IV. Recommendations for Engaging Key Target Groups

IVa Interested citizens

The research revealed that interested citizens in all five countries lack information about the international development efforts of their own governments and of other organizations involved in international development, as well as about the effects of these activities. This information gap potentially undermines interested citizens' support for international development and overseas spending.

The development community is well placed to fill this gap in the short term through a range of public communication and outreach activities. However, to increase public engagement with international development and also ensure that support for development activities and overseas spending is sustained, development organizations also need to consider longer-term strategies. These will aim to inform the values and promote personal experiences that shape people's attitudes toward development issues, typically from a very early age.

The key challenges for such engagement are:

- Interested citizens lack the information and the opportunities to become further involved.
- They find the language used in international development to be unfamiliar and imprecise.
- They are generally not active seekers of information about development issues; they mainly receive this information passively.
- Long-term strategies are required to encourage people to care about development issues; there are no short-term solutions that will yield lasting engagement.
- Interested citizens tend to choose activities that are easiest for them to conduct and that require minimum commitment.
- They rarely mobilize others to engage; when they do, it is either because their commitment is very high or the means of mobilization are very simple.

Taking into account these challenges, developing and deepening engagement with interested citizens should focus on two goals:

1) Raise awareness and fill knowledge gaps

- Facilitate the creation and distribution of informational content about development through mass media, particularly through trusted television networks and print titles. Interested citizens are generally avid consumers of mass media and are easier to reach through this conduit than are government decision-makers and influencers. The following media outlets should be prioritized in such outreach strategies:

  - China: CCTV, provincial/local newspapers
  - France: TF1, France 2, BFM TV, Le Monde, Le Figaro
  - Germany: ARD, ZDF, RTL, Der Spiegel, Focus, Die Zeit

  - Promote content that demonstrates the impact of international development, notably through personal stories, but which also is honest about the difficulties encountered.
Although this content can also be communicated through mass media, it should be created in such a way that it can also be shared through social media and through offline events and materials.

- **Ensure that personal stories or accounts feel authentic.**
  Include voices of those on the ground, both beneficiaries of aid and those delivering the aid. Criticisms or controversy should also be addressed—interested citizens do not want the bland or sanitized view.

- **Address head-on valid public concerns about corruption and waste in relation to aid.**
  This provides an opportunity to talk about how to tackle these challenges while also highlighting successes.

- **Avoid development jargon.**
  Use language that is easy to understand and is precise (e.g., about a specific health issue rather than about health in general). Focus on outcomes (such as increased equality or a reduction in poverty) rather than on processes.

- **Use video to grab attention.**
  Interested citizens’ tendency to share links and the growing use of online social media (notably YouTube) presents an opportunity to raise awareness and increase engagement online. Moving pictures are effective at telling a story and links to videos on sites such as YouTube are often shared on social networks.

- **At every opportunity, focus on how individuals can help, what impact they can make and how supporting development efforts benefits them personally.**

2) **Make it easy for citizens to move to deeper levels of engagement, in part by leveraging their propensity to donate to causes**

- **Support a cross-organizational alliance to create a common, "unbranded" digital space for international development information gathering and sharing.** This would serve as a neutral online knowledge sharing portal to facilitate engagement with international development issues.

- **Support citizen forums within this portal to provide space for debate and information sharing about development issues within and among interested citizens.**
  The forums could be promoted and managed by the new generation of development champions, i.e. young people who have completed international exchanges in developing countries and are interested in increasing their engagement in development issues.

- **Engage with schools and other organizations that can help to foster an interest in development issues at a young age.** This could include designing modular campaign activity “packages” around issues such as global poverty and global health that can be used by schools, faith-based groups and other community groups.

- **Develop longer-term projects targeted at people where they work.**
  For example, hospital staff could support a health center in a developing country and bank staff could support a micro-financing initiative.

- **Establish annual competitions for students aimed at creating a new generation of development champions.**
  For example, competition participants could be encouraged to raise awareness about development issues among youth in their communities. Winners could be offered the opportunity to participate in a development project overseas.
• Partner with organizations that provide volunteering and international exchange opportunities for young people.
  The dialogue with this group should continue after they have completed their exchange or volunteer work; development organizations can deepen their engagement with this group by establishing a network of young ambassadors for international development and by encouraging their participation in the knowledge sharing portal (see above).

• Increase civic engagement with e-action strategies, where those donating online are prompted at the time of donation to engage in other activities, such as signing an online petition or sending a formatted e-letter to an elected representative. E-strategies will work best during high-profile events such as an appeal for a specific disaster.

• In China, make use of online media to reach interested citizens because they often perceive traditional media as biased. They look to online media (particularly to blogs and microblogs) for more trustworthy, unfiltered information.

IVb Influentials

Overall, influentials have two specific needs: gathering information and hard data about development issues germane to their areas of expertise, and looking for avenues to deepen their engagement with government decision-makers in their specific areas of interest.

The development community can help influentials in both of these areas through a combination of short and long-term strategies. That said, development organizations should consider the following challenges when planning to engage with influentials about development issues:

• Influentials’ information needs are very diverse.
  Some, such as academics and think tank staff, need very specialized data about their areas of interest, as well as data from the field. Others, such as journalists, need broader contextual information about development issues and the broader effects of development policies.

