

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Birmingham		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 22, Anthropology and Development Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Transforming development communications and campaigns		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2018-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
David Hudson	Professor of Politics & Development	2017-present
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Niheer Dasandi	Senior Lecturer	2016-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2018-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The Development Engagement Lab, previously the Aid Attitudes Tracker, has <b>radically altered how policy makers and development organisations present aid</b>. It has enabled them to <b>defend aid to the sceptical ‘marginally engaged’</b> demographic through a shift in focus from ‘pity based’ campaigns, which focus on negative portrayals of need, to an emphasis on more positive campaigns. That this has been effective is shown by the ‘Aid Works’ campaign, which was championed by the Secretary of State for International Development and led to a <b>15% increase in people’s understanding of how aid works</b>. The programme has gone on to <b>shape ‘The Campaign to Defend Aid and Development’, a sector-wide aid</b> campaign involving 25 of the largest international NGOs and accounting for £5.6billions (7%) of total UK charity spending annually. This approach has now been adopted across the sector, leading to <b>collective, joined up, and positive campaigns as the norm</b>.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The Aid Attitudes Tracker (AAT) has been a vital source of research-based evidence about changing public attitudes toward support for government aid and charitable giving to international development NGOs. Initially funded by the Gates Foundation, the AAT, now the Development Engagement Lab (DEL), is a collaborative project between the University of Birmingham (UoB), University College London, and the University of Texas at Dallas. The AAT collects large-N, panel, and experimental survey data across the UK, France, Germany, and the US, in order to track changing public attitudes to overseas aid.</p> <p>Since joining UoB in 2017, Professor David Hudson, an expert in the politics of development, has led the UoB strand of the AAT project. He has designed survey questionnaires and experiments, and run segmentation analysis, as well as writing up and presenting the findings in a series of academic publications. The AAT’s segmentation is unique in that it tracks 18 behaviours or actions related to supporting overseas aid; for example, donating money, contacting their MP, or volunteering.</p> <p>The AAT has over 30 official partner organisations across the UK, US, France, and Germany (e.g., ONE, Save the Children, Water Aid, Oxfam, Welthungerhilfe, Coordination SUD, Agence Française de Développement, and DFID), with impact reaching across the entire UK development sector, from small NGOs, to large NGOs, to the government (DFID). The project uses specialised country consultants to work in a hands-on way with partner organisations to increase the take-up and application of AAT insights into communications, advocacy, and fundraising campaigns. The research has developed in tandem with the AAT’s impact: in addition to the survey questionnaire’s core tracking questions, 25 questions were set aside at each wave for partner input, which has</p>		

enabled the systematic co-production of research to reflect a combination of best academic practice and partner needs.

Three key **research findings** underpin the AAT's impact:

**F1.** Data from the AAT have identified 5 sub-groups of the public with respect to how they engage with international development and global poverty: Totally Disengaged (32% of British public), Marginally Engaged (35%), Informationally Engaged (17%), Behaviourally Engaged (13%), and Fully Engaged (3%). The AAT has revealed — contrary to what many in the sector had assumed — that the **third of the public who are 'marginally engaged' can and do change their minds**. The findings show that an individual's engagement *does* change over time. Although engagement levels can be 'sticky' (i.e., respondents typically stay within the same segment over time) and engagement isn't a linear 'journey', people are not immovable and can be 'won over' or 'lost'. **Moreover, the AAT has revealed which factors make them more engaged: a sense of duty and a belief that they can make a difference** [R1].

**F2. Pity-based fundraising appeals undermine cosmopolitan sentiments.** NGOs tend to use 'pity-based' fundraising appeals; for example, images of starving children shown as 'grateful receivers', without context or agency [R2]. The AAT team has shown that such pity-based appeals (1) are no more likely to get people to donate money compared to a more positive or empathy-based appeal; (2) are more likely to undermine people's sense of being able to make a difference to global poverty; and (3) are mediated or translated into behaviour by an individual's emotional response. When people feel increased hope, they are more likely to donate and feel a sense of cosmopolitanism, but pity-based appeals undermine people's hopefulness and belief that they can make a difference [R3].

