiveness/corruption).

Table 1. Sample of Major Surveys of Public Opinion/Attitudes and Development Aid, 1999-2009

Year(s)	Commissioner	Title	Unit(s)/Sample size/House/Type
2009-1999[1]	**Department for International Development (DFID)**	**Public Attitudes towards Development**	**United Kingdom (08 N=2,056) (05 N=1,248); TNS (07-08); Office of National Statistics (99-05); Cross-section**
2008	**Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA)**	**World Opinion on Addressing Hunger and Poverty**	**20 countries; (N=16,370); Pooled cross-section**
2008	Action Aid	Where are the Public?	United Kingdom; Cross-section (N= 1,000)
2007	Action Aid	Public Attitudes to Aid	United Kingdom; Cross-section
2007[2]	European Commission: Eurobarometer (286)	Citizens of the New EU Member States and Development Aid	New EU Member States (N= c. 11,000); TNS Opinion and Social; Cross-section
2007	**European Commission: Eurobarometer (280 EB 67.3)**	**Europeans and Development Aid**	**27 EU Member States; (N=26,755); Cross-section; TNS Opinion and Social**
2007-2004	Department for International Development/COI	The UK Public's Perspective on Global Poverty	United Kingdom; 6 Waves Andrew Darnton
2007-2004	The German Marshall Fund of the United States	Perspectives on Trade and Poverty Reduction	6 countries; Cross-section; TNS Opinion and Social
2006	European Commission: Eurobarometer (268)	Humanitarian Aid	EU Member States; Romania, Bulgaria (N= 26,853) ; TNS Opinion and Social; Cross-section
2006, 2005, 2000, 1995, 1990	European Values Study Foundation/World Values Survey	World Values Survey Omnibus	Various countries (60+); Cross-section
2006-2002	Gallup International	The Voice of the People	68 countries; (N=53,749); Cross-section
2005	**European Commission: Eurobarometer (222 EB62.2)**	**Europeans and Development Aid**	**25 EU Member States (N=24,999); Cross-section**
2005	Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA)/ Knowledge Networks	Americans on Addressing World Poverty	United States; Cross-section (N=812)
2003	Development Studies Centre/OECD	Public Opinion and the Fight Against Poverty	OECD/DAC countries (N= various); Cross-section
2002	European Commission: Eurobarometer (184 EB58.2)	Europeans and Development Aid	15 EU Member States; TNS Opinion and Social
2001	**Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA)**	**Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger: A Study of US Public Attitudes**	**United States; Cross-section (N=901); Communications Center**
2000/1999; 1996/1995	European Values Survey	European Values Foundation	33 countries; (N=41,125); Pooled cross-section
1999	**European Commission: Eurobarometer (EB 50.1)**	**Europeans and Development Aid**	**15 EU Member States; (N=16,214); DGX: Public Opinion Analysis Unit; Pooled cross-section**

(Source: Compiled by authors; OECD Development Centre. See http://www.oecd.org/document/6/0,3343,en_2649_34101_39295366_1_1_1_1,00.html for representative list of surveys. [1]2005 and 2008 reviewed here; [2]The European Commission conducts a number of waves, however we separate them out here as the enlargement of EU membership results in different countries sampled).

Public opinion and support for development aid

In this section we present three critiques of the validity of existing measures of public support for development: 1) there is substantial variation in the questions which surveys ask and then report as a measure of public support for development aid; 2) articulated support is conflated with actual political support for aid budgets; and 3) survey instruments do a poor job of specifying aid.

First, as shown in figure 1, support for development assistance has been remarkable in terms of its consistency across countries and over time, even recently. Historically, levels of support have ranged between 65-90 per cent, and average upwards of 70 per cent. The 2009 UK survey, *Public Attitudes towards Development*, reports 'public support for overseas aid' at 72 per cent (DFID, 2009); while in the US support was a comparable 79 per cent (PIPA, 2001); and average support across the EU trends slightly higher than in the US and UK with 91 per cent saying it was either very (53%) or fairly (38%) important to provide aid to poor countries (Eurobarometer, 2005).[1] Importantly, it is these figures which are reported as reflecting levels of public support in each country.

