Mass Media and Public Support for Development Cooperation

Results from a study through round table discussions, literature review and an online panel survey in Belgium

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Commissioned by Research Platform PULSE, Directorate-General of Development, Belgian Federal Government

October 2012
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**Executive summary**

As part of the research programme PULSE (VLIR/DGD) on public support for development cooperation, this report focuses on the role of the mass media through two research questions: (1) how should the sector of development aid and global solidarity get its messages in the media? And (2) to what extent does a mediated message affects the attitude and the behaviour of the public? This study, carried out by HIVA, consisted of literature review, round table discussion, interviews with experts and a representative online survey with the public.

Conceptually, mass media are considered a source of perception, just like direct experience and what is told by other people. We postulated that the effect of mediated messages correlates to the sphere of interest of the receiver, ranging from strong correlation in the case of self-interest, less strong in the case of group interest and weak in the case of global interest. Moreover, mass media have become powerful institutions which are not necessarily neutral in reflecting the social reality. This makes for our hypothesis that themes related to global solidarity and development aid are at the least likely end of messages reaching the public in an effective way, this is affecting their attitude and behaviour. However, empirical research either confirming or rejecting this hypothesis is thinly spread.

Two round table discussions and additional interviews with media experts concentrated on the question how development educators and communicators should get their message in the media. One advice was that the way mass media work should be well understood, including the different potentials of the various formats (news, news show, human interest, documentary, entertainment). The prime time news, though reaching a large audience, is hard to get in to if a message is not ‘news’ in the sense of recent and out of the ordinary, and the effect may be grossly overrated due to the many news items competing for attention. Other formats could therefore be more effective. A second advice for development communicators is that the quality of the message can make a difference. This means it should have a concrete storyline, a local interest, a positive undertone and an action perspective.

The survey we carried out with a representative online panel of 600 Flemish adults showed that mediated messages on development issues do have an effect, however minimal. The amplitude of the effect depended among other factors on the media source, this is the chosen format and the broadcast time. In the case of a news item, the effect in terms of outreach and adjusted attitude was marginal, compared to the case of an item embedded in an after-news entertainment programme. Another case, the Music For Life-radio, showed that the creation of a massive, if temporary hype combined with the simplicity and concreteness of the message can work well. However, another study carried out in the Netherlands recently made clear that embedding ‘serious messages’ in entertainment formats has its limits when it comes to affecting attitude and behaviour.
The idea for this research component was not just to draw a state of the art, but also to induce methodology to better monitor and assess the use of mass media, possibly in combination with social media and physical forums in the future. Quick scan surveys of the type we carried out, in combination with after-programme audience focus group discussions may be highly instructive for the choice and design of messaging through the mass media, and therefore be an ahead-laying task for development communicators and researchers.
Introduction

This report gives an account of the research we carried out about the role played by the mass media - TV, radio, written press - in either creating, sustaining or possibly undermining public support for development aid. This research constitutes one of the components of the Pulse programme of which HIVA is the main promoter (2009-2013, commissioned by VLIR/DGD).

In a first section, we picture in broad terms what the mass media theory learns us about the creation of perception and the conditions to influence the public through mass media. Interviews with key experts at an early stage made clear that researching the role of the mass media for lifting public support for development aid would break into two basic research questions.

One question, which is dealt with in section 2, is how messages related to development aid - in the sense of campaigns, calls for help or simply any information deemed relevant - would be brought into and picked up by the media. In order to answer that question, we organised two round tables with insiders of both the media and the development aid sector, went through relevant literature and took some additional interviews.

Another question, to which section 3 is dedicated, is how mediated messages - campaign publicity, news facts, documentaries - would be seen, heard or read by the public, this is by how many, and in which quality: simply seen and understood, or did it affected their attitude and possibly their behaviour? We browsed through some recent surveys and eventually launched our own survey through a representative online panel.

A 4th section rounds up the main conclusions.

This mass media chapter is by no means closed. One of the aims of Pulse is to give directions about robust and acceptable methodology to tackle the issues researched here even more systematically in the proximate future. We hope this report made a contribution to that.

We are very acknowledgeable to the people who had a significant input in this work. Peter Verlinden (VRT and University of Leuven) was our reference expert and a source of inspiration throughout this research. Keith Roe and Baldwin Van Gorp (both of Department of Communication Studies, University of Leuven) introduced us in the scientific understanding of mass media. We had interviews and two round table discussions with Marc Dupain (VTM-VMM), Diane Waumans (VRT Radio), Koen Vandenbroek (Ethicom), Corine Van Kelecom (11.11.11), Reinout Van Vaerenberg, Martine Warck and Thomas Reyners (DGD), Bart Beirlandt and Annelien De Greef (De Standaard), Guy Fransen (Het Nieuwsblad), Pierre Doumont (Canal C, Namur), Dominique Thibaut (Yelem Production House), Marie-France Cros (La Libre Belgique), Gerald Papy (VIF/L’Expres) and Spencer Henson and Nick Perkins (IDS, Sussex UK). Our colleague Bénédicte Fonteneau facilitated the second round table discussion which was in French.
1. Mass media and the perception of reality

1.1 Sources of perception

More than half a century ago, C. Wright Mills wrote in *The Power Elite*: “The individual does not trust his own experience, until it is confirmed by others or the media” (Wright Mills, 1956, p. 312). This quote made clear that in the modern era, there are three sources for experience based opinion making, and mass media is one of them. Over the years, communication specialists transformed this basic idea in what was to become the *media dependence theory*: perception stems from (a) direct experience, (b) social contacts or (c) the media. If an issue is such that neither a or b could be a source for perception, then c, the media may play a strategic role in generating knowledge and attitudes about this issue. In the other case, media will still be important in confirming or challenging the picture that individuals have drown through their own or others’ experiences (Shoemaker & Reese, 2005).

Opposed to this view on media as an additional source for perception is the *theory of reality inversion*. The live footage of the attack on the WTC towers by Muslim terrorists in 2001 showed how powerful a media experience can be. As it happened, people’s own experience was put under pressure not to believe that America and the Western world were under an imminent threat which would only be taken away if the enemy was physically annihilated. There was no direct experience at hands to contradict this.

Traditionally the influence of mass media has been studied predominantly from the supply side (the sender, i.e. the content of medium itself). Communication scientists tend to distinguish three theories to describe the influence of mass media (e.g. O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2009). The *limited-effects theory*, dating from the 1950s thought the influence of media is negligible, because people base themselves on what they already believe in choosing which media to interact with. The *class-dominant theory* states that the media reflects and projects the view of a minority elite, which controls it. Combining those two theories, a third, so-called *culturalist theory* was developed in the 1980s and 1990s, claiming that people interact with the media to create their own meanings out of the images and messages they receive.

This categorisation indicates that the concern of scientists has been whether and to what extent the media either represent or distort the social reality. The shift of paradigms over the years shows that the question pertaining the *neutrality issue* was to a large extent whether the public is either sovereign in its free will to receive and understand messages or is rather manipulated by the senders of these messages. While this manipulation is no longer put in terms of class struggle in the Marxist sense, the idea of a free and unbiased reception of neutral messages has since long been abandoned.