**F3. NGOs should not use celebrities to endorse development campaigns, but rather should use volunteers or frontline workers.** The AAT team found that effective aid messengers (i.e., advocates or spokespeople) are those that are perceived as both warm *and* competent — one without the other does not work. With respect to donations, members of the public are more likely to respond to messengers that are perceived as relatable. When asked to sign a petition, being seen to care for others is important. AAT data show that frontline workers and volunteers are the most effective categories of messenger for donations and signing petitions, whereas celebrities, business people, and philanthropists have a negative impact [R4].

### 3. References to the research

**R1.** Hudson, Jennifer, **Hudson, David**, Morini, Paolo, Clarke, Harold, & Stewart, Marianne C. (2020) 'Not one, but many "publics": public engagement with global development in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States', *Development in Practice*, 30(6): 795–808. DOI: 10.1080/09614524.2020.1801594

**R2. Beswick, Danielle, Dasandi, Niheer, Hudson, David, & vanHeerde-Hudson, Jennifer** (2018). 'International Development NGOs, Fundraising Appeals, and Public Attitudes of UK-Africa Relations'. In Danielle Beswick, Jonathan Fisher, Graham Harrison, & Stephen Hurt (eds), *Britain and Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Between Ambition and Pragmatism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

**R3. Hudson, David, vanHeerde-Hudson, Jennifer, Dasandi, Niheer, & Gaines, Susan** (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. DOI: 10.1111/ssqu.12587

**R4.** Hudson, Jennifer, **Hudson, David**, Morini, Paolo (2020) 'Who can communicate international development? Understanding effective messengers', London: Development Engagement Lab. Available on [Development Engagement Lab website](#).

#### 4. Details of the impact

The Aid Attitudes Tracker (AAT) has improved how aid is viewed in the UK and made an influential contribution to international aid campaigns across a number of civil society organisations. This has manifested through changing the practices of several NGOs, policymakers, and charitable organisations engaged in international aid work.

##### 1. Transforming how policy makers and NGOs engage with, and present aid campaigns to, the public

**Policy makers have changed the way that they communicate with the public to present international aid** as a result of AAT data. Specifically, the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) have changed how they track and monitor their public perception KPIs [F1–F3; C1]. An integral element of DFID’s mission is to garner support for international aid through explaining aid impact to the general public and defending the Government commitment to spending 0.7% of GNI on development aid. AAT has provided more effective ways to do this, moving from a victim narrative to a narratives that tell “positive stories of change” [C2]. This enables stronger support for international aid, including from the marginally engaged, a previously ignored segment of the population [F1]. **AAT has enabled policy makers and key stakeholders in the development sector to improve public support for development and aid**, which is attested to by an FCDO (formerly DFID) Deputy Director, who states “AAT/DEL evidence is embedded in the communications approach of the department” and “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” [C3]. As consequence **the public’s understanding of how aid works has changed**, particularly for the marginally engaged, whose engagement with aid campaigns was improved by a concerted communications effort [F1; C4]. For example, DFID used AAT evidence to target the marginally engaged in their ‘Aid Works’ campaign, which was championed by the Secretary of State for International Development and led to a **15% increase in people’s understanding of how aid works** over the campaign period, compared to no change in the control region.