• Most influentials gravitate toward specialized sources and trusted networks.
  They may be difficult to reach directly as a result. They are also suspicious of any indication of spin in the information they receive.

• Influentials in China are particularly hard to reach because they depend primarily on government sources and information from within their own organizations.

• New generation influentials and established influentials from smaller organizations often lack the avenues and opportunities to engage regularly with government decision-makers.

To deepen engagement with influentials, development organizations should focus on the following two goals:

1) Create online and offline forums where influentials can exchange information and discuss development issues with each other and with government decision-makers
   • Tap into the proposed online knowledge sharing portal to:
     a) facilitate deeper and more regular exchanges between influentials and government decision-makers through expert sessions;
b) strengthen interactions between experts within particular disciplines by creating thematic strands that focus on specific issues. Specific topics could include:

- **Health** (of interest in all five countries), particularly the spread of communicable and non-communicable diseases and the improvement of health systems.
- **Climate change** (of interest in all five countries).
- **Education** (of interest in all five countries and considered particularly important by new generation influentials).
- **Poverty alleviation** (of interest especially in China).

c) Continue and promote this dialogue offline by hosting and/or sponsoring conferences and dialogues about specific development issues.

2) **Respond to influentials’ diverse and specialized information needs**
   • Engage with specialized sources, trusted mainstream media and bloggers whom influentials rely on for objective and up-to-date information on development issues.

Figure 19: Sources quoted most frequently by the influentials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Countries</th>
<th>The Economist, The New York Times, Financial Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>China.com, Xinhuaiet, Phoenix Net, Global Voices blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td><em>BBC, Der Spiegel Online, Die Welt, Suddeutsche Zeitung, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die Zeit, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Blogs from The World Bank, Amerika21.de, Glocalist, Duncan Green (Oxfam), ONE</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td><em>BBC, The Guardian, Lancet, ODI, Oxfam, DFID. Blogs from Dambisa Moyo, Aid On The Edge Of Chaos, Chris Blattman (Yale), Do No Harm, Education For All, Rethinking Development, Paul Krugman (The New York Times), Brad de Long (University of California, Berkeley), Stephanie Flanders (BBC), Duncan Green (Oxfam), Sarah Boseley (The Guardian), Owen Barder (CGD), Diane Coyle (The BBC)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Promote and facilitate practical field experience for subject experts, NGO representatives, think tank staff and new generation influentials.
IVc Government decision-makers

Government decision-makers have specific, clearly identified needs that can be addressed by local and international development organizations. However, those looking to engage with government decision-makers face the following challenges:

- **Reluctance to increase their information overload.**
  Government decision-makers are often awash in information about development issues and typically rely on junior staff to selectively identify relevant information on their behalf.

- **Reluctance to engage with unfamiliar entities.**
  Government decision-makers are skeptical about interacting with unfamiliar entities or those perceived as agenda-driven. They prefer to receive policy input from trusted experts, NGOs and think tanks considered unbiased, knowledgeable and well-informed.

To address these challenges, development organizations and stakeholders should focus on two broad goals:

1) **Provide targeted information to help decision-makers and their gatekeepers to cut through information clutter**

   - **Provide regular, independently curated digests of research studies and development news.**
     Where possible, digests should be available via websites of traditional media brands that decision-makers typically consider as go-to sources for general news and information. Examples are The New York Times, the Financial Times and The Economist, which transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. Other country-specific sources to be considered for this purpose include:
     - France: Le Monde
     - Germany: Der Spiegel, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Sueddeutsche Zeitung
     - U.K.: The Guardian, BBC
     - U.S.: The Washington Post, BBC

   - **Sponsor independent research about priority development issues** to provide budget-stretched decisions-makers with empirical evidence to inform their policy positions. Emphasize research that demonstrates the impact and effectiveness of the development approaches prioritized by elites. Include research capacity strengthening in developing countries in order to ensure that the research meets the needs of the intended beneficiaries.

2) **Facilitate engagement of government decision-makers and subject experts through information exchange and debate on development issues**

   It is crucial that development organizations and stakeholders looking to engage with government decision-makers create a convenient engagement space and engagement avenues, ideally online, where government decision-makers can easily access and share information and opinions on specific issues without time constraints. Development organizations should consider the following actions to achieve this goal:

   - **Support the creation of a neutral online knowledge-sharing portal** as a forum for influentials and government decision-makers worldwide to discuss and debate development policy issues in real time. Online expert sessions about specific development issues could be arranged to facilitate engagement between government decision-makers and trusted subject experts from influential NGOs, think tanks, academia and bilateral and multilateral organizations.

   - **Host and/or sponsor conferences and offline dialogues** to foster connections between government decision-makers and influentials.
• Focus forums/discussions on topics that dominate the concerns of government decision-makers in each country, namely:

• Framing the development agenda in the post-MDG world (of concern in all countries)
• Governance in developing countries (of concern particularly in Germany and the U.K.)
• Unfair trade practices (of concern particularly in Germany and the U.K.)
• Education (of concern particularly in France, the U.K., and the U.S.)
• Health issues, specifically communicable diseases and building capacity in healthcare systems (of concern particularly in France, Germany, and the U.S.)