Deformation and re-interpretation of facts and ‘truth’ comes in many forms. Studying the populist radio-maker Rush Limbaugh, researchers have put forward
the manipulative occurrence of the *echo chamber effect*: one purveyor of information will make a claim, which many like-minded people then repeat, overhear and repeat again, often in a distorted form, until most people assume that the most extreme variation of the story is true (Jamieson & Cappella, 2004). Psychologists focusing on the receiver, acknowledged the *third-person effect*: people tend to perceive that mass communicated messages have a greater influence on others than on themselves (Davison, 1983). Yet another effect is the *mean world syndrome*: reported cases of violence or negatively-related content of mass media make viewers believe that the world is more dangerous and negative than it actually is (Gerbner et al., 2002).

Some reputed cases have shown deformation of news facts spread through so-called independent media can be heavily intended. A relentless campaign through 2002 and 2003 by the Bush administration claiming the Saddam Hussein regime possessed weapons of mass destruction shaped the public opinion to support the war on terrorism to be turned into an all-out war on Iraq.

By studying the relation between mass media and items of general interest, such as public health, Viswanath & others (1999) identified three main effects or functions of mass media:

- **the knowledge gap**: whether audiences can or cannot be properly informed about matters which should concern them depends on the extent the content is appealing, the degree of accessibility of information channels, and the amount of social conflict and diversity there is in a community;

- **agenda setting**: when risks are highlighted in the media, the extent of agenda setting is likely to be based on the degree to which a public sense of outrage and threat is provoked. Groups, institutions and advocates compete to identify problems, to move them onto the public agenda, and to define the issues symbolically. To that end, framing can be invaluably useful to a mass media organisation. It involves taking a leadership role in the organisation of public discourse about an issue. In the case of development cooperation, the frame could be the budget element. (How much is spend? Should development cooperation been exempted from public spending cuts?) Or it could be the effectiveness debate, or the tension between accountability and generosity, etc.;

- **cultivation of perceptions**: the extent to which media exposure shapes audience perception over time. For example, having prolonged exposure to TV or movie violence may affect viewers to the extent where they actively think community violence is a problem, or alternatively find it justifiable.

Acknowledging these general tendencies of mass media functions and influences, does not easily translate in practical guidelines about how to get in the media, and to predict the effect the media will have on their audience. This is because there may be no such thing as a one-to-one causal link between input (media) and effect (attitude and behaviour of the public). On the other hand, people’s opinion on
subjects which are not featuring prominently in their sphere of direct experiences or interest, may depend on what is reported to them by others or by the media, so it is highly plausible there may be an effect of some sorts.

Given this diffuse cause-effect link, our research questions (factors on coverage of issues by the media, and influence of mediated messages on people’s opinion, attitude, behaviour) should be unpacked into more concrete questions which then will be specified for issues like charity, altruism, global solidarity and development aid.

1.2 Media, message, public: deconstruction and determinants

In order to unpack our research questions, we need to deconstruct the concept of mass media, as well as the principal media components, such as embedding of ‘messages’ within the media (through programmes), the type of message, the sphere of interest of the message, the target audience, and - as an interacting variable - the value environment which may either facilitate or inhibit the message to get through to different types of audiences.

Mass media we consider in this research are the TV, the radio, the newspapers and magazines. TV has been recognised to be the most important, both in terms of outreach and in terms of effect. The culture of visual images is widely used and widely accepted in nearly all types of society in the modern era. Radio broadcasting and newspapers, though allowing for more detailed messages are more selective and have a less profound effect on the public at large. They are, however, powerful mass media in their own right and can have a significant influence on public opinion. While gradually gaining more importance in terms of communication in the public sphere, the internet and the social media are not considered mass media as they do not in principle spread uniform messages to homogenous audiences. Of course, many people use the internet as a radio or TV-receiver, or a digital newspaper, making use of the option to watch, listen or read at times more convenient to them. In that sense, the internet provides the technical facility for mass media and can be considered as such.

The embedding of messages within the media - in this case the TV - aims for a proper categorisation of TV-programmes and what they are meant for. A first category is the *news and news-explaining programmes* (news shows). As for the news, time and timing is extremely important and items are usually short and chosen on their ‘news value’ and estimated interest of the public rather than their societal or global importance. News shows, often with invited guests and experts allow for a more in-depth interpretation of facts recently revealed. A second category is the *human interest programmes*, ranging from documentaries, journalist investigations, consumer programmes, etc. Human interest holds an educational element. People watching it want to be informed about something happening somewhere, although it does not need to have a news (‘just happened’) element. The third category gathers all that is *entertainment*: shows, quizzes, sports, cooking, fashion, roy-
ality, games, music, soap series, movies etc. People watching these want in principle to be amused or entertained, and not to taught something.

Analysing TV over the last decades, three tendencies come forward that are relevant to those wanting to get ‘difficult messages’ through. (a) TV - by all its sponsoring - is essentially big business, following the rule of the audience figures rather than programmers concepts; (b) there’s a growing proliferation and specialisation of TV-channels; (c) in search of more viewers and format innovation, types of programmes tend to be more blurred and less separated from each other: a breakfast show often includes a regular news update, some documentary, and some entertainment. Human interest items are often brought in an entertainment format (‘infotainment’) in order to present ‘difficult messages’ to parts of the public which would normally not automatically want to watch them. While the message may in that case reach a larger audience, the question is whether it sticks.

This brings us to the message itself, which does not have to be an explicit message in the moral sense, but drawing the attention to aspects of life and society wherein the explicit message may find its explanation. With regard to public support for global solidarity or development cooperation, we could analytically make a distinction between:

- an explicit message, usually framed within a campaign advertisement, with a texting ending in a phrase like ‘you can help these people by donating money on bank account xxx’;
- an implicit message, usually framed in a documentary, or a human interest programme, or a news item, showing the problematic situation of certain population groups in the developing world, or efforts by local people, or NGOs, aid workers or other philanthropists to overcome those problems;
- a second-order message, aimed to raise sympathy or interest in the developing world: documentaries showing for example items from daily life in a country in the South, like local sports heroes, radio making, cinema, food and cooking, wildlife protection etc. A rather positive image of the South is shown, possibly with the idea to counteract that the only news coming from the South involves misery, natural disasters, war or atrocities.

These types of messages come with a specific sphere of interest, which may be a decisive factor for the effect the message has. One could have messages linked to:

- sphere of self-interest: anything linked to health (food habits, hygiene, smoking, etc.), security and living comfort (‘how to isolate your home’, etc.);
- sphere of group interest: for example, driving behaviour, waste disposal, etc. Anything that applies to a decent organisation of life in a identifiable group (municipality or country);
- sphere of global human interest: reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, fair trade, development cooperation, respect for human rights, peaceful negotiations as a way of solving conflicts, etc. Issues to which your behaviour or your
governments behaviour can matter, but of which the effects are transcending borders between countries or continents.

When broadcasting messages with the purpose of raising effects, it is important to identify the target group. It can be the population at large, or those ‘already convinced’, or ‘likely to be convinced’, or young people, or other groups according to morphological characteristics. Message-senders should carefully assess the interests and the point of view of the intended receivers in order to see how a message should be shaped and presented. Without doing injustice to the noble art of marketing, we dare to state that there is no standardised way of sending out a complicated message. An inductive approach, using focus groups who assess the power and the comprehensibility of the message, is highly recommendable.