**A sector-wide aid campaign involving 25 of the largest international NGOs**, The Campaign to Defend Aid and Development, which accounts for £5.6billions (7%) of total UK charity spending annually, has been shaped by AAT data. This has influenced a move from campaigns which focus on the needs of overseas beneficiaries to campaigns which start from the perspective of citizens in the UK and makes the case in the context of their own lives [F2]. The aim of the campaign is to change the view of marginally engaged populations, such that they see aid as positive and right for the UK to provide and thus support it, and has been successful in that it “has influenced change in campaign design throughout the sector and transformed the way that organisations make the case for aid” [C5a]. For example, CARE International removed their pity-based advertising in response to the campaign’s innovations and learnings, and World Vision are now using radio advertising to target the marginally engaged based on the campaign’s appeal for NGOs to “grow the market” [F1, F2, C5a]. That the campaign is underpinned by AAT data is attested to by the campaign’s Director, who stated that “the depth of the collaboration that UK NGOs have achieved [...] could not have been possible without AAT” [C5a]. The campaign was initiated in 2017, with AAT findings [F3] underpinning its theory of change [C5b] and enabling organisations to work in a coordinated and evidence-based way. The campaign’s target audience was defined by an AAT segment [C1], collectively targeting marginally engaged members of the public [F1].

Other AAT partners have **taken a more proactive and joined-up approach to engage the public in aid campaigns** as a result of AAT’s segmentation and profiling [F1–F3]. Whereas previously organisations’ insights and campaign teams worked in silos, key organisations including the Disasters Emergency Committee, DFID, UNICEF, Comic Relief, and the Gates Foundation are now using AAT segmentation and profiling to align communications strategies and to define their measures of success and KPIs [F1; C3]. This particularly has benefitted smaller NGOs, for whom there was “nothing comparable to access in terms of data, evidence and rigour”,

and who “would not have the resources to carry out audience segmentation or opinion polling themselves” [C1].

## 2. Improving NGO partners’ aid campaigns

**Practices have changed within non-governmental organisations** as a result of AAT research findings. AAT has **improved the effectiveness of the messages NGOs include in their public-facing campaigns** by influencing the types of people they use as messengers [F3], making them “more rigorous [...] than they otherwise would have been” [C1]. Multiple international development NGOs, including Plan International, WaterAid, CARE International, and Save the Children UK, have **fundamentally changed the design and content of their appeals as a result of engagement with AAT evidence** [F2], with an evaluation report acknowledging that “in some cases the analysis would not have taken place without the building blocks from AAT” [C1]. **NGOs are now moving away from pity-based campaign appeals and images towards sharing more positive stories** [C1, C2], with AAT evidence having moved this “from being a hypothesis to a business consideration” (Executive Director of Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns, Save the Children UK [C1]). This influence, developed through the AAT team’s 6-monthly partner meetings that were attended by representatives from DFID/FCDO and over 20 development NGOs, is best demonstrated in the following areas:

- a. Organisations are now more likely to use volunteers and frontline workers to communicate their messages instead of celebrities and aid recipients, which has **led to increased public interaction with appeals**. DFID/FCDO in particular have adopted this as best practice, stating that “FCDO now uses different messengers [...] to deliver communications or endorse campaigns, improving the effectiveness of the messages they’re trying to get across. DFID [...] moved to using with volunteers and frontline workers” [C3]. This has been shown to **improve the effectiveness of the work of NGOs**: Facebook testing showed that a campaign ad featuring relatable local people as messengers [F3] was more effective in making people take action towards the issue than using existing DFID content [C5b].
- b. AAT has **shaped campaigning organisations’ approaches to using messengers**. Purpose ran 10 large campaigns in Germany, France, and the UK directly using AAT’s evidence base, acknowledging that “AAT research contributed towards the definition of our campaign hypotheses” [C6a]. Some of their most prioritised insights for campaigns, including relatable/knowledgeable messengers [F3] and speaking in positive terms and emphasising the solution [F2] were “shaped by AAT insights” [C6b]. One key example of this was their ‘Project Period’ campaign which reached over 2 million people, of which many “went on to take higher barrier actions, raising funds or awareness of Global period poverty to their own networks” [C6c]. The campaign also surpassed its target of \$30,000, which was the amount needed to start a hub for sanitary pads production in rural Kenya. Purpose’s Strategy Manager stated that “the campaign activated a wide range of audiences that were not necessarily behaviourally engaged with global development but might develop affinity based on menstruation”, demonstrating that employing period poverty activists in their communications led to greater engagement from more diverse networks than they would have otherwise had [C6a].
- c. WaterAid have **reinvented their campaigns**, moving away from the traditional pity-based appeals to emphasise different emotions and give their audience a lot more hope [F2], as well as changing their focus to “*draw people closer*, bringing faraway people who lacked clean water and decent toilets as close to our supporters as their own friends and family” [F3; C7]. WaterAid’s Head of Performance and Insight has reported **that AAT/DEL are “catalys[ing] real change in the wider sector’s approach to public communication”** and that this is having a “hugely positive effect on public perceptions of aid and development” [C7]. Their new communications direction, which was reported to be testament to AAT/DEL insight [C7], was implemented through their award-winning ‘Untapped’ campaign, which showed many markers of success, including increased awareness of WaterAid by 2% and consideration of the NGO by 2.6% over the course of the campaign. This campaign also performed well in fundraising terms, significantly exceeding its £4million target and ensuring a full DfID Aid Match was secured.

Additionally, AAT insights have **influenced the funding guidance for Aid Match and AAT findings have assisted NGOs in their successful applications**. Aid Match, a scheme whereby donations of up to £3million are match-funded by DFID, has enabled 61 organisations across the UK to run projects that have helped approximately 23.4 million people across 37 countries. AAT findings around pity-based appeals and messengers [F2, F3] are featured prominently in the communications and appeal guidance. For example, for Aid Match campaigns in 2020, it stated that “strong messaging [...] avoids making people feel guilty, blamed, helpless or pitying” [F2; C8, p.21]. Multiple organisations found that their knowledge of **AAT contributed to the success of their applications**, as the alignment of Aid Match guidance with AAT findings meant that groups were able translate key concepts around audience and campaigning to the requirements of the funding [C1].

AAT’s segmentation [F1] has also resulted in **organisations changing their approach to monitoring and evaluation**, with UNICEF’s Soccer Aid being a high-profile example of this. As a result of Aid Match and the funding conditions influenced by AAT, **UNICEF have changed their messages around Soccer Aid** to be more hopeful and joyful rather than pity-based, with their Strategic Communications Lead stating that AAT “has helped us develop our Soccer Aid for Unicef campaign over the past three years and **has played a part in increas[ing] income by £2.6 million.**” [C1, C2]. By increasing their understanding of their audience, in that many who engage in the event are marginally engaged [F1], the organisation were better able to target their adverts to ensure those audiences were made aware of donations being doubled [C1, C2]. UNICEF reported that SoccerAid 2020 was their most successful campaign yet [C2], raising £9.3million in 2020 compared to £6.7million in 2018 (before engaging with AAT evidence), which they attribute in part to a change of messaging [F2; C2]. This change in tone has also **led to a change in donor behaviour**, with UNICEF reporting that “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” [C2].

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1.** Savani (2018) [AAT Impact Report Summary: Findings and excerpts from AAT stakeholder interviews](#) [Available as PDF]
- C2.** Testimony from UNICEF’s SoccerAid Strategic Communications Lead [Available as PDF]
- C3.** Testimony from FCDO’s Deputy Director, Corporate and Internal Communications [Available as PDF]
- C4.** [‘#AidWorks’ West Midlands Pilot Evaluation](#)
- C5.** Evidence of influence on Campaign to Defend Aid and Development:
  - a.** Testimony from Campaign Director (26<sup>th</sup> November 2020) [Available as PDF]
  - b.** Cross Sector Campaign for Aid and Development Theory of Change for 2019 [Available as PDF]
- C6.** Evidence of influence on Purpose’s campaigns:
  - a.** Testimony from Purpose’s Associate Strategy Director (11<sup>th</sup> December 2020) [Available as PDF]
  - b.** Global Development Campaigns Lab presentation [Available as PDF]
  - c.** Purpose [Project Period case study](#) [Available as PDF]
- C7.** Testimony from Water Aid’s Head of Performance and Insight [Available as PDF]
- C8.** Aid Match II Round 5 [Communications and appeal application rule book](#) [Available as PDF]