

Institution: University College London		
Unit of Assessment: 19 Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Enabling government, policymakers, and NGOs to build public support for sustainable development		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Jennifer vanHeerde-Hudson	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Political Behaviour	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: September 2003–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Efforts by donor governments and international NGOs to build public support for sustainable development have been hampered by a lack of robust, cross-national evidence. Through the Aid Attitudes Tracker (AAT) and the Development Engagement Lab (DEL), Prof. Jennifer vanHeerde-Hudson's collaborative research has transformed the way development organisations engage the public. AAT/DEL has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided a convening point for 150 development organisations in France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, enabling NGOs to collaborate on and build public support for development; • served as the definitive data source for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's monitoring and tracking of UK public opinion, shaping the organisation's GBP120,000,000 Aid Match programme, high-level communications, and campaigns; • underpinned the Theory of Change and strategy for the cross-sectoral UK Campaign to Defend Aid and Development; • improved development NGOs' campaigns and communications by producing a bespoke audience segmentation analysis and by identifying effective messages and messengers, which has changed the strategies of NGOs/consultancies such as UNICEF, Water Aid, and Purpose, thereby increasing donations and engagement. 		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Prof. Jennifer vanHeerde-Hudson (hereinafter Hudson) is an international leader in research on public opinion towards foreign aid and public engagement with sustainable development. Her work centres on two international collaborative projects. The Aid Attitudes Tracker (AAT, 2013–18), a research programme between equal co-investigators at UCL (Hudson) and the Universities of Birmingham and Texas, analyses public engagement with global poverty through quantitative and qualitative data on public attitudes and behaviours in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the US. The success of the AAT led to a second phase, the Development Engagement Lab (DEL, 2018–23). Led by Hudson, DEL is a joint research programme between UCL and Birmingham, and expands the research begun with AAT. Both AAT and DEL are international partner-focused research programmes working with over 30 international development NGOs and government ministries. The combined AAT/DEL project has yielded four principal findings.</p> <p>1. Audience segmentation AAT/DEL has developed a bespoke segmentation audience analysis for the development sector, drawing on panel data measuring 18 actions that people can take in relation to global development (e.g. reading/watching/listening to news, donating money, contacting their MP). The segmentation identifies five audience groups: Totally Disengaged (39% of people across the four countries); Marginally Engaged (36%); Informationally Engaged (12%); Behaviourally Engaged (7%); and Fully Engaged (5%). The research shows both aggregate and individual-level change in engagement over time [R1]. However, contrary to received wisdom that individuals usually climb a <i>ladder of engagement</i>, patterns of engagement tend to remain fixed within a segment. Moreover, respondents in the Totally Disengaged and Marginally Engaged groups are likely to remain there, while respondents in the engaged groups are more likely to move down. This has implications for development organisations aiming to grow public support.</p>		

2. Campaign appeals NGOs frequently use ‘pity-based’ fundraising appeals: images of poor, starving, (frequently) African children, shown as ‘grateful receivers’, without context or agency [R2]. The research shows the *unintended consequences* of pity-based appeals: while they increase the likelihood of making a donation, they also reduce respondents’ sense of personal efficacy (ability to make a difference in reducing global poverty), which harms other forms of attitudinal engagement beyond donation. Alternative, empathy-based appeals – which generate feelings of hope – increase both donation likelihood and personal efficacy. The evidence shows no statistical difference in the likelihood to donate between the pity- and empathy-based treatments [R3].

3. Messengers The research identifies and tests 10 traits (e.g. trustworthiness, knowledgeability, attractiveness) associated with either warmth or competence. Messengers rated high on both warmth and competence are seen to be effective messengers for development aid. Testing more than 40 messengers, the findings show that frontline workers (nurses, doctors, engineers) and volunteers are the top-rated messengers on both dimensions. Contrary to widespread practice, celebrities, business-people, politicians, and philanthropists may score well on one, but not both, dimensions. With respect to specific traits, messengers who are seen to be relatable are more effective in getting the public to donate, whereas messengers who are seen to care for others are more effective in getting the public to sign a petition [R4].