It is equally important to study and to test facilitating or inhibiting factors. For example when spectators of a short campaign documentary are asked to donate or to volunteer, the probability of the effect is higher when the required behaviour comes at a low cost (e.g. only a text message), or else when it is rewarding in another way, for example by the chance to meet other people through a social event. Another facilitator - to some extent - is the perception that the problem presented (e.g. rampant malaria) could be responded to by a quick and simple solution (e.g. sending mosquito nets). Inhibiting factors include a negative mindset (see above: ‘mean world syndrome’, nobody to be trusted), an egocentric value disposition (hedonism and achievement – in contrast to universalism or benevolence) and the absence of social approval or even social crosschecking. The latter leads to what is known in micro-economics as the free-rider syndrome (‘it is good that we support the cause, but nobody will know when I’m opting out’) and the prisoners dilemma (‘I will only commit myself if I know the other ones also do, but since I’m not informed about this, I better don’t commit myself’).

1.3 Global solidarity, development aid and altruistic themes in the media: an uneasy position

Issues related to global solidarity and development aid are usually not stirring up strong emotions. Only recently, they have become the subject of media research, as archetypical media studies are more interested in subjects holding some controversy, such as for example the impact of violence on TV or the use of erotic images in publicity.

Indeed, issues like development aid and global solidarity appear to be at a considerable geographical and mental distance from our daily worries and interests. And even though more people than ever have had - through travel or contacts - direct experiences with the less privileged parts of the world, the mass media may still be the primary source for creating a perception about them.

Following our ‘deconstruction’ of the media components in paragraph 1.2, we now aim to reconstruct these components schematically to position issues
according to their potential strength on public opinion. To this end, we choose to combine two parameters, this is the source of experience and the sphere of interest in an ‘opinion strength matrix’. The assumption is that urge for individuals to make an opinion is higher when stemming from direct experience than from the media, and also higher when touching self-interest than group-interest or global interest.

**Chart 1**  
Source of experience and sphere of interest of issues as influences on the strength of opinions: examples (hypothetical)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion/perception urging parameters</th>
<th>Direct experience (or through peer group)</th>
<th>Mediatised experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevant for self-interest</td>
<td>Type 1 issues: e.g. traffic jams, inflation</td>
<td>Type 2 issues: e.g. crime rate in suburbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant for group interest</td>
<td>Type 3 issues: e.g. illegal waste disposal</td>
<td>Type 4 issues: e.g. immigration flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant for global interest</td>
<td>Type 5 issues: e.g. climate distortions</td>
<td>Type 6 issues: e.g. development aid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Strong opinion.
- Weak opinion.

If we consider these 6 quadrants, the idea is that more people will have strong opinions about quadrant 1 issues than about quadrant 3 or 4 issues, and even less people will have strong opinions about quadrant 6 issues. The trend arrow goes from top left (strong opinion) to bottom right (weak opinion).

With this matrix, we want to sharpen the hypothesis that development aid, and therefore development education are at the least favourable end when it comes to influencing people. The challenge for development educators in this context is how to motivate people to have an opinion (and if at all possible a sympathetic one) about an issue that is only experienced through the media, and clearly in the outer sphere of interests. What message should be given? How should it be presented? Will it be heard and understood by the public, and by how many of them? And first of all, how do you get it in the media? To that last question, our next section is dedicated.
2. Getting the message in the media

In theory, five determinants are co-deciding which messages will make up the content of the news in the media: the social reality, the media workers, the media routine, the societal forces and the dominant ideology (Shoemaker & Reese, 1995). Media people tend to say that they look at what happens in society, select what has ‘news value’ and let themselves lead by what they think the public wants to see, hear or read. This selection of news value through anticipated demand makes that proximity, recognisability, as well as the controversial or spectacular character of the items come forward as important factors.

In practice, the media, especially the TV-stations have been growing since the mid-20th century to become massive institutions. As it usually goes with growing institutions, they create their own rules, aim to inflate their relevance, expand their influence, and are staffed by ambitious people.

For a topic like development aid, not in the sphere of self-interest and not in the entertainment business, it is ever again an uphill battle to get into TV-programming, certainly when programming is more than ever before a nearly linear function of viewers density. Therefore, aid workers and journalists with an interest in development aid are advised to follow the ‘rules’ of the media if they like to have their message framed.

Out of our two round table discussions with media and development education experts came a number of issues with regard to our fore laying question ‘how to draw the attention of the media on development aid’, and also advice about how to manoeuvre.1 We summarise them in five topics: the format, the anticipated public, the shape of the message, the networking and the credibility of the issue.

2.1 The rules of the format

Focusing on TV, there is a clear distinction between news, news shows (explaining news topics by expert interviews), human interest, documentaries and the wide range of entertainment programmes. Each of these programme types has a proper format, which makes it identifiable for the viewers, but which also dictates which subjects can make it to the programme, how these subjects should be presented (content, tone, context, …). The evening news, for instance, does not have a format in which development aid would fit easily. While the news has a large outreach, it is composed of very short items, not allowing time for a broad story or a nuanced

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1 The round table discussions took place 6th of April 2011 (Leuven - Dutch speaking group) and 19th of March 2012 (Brussels - French speaking group). The lead questions are included in Annex 1 of this report.
vision. Moreover, it has to be **news**: something which very recently happened, and which diverts from the ordinary. **Something being ‘news’ does not mean it is per definition important, and something important happening by no means makes it ‘news’**. This means that in the aid sector, emergency aid (or the call for it) will stand a much higher chance to get into the news than structural aid or North-South economic relations. When however development aid would happen to become the subject of a political dispute, it may get the headlines as part of the political chapter of the news. Aid would also get media attention when some scandal - in the sense of funders or tax payers money been diverted - would be revealed or merely suggested: it then clearly becomes part of the self-interest and domestic sphere, hence news.

Therefore, getting a message in the media involves the reflection: which message for whom? Documentaries allow for nuance and analysis, but will reach only a small public, possibly those already convinced of the usefulness of development aid. This does not mean that reaching ‘those already convinced’ would be useless, as an idea or a conviction is never fully achieved, may fade away and therefore needs regular refreshment. Still, the more popular TV-stations, radio or press can serve a public that is different from the typical globally interested intellectuals, but then the message should be made digestible, and preferably feature a local component.

There is a variety of formats to be used. Opinion pages and columns are popular tools, certainly when they inflict a polemic. On TV, discussion forums attract more viewers than the monologue interview, even if an interview allows for better nuance and exposition. Each format requires proper and adequate talents, skills and training to turn it into an attractive programme or article.

### 2.2 What the viewer wants

A study carried out for the Electronic News Archive ENA showed that during 2003-2010, the proportion of foreign news in prime time TV-news was declining from 32% to 27% (Flemish public channel) and from 26% to 16% (Flemish commercial channel). Also, the commercial channel tends more and more to domesticate the foreign news items, this is linking it to something or someone ‘at home’ (De Smedt, Hooghe & Walgrave, 2011). The authors came to this (and other) conclusions after scanning 5,223 news programmes and 108,454 news items.

Strangely enough, TV-channels seem to know what the viewer wants, without putting much effort in researching it. Viewer density is often the sole parameter used as a monitoring tool, without a more systematic related feedback on the programme content, for example through viewer panels. While TV-stations, under pressure from advertisers and sponsors, may still assume that only the local news gets viewers attention, the early 21st century has been marked by a quickly rising globalist interest by ordinary citizens, through travelling, internet contacts, sports and popular music, and even a growing number of private aid projects.
Studies about public support for development aid in general (Pollet, 2012) reveal that the public tends to become very critical to one-time appeals for charity or funding. Many people will also want to know what happened afterwards with the money donated. A programme in the style of ‘one year later’ will be appreciated, even if intervention results are only so-so, for example in the case of the Haiti emergency action. Failing to cover this leaves the door wide open for journalists looking for a scandal. Moreover, it should be taken into account that an increasing part of the public has its roots in other continents. They may not only have a particular interest in what happens in their country of origin, they are also sensitive to the stereotypes used to explain the events in these areas. In other domains, the image of the ‘poor South’ tends to get steadily adjusted, for example the Indian entrepreneur Mittal gradually taking over the European steel industry, Angola offering Portugal an emergency loan to overcome the financial crisis etc. These developments will constitute an additional and ever more significant challenge to the media coverage of the South.

Due to the media not researching systematically their viewers’ interest, they may miss out on opportunities in relation to global issues. Too many media channels opt for the hypothetical modal viewer, while recent research panels2 learn us that the viewers market, and therefore the fields of interest, are much more diversified than in the past.

2.3 The packing of the message

While the format may be set and the expectations of the public unknown, the message is something one has clearly in hands. We can distinguish five elements which should feature in any message directed to the public in order to convince them, directly or indirectly, that an attitude towards global solidarity makes sense:

– **arc of suspense**: in order to raise an interest, one should always consider the message as a story, with what is known in scenario-writing as a proper ‘arc of suspense’. A story has a beginning, a middle part and an end. The beginning would in this case mean that a problem is exposed, for example by introducing a ‘protagonist’ struggling to pay his school fee, or to get access to a hospital, or to save his harvest from an epidemic. In the middle part the suspense will be build up further by showing the odds are against him, for example an unwilling government, privatisation of health care etc. In the end the suspense will be relieved, not through a catharsis but through a condition, for example this person may have a future still, if this or that would happen, … for which solidarity from abroad would be helpful;

– **local interest**: local in the sense of the locality of the public watching (or reading, listening). This may be under the form of an aid worker from ‘here’ with a per-

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2 For example, the annual Dutch barometer on international cooperation is carried out through questioning an online panel, stratified by their TV-preferences (Hento, 2011).
sonal story of his own, or a well known public figure (e.g. sportsman) adopting a project, or a local committee raising funds every year, or a school getting in contact with a school in Africa, etc.;

– concrete story: rather than the big story, media want a concrete story. The hardships of one person are easier to show than the suffering of a whole community or even a country. That makes that the figure of 300,000 people on the run in the Eastern Congo speaks less to the imagination than the story of one woman (told by herself) who had to survive months in the jungle before making it to a safe haven. For NGOs, it may therefore be more important to create a picture that invokes empathy than to give the public analytical insight in the problematic;

– positive elements: while starving and screaming children may still work as a way to catch the first-minute attention, the miserabilistic message does not work anymore as it did 30 years ago. The public wants to see something positive, signs of self-reliance, people taking their fate in their own hands. This gives more credibility to the idea that help from abroad will have a sustainable impact;

– action perspective: in array with the positive elements, the message should also give a perspective about what can be done (by the viewer, directly or indirectly). This can vary from donating money, to volunteering, to participating in an event, or giving support to a lobby campaign. Of course, the issue and the message should have a convincing appeal, but the practical conditions also play a role, for example donating by text message is easier than by bank transfer. Finally, an action perspective can simply be to guide a part of the public to a forum (on the internet or near their physical location) where a discussion can be continued.

It is important to realise that the effect of over-simplified messages, limited to a picture of misery directly followed by a bank account number, is virtually exhausted. People tend to be critical and suspicious about what happens with their money. Also, the competition for compassion and indignation is fairly steep. Therefore, simple campaign announcements should be backed-up by more in depth coverage. On top of that, mass media are the most effective if they are come simultaneously with direct or reported experience. This should preferably take the form of dialogue forums, as people are more receptive if they are given room themselves to express their views. Once opinions and/or frustrations are expressed, people know that they are taken serious, and will accept more easily that their views are either confirmed, adjusted or contradicted.

2.4 Approaching journalists to cover a message

It is commendable that NGOs and Aid Workers do sufficient networking in order to have easy access to journalists, editors and programme makers. Having the
contacts already established will allow to save precious time when it matters. In the case something comes up with ‘news value’, quick contacting is essential, for journalists want to have a scoop. News value would imply a sudden urgent matter in the South, or an event (e.g. ‘singing for the climate’), or even a scandal. A message meant to be ‘news’ should be recent, short and powerful, and not analytical. Also, observing the current production process of news, it should be more or less readymade for the correspondent to cover without needing much further research. Organising a press conference or press communiqué are methods of the past. NGOs should be at the lookout for events happening to which they can attach their message, for example the visit of a head of state or a cabinet minister to the country in which they have projects, or natural disasters, or political events in this country.

Some journalists have celebrity status. It pays to invest in them as they represent a degree of credibility in themselves. However, these people are much solicited, which means they will want messages which fit in their professional profile and of which they do not have to double-check the credibility. This means ties have to be build up over a long period.

As said, messages related to development aid are better suited for a long format, documentary style. In the past, NGOs often used to offer an embedded tour to journalists, hoping for a positive image in the eventual programme or article. These days however, NGOs and aid workers have no longer the image of idealistic ‘modern angels’. Journalists are very wary to accept whichever invitation to join a fact finding mission, whether it comes from an NGO or from a private sector company. If they do accept, it will in principle be at their own (or the media company’s) expense, and the article or programme they produce may be critical. Journalists are very keen to ascertain their independence.

2.5 The credibility of the message

Aid workers and NGOs should acknowledge that the odds are against them. Fifty years of development aid may have had successes and meant a lot to many people, but it has not eradicated the massive poverty and underdevelopment of large parts of Africa, Latin America and South Asia. While there may be many pro-and-con arguments and reasons to put things in perspective, the public is sceptical with regard to the effectiveness and transparency of development aid (Pollet, 2012). Moreover, development aid has over the years redefined itself, changing paradigm quite a few times: from a technical to a political approach, from state support to small projects, from infrastructure works to institution strengthening, from solidarist structural help to neo-conservative structural adjustment, etc.

In addressing the public, modesty and concreteness should be the tone, as in the past too many ‘big truths’ have shown not to be all that reliable. Modesty does not exclude nuanced visions, such as the economic interdependency between consumerism in the North and working conditions in the South, or the global conse-
quences of environmental pollution. While the complexity of the development issue is often felt as an obstacle, the public may be made to understand that indeed global development and poverty eradication are very complex issues, compared to solving societal problems within one country which can also be dauntingly complex, and that complexity and the uncertainty of the outcome should not be a reason to turn a blind eye to the relevance of global solidarity.

Finally, failures happen, whether at a large or at a small scale. The High Level Forum of Busan, for example, did not deliver up to the expectations. People from the aid sector should seriously reflect in public whether such High Cost meetings make much sense. More essentially, any development aid project is an intervention from strangers in a strange land, depending on the soundness of the project design and the quality of the implementation. It is done by people, and people make mistakes - the more so in a problematic and hazardous context, otherwise there would not have been the need for a project in the first place. Failures should be communicated, as they show that development is at all times a learning process. Being open and honest about failures, allows for being proud of successes.

The round table discussions with media experts showed there are no miracle receipts for ‘getting a scoop’, but they do provide quite a few useful reflections on how the media function, and what this means for messages related to development aid and global solidarity.

While development educators do not control the logic and the mechanics of media making, they do have options in hand to present their case, by establishing links with media people, choosing the right format, targeting their audience and packing their message in an attractive and credible way.

In an attempt to thinking out-of-the-box, one can see the 21st century citizen as challenged by the growing complexity of a (globalising) society, a multitude of issues urging him/her to take a position, the search for identity and the compulsion to be networked and involved. The fishing line to ‘catch’ this puzzled citizen may therefore be more likely to be effective through involvement than through adding yet more ‘mean world’ items to the daily news cannonade.
3. Development cooperation and global issues in the mass media: does it find its way to the public?

Whereas the former section of this report was focusing upon the question how development actors can or should approach the media to have their message broadcasted, this section deals with the question to which extent a mediated message reaches its public. What reaching a public exactly means, is open for interpretation. For those representing the interests of the media, it will be sufficient that a certain number of people have seen or heard or read it. For those involved in the development cooperation sector, the ambition will be probably higher. Their hope will be that people have understood the message, that it has affected their empathy, attitude and opinion on the issue, and eventually their behaviour.

This section has two paragraphs. A first paragraph dives into some recent literature about the effect of media attention to social and altruistic issues on people’s attitudes and behaviour.

In a second paragraph, we present a recent online survey we carried out ourselves on the influence of three recent TV- and radio broadcastings with a North-South or aid reference on the public’s attitude in the issue.

3.1 The influence of mass media: some recent research

This overview of research on the effectiveness of mass-mediated messages is by no means complete. The intention was to put a broad-angle picture in order to allow us to obtain a solid impression about what mass media can do, and to what extent this can be monitored.

In an overview article on altruism and media, J. Whittemore (2005) sees a threefold link: media as a tool of altruism, for example allowing relief organisations to collect donators’ money; media as a representation of altruism by showing examples of who is giving and where the donation is spend to; and media as a form of altruism in its own right, for example reporters risking their life to reveal miserable living conditions or human rights violations. The article is however inconclusive to whether and how the media significantly influence public opinion on altruistic issues. Nevertheless, the article highlights the role of the media in response to the 2004 Tsunami emergency, which helps us to refine our ‘sphere of interest’ suppositions. Contrary to the very mediocre response to the recent Somalia famine (July 2011), it seems plausible to assume that the Tsunami tended to get a better coverage and a much larger response in terms of donations for multiple reasons: the Tsunami was perceived as a 100% nature-born disaster, easy to visualise and taking place in a region we associate with tourism and gradual reduction of poverty. Opposed to that, the Somalia famine may be perceived as at least partly man-made (through the fundamentalist Al-Shahaab militias) in a country where poverty and backwardness has been increasing ever since its independence.
The International Broadcasting Trust (IBT) made a study on this coverage of the *East African famine* (Magee, 2011). The study, based upon interviews with media and NGO representatives, finds no major paradigm shift since the Live Aid period (1985), even though coverage had happened differently. It is felt that powerful images are sometimes necessary, but creating a public appetite for more nuanced coverage is also needed. All in all, NGOs may find it difficult to criticise media for simplified coverage, as all too often their own messaging is found too simplistic as well, failing to address the limitations of humanitarian aid. Another publication of the same institute looks at how international content can achieve *greater impact with audiences*, given the rapidly changing media environment, specifically in relation to marketing, time-shift television and social and online media (Scott, 2011). One of the findings is that the most effective means of promoting international programming is to target relevant opinion leaders through social media. That way, from a relatively small range of sources, a multiplication effect can be sorted.

For more empirical evidence on the effect of media campaigns, we searched for reports based upon a viewers survey. We found our sphere of interest categorisation quite helpful to explain why, apart from the quality of the campaign, some campaigns would turn out to be more successful than others. In the sphere of self-interest, a survey through reconstruction of panel data in California from 1986 to 2002 showed that the *anti-smoking media campaign* significantly reduced the prevalence of smoking among adults and adolescents (Hong Liu & Wei Tan, 2009).

Campaigns to *reduce greenhouse gas emissions* refer more to group interests, and even to global interests. A study on the effectiveness of such campaign in Japan found that increased media coverage of global warming had an immediate but short-time influence on public concern. At one side of the causal link ‘reality-media-perception’, the parameters considered were the number of newspaper articles during the 1998-2007 period, which in itself reflected related events such as the Bonn agreement (2001) and the start of the Kyoto Protocol enforcement and the Cool Bizz campaign (2005). At the other end of the causal link ‘reality-media-perception’ was a nationwide monthly public opinion poll, gathering a sample of 2000 citizen, questioned orally about what they thought to be the most serious issue in Japan and the world. The fluctuations in the frequencies of the answer ‘environment’ clearly reflected the intensity of the media coverage, even when disturbing events such as the launching of missiles by North Korea in 2006 brought the issue of ‘peace’ more in prominence. Unfortunately, the effects in terms of behaviour, for example the use of fuel, have not been researched. The effects were only in terms of public awareness, and they never lasted for more than a month (Sampai & Aoyagi-Usui, 2009).

Another time-series based study is about the effect over the years (1988 to 1996) of the *Give Five campaign* (Yörük, 2009). This widely advertised campaign in the USA was aimed to encourage people to give five percent of their income and volunteer five hours a week for purposes other than self-interest. The exact benefitting destination of the donation or the volunteering was left open. It therefore
stands for charity or altruism in the broad sense. The data were derived from household panel surveys. In the survey rounds during these years, respondents were systematically questioned on whether they had heard of the Give Five campaign. It appeared that 9% had heard of it. People who had heard of it tended to be younger, better educated and having a higher income than the people not aware of the campaign. On average, those who were informed about it donated 2.1% of their income and volunteered 2 hours per week, while those uninformed donated 1.7% and volunteered 1.6 hours weekly. So, the effect of the campaign could be called significant, both in the statistical sense as in the societal sense. Extrapolating the effect over the whole target population, the author suggests the effect of the campaign may correspond with 48 million $ per week if the abstraction would be made of the differences in composition between the informed and uninformed groups.

Also in 2009, the Dutch ERGO-Institute made a most interesting survey on the effect of documentaries upon viewers in relation to their degree of support for development aid (Heinen & Westra, 2009). At stake were five documentaries shown on Dutch national television during 2008 or 2009. All five documentaries were about a humanitarian or development issue in Africa:

- ‘Bleu Gold’ introduced the viewers to some small projects dealing with the consequences of lack of clean water in Ghana;
- ‘Warzone Cameroon’ was about projects tackling the spreading of HIV/AIDS among young prostitutes in Cameroon;
- ‘Expedition Unlimited’ was a competitive adventure programme about Dutch disabled youngsters helping fishermen in a Cape province village to sell their produce;
- ‘Displaced’ pictured a portrait of Western aid workers helping refugees in remote South-Sudan;
- ‘Sick of war’ investigated sociotherapy for war refugees (from Rwanda, Iraq, Bosnia, Liberia, etc.) with post-traumatic stress disorder in an Amsterdam based centre and a field clinic in Rwanda.

Through an online panel, regular viewers of TV-documentaries were informed about the programme the day before it was broadcasted. Afterwards they were again contacted with the request to fill out the survey. In total 810 people participated (160 on average per programme).

Apart from the survey, the viewers ratios showed that Expedition Unlimited had more than the double number of viewers (215,000) than the other programmes (which had 100,000 or a bit less).

So we have 4 documentaries and one entertainment programme. The profile of the people who watched these was quite similar: relatively well-educated, employed or self-employed and with a slight majority of believers (in the religious sense). Also their point of departure attitude towards development aid was
homogenous over the five groups: 80% had a positive stand, about 50% were donating money, 66% were critical in the sense they found not all of the budget for aid was well spend. This homogeneity lead the author to say that differences in appreciation of the programme would have to be explained by the content of the programme and not by the profile of the viewers.3

How were the 5 programmes appreciated? We summarise the findings:
- more than 70% of the documentary viewers found the message convincing, compared to only 40% of the adventure programme viewers;
- more than 50% of the documentary viewers found the programme quite or very informative, compared to only 20% of the adventure programme;
- about 65 to 75% of the documentary viewers and 84% of the adventure programme viewers said their opinion on development aid was unchanged after viewing the programme; 29% of the viewers of Blue Gold and Sick of War said it had changed in the positive sense, compared to only 10% of the adventure programme, 19% of Warzone Cameroon and 16% of Displaced; but 17% of the Displaced-viewers said their opinion had changed in the negative sense. Indeed, the Displaced-documentary was quite critical for aid workers who were struggling with all sorts of setbacks and disappointments;
- about 60% of the documentary-viewers felt they were stimulated to reflect about the development problem (compared to only 20% of the adventure programme viewers);
- 70 to 80% of the documentary viewers said the programme had given them more insight, compared to only 34% of the adventure programme viewers;
- then the quintessential question: are you intended to donate more money to development organisations after viewing the programme? Of the Blue Gold-viewers and the Warzone Cameroon-viewers, 13% were. Of the Sick of War-viewers, 8% were. Of the Expedition Unlimited-viewers (the adventure programme), 5% were. And of the Displaced-viewers, only 3% were;
- finally: would you be prepared to be more active yourself (e.g. as a volunteer) to improve the situation in development countries? Here the percentages of those willing were 24% (Blue Gold), 20% (Warzone Cameroon), 16% (Sick of War), 12% (Displaced) and 10% (Expedition Unlimited).

The conclusions of this research are that in general, documentaries and messages embedded in entertainment programmes do have an effect, be it marginal. Embedding aid-related messages in entertainment programmes makes for a larger outreach, but this advantage is virtually annihilated by the much weaker effect on

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3 This probably is a too hastily made assumption. The profile of the viewers may be similar in morphological terms, even in attitude towards development aid in general, but may differ significantly in terms of living culture or group mentality or other independent variables (hour and time of broadcasting, TV-channel, etc.). This should have been researched before jumping to the conclusion that all variations in the dependent variable are due to the contents of the TV-programmes.
attitude and intended behaviour. In a documentary, a clearly drawn problematic accompanied by a credible ‘way-out’ in the sense of an instrumental intervention works best as a positive message and, hence, a motivator. However, the effects are not spectacular as most viewers stick to the ideas and attitudes they already had worked out for themselves. A more critical programme does not work to convince people, at least when the critique is not put in perspective. Honesty, in this sense, is not rewarded. Still, it may be that different people are looking at different programmes, and that therefore each type of programme has its added value in the whole of mass-mediated messages about global solidarity and development aid.

3.2 The effect of three Flemish TV- or radio programmes on attitudes regarding development aid: a quick scan survey

3.2.1 Set-up

In July 2012, making use of a representative online panel, we verified the effect of three different mass-media programmes. Differences between programmes concerned multiple aspects: content, timing, embedding and medium used.

The programmes were:

1. **TV-programme: ‘Radio Bangladesh’**. This is a 5-minute item presented weekly during the winter and spring of 2012 on a fixed hour in the programme ‘Man bijt hond’ (Man bites dog), just after the evening news on the first channel of public Flemish television (VRT). ‘Man bijt hond’ contains all sorts of trivial and funny news items, presented in an entertainment format rather than a news format. Radio Bangladesh shows daily life and human interest from the viewpoint of a Bangladeshi radio maker, all with a wink and a smile. Radio Bangladesh is sponsored by a Belgian NGO, operating in Bangladesh. The idea is to present a positive, good-humoured picture of a developing country.

2. **TV-programme: ‘50 years independence of Burundi’**. This consists of just three items on Burundi at the occasion of the independence anniversary shown in the evening news (VRT) on three consecutive days in June 2012. The first item was about the independence anniversary festivities. The second item was about the country and its political and economic challenges. The third item was about a local cooperative carrying out rural development projects. It is seldom that development projects feature in the prime time news, so it was obvious to us to see whether this would have sorted any effects.

3. **Radio programme ‘Music For Life’**. Just like the past years, the radio channel called Studio Brussel broadcasts during the Christmas week from their ‘house of glass’, set up in a busy public place in a Flemish city. During this week the radio announcer constantly calls for donations for a chosen and much pro-
moted project. Donators (often grouped through a company, sports club, neighbourhood, …) can make themselves known to the public or use the format to create their own event. The project for December 2011 was providing toilets and accompanying facilities to certain areas in Nepal to prevent people to catch or spread dysentery.

Out of the online panel, a monthly omnibus survey is carried out by the panel operator (IVOX), to which we bought in questions about the three mentioned programmes:

- have you seen the programme?
- did it affect your opinion on development aid?
- please, explain this (open question).

Of the 1,000 people filling out the omnibus, the 600 who are Flemish have answered our questions (for obvious reasons, the French-speaking panel members were not asked to respond to this part of the omnibus). By weighting, the respondents sample was made representative according to gender, age and education level.

3.2.2 Results

The results are grouped per programme. We show the number of viewers/listeners, possible differences per subcategory (age, education level, gender), the effect it had on respondents’ opinion on development aid, and the way the respondents themselves explained this effect.

Radio Bangladesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you seen Radio Bangladesh?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just once</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now and then</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0 (=569)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only a minority remembers to have seen ‘Radio Bangladesh’, and under 5% have seen it regularly. These percentages did not differ significantly for categories

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4 Due to logistical constraints, we had to limit our number of questions. In Annex 2, we have included the exact phrasing (in Dutch) of the questions.
according to gender and education level, but they differed for categories according to age.

**Table 2**  Viewers of ‘Radio Bangladesh’, comparing for age categories (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you seen Radio Bangladesh?</th>
<th>18-29 years</th>
<th>30-49 years</th>
<th>50+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just once</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now and then</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**  Influence of viewing ‘Radio Bangladesh’ on opinion on development aid (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did viewing Radio Bangladesh affect your opinion on development aid?</th>
<th>Viewers</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in the positive sense</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in the negative sense</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Not relevant)</td>
<td></td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0 (=243)</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0 (=569)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whereas most of the viewers stick to their opinion, 15% of those who have seen Radio Bangladesh take on a more positive attitude with regard to development aid. This was further explained in the answers on the open question. People found the short stories of ‘Radio Bangladesh’ realistic, positive, showing the local reality as it is. It was not focusing on poverty or misery, yet, it was clear that many people in Bangladesh needed a lot of inventiveness to put both ends together. This combination of positive thinking, dire needs and self-reliance made some people consider that it is worth supporting people like these.

Those sticking to their opinion on development aid (84% of the viewers) roughly divide into about half of them who are sceptical about the value of aid (‘doesn’t work’, ‘doesn’t arrive’, ‘give priority to the poor at home’), about a third who have seen the programme without having impressions or reflections on it, and about a sixth who had already a pro-aid attitude.

