I. Introduction

Supporting development assistance in an era of austerity

The international development community faces a historic challenge.

On the one hand, there are strong arguments for sustained aid flows to dozens of countries grappling with health crises, environmental degradation, rapid political change, security threats, and more. Many also risk falling well short of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the 2015 fulfillment deadline, leaving millions if not billions of people lacking in basic needs to underpin their struggle out of poverty. These countries also risk ongoing social instability, with related security and humanitarian challenges.

Meanwhile, a number of other developing countries (notably in Africa) finally appear to be emerging—showing signs of accelerated and/or increasingly stable economic activity—and would benefit from ongoing, targeted foreign assistance to help them achieve sustainable liftoffs.

On the other hand, in leading aid donor countries, the past few years of economic stagnation and fiscal slippage have forced policy-makers to scrutinize foreign aid budgets, with an eye toward either slashing them outright or reallocating more resources to domestic programs. Furthermore, this situation is not likely to change in the foreseeable future, given longer-term fiscal strains from aging populations.

Development advocates thus urgently need to connect more meaningfully with key constituencies in donor-country discussions about policy priorities, in order to raise awareness of and increase levels of engagement with development policy issues—with the ultimate purpose of letting policy-makers know that they should not be knocked from national policy agendas. The Building Support for International Development study, launched by InterMedia in 2011 with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, provides a roadmap for doing so, based on in-depth research among three important target groups:

- **Interested citizens** – members of the public who are predisposed to engagement with international development issues, based on their self-reported interest in global health and international development issues, and their previous participation in activities in support of development causes (such as donating or writing to a public official).

- **Influentials** – Citizens with the potential to influence decisions by governmental officials on development policies.

- **Government decision-makers** – Elected and appointed officials who are engaged in forming and implementing national policies on international development and global health.

The Building Support study covers the four largest bilateral aid donors—France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States—as well as China, which is fast becoming a major player in the aid arena. The project is based on the assumption that successful engagement—defined as connecting meaningfully to incite positive policy-focused action—with key audiences can steer development policies in a desired direction and help to sustain aid flows.

The report draws from survey, focus group and in-depth interview research in the five countries and builds on previous research on the relationship between public opinion and levels of support for development aid conducted by bilateral and multilateral agencies, including the U.K. Government’s Department for International Development (DFID), the World Bank and others, (see, for example, Paxton and Knack, 2008). These include studies conducted in the U.S.
(Ramsay, Weber, Kull and Lewis, 2009; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010) and the U.K. (Henson and Lindstrom, 2010; UKaid, 2010) to understand public opinion about global health, global health policy, aid to beneficiary countries and international development more generally.

This InterMedia study goes beyond typical analyses of opinions about aid policies to consider the actual drivers of and impediments to deeper engagement. It is thus a practical guide to interacting with these groups and spurring them toward policy action.

I hope you will find this report to be a valuable strategic resource. I also invite you to become part of the discussion at the Building Support for International Development portal hosted at InterMedia’s AudienceScapes knowledge center, at www.audiencescapes.org/buildsupport. More information about the portal and the study’s Twitter feed can be found in Section V of this report.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Gerry Power
Managing Director, InterMedia U.K.
International Development Practice Lead
powerg@intermedia.org, tel. +44.207.831.8724
II. Summary of Key Findings

The Building Support for International Development study focused on the following themes:

- how and under what conditions are priority target groups for engagement with development policy issues most likely to engage;
- what factors influence and motivate both engagement and policy decision-making by members of these target groups;
- through which communication channels can members of these groups be accessed most readily and with the greatest impact.

The research included a total of 128 in-depth interviews with influentials and government decision-makers; surveys of 3,824 interested citizens, and focus group discussions with 160 interested citizens. Detailed information about the research methods are in Section VI starting on page 44.

II.a General takeaways:

Development advocates have fertile ground in which to sow deeper engagement among citizens. In all five donor countries studied, interested citizens made up a significant proportion of the citizenry as a whole, indicating that development advocates have large groups of potentially receptive people to target.