The consistency in the reported findings is all the more remarkable given inconsistencies across the surveys, primarily in terms of the various measures designed to tap support. This is not just a case of cosmetic differences in question wording but, more significantly, the *substance* of the question varies to the extent that different surveys are measuring different concepts. Consider the difference in the following
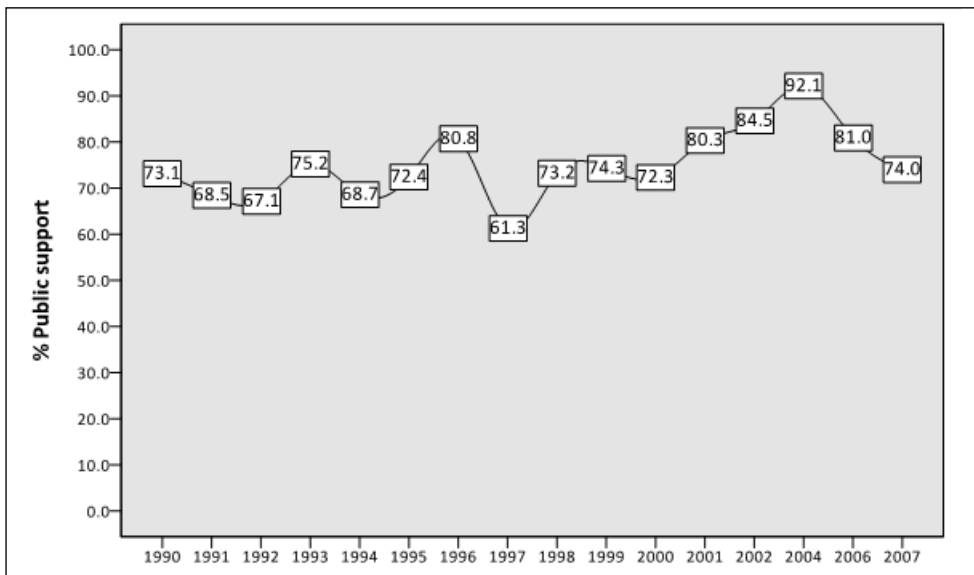

Figure 1. Average levels of public support for development aid/concern for poor in OECD countries, 1990-2007
(Source: Compiled by authors; data from Eurobarometer surveys EB50.1, EB 62.2, EB 67.3; DFID 2008, 2005; McDonnell, 2001; McDonnell et al., 2003; PIPA 2001)

questions which resulted in the figures reported above. In the UK's annual survey, since 1999, DFID has routinely asked respondents to indicate 'how you feel about levels of poverty in poor countries?' In the US, respondents were asked to what extent they agree that: 'The United States should be willing to share at least a small portion of its wealth with those in the world who are in great need' (PIPA, 2001). And the EU's Eurobarometer (2005) asks: 'In your opinion, is it very important, fairly important, not very important or not at all important to help people in poor countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, etc. to develop'?

Although each of these questions tap varying levels of support for alleviating global poverty, questions asking about respondent's level of support for aid or help in principle, are significantly different from questions on concern about levels of poverty in poor countries (Czaplińska, 2007). More importantly, policymakers and practitioners have (erroneously) used each type of question to infer high levels of support for a specific policy instrument, development assistance. In other words, many of these questions are of poor face validity – or – they fail to measure the concept they intend to. First, simply in terms of measurement error, respondents may feel compelled to reply in the affirmative in supporting the principle of aid, if only as a socially desirable response. Second, the principle of supporting aid is very different from the actuality, particularly when an issue suffers from low salience, low levels of knowledge and high levels of scepticism about the effectiveness and efficiency of aid programmes. The variation in the way the question is worded clearly matters and this is a non-trivial observation.

A second critique is that policymakers have assumed that high levels of articulated support readily translate into *political* support, i.e. respondents are willing – by virtue of registering a high degree of support or concern – to vote or otherwise register such preferences with relevant political officials. Whilst absolute support for development aid is consistently above 70 per cent, such support does not translate politically due to a lack of salience amongst competing policy issues. Hence, valid measures of support should adopt *relative*, not absolute, measures of support. In measuring relative support respondents are asked to make reasoned trade-offs between competing policy issues. For example, a PIPA (2001) survey asked respondents to register their priorities; foreign aid is seen as less important than domestic concerns. An overwhelming 84 per cent agreed with the assertion that 'taking care of problems at home is more important than giving aid to foreign countries' (PIPA, 2001:9). Assuming there is finite space for public attentiveness to a large and competing number of policy issues and limited resources, surveys must take into account the relative priority of development aid against competing objectives. Moreover, this may be particularly important during times of general economic decline where 'home first' sentiments tend to increase.

Recently there have been some improvements in measuring relative versus absolute support for development aid. In a direct response to the IDC Aid Under Pressure

report, DFID has now begun asking questions that provide relative measures of the salience of development aid vis-à-vis other competing policy issues (DFID, 2009; IDC, 2009). For example, respondents were asked to rank the priorities for government expenditure from the following areas: the police, the National Health Service, support to poor countries, education and schools, defence, and social services. Such questions allow respondents to rank development aid alongside other issues and weigh the costs and benefits of competing policy choices, providing researchers and indeed policymakers with a more robust indication of relative salience and priorities. However, while such questions do go some way towards measuring relative support they still belong to the 'in principle' or 'cost free' category and they certainly do not require respondents to make monetary or budgetary trade offs.

Another way of navigating this problem is to ask respondents whether they would be willing to support development assistance that amounts to a certain monetary value. For instance, the World Bank (Shantayanan *et al*, 2002) has estimated that it will require an extra US$39-54 billion per year to meet Millennium Development Goal 1 (MDG1). Using this information, a 2008 survey asked citizens of OECD countries whether they would be willing to pay the estimated per person amount necessary to meet the MDG1 goal of cutting poverty and hunger in half by 2015. The amount that the World Bank has estimated was divided between the OECD donor countries, adjusted for income, and then the cost per person was calculated. The per person cost of meeting MDG1 came to £25 for the UK, $56 for the US, €27 for Germany, and so on. On average 77 per cent of respondents are in favour of contributing towards meeting the goal (provided that all others do too). To take the US example, 75 per cent of people supported paying an extra $56 per year to meet MDG1. What is significant about this figure is that it is only slightly below the support for the 'cost free' question as to whether the US should be willing to share a small portion of its wealth with those who are in great need (79%). But it is also at odds with the high proportion (61%) of US citizens who felt that the US spends too much on foreign aid.[2] From this, we can infer that informed respondents respond differently and that support *may* well be more robust with accurate background knowledge than without.

Third, survey measures fail to define important or key terms which are critical to reducing measurement error. This is especially critical where knowledge-levels are low. For example, PIPA's (2003) survey used the terms 'foreign aid', 'aid to foreign countries', 'economic aid', and 'foreign policy programme' without definition or contextualisation, which may serve to confuse those respondents who can and do make a distinction between foreign aid and its subset, development assistance, and reinforce for other respondents their sameness. The distinction between foreign aid, which includes military spending, and development aid/assistance is an important one; as is the distinction between emergency or humanitarian aid and long-term development assistance. Research has shown that development aid/assistance can

be interpreted by respondents as at least three quite different things, namely '1) attitudes toward humanitarian aid, 2) attitudes toward Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) in relation to other government expenditures, and 3) views on the effectiveness of different ODA activities' (Boas, 2002:2). McDonnell *et al* (2003) reiterate this point, arguing 'public opinion does not even see 'helping poor people' as 'development' because they conceive of aid as short term charity for humanitarian relief' (McDonnell, 2003:5).

A recent Eurobarometer (2007) survey has taken this criticism on board noting: 'Development aid means giving grants or loans to developing countries which aim to promote economic development and human welfare. We are not talking here about humanitarian aid (that is assistance provided in emergency situations like war, natural disaster, famine, etc.), but about development aid.' This sort of definitional framing is crucial as evidence from the UK has found that the public tends to view Government involvement in development as disaster relief rather than promoting economic development (DFID, 2008). This is highly problematic given that in 2008 humanitarian aid only accounted for 7 per cent of all donor countries aid commitments.[3] Thus, in order to minimise measurement error, surveys must properly define concepts and/or provide contextual information to respondents which is particularly important for content where knowledge-levels are low.

In summary, there is significant variation in the ways in which surveys capture and report on support for development. These can be categorised as follows, ranging from less to more valid measures of support for development assistance: concern about levels of poverty in poor countries; support for aid in principle; support for current levels or marginal increases in aid expenditure/budget; and willingness to pay for costed development targets. It is also clear that some survey questions problematically conflate concern for poverty/poor people in developing countries with other vague notions of supporting aid in principle or with actual support for (the principle of) funding development assistance. In order to increase the face validity of the measure and minimise measurement error future instruments should eliminate those questions that are poor indicators of support for development assistance (eg. concern for poverty in developing countries), provide respondents with a clear definition of development assistance and measure relative support in order to tap genuine levels of political support.[4] Properly measured, support for development assistance may indeed fall; however, this is not necessarily the case. Regardless, better measures provide policymakers, NGOs and the development community with a more informative baseline from which to target building support and education programmes. As would be expected, one conclusion is that different results are gained by being more concrete and by providing respondents with accurate information, but there is also some indication that questions with greater validity (and thus information about costs) do not always reduce levels of support.

Motivations for support

Academic research on motivations for support has traditionally relied on two categories: self-interested and other-regarding motivations, such as morality. And while there is a great deal of work in political science that has explored the reasons for states giving aid, there has been much less work exploring public attitudes or individual-level motivations to support development assistance. Our critique here is twofold. First, there is a reasonable amount of data on motivations already available from existing surveys; the problem is that it is never fully-utilised in order to analyse, say, whether certain motivations correlate with different levels or types of support. Yet, this is clearly central to the whole project of understanding and building public support for development as outlined by the likes of the OECD/ DFID. Second, again we argue that better survey tools need to be developed; specifically more disaggregated and nuanced measurements of motivations. While there has been a dearth of empirical analyses on individual-level motivations and development, recent and excellent work done by moral philosophers on questions of global justice provide some useful routes towards these better survey tools.

Existing surveys do gather some data on motivations and, like the political science literature on state motivations, it appears to be dominated by self-interested logics. The Eurobarometer (2007:33) survey concludes 'The largest segment of EU citizens think that the two main motivations for providing development aid are self-interest, the awareness that investing in development is investing in their own future, in terms of giving aid to countries in order to increase trade with them and contributing to global stability'. Similar questions in the US and UK show that a majority of citizens believe that because the world is so interconnected, aid helps to serve national interests by creating new and bigger markets, promoting political stability, and reducing the risks of drugs, immigration, terrorism etc. (PIPA, 2001; Eurobarometer 1999). Yet, a sense of moral responsibility *also* appears to be significant. For example, a 2008 cross-country poll showed that, on average, 81 per cent of respondents believed that developed countries do have a moral responsibility to work towards reducing hunger and severe poverty (WorldPublicOpinion.org, 2008). Such moral drivers which suggest that giving aid is just the right thing to do would appear to be significant; so much so that it leads to an anomaly, contradiction, or a paradox (Riddell, 2007:117). Riddell usefully highlights 'the Gap', a phenomenon highlighted by polls, which suggests that the number of people who do not support aid is less than those who think that it's a failure. The logical conclusion is that there are a good number of people who support aid despite the fact they do not think it works. What this suggests – but cannot show in any detail – is that people have non-utilitarian motives for supporting aid.

Surveys do recognise the distinction between instrumental and normative motivations and ask questions to tap into the distinction, even if indirectly. DFID (2005) asked respondents to what extent they agreed with the statement that 'poverty in

developing countries is a moral issue'. The survey later asks if respondents feel that poverty in developing countries could have consequences that affect them personally and, in a separate question, have consequences that damage the interests of the UK. What is done less well is attempting to parse out the impact of these different motivations on attitudinal structures. Drawing on the DFID (2005) data, vanHeerde and Hudson (2010) examine individual-level motivations for concern for poverty using a broad self-interest versus moral judgment framework. The analysis suggests that moral attitudes are positively related to concern for poverty, whereas self-interested attitudes are negatively related to concern. However, respondents appear to have a significantly different calculus in thinking about poverty in developing countries in terms of demarcating it as an issue that has personal consequences versus whether it has consequences which are more widely distributed. That is, respondents are more likely to be concerned about global poverty when they feel it affects them personally, whereas where global poverty is deemed to affect the UK as a whole, respondents are less likely to be concerned. It is entirely plausible and logical that people are able to hold, simultaneously, both an instrumental and normative view for supporting development assistance. Part of the problem here is that the survey instruments are not sufficiently designed to elicit the multiple factors that motivate respondents' support.

Using the World Values Survey, Chong and Gradstein (2006) found that satisfaction with own government performance and individual relative income are positively related to willingness to provide aid. Another potentially crucial driver of motivations is religiosity. Whilst this variable has just begun to get some attention in recent studies, Paxton and Knack (2008) found no correlation with expressing religiosity, but did find a significant relationship with how often a person actually attends a place of worship. Paxton and Knack's (2008) study uses survey data from both the World Values Study and Gallup and examines determinants of public opinion in donor countries. Among other things, they find that those respondents who see themselves as members of the world, are satisfied with their financial situation, trust in people and institutions, and are women are more likely to support aid. Harper *et al* (1990) find that respondents' perceptions of poverty (as measured by an 18-item Causes of Third World Poverty Questionnaire (CTWPQ) were correlated (but multifactorial) with their disposition to believe in a just world; that is, those who believe in a just world also tend to 'blame the poor' for their poverty.[5] Harper and Manasse (1992) show that just-world-believers tended to blame poverty on exploitation, war, and economic systems. These disparate but suggestive findings indicate that much more needs to be done by way of examining individual-level motivations for support.

Moreover, support for aid is likely to be a function of broader attitudinal structures. As noted by Czaplińska (2007:14) 'polls rarely deliver information on underlying attitudes and values, and they neglect people's approach to policy issues going

beyond aid, for instance trade, debt and immigration policy'. Support for aid may co-vary with attitudes on domestic welfare redistribution (Noel and Therein, 2002), position on left-right ideological scale, inter-personal trust (Brewer and Steen-bergen, 2002), or trust in political institutions and other nations (Brewer *et al*, 2004). Measuring support for aid must include valid measures of individual level support for development assistance (the dependent variable), a thorough explication of the factors which drive support, and analysed by rigorous multivariate analysis which allows us to examine the impact of one set of variables, eg. political values or knowledge, whilst controlling for another set of variables, eg. education, age and so forth.

There are a number of ways to move beyond the blunt self-interest versus moral judgments framework. We suggest that the work done by political theorists on questions of global ethics is one important source of inspiration, and the second is work done by psychologists on attitudes and motivations. First, it is important to distinguish and demarcate between self-interest in a crude sense, where the assessment of utility is a very direct and narrow calculation, and on the other hand, more enlightened notions of self-interest. The former view often sees the world as a zero sum game, whereas a more encompassing view of self-interest recognises the indirect benefits which can accrue from cooperation or assistance, such as increased economic trade or collective security, and tends to view the world as a positive sum game. Furthermore, evidence of altruism, as it is understood by economists, is entirely explicable within a self-interested rational framework; if we assume feelings of well-being are gained by helping others then this satisfaction derived from others' increased utility is simply included in your preference set. What these different drivers suggest is that some policies and framings of development assistance are likely to appeal more with different individuals depending on how they conceptualise self-interest. Likewise, notions of 'morality' need to be disaggregated; more specifically *why* do people feel as though we have a moral obligation to help distant others? Is this simply a question of charity (where assistance is voluntary) or a matter of justice because we have reasons which stipulate that we have obligations or duties to assist? This is where the deontological work done by theorists provides some important guidance. Philosophers have suggested a range of different rationales for supporting aid including utilitarianism (Singer, 1972, 2009), cosmopolitanism (O'Neill, 2000), humanitarianism (Lumsdaine, 1993), political responsibilities of global justice, human rights (Pogge, 2008), religious motivations (Paxton and Knack, 2008; Busby, 2007), charity or beneficence, and emotion or moral sentiments (Rorty, 1998). These should not be lumped together, as at present, under a single label of moral reasons-they are supported by different assumptions about the way the world works and have practical implications for how support is understood and built. As outlined by Darnton and Kirk (2011) the work done by psychologists on values and attitudes offers other important clues in what motivates people to action (Schwartz, 1992; Maio *et al,* 2009). We could also add the work being done by neuro-

scientists and geneticists. Plus, we need to know more about how individuals distribute responsibility among individuals, NGOs, and governments for discharging any obligations that are thought to exist (Henson *et al*, 2010). In sum, as argued elsewhere (vanHeerde and Hudson, 2010), knowing what motivates individuals, and how this links to support for development assistance, matters. If development agencies, NGOs, and educators are seeking to communicate with the public to garner support for development they should be aware of which messages work and for whom.

Knowledge and perceptions of development aid

One of the more robust findings from survey research is that the public possesses very little knowledge of development aid programmes. Existing surveys have relied on two indicators of respondents' general knowledge of aid policies: estimates of the percentage of the national budget allocated to (foreign) aid, and since 2001, knowledge of the Millennium Development Goals. With regard to the former, there is significant variation around both mean and median estimates, which nearly always exceed the actual allocation, sometimes by a very large margin. Americans, apparently, are particularly ignorant. For example, a PIPA (2001) survey asked respondents two questions: 'What proportion of the budget they thought went to foreign aid' and 'What is an appropriate percentage of the federal budget to go to foreign aid, if any'? On average, Americans thought just under 25 per cent of the US budget was allocated to foreign aid, and government should allocate less than 14 per cent of the national budget. However, when told that US spends approximately 1 per cent of the federal budget on foreign aid, 37 per cent of respondents thought this was too little, 44 per cent thought it was about right, and 13 per cent thought it too much.

A second approach asks respondents about their knowledge of the MDGs. Despite the centrality of the MDGs to poverty alleviation programmes, and efforts made by international organisations and national governments in coordinating and focusing development activities centred around MDG aims, knowledge is poor. For example, in 2005, a year of enhanced media coverage and increased public awareness of global poverty (Make Poverty History Campaign, Live8 concerts, Gleneagles Summit, etc), 88 per cent of EU citizens cited no knowledge of the MDGs (Eurobarometer, 2005). By 2007, knowledge levels had improved slightly with only 80 per cent claiming not to have heard of the MDGs (Eurobarometer, 2007). DFID's (2008) survey shows similar findings: 75 per cent of respondents had not heard of the MDGs, and although another 6 per cent claimed to have heard of the MDGs they were not able to articulate what they stood for or were about. Segmenting respondents by level of interest in development activities found little variation for groups who claimed to have knowledge of the MDGs. Although policy-specific knowledge is low, respondents felt that they 'know something about the lives of people living in poor coun-

tries' more generally, with 58 per cent of respondents feeling they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' (DFID, 2008).

The relationship between limited policy-specific knowledge and respondents' perceptions of aid effectiveness is not well-understood, although low knowledge is not a barrier to holding attitudes (Henson *et al*, 2010). Here, the evidence suggests that support for development assistance is highly contingent on respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of aid, especially with regard to corruption (Henson *et al*, 2010). For example, in the UK, 47 per cent of respondents thought that aid was wasted, with sizable majorities citing corruption and poor management and/or delivery as primary factors (DFID, 2008). More disconcertingly, US respondents thought that only 23 per cent of US aid money that goes to poor countries ends up helping the people who really need it and 54 per cent of US aid money that goes to poor countries ends up in the pockets of corrupt government officials (PIPA, 2001). However, respondents' perceptions of aid effectiveness are mediated by the type of organisation charged with delivering aid: international charities and NGOs are deemed best suited/most effective compared to donor countries (DFID, 2005).

Unlike our criticism of the measurement validity of support for aid, existing surveys do well in measuring respondents' knowledge and perceptions of aid. The 'problem' with knowledge and perception measures, is that they are not controlled for when estimating support. For example, mainstream arguments would hypothesize that low knowledge levels are negatively related to support and (negative) perceptions of aid effectiveness also negatively related to support. Thus, we would expect to see a measureable decline in the per cent of respondents supporting aid to poor countries. In this scenario, controlling for knowledge and perceptions would likely lower support, and may also contribute to explanations of no relationship, or even a negative relationship between opinion and aid. Mainstream arguments however, have been challenged by Riddell (2007) who essentially argues that simple control techniques may not be enough to tease out more complex relationships. In other words, respondents know very little about aid programmes and perceive aid to be ineffective or wasted by corrupt politicians, and yet, still support the principle of aid/concern for poverty. Determining the direction and impact of knowledge and perceptions can only be done through well-designed surveys and rigorous analysis.

A second, and related criticism here addresses the question of what *should* citizens know about aid policy in order to render informed opinion? Whilst a number of scholars have long argued that knowledge is vital for democratic politics (Converse, 2006; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996), others have suggested that citizens are effective in making use of heuristics and short-cuts in making judgements, particularly in terms of choosing parties and candidates to vote for (Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1991; Sniderman *et al*, 1991). Whilst citizens may be able to make use of cues in high-information environments such as elections, the low-salience, low-information environment that characterises aid policy makes this claim less tenable, or at least

subject to empirical verification. Moreover, work by Gilens (2001) has shown that ignorance of policy specific information leads citizens to hold views different from those they might hold otherwise. In short, policy specific information may yield different preferences than general political knowledge, thus, it is not enough to be interested or informed about politics generally, one must be able to engage with policy specific knowledge in order to express genuine attitudes and preferences.

This however, assumes that the relationship between information and support is uniformly positive – where individuals have access and are exposed to (more) information about aid programmes, their level of support for aid regimes increases. On reflection, this relationship is less straightforward. As noted earlier, because support for development assistance is contingent on perceptions of aid effectiveness, exposing the public to more, detailed information about aid may have unintended consequences. This is especially true in other policy areas where measures designed to increase public trust and confidence in political institutions through increased transparency has contributed to further disengagement and cynicism (O'Neill, 2002). Second, support for development assistance need not be a function of the (de)merits of aid programmes in and of themselves, but relative to other policy priorities. The recent debate in the UK over the Government's decision to ring-fence DFID's budget in the current spending review when other departments face cuts upwards of 25 per cent illustrates the trade-offs involved in allocating scarce public resources. Finally, knowledge is not monocausal, but is part of a larger calculus of individual-level support for development assistance that may include both rational/instrumental and moral motivations.

Conclusion

In conclusion we reflect on some of the policy and political implications which flow from this paper. We have argued that in order to effectively support and inform the development community's education and engagement activities, survey tools need to be radically improved. To this end, future surveys must develop valid measures of support for specific policy instruments – development aid or otherwise – and demarcate these from more general measures including concern for poverty and support in principle. Moreover, developing shared measures for country and cross-country surveys would aid comparative analyses. Analysing support for development needs to be subjected to rigorous multivariate analyses controlling for relative versus absolute support, knowledge, perceptions, and attitudinal structures.

Future research should also direct its attention to a more nuanced understanding of the determinants of individual-level support, moving beyond existing self-interest versus moral frameworks. This can be achieved through more precise survey instruments and through complementary qualitative research. Existing qualitative data is neither used comparatively nor is there any attempt to reconcile existing data sources with quantitative survey results. Hence, a mixed methods approach would

seek to fully-integrate qualitative approaches, for example, in the original construction of the survey as well as its interpretation. Surveys should also be supplemented with experimental research designs in order to further unpack motivations and attitudes, and furthermore to collect behavioural data in order to tie together values, attitudes, and the types of engagement these foster.

Understanding varying motivations for support has important policy implications for educators, activists and advocacy organisations, as well as for strategic communications on behalf of government aid agencies and aid organisations. For example, one of the key aims of DFID's 1999 strategy paper was to build support for development using an 'overall approach that aims to reach people right across society'. However, since then DFID has tended to appeal to the individual's sense of enlightened self-interest by recognising the mutual interdependence of states in an increasingly globalised world. What this approach misses is that citizens have very different motivations for support which are enveloped in much broader attitudinal structures towards government and the politics of redistribution. Building support for development isn't just about capturing support for the principle of aid, but rather is about addressing a much larger and complex set of policy preferences citizens hold, which undoubtedly shape and influence their attitudes towards aid. Building support using a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to work given such complexity.

Three political phenomena highlight the importance of this research and policy agenda. First, the economic and social costs of the global financial and economic crisis have served to increase the demand for development assistance in particular parts of the developing world, while simultaneously undermining its supply in the donor countries. As attitudes towards helping distant others harden, as 'home first' instincts heighten, valid and robust measures of aggregate levels of public support are all the more important for governments to accurately assess any changes in support and to allocate increasingly scarce resources. Second and looking ahead, the failure to meet the MDG targets may well result in lower levels of aggregate support for aid, through disillusionment or reinforced stereotypes akin to the 'Live Aid Legacy' (Darnton, 2011). However, support for aid is not likely to decline randomly or uniformly, but is mediated by knowledge and perceptions of aid. Understanding how and why different segments of the public are affected, gives policymakers more leverage in driving the aid agenda. Finally, initiatives such as UK Premier David Cameron's 'MyAid' plan – where the public gets to vote on how a pot of money should be distributed – suggest that the issue of public support, and understanding the values and motivations behind support, is only set to become politically more, and not less, important.

These policy implications raise bigger, normative questions of democratic politics and the purpose of public engagement more generally. It is worth considering, at the very least, whether public support, writ large, is either necessary or desirable.

Given the complexity of factors that determine support for aid, would the development community be better off securing support not from 'the public', but from many publics? Are there constituencies of support for development, each motivated by different factors? Should the approach to building support for development aim for support that is an inch wide and a mile deep? Should building support for development seek to work through accommodating existing policy preferences or aim to actively shape preferences? Without better empirical knowledge it is difficult to suggest answers to such questions.