The few whose opinion was negatively affected said development aid does not work, and programmes like this are ‘money wasted’.
50 years independence of Burundi

Table 4  Viewers of 50 years of independence of Burundi (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you seen the news items dedicated to the 50 years of independence of Burundi?</th>
<th>82.3</th>
<th>16.2</th>
<th>1.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>100.0 (=569)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have seen something of it</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have seen all three items</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Very few people remember to have seen the items on Burundi, all though they were shown in the VRT evening 7 o’clock news on three consecutive days. For the different groups according to gender and education level, this pattern was very similar. However, age is a factor, as the older groups tend to have seen it more often.

Table 5  Viewers of ‘50 years of independence of Burundi’, comparing for age categories (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you seen the news items dedicated to the 50 years of independence of Burundi?</th>
<th>18-29 years</th>
<th>30-49 years</th>
<th>50+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have seen something of it</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have seen all three items</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6  Influence of viewing ‘50 years of independence of Burundi’ on opinion on development aid (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did viewing ‘50 years of independence of Burundi’ affect your opinion on development aid?</th>
<th>Viewers</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in the positive sense</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in the negative sense</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Not relevant)</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0 (=101)</td>
<td>100.0 (=569)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If we consider only the viewers, we see that again over 80% are unaffected in their opinion on aid, but - compared to Radio Bangladesh - more people’s opinion is
negatively affected this time. The corruption of the country and the contrast between the budget spend at the festivities and the poverty of much of the population turned people off: how on earth can development aid sort this out? Those positively affected had a good impression of the projects shown in the programme, or were already pro-aid in the first place. The viewers who remained unaffected explained they were sticking to their opinion on development aid (either pro or contra), or they had been watching it superficially or the things shown did not reveal anything new.

*Music For Life*

**Table 7**  
Audience of ‘Music For Life’ (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you been listening to the Music For Life programmes on the radio?</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neither listened nor heard of it</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not listen but heard of it</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listened to it once in a while</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listened to it now and then</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listened to it quite often</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong> (=569)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing for different morphological categories, we see that both education level and age plays a role, while gender does not.

**Table 8**  
Audience of ‘Music For Life’, comparing for age categories (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you been listening to the Music For Life programmes on the radio?</th>
<th>18-29 years</th>
<th>30-49 years</th>
<th>50+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neither listened nor heard of it</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not listen but heard of it</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listened to it once in a while</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listened to it now and then</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listened to it quite often</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9  Audience of ‘Music For Life’, comparing for education level categories (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you been listening to the Music For Life programmes on the radio?</th>
<th>Low education level (primary or lower secondary)</th>
<th>Middle education level (higher secondary)</th>
<th>High education level (bachelor, masters, PhD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neither listened nor heard of it</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not listen but heard of it</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listened to it once in a while</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listened to it now and then</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listened to it quite often</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Music For Life was more listened to by younger people and slightly more listened to by the middle or higher educated.

Table 10  Influence of listening to Music For Life on opinion on development aid (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did listening to ‘Music For Life’ affect your opinion on development aid?</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>76.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in the positive sense</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in the negative sense</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Not relevant)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 100.0 (=348)</td>
<td>100.0 (=569)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All though the outreach of Music For Life was much higher than the two TV-programmes mentioned above, we see that the effect pattern is more or less the same. Those who said it did not affect their opinion said that they had a already an opinion about development aid anyway (good or bad) which they would not alter, or that they did not believe the project which made the subject of the Music For Life campaign (toilets for Nepal) made much sense, or that they did not have much on an opinion on development aid. Those affected positively explained they were charmed by the concreteness of the project, and by the certainty the money would arrive at its destination, or they were triggered by the number of people who were speaking about it (mass character, or ‘positive’ echo chamber effect). Those affected negatively said they were against development aid in the first place.

The way in which the audience opinion was affected slightly varied among age groups. Of those younger than 30 years, 33% felt affected positively (compared to 16% of the 30-50 years group and 18.5% of the 50+ group).
3.2.3 Comparing the three programmes and their effects

What the programmes have in common is that they are embedded in a popular format. ‘Radio Bangladesh’ is a human interest programme embedded in the after-news entertainment Man Bites Dog (Man bijt hond). ‘50 years independence of Burundi’ was presented during the evening news, with only the festivities - with a royal Belgian presence - having news value and the two other items being more documentary style. Finally, Music For Life was embedded in a live FM radio format, appealing to a young public and a trendy lifestyle. All programmes could therefore benefit from a high audience density. Both the VRT evening news and Man Bites Dog regularly have more than a million viewers (40% of the TV-market share), while Studio Brussel is a popular radio station year round.

This said, it should have been interesting to have added a documentary programme properly in this survey, to see if a lower viewer density would have been compensated by a higher effect.

The programmes differed from each other, however, with regard to the message and the style in which the message was launched. ‘Radio Bangladesh’ had a positive, light-mooded tone and may qualify as human interest. ‘50 years of Burundi independence’ can be seen as a very short documentary smuggled into the news. ‘Music For Life’ is a campaign (a clear message to donate for a well explained project), mixed into an on-going popular FM radio show.

More than 40% of the respondents remember to have seen or listened to ‘Radio Bangladesh’ and Music For Life. Only 18% remembered to have seen the Burundi items. True, ‘Radio Bangladesh’ was running weekly along the length of a whole TV-season, and Music For Life was intensively present during the Christmas week, but the Burundi items were in the prime time news, not all that long before this survey was launched (the items were shown by mid-June, the survey was launched by the end of July). This could mean that the evening news, despite having a large outreach, is not well suited for passing on indirectly a message holding the relevance and the value of development aid. The message item is short, not allowing for much nuance or ‘story’ and being embedded in the news means it has to compete with ever so many other items screaming for attention. As a result, the Burundi items have more or less been overwhelmed by the other news items.

Comparing for age groups, it appeared that both TV-programmes had a higher viewers percentage among the 50+ group, while the Music For Life radio programme had a larger audience among the young (under 30). This may be explained by age differences between the TV-watchers in general and the youngish target public of the Studio Brussel radio station.

While we noticed a significant variation in the number of people reached, the difference between the programmes in terms of effect was less dramatic. About 80% of the reached audience declares to be unaffected. A positive effect in the sense of a more positive opinion on development aid after viewing/listening to
the programme varied from 12.5% (Burundi), 15% (Radio Bangladesh) to 20% (Music For Life). In an attempt to explain this, one cannot overlook the different tone in which the ‘messages’ were broadcasted. The Burundi items came in a serious and informative style. ‘Radio Bangladesh’ had a light and optimistic tone, despite the fact that the underdevelopment of the country was not hidden. Music For Life was a direct message, with a popularising undertone (‘look, everybody is supporting the project, you don’t want to stay at the sideline, do you?’).

As for the Burundi items, the number of people in general - both viewers and non-viewers - affected positively with regard to their opinion is marginal (2.2%). As it has been shown elsewhere, a change in opinion does not guarantee a change in behaviour (Pollet, 2010, p. 41). Showing a good case for development aid (an understandable problematic plus a realistic solution) may make people to have a more favourable view on aid to the point they are more prepared to donate (as has been shown in the ERGO study, cf. section 2.1.3), but embedding this item-wise in a primetime news does not guarantee to sort that effect: too short, too shallow, not enough nuance, too much competing with and overwhelmed by other news.

As for the two other programmes, the positive tone and the self-reliance aspect (Radio Bangladesh), and the concreteness of the project (Music For Life) proved to sort a modest yet significant effect on people’s mind. Whether this translates in solid and lasting changes in attitude, empathy and behaviour remains to be seen, but making smart use of the mass media is certainly paying off – even when the appeal is to altruism.
4. Concluding observations

In this study, we first did a brief literature round-up, helping us to situate well our two research questions: (1) how should development aid get its message in the media? And (2) to what extent will a mediated message reach and affect the public?

A quick overview of the mass media theory showed that themes like global solidarity and development aid are at the least favourable end of the opinion making matrix. The experience on these topics is mostly through media only, not originating from direct observation, and the relevance is for global interest rather than self-interest.

Our round table discussions and online survey revealed that it may be rewarding, however, to improve the quality of messages. A story-line with a suspense element in it, concreteness, local interest, a positive undertone and an action perspective are considered elements which significantly enhance the attractiveness of broadcasted message, whether as campaign spots, as documentaries or news show items, or embedded in other programmes. At the other hand, embedding a message in another type of programme holds risks. An entertainment programme may reach a large audience, but chances are high that nothing sticks from the moral message smuggled in. Prime time evening news, for instance is full of items the global solidarity message has to compete with, without providing much nuance or context.

Therefore, the format of the message is a strategic choice, as each type of programme has its set format. News, for instance, has to be news, unusual and recently happened, rather than important or determining the lives of many. A news-show, following the prime time news, is more geared for explaining a message with a global interest. So is a documentary, even when the audience figures are much lower. Infotainment, as a variation on entertainment, can work to echo a certain atmosphere, for example how people in difficult circumstances still cope with the daily challenges and produce their own joys and sense of humour.

Getting in the media is the first catch. It pays to establish good contacts with media workers and to respect their independence. At the same time, people from NGOs and other development organisations are advised to deliver messages which are more or less ready for publication. Still, these messages have to contain sufficient elements which do raise the interest of the public, as the time that development work is considered sufficiently interesting as such, is way behind us.

Surveys - including our own - have shown that mediatised messages do have an effect, even when only marginal. Most people remain unaffected, but some people do reflect upon what they have heard or seen and are ready to adjust their opinion. Whether this translates in an adjusted behaviour pattern remains to be demonstrated. The Music For Life-example showed that the massive character of the message, including the creation of a hype, has the effect on many people wanting to be ‘part of something cool’. At the same time, one can wonder to which extent...
this can be repeated without losing this sort of momentum. It looks that in order to get through, the format, scale, exact medium, style en embedding of messages will have to be reinvented regularly. Development aid communicators will continue to face a huge task, demanding creativity and persistence alike.

Our recommendations for the development aid sector is to produce messages which are attractive to their target public, by shaping it through an arc-of-suspense narrative, attaching it to a local interest and a practical outlook, and embedding it in the appropriate media format. Development educators should be well networked with media workers. Moreover, if the media fail to monitor and assess the appreciation and the effect of their productions, development educators should assume this task themselves by organising post-programme focus groups. Also, the use of mass media does not stand on its own. It should be an integrated part of a communication strategy which also features social media and discussion forums. Recognised voices can easily amplify and multiplicat one-time-one-source messages. Forums, whether virtual or through physical meetings and events, allow for a two-way dialogue which is most productive in influencing people's ideas, if only for the reason of being heard, and of belonging to a group of like-minded people.

While the mechanics of media making were to some extent demystified, the answers to the question to which extent mediated messages can and do affect audience behaviour still remains misty. Above all, the media do not seem accustomed with the habit of systematically monitoring how their productions are met by viewers, listeners or readers. What counts for them are the figures, and much less the reasons or the motives. However, having systematic feedback from representative viewers panels would add greatly to programming different types of messages for different target audiences. In that sense, we would also recommend the mass media to become more aware of the expectations of the public, the diversity of the audience and the increasingly globalised interest of the 21st century citizen.

Finally, this exploring study should be a first step of a more in-depth research programme. More broadcasting should be monitored in order to create standard monitoring systems, which not only include the viewers density and appreciation, but also the lasting effects in terms of attitude and behaviour. Also, research on the role and the monitoring of the media with regard to development aid should be extended to other regions such as North-America, Japan and the new donor countries (China, India, Brazil, Turkey, etc.). Creativity stems from comparing familiar systems with strange systems. Creativity will be needed when the aim is to make better use of the media to familiarise the public at large with the idea of global citizenship and global solidarity.
Annex 1 / Lead-questions of the round table discussions

1. When does development aid reach the news? In which media, which programmes? Which aspects of the aid system are highlighted?

2. How do organisations catch the attention of the media? How can they arrange that their message will be broadcasted the way they want it to be?

3. Does the media attention concentrate on:
   – good news (self reliance, improved standard of living), or rather bad news, hunger crises, catastrophes, war, …?
   – either news or analysis?
   – problems (including the call for donations) or solutions?
   – economic relations between North & South (e.g. buying behaviour, speculation, …)?
   – the need for political or military intervention (e.g. Libya, Ivory Coast, …)?

4. What is the supposed effect on the public? How do the media handle feedback comments? Specifically with relation to:
   – more broadcasting, more gathering of funds?
   – too many stimuli, too many calls to donate?
   – too much misery?

5. Which type of public is targeted? To sort which effect? (funds, commitment, opinions?)

6. What explains that some NGOs get into the media quite frequently and others much less so?
Annex 2 / Transcript of the online questionnaire (Dutch only)

1. We willen u enkele vragen voorleggen over tv-uitzendingen die de ontwikkelingslanden in beeld brengen. Afgelopen voorjaar was er op Man bijt hond wekelijks een stuk ‘Radio Bangladesh’ te zien. Heeft u dit gezien?
   a. Ik heb het nooit gezien (naar vraag 3)
   b. Ik heb het een enkele keer gezien
   c. Ik heb het af en toe gezien
   d. Ik heb het vaak gezien

2. Het feit dat u dit heeft gezien, heeft dit een invloed gehad op de manier waarop u tegenover ontwikkelingshulp staat? (+ verduidelijk uw keuze)
   a. Neen
   b. Ja, in de positieve zin
   c. Ja, in de negatieve zin

3. Naar aanleiding van de 50-jarige onafhankelijkheid van Burundi waren er in juni op de VRT een drietal nieuwsitems gewijd aan dat land, zowel over de feestelijkheden als over enkele hulpprojecten. Heeft u dit gezien?
   a. Ik heb het niet gezien (naar vraag 5)
   b. Ik heb er iets van gezien
   c. Ik heb deze drie nieuwsitems allemaal gezien

4. Het feit dat u dit heeft gezien, heeft dit een invloed gehad op de manier waarop u tegenover ontwikkelingshulp staat? (+ verduidelijk uw keuze)
   a. Neen
   b. Ja, in de positieve zin
   c. Ja, in de negatieve zin

5. Afgelopen winter (december 2011) heeft Studio Brussel veel aandacht gewijd aan de Music For Life actie. Heeft u naar deze uitzending geluisterd?
   a. Ik heb er niet naar geluisterd en ook elders over Music For Life niets vernomen (einde van dit enquêteonderdeel)
   b. Ik heb er niet naar geluisterd maar heb wel elders over Music For Life iets vernomen
   c. Ik heb er een enkele keer naar geluisterd
   d. Ik heb er af en toe naar geluisterd
   e. Ik heb er vaak naar geluisterd

6. Het feit dat u hiernaar heeft geluisterd, heeft dit een invloed gehad op de manier waarop u tegenover ontwikkelingshulp staat? (+ verduidelijk uw keuze)
   a. Neen
   b. Ja, in de positieve zin
   c. Ja, in de negatieve zin
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