Gaps and inefficiencies in the delivery of development information provide ready avenues for deepening engagement with all target groups. Citizens are exposed to little development-related information; influentials and government decision-makers, meanwhile, need help sifting through clutter and finding specialized information. Both needs represent concrete engagement opportunities.

Strategies for engaging target groups should include both short-term and long-term approaches. The research highlighted that, in general, people’s attitudes about development issues tend to be formed through their own upbringing, personal beliefs and life experiences. Engagement needs to feed through these formative elements, and be sustained over long periods.

The digital sphere provides a number of convenient conduits for connecting with and involving various constituencies in the development discussion. This report urges the creation of a common, “unbranded” digital space for gathering and sharing information about international development policy issues.

Despite digital opportunities, members of different target groups have differing levels of trust in and enthusiasm for the use of social media for gathering information. Although the use of social media is becoming widespread among all three target groups in the major donor countries, social media sources are not necessarily considered the most authoritative for development policy information.
II.b Targeted findings: Interested citizens

What development issues do they care about?

• Poverty, health issues and lack of access to health and education services were widely acknowledged as priorities. Poverty was identified as one of the top three challenges by interested citizens in every country. Interested citizens in France, Germany, the U.K. and the U.S. placed lack of access to education and/or lack of access to health care slightly above poverty alleviation. Interested citizens in China also considered corruption and the spread of infectious diseases to be top challenges.

• HIV/AIDS is widely regarded as the most urgent health-related challenge.

Where do they get information about development issues? How informed are they?

• Interested citizens in most countries are generally not well informed about their governments’ development efforts overseas and the impacts of these policies. Although interested citizens are aware of their governments’ involvement in international development, they do not have in-depth knowledge about the specifics of these activities.

• The majority of interested citizens do not actively seek out information on international development; they mainly receive it passively through mass media sources, particularly television. Active sourcing typically occurs only in response to specific triggers such as a major political event or natural disasters.

• Many interested citizens use the internet (specifically, news websites) to keep up to date with general news and current events, but they generally don’t use such sources to seek out information about international development issues per se.

• Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) are generally not considered a source of development information, but are used occasionally to share links to campaigns on development issues with friends.

• In China, word-of-mouth is an essential source of information about development topics.

• The language used in international development is unfamiliar and often misunderstood. Indeed, terms such as “international development” and “food security” are considered vague and do not resonate with interested citizens.

How and why do they engage in international development issues?

• Of those who have taken supportive actions for development, most have chosen to do so in a way that is a minimum burden—through donating. In China, Germany and the U.K., more than twice as many people said they donated money than participated in any other activity. Between 63% and 71% of interested citizens donated money in those three countries in the previous six months, compared to 51% in the U.S. and 36% in France.
Triggers and facilitators of engagement

• **Upbringing, beliefs and experiences shape one’s propensity to engage in development issues.**
  Interest in development fostered at a young age tends to stick more securely in a person’s value framework. Traveling to developing countries or volunteering also have a positive impact on a person’s likelihood to engage. Personal beliefs (either religious or secular) and the need to act as humanitarians or global citizens also play a role.

• **Personal ties—for example, impetus from already-engaged friends or family, or a personal connection to someone living in a developing country—can be stronger triggers of engagement than a development cause itself.**

• **Emotional resonance and evidence of positive impact of international development are important factors.**
  Either in isolation or in combination, they can motivate interested citizens to act. It is particularly important to provide evidence of the positive impact of an individual’s development-supportive activities.

Barriers to engagement

• **Time and money constraints hinder engagement.**
  As in many other areas of activity, engagement opportunities are more attractive if they are economical, convenient and easy to perform.

• **Perceptions and/or evidence of aid ineffectiveness, waste and corruption in recipient countries are widespread.**
  These do not necessarily deter people from performing personal actions of support, such as donating and volunteering. However, they can color views on official (governmental) aid programs and potentially undermine public support for these policies. (see next section)

What are their views on the development efforts of their governments?