Finally, is the goal to maximise support for poverty alleviation or to foster critical civic engagement with global poverty itself? We noted in the introduction that existing survey instruments are not fit for purpose because they are driven by a narrow prioritisation of measuring aggregate levels of public support rather than understanding the variation and determinants of individual support. This narrow purpose is aligned with what Bourn (2008:7) characterises as 'bottom line arguments' for development education; that is, the end goal is to maximise public support and/or fundraising. Critics argue that this instrumentalist approach has been a failure *on its own terms* (Darnton and Kirk, 2011). Despite massive awareness-raising initiatives such as Make Poverty History, the Jubilee Debt Campaign, and Comic Relief, the public understand and relate to global poverty no differently than they did in the 1980s. This is because the way in which global poverty is framed and the values which are used to engage the public actually succeed in undermining public support. More specifically, popular strategies among development charities which prioritise raising money (so-called 'chequebook participation') rather than in-depth engagement, and often appeal to self-interested or extrinsic motivations, have helped produce short term financial success in terms of fundraising but cause collateral damage to the supporter base in the long term. The conclusion reached by the authors is that public engagement *should* be about 'opening up the political and wider societal space to the possibility of deeper change' (Darnton and Kirk, 2011: 14). Our final point is that the assessment of this, and indeed all such claims, and the design of effective strategies fundamentally require better empirical knowledge of individual values in relation to development.

Notes

1 There was, however, substantial national variation across the EU member countries.

2 While these figures are illustrative, they should be treated with caution as the data come from two different surveys.

3 OECD International Development Statistics 2009.

4 A further point is that once a more valid measurement is identified this should be disseminated as global best practice, probably by the OECD. Individual countries can and should obviously retain their own additional questions. But while a case could be made for a variety of different measures, the field would benefit from an agreed measure of public support. This would facilitate cross-national comparisons and serve to harmonise understandings of public support where appropriate.

5 For the Just World Scale see Rubin and Peplau (1975).

David Hudson *is Senior Lecturer in Political Economy in the Department of Political Science, University College London. His research interests are in global finance and development, public attitudes towards poverty, and in international political economy and global governance more generally. He co-edited with Andrew Baker and Richard Woodward* Governing Financial Globalization *(Routledge, 2005) and* Global Finance and Development *is currently in press (Routledge). (d.hudson@ucl.ac.uk)*

Jennifer vanHeerde-Hudson *is Senior Lecturer in Research Methods in the Department of Political Science/School of Public Policy, University College London. Her research interests include public opinion, attitude formation, political communication and political finance. Her work has been published in* Political Studies, Party Politics, British Journal of Political Science, Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties *and the* British Journal of Politics and International Relations. *(jennifer.hudson@ucl.ac.uk)*

References

Boas, M. (2002) *Public Attitudes to Aid in Norway and Japan. Working Paper No. 2002/03*, Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo.

Brewer, P, Gross, K., Aday, S., and Willnat, L. (2004) International Trust and Public Opinion about World Affairs. *American Journal of Political Science* 48(1) p. 93-109.

Brewer, P. and Steenbergen, M. (2002) All Against All: How Beliefs about Human Nature Shape Foreign Policy Opinions. *Political Psychology* 23(1) p. 39-58.

Busby, J. (2007) Bono made Jesse Helms Cry: Jubilee 2000, Debt Relief and Moral Action in International Politics. *International Studies Quarterly* 51(2) p. 247-75.

Bourn, D. (2008) Development Education: Towards a re-conceptualisation. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 1(1) p. 5-21.

Chong, A. and Gradstein, M. (2006) *Who's Afraid of Foreign Aid? The Donor's Perspective. CESifo Working Paper No. 1833*. Inter-American Development Bank.

Converse, P. (2006) The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics. *Critical Review* 18(1) p. 1-74.

Czaplińska, A. (2007) *Building Support for Development Cooperation*. ICEI: Instituto Complutense de Estudios Internacionales: PP 02/07. http://www.ucm.es/info/icei/ pdf/PP%2002-07.pdf [Accessed February 2009].

Darnton, A. (2011) 'Aid: why are we still stuck in 1985?', *The Guardian*, 28 March 2011. http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/mar/28/aid-public-perceptions [accessed 14 July 2011].

Darnton, A. and Kirk, M. (2011) *Finding Frames: New ways to engage the public in global poverty*. London: BOND.

Delli Carpini, M. and Keeter, S. (1996) *What Americans Know about Politics and Why it Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Department for International Development (DFID) (2009) *Public Attitudes towards Development*. Department for International Development. London.

Department for International Development (DFID) (2008) *Public Attitudes towards Development.* Department for International Development. London.

Department for International Development (DFID) (2005) *Public Attitudes on Development: Beliefs and Attitudes Concerning Poverty in Developing Countries.* London: Office for National Statistics, Omnibus Survey.

Eurobarometer (2007) *Europeans and Development Aid, 280 EB67.3.* Brussels: European Commission.

Eurobarometer (2005) *Europeans and Development Aid, 222 EB62.2.* Brussels: European Commission.

Eurobarometer (1999) *Europeans and Development Aid, EB50.1.* Brussels: European Commission.

Fransman, J. and Solignac Lecomte, H.-B. (2004) Mobilising Public Opinion against Global Poverty. *Policy Insight* No. 2, Paris: OECD Development Centre.

Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Gilens, M. (2001) Political Ignorance and Collective Policy Preferences. *American Political Science Review* 95(2) p.379-396.

Harper, D. and Manasse, P. (1992) The Just World and the Third World: British Explanations for Poverty Abroad. *Journal of Social Psychology* 132(6) p.783-785.

Harper, D., Wagstaff, G., Newton, J. and Harrison, K (1990) Lay Causal Perceptions of Third World: Poverty and the Just World Theory. *Social Behaviour & Personality* 18(2) p.235-38.

vanHeerde, J. and Hudson, D (2010) The Righteous Considereth the Cause of the Poor? Public Attitudes towards Poverty in Developing Countries. *Political Studies* 58(3) p.389-409.

Henson, S. and Lindstrom, J. (2010) *Aid to Developing Countries: Where does the UK Stand?* Institute of Development Studies http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/IDSUKPOMReport.pdf [Accessed February 2011].

Henson, S, Lindstrom, J. and Haddad, L. with Mulmi, R. (2010) Public Perceptions of International Development and Support for Aid in the UK: Results of a Qualitative Enquiry. *IDS Working Paper* http://www.ids.ac.uk/index.cfm?objectid=9EC8ACF6-91C1-CED2-7C6912061A53BC53 [Accessed August 2011]

Hudson, D. and vanHeerde, J. (2009) 'A Mile Wide and an Inch Deep': A Review and Critique of Extant Surveys on Public Opinion and Development. Paper Presented at the International Studies Association Annual Conference, 15-18 February, New York.

International Development Committee (IDC) (2009) *Aid under Pressure: Support for Development Assistance in a Global Economic Downturn. Fourth Report of 2008-09 Session*. London: House of Commons, International Development Committee.

Lumsdaine, D. (1993) *Moral Vision in International Politics: The Foreign Aid Regime, 1949-1989*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Lupia, A. (1994) Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behaviour in California Insurance Reform Elections. *American Political Science Review* 88(1) p.63-76.

Maio, G.R., Pakizeh, A, Cheung, W. and Rees, K.J. (2009) Changing, priming, and acting on values: effects via motivational relations in a circular model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97 p.699-715.

McDonnell, I., Lecomte, H. and Wegimont, L. (eds.) (2003) *Public Opinion and the Fight Against Poverty.* Paris: OECD/North-South Centre.

Noël, A. and Thérien, J. (2002) Public Opinion and Global Justice. *Comparative Political Studies* 35(6) p.631-56.

O'Neill, O. (2002) *A Question of Trust. Reith Lectures*. BBC Radio 4. London: British Broadcasting Corporation

O'Neill, O. (2000) *Bounds of Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Paxton, P. and Knack, D. (2008) Individual and Country-level Factors Affecting Support for Foreign Aid. *Policy Research Working Paper*, 4714. The World Bank: Development Research Group

Pogge, T. (2008) *World Poverty and Human Rights*. Cambridge: London.

Popkin, S. (1991) *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) (2008) *Publics in Developed Countries Ready to Contribute Funds Necessary to Cut Hunger in Half by 2015*. Available at: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/btdevelopmentaidra/554.php?lb=btda&pnt=554&nid=&id= [Accessed August 2008].

Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) (2003) *Americans on Africa*. http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Africa/Africa_Jan03/Africa_Jan03_quaire.pdf [Accessed September 2008].

Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) (2001) *Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger: A Study of US Public Attitudes.* Available at: http://www.pipa.org/ OnlineReports/ForeignAid/ForeignAid_Feb01/ForeignAid_Feb01_rpt.pdf [Accessed August 2008].

Riddell, R. (2007) *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rorty, R. (1998) Human rights, rationality and sentimentality. In R. Rorty (ed.) *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Rubin, Z. and Peplau, L. (1975) Who Believes in a Just World? *Journal of Social Issues* 31 p. 65-89.

Schwartz, S. (1992) Universals in the content and structure of values: theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. In M. Zanna (ed) *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. Orlando: Academic Press.

Shantayanan, D., Miller, M. and Swanson, E. (2002) Development Goals: History, Prospects and Costs. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper WPS2819.*

Singer, P. (1972) Famine, Affluence, and Morality. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1(3) p.229-243.

Singer, P. (2009) *The Life You Can Save*. Basingstoke: Picador.

Smillie, I. (1996) Mixed Messages: Public Opinion and Development Assistance in the 1990s. In C. Foy and H. Helmich (eds) *Public Support for International Development*. Paris: OECD Development Centre

Sniderman, P., Brody, R. and Tetlock, P. (1991) *Reasoning and Choice: Explorations in Political Psychology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Stern, M. (1998) *Development Aid: What the Public Thinks?* New York: United Nations Development Programme, Office of Development Studies.

World Public Opinion.org (2008) *World Opinion on Addressing Hunger and Poverty, Publics in Developed Countries Ready to Contribute Funds Necessary to Cut Hunger in Half By 2015*. PIPA: University of Maryland. Available at: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/btdevelopmentaidra/554.php?nid=&id= &pnt=554&lb= btda [Accessed November 2008].