4. Drivers of support AAT/DEL has identified the drivers of support for aid and concern for poverty through experimental, cross-sectional and panel data analyses. Donor publics significantly overestimate the percentage and volume of aid expenditure; however, AAT/DEL research shows that efforts to correct such misperceptions do not increase support for aid [R5]. The research – building on earlier work in the UK [R6] – finds that moral sentiments, such as seeing an obligation to help others in need, are a key driver of support for aid across the four countries surveyed [R1].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1. vanHeerde-Hudson, J., Hudson, D., Morini, P., Clarke, H. & Stewart, M. (2020)** ‘Not One, but Many: Public Engagement with Global Development in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States’. *Development in Practice* 30(6): 795–808. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2020.1801594>. (Peer-reviewed; funded by i,ii.)
- R2. Beswick, D. Dasandi, N., Hudson, D., & vanHeerde-Hudson, J. (2018)** ‘International Development NGOs, Representations in Fundraising Appeals and Public Attitudes in UK–Africa Relations’. In D. Beswick, J. Fisher, G. Harrison, & S. Hurt (eds.), *Britain and Africa in the 21st Century: Between Ambition and Pragmatism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press: pp. 196–213. (Available on request.)
- R3. Hudson, D., vanHeerde-Hudson, J., Dasandi, N. & Gaines, S. (2019)** ‘Making and Unmaking Cosmopolitanism: An Experimental Test of the Mediating Role of Emotions in International Development Appeals.’ *Social Science Quarterly* 100(3): 544–564. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12587>. (Peer-reviewed; funded by i.)
- R4. vanHeerde-Hudson, J., Hudson, D. & Morini, P. (2020)** ‘[Who can communicate international development? Understanding effective messengers.](#)’ London: Development Engagement Lab. (Funded by i,ii.)
- R5. Scotto, T., Reifler, J., Hudson, D. & J. vanHeerde-Hudson. (2017)** ‘We Spend How Much? Framing Foreign Aid in the United States and Great Britain’. *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 4: 119–128. <https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2017.6> (Peer-reviewed; funded by i.)
- R6. vanHeerde, J. & Hudson, D. (2009)** ‘The Righteous Considereth the Cause of the Poor? Public Attitudes towards Poverty in Developing Countries’. *Political Studies* 58(3): 389–409. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2009.00800.x> (Submitted to REF2014; peer-reviewed.)

The research is supported by two large grants:

- i. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (USD4,297,986; 2018) *Development Engagement Lab*, 2018–2023. J. Hudson, Principal Investigator; D. Hudson, co-Investigator.
- ii. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (GBP468,917) *Aid Attitudes Tracker*, 2013–2018. J. Hudson & D. Hudson co-Is (with H. Clarke & M. Stewart, University of Texas, Dallas).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)**1. AAT/DEL convenes more than 150 development organisations in France, Germany, the UK, and the US, enabling NGOs to collaborate on and build public support for development.**

Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Aid Attitudes Tracker and Development Engagement Lab had two primary tasks: (1) to produce world-leading research on public engagement with global development; (2) to build a research-partner network in four donor countries to enable development organisations to use evidence in their campaigns, advocacy and communications. The success of the AAT led to DEL, with around seven times more funding (see i & ii above). AAT/DEL works with partner organisations in the four countries to identify the key questions organisations face, design analyses to answer these questions, and disseminate the research. In three main ways, AAT/DEL has thereby transformed the development sector in France, Germany, the UK and the US, as well as other OECD countries.

First, AAT/DEL convenes meetings in the four countries three times per year to share key research and insights with partners (e.g. Oxfam, Water Aid, Interaction, ONE, Global Citizen, Save the Children, Welthungerhilfe, UN Foundation). It employs country-specific development/communications consultants to help organisations take up insights and improve the feedback loop.

Second, the project provides research and insights beyond its core partners through bespoke presentations to organisations (e.g. US Global Leadership Coalition, Agence Française de Développement, UK Labour Shadow International Development Team, Global Affairs Canada, European Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, and the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development). Through partnership with Bond, the UK network for international development organisations, AAT/DEL has provided presentations/webinars and reports reaching over 400 NGOs [A^{1/A}2]. In France, AAT/DEL research supports Focus 2030's International Development Barometer [A³]. As noted by the Head of Performance and Insight at Water Aid, AAT/DEL 'produce[s] a large number of resources/outputs to support development organisations; the new website provides access to blogs, data, and reports, as well as bespoke slide decks for partners in each of the four countries.... We feel incredibly lucky to have access to such an amazing resource' [B].

Third, AAT/DEL provides the foundation of research, data and outputs for the Development Compass website [A⁴], an open-source portal for data, publications, and insights, developed with the OECD Development Communication Network (DevCom). AAT/DEL research has underpinned a wide range of policy reports – for example, by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEVal) and the Mercator Dialogue on Asylum and Migration [A⁵] – as well as major pieces in *Devex* [A⁶] and *The Guardian* [A⁷].

AAT/DEL research thus provides a coordinating point for the sector that previously did not exist, enabling organisations to think and collaborate to address key challenges. According to Water Aid: 'the AAT/DEL partner meetings provide a unique forum for informed debate and discussion; this is not a talking shop however, rather a platform for the rigorous examination of key and emerging hypotheses under objective, academic leadership' [B]. The Director of the UK Campaign to Defend Aid (comprising 25 of the UK's largest INGOs) notes, 'the depth of the collaboration that UK NGOs have achieved over the last four years could not have been possible without AAT/DEL' [C]. Several smaller NGOs note that 'without AAT research there was nothing comparable to access in terms of data, evidence and rigour, and they would not have the resources to carry out audience segmentation or opinion polling themselves'. [D¹]

2. AAT/DEL research is the definitive data source for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's monitoring and tracking of UK public opinion and has influenced the organisation's high-level communications and campaigns.

The UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), formerly the Department for International Development (DFID), uses AAT/DEL as the definitive source of data on UK public opinion towards global poverty, providing tracking data for key performance indicators, and enabling an evidence-based approach to its public engagement and communications work. AAT/DEL research has provided insight into public support for Official Development Assistance,

highlighting the importance of morality as a foundational driver of support [R1/R6] and the limits of talking about aid volume as a means to build public support [R5]. The Deputy Director, Corporate and Internal Communications (CIC) at the FCDO, writes:

AAT/DEL evidence is embedded in the communications approach of the department. A pillar of the former DFID Communication Division strategy was to showcase how UK aid works, and is making the world a safer, healthier place, and AAT/DEL insight is key to how this is delivered as it underpins a communications approach which explains how aid is being used and is effective. For example, AAT/DEL insight was used as a rationale and as guidance for the campaign '100 Ways that Aid Works' undertaken by DFID on social media in 2019. [E]

AAT/DEL's specific impacts on DFID/FCDO policy can be illustrated through three examples. First, as championed by the then Secretary of State, DFID ran a six-week pilot communications 'Aid Works' campaign in the West Midlands in 2018, to test whether a concerted communications effort can change attitudes towards aid [E]. The campaign targeted the 'Marginally Engaged' group identified by AAT/DEL's segmentation analysis [R1], and drew on AAT/DEL insights on messengers and messages [R2/R3/R4]. One DFID official noted that the AAT segmentation model 'is at the heart of what we do' on audience insight [D¹]. A systematic impact evaluation of the campaign showed a 15% increase in people's understanding of how aid works, compared to no change in the control region. [D²]

Second, AAT/DEL insights on effective messengers have informed a new strategy. The Deputy Director for CIC notes: 'DFID moved away from relying on ministers and aid recipients to communicate their messages and moved to using volunteers and frontline workers. AAT research showed that pairing Ministers with volunteers or frontline workers was more effective'. The change has 'improv[ed] the effectiveness of the messages they're trying to get across'. [E]

Third, AAT/DEL has influenced the allocation of more than GBP120,000,000 through the FCDO's UK Aid Match Scheme. Aid Match provides grants to UK-based NGOs for poverty reduction projects in developing countries. The fund is open to more than 60 UK-based organisations, and has helped around 23,400,000 people in 37 countries. The FCDO has incorporated AAT/DEL insights into the criteria for receiving Aid Match funding, particularly those on pity-based appeals [R2/R3] and effective messengers [R4]. To illustrate, it is now required that projects 'choose images or film that show beneficiaries as active, not passive, and portray people as individuals that the viewer can relate to... It is unacceptable to use images that evoke mere pity and helplessness'. [D¹/E]

3. AAT/DEL's audience segmentation analysis underpins NGOs' core campaigns strategy, enabling them to target appeals and communications effectively. NGOs use messages and messengers more effectively and with greater impact as a result of AAT/DEL research.

AAT/DEL research has produced actionable insights for development NGOs, transforming their strategies, appeals and impact in four principal ways. First, in 2017 the Gates Foundation, in partnership with Purpose (a campaign consultancy organisation), launched the Global Development Campaign Lab (GDCL) to scope and test campaigning interventions to identify and scale effective ways to activate new audiences and grow support for global development. This ran 10 campaign interventions in Germany, France and the UK, and AAT/DEL research was central to 'the definition of our campaign hypotheses, the definition of our narrative frames and engagement of messengers, and the definition and prioritization of campaign actions' [F]. This was reflected in the 'Project Period' campaign, launched in the UK to elevate the issue of period poverty to the global level. In designing their interventions focusing on effective messengers, Purpose targeted the use of relatable and audience-appropriate messengers [R4] which were 'shaped by AAT insights' [G]. Purpose's 'right messenger for the right audience' approach reached over 2,000,000 people who went on to take higher barrier actions, raising funds or awareness of global period poverty to their own networks. [G]

Second, fearing a collapse in public support and a weakening of political consensus around the UK government's commitment to spending 0.7% of GNI on overseas aid, in 2017, the UK's 25 largest development NGOs, accounting for GBP5.6bn (7%) of total UK charity spending annually, created a sector-wide Campaign to Defend Aid and Development. AAT/DEL's audience

segmentation has enabled this group to target its campaigns more effectively [C]. As a member of the Campaign's steering board notes, AAT/DEL's analysis is at the heart of the cross-sector theory of change. The [Campaign's] target audience is defined by an AAT segment [D¹/H]. According to the Campaign's Director:

Every year since (2018, 2019, 2020 and for 2021), AAT/DEL data has featured in our strategy documents and informed the investment decisions of CEOs donating pooled resources into Campaign funds. Specifically, the segmentation methodology and the 'Marginally Engaged' as a concept has become part of the strategy discourse for CEOs and Executive Directors, as well as hands-on staff in Comms, Marketing, Public Affairs and Fundraising Directorates alike. [C]

Third, organisations have moved from using celebrities and aid recipients to communicate their messages towards foregrounding volunteers and frontline workers [R4]. NGOs' activities around messengers are 'more rigorous with the influence of AAT's approach than they otherwise would have been' [D¹]. Organisations have also changed the content of their appeals, moving away from 'pity-based' appeals and images and towards sharing more positive, empathetic stories [R2/R3]. The negative impact of pity-based images was long-suspected by many organisations and has now moved 'from being a hypothesis, to a business consideration' [D¹]. Plan International, CARE International, and Water Aid have fundamentally changed the design and content of their appeals [D¹]. According to the Head of Performance & Insight at Water Aid, AAT/DEL research has played a significant role in 'shaping a public communications culture shift at WaterAid' [B]. He notes: 'In 2016, we resolved to move away from the traditional, transaction-focused model of public engagement towards an approach that recognises supporters as being "partners in the mission, not just funders of the mission".' He continues, 'the need-focused messaging that everyone was seeing ... was obscuring the organisation's progress narrative, thereby suppressing any sense of hope and limiting an individual's sense of personal efficacy'. [B]

Fourth, UNICEF has used AAT/DEL's insights on both audience segmentation and messaging to change the approach of its annual Soccer Aid event, with marked effects on income. Its Strategic Communications lead, notes:

The Soccer Aid appeal films have used the AAT insights to make a conscious shift in tone, and so far they have been working, and they are raising more every year. Soccer Aid donations have increased from GBP6,700,000 in 2018 [the year before they took AAT insights on board] to GBP9,300,000 in 2020, which in part can be attributed to AAT providing evidence that more hopeful, joyful stories deliver the same or greater levels of income. [I]

Importantly, AAT/DEL has 'helped to move along internal conversations around effectively changing appeal films by providing evidence that previously didn't exist. Not only has the shift in tone increased the overall amount raised on the night of TV, it has also increased the value of individual donations with more viewers donating the higher price point of £30 than ever before'. [I]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A.** Compendium of Materials Relating to AAT/DEL Engagement Activities: (1) Bond event listings; (2) Bond policy reports presenting AAT/DEL evidence; (3) Focus 2030 International Development Barometer; (4) Development Compass website; (5) Policy reports presenting AAT/DEL evidence (6) Articles in *Devex*; (7) Article in *The Guardian*
- B.** Testimonial: Head of Performance & Insight, Water Aid
- C.** Testimonial: Director, UK Campaign to Defend Aid and Development
- D.** Impact evaluation reports: (1) Savani, M. (2018) 'AAT Impact Report Summary: Findings and Excerpts from AAT Stakeholder Interviews'; (2) Hudson, D. (2019) 'Aid Works: West Midlands Pilot Evaluation Report'
- E.** Testimonial: Deputy Director, Corporate and Internal Communications, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (formerly DFID)
- F.** Testimonial: Strategy Manager, Purpose (Europe)
- G.** Purpose. (2018) 'Integrating AAT Research into Public Mobilisation Campaigns: Global Development Campaigns Lab'
- H.** Campaign to Defend Aid and Development. 'Cross Sector Campaign for Aid and Development: Theory of Change for 2019'. Bond. [Available on request]
- I.** Testimonial: Strategic Communications Lead, Soccer Aid UNICEF