• **Interested citizens in China, Germany, the U.K. and the U.S. generally believe that the main responsibility for addressing development challenges rests at the door of developing countries’ own governments.**

• **In France, the largest share of interested citizens think this is primarily the task of developed countries.**

• **International organizations such as the UN are not accorded central responsibility for development work.**

• **Interested citizens across the five countries generally support the international development efforts of their governments.**
  Support for greater government engagement in international development seems to be strongest in France and Germany, where about half of interested citizens think their governments are currently doing too little to support international development. This support is substantially lower in China, the U.K. and the U.S., where less than a third of interested citizens believe this is the case.

• **However, there are doubts about the impact of international development efforts.**
  More than two-thirds of interested citizens in France, Germany, the U.K. and the U.S., as well as almost half of interested citizens in China, believe that their own governments’ international development efforts have made either a small difference or no difference in the past 10 years.
• Perceptions of wasted development aid are widespread.
France showed the highest percentage of interested citizens who believe this (66%); China showed the lowest percentage (37%).

• But interested citizens still tend to donate to development causes even if they believe that most official financial aid is being wasted. This is likely, in part, because decisions to engage are often emotional responses rather than hard-headed, policy-driven decisions.

**Whom do they view as effective champions for international development?**

• Politicians lead the ranks of preferred champions in all five countries.
Interested citizens usually named national politicians as those whom they regarded as current and future ambassadors for international development in global health. For example, French President Nicolas Sarkozy was the most frequently mentioned champion for these issues among the French interested citizens. A few politicians, such as U.S. President Barack Obama, transcended national boundaries in the ratings.

**II.c Targeted findings: Influentials**

Note: This report makes a distinction between established influentials and new generation influentials. Established influentials include journalists and other media practitioners, representatives of academia and think tanks, NGOs and faith-based organizations. New generation influentials include institutional bloggers—individuals working for recognized development organizations such as Oxfam or the Centre for Global Development—as well as independent bloggers who discuss development issues online but do not have development-related careers outside of the blogosphere. For a more detailed explanation, refer to page 21.

**What development issues do they care about?**

• Influentials emphasize the interdependence of development issues and resist the notion that any particular challenge can be prioritized above others. Still, a few issues stood out: health, poverty, climate change, education and structural challenges (e.g., poor governance).

• They acknowledge that the priorities of developing countries are not necessarily in line with the priorities of donor governments, leaving room for ambiguity. Academics and representatives of NGOs and think tanks tend to prioritize development issues through the filter of their own areas of expertise. New generation influentials tend to describe challenges from a more generalist and sometimes politically-charged perspective, in which addressing inequalities is the principal informing action.

**Where do they get information about development issues?**

• Established influentials turn mainly to tried and trusted sources of information while new generation influentials are more open to accept information from sources they do not know personally.

• Personal networks are used to help validate and vet information from other sources. Personal networks and sources were also cited as the most trustworthy sources of “insider” information and useful for sharing information on development issues.
• Prominent traditional media outlets are valued as sources of contextual information on international development. Journalists, representatives of NGOs and bloggers draw from traditional media as they discuss development issues in the broader economic, social and security context, and for general background information. Key media brands that cross cultural and linguistic boundaries include: The Economist, the BBC (online), the Financial Times, The New York Times and The Washington Post.

• When online, influentials tend to gravitate toward organizations with prominence in certain areas of development. These include major international organizations, such as the UN and the World Bank, and prominent non-governmental groups, such as Oxfam.

• Blogs are less popular and considered less trustworthy as a medium for professional dialogue. In general, blogs polarize opinion among influentials: on the one hand, they are valued as sources of personalized and more experiential views of events; on the other hand, they are not considered very reliable or trustworthy as information sources.

• Twitter is used by a minority of influentials, mainly to follow breaking news. There was some concern that Twitter sources are difficult to verify.

• Facebook is generally avoided by older influentials, and even younger ones do not tend to think of it in terms of sharing or obtaining information on development issues.

• Influentials gather information from decision-makers through a variety of channels. These include informal meetings, conferences, email and telephone. This communication tends to intensify around the time of major events or campaigns around specific development issues.

What are their views on the development efforts of their governments?

• They support and often praise the development efforts of their own national governments. Influentials acknowledge the roles their national governments have played in development successes in areas such as debt relief, vaccination programs, raising life expectancy and lowering infant mortality. At the same time, NGOs such as Oxfam are credited with instigating government action that has led to some of these successes.

• However, most influentials see international development primarily as the responsibility of developing-country governments. Most influentials believe that governments of developing countries should be the main drivers of development, albeit with support from the donor countries. Many interviewees view this within a moral framework, arguing that leaders of developing countries are responsible for facilitating democratic processes and equal access to resources and to meeting basic needs.

• They also highlighted specific challenges to good governance in development: bureaucratic lethargy and infighting; a lack of prioritization; politicization of aid; and corruption and lack of aid coordination on the ground.
Whom do they view as effective champions for international development?

- A very small cluster of development champions are seen to create broad appeal. Notably, Bono, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Bill and Melinda Gates are considered to have sufficient star power and credibility to sway the range of development stakeholders.

- Otherwise, influentials say that different advocates appeal to different target groups. Influentials named a wide range of potential and current champions, including celebrities, high-profile politicians, religious leaders and development experts.

II.d Targeted findings: Government decision-makers

Which development issues do they consider to be top priorities?

- There is no consensus on which issues should dominate the development agenda. As might be expected, decision-makers tend to focus on their own governments’ stated development policy priorities.

- Systemic challenges, such as poor governance, were among the issues mentioned most frequently across the countries. Other frequently-cited challenges include health, education, unfair trade practices and climate change. Most interviewees also recognized that many of these challenges are interlinked and need to be addressed jointly rather than in isolation.

Where do they get information about development issues?

- The most trusted sources of policy-relevant information are: personal networks, specialized sources and development experts who are considered well-informed, objective and able to provide information targeted to specific interests. Highly-valued sources include experts within the government and in personal and professional networks; detailed reports on development issues from trusted sources (NGOs, think-tanks and international organizations); and specialized publications such as peer-reviewed journals.

- There is also suspicion of information supplied by interest groups. Government decision-makers view information from NGOs, lobbyists and various types of special-interest groups with a critical eye, knowing that it often comes with an agenda behind it. Using experts deemed trusted and objective is one way to get around this challenge.

- Government decision-makers rely on traditional media sources mainly for news and current affairs, not usually for policy-relevant information.

- They also rely heavily on the internet for information, but not on social media. Facebook, Twitter and the like are not seen as go-to sources for policy-making purposes. Decision-makers are often wary of Twitter, both in terms of its reliability as an information source and its perceived threat as a time waster.

- Blogs sponsored by recognized institutions are popular, including those run by recognized development NGOs (e.g. Oxfam) and multilateral funders/agencies (e.g. the World Bank).
Where do they place responsibility for addressing development challenges?

- Government decision-makers see international development as a shared responsibility. They believe the national governments of developing countries, donor governments and institutions in the developed world should work together. Many see the engagement of developed countries in improving conditions in developing countries in the context of global solidarity and as a moral responsibility.

- Partnership and collaborative models of development are popular. Decision-makers (as well as many influentials) expect to see increasing emphasis on partnerships and collaborative approaches with recipient countries.

- The Millennium Development Goals are viewed as an effective common framework for development policy and planning. Decision-makers say the MDGs have helped shape policies and programs. However, there is concern about what will drive policies once the 2015 deadline for achieving the MDGs passes.

How do they view the role of public opinion in development policy-making?

- Public opinion is viewed as an important but not a central element to policy-making on development issues. Government decision-makers in France, Germany, the U.K. and the U.S. noted their governments regularly monitor public opinion on issues pertaining to budget allocation on overseas development. Not all interviewees from these countries agree that public opinion has a direct impact on policy. Still, they generally agree that increased public support for overseas spending is desirable.

Whom do they identify as effective champions for international development?

- Subject-matter experts top the rankings as favored champions. Government decision-makers say subject experts are the most appropriate and credible advocates, although some prominent fellow decision-makers also receive endorsements. Among U.S. respondents, frequently-mentioned champions included Dr. Gebisa Ejeta, the winner of the 2009 World Food Prize, and Rajiv Shah, USAID Administrator. U.K. and French interviewees often mentioned Oxford University Professor and development expert Paul Collier; several German respondents cited international economist Dambisa Moyo and Indian economist Amartya Sen, who won the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences.