



# IDS

## What Does the Public Think, Know and Do about Aid and Development?

Results and Analysis from the UK Public Opinion Monitor

*Johanna Lindstrom and Spencer Henson*

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## Key Findings

### Views on UK Government aid:

- **In the context of addressing the budget deficit, support for the Government's aid spending is declining.**  
In June 2010, 63 per cent of people thought aid should be cut in the context of addressing the deficit. By November 2010, this figure had risen to 71 per cent.
- **In the long-term, support for aid spending is higher: views are directly affected by the current UK economic situation.**  
In March 2011, 51 per cent of people thought aid should be cut in the longer term (5 – 10 years).
- **The public believe the UK Government is performing relatively well on aid issues.**  
The Government is judged to be performing best on reducing the budget deficit, followed by aid to developing countries, in comparison to other current issues.

### Views on overseas aid charities:

- **The public strongly support international development charities.**  
Charities providing overseas aid and disaster relief are the most popular cause for regular individual charity donations.

### Views on humanitarian crises:

- **Less people donated to the Horn of Africa famine than the 2010 Pakistan floods and the 2010 Haiti earthquake.**  
There are fewer donations to the Horn of Africa famine, but average donations are higher than for the Pakistan floods.
- **Complex, slow-developing disasters generate less public support of Government aid than those perceived to be sudden and clear-cut.**

### Views on awareness of aid and development:

- **The majority of the public considers themselves to be uninformed about aid.**  
Only 1 in 5 people consider themselves informed about UK aid.
- **Informing people about poverty impacts on their support for aid in specific situations.**  
When informed about poverty levels in India, 30 per cent of respondents changed their view on aid to that country.

## The UK Public Opinion Monitor: Aims and Approach

The UK Public Opinion Monitor (UKPOM) is a longitudinal panel of approximately 6,000 people from across the UK that is broadly representative of the demographic make-up of the UK population by gender, age, level of education and region. Members of the panel receive an internet-based survey every six to eight weeks.

This report presents the most recent findings from the survey undertaken in August 2011, key findings from surveys undertaken in October 2010, November 2010 and March 2011 and draws together some of the evidence from previous UKPOM reports (see *Aid to Developing Countries: Where does the UK Public Stand?* September 2010 and *What should drive aid to developing countries?* December 2010).

### Aims of the research

The UKPOM aims to better understand how people view life in the UK and how their attitudes change over time. While the primary interest of IDS is in attitudes towards development issues, the panel aims to position these within broader views on economic, political and social issues. This is the first time that a long-term panel of the general public has been used to explore attitudes towards development in the UK, and in this sense the results provide a unique insight into the state of public opinion.

On the subject of public attitudes to development, the UKPOM is seeking to answer the following questions:

- How do attitudes towards development vary across the UK population and change over time?
- What are the key drivers of attitudes towards development?
- How do attitudes towards development influence the level and nature of support for aid to developing countries?
- What factors determine the other development-related behaviours that people engage in, such as donating to charities that operate in developing countries, political campaigning, product choices, etc?
- How can donors, development NGOs and others communicate most effectively with the public on development issues?

The findings presented here represent the part of an ongoing programme of research using the UKPOM that will enable donors, development NGOs and other stakeholders to engage more effectively with the public on development issues.

### Approach

The UKPOM provides a unique opportunity to explore changes in attitudes of the UK public over time. This is because, critically, the UK Public Opinion Monitor enables us to track

changes in attitudes of identified individuals, rather than separate samples of (different) people that have similar characteristics. This will enable the drivers of changes in attitudes towards development to be tracked over time, which has not previously been possible.

To date, nine surveys have been undertaken. The results presented here include all the key results on aid and development, including the most recent results from the survey undertaken in August 2011, with 1,492 valid responses. The sample is weighted to be representative of the UK population on the basis of gender, age and level of education.

Topics addressed by these surveys to date include:

- Diet and health
- Voting behaviour at the recent general election and the importance of key policy issues
- Extent to which the UK and the rest of the world are interconnected
- Aid to Haiti following the 2010 earthquake
- UK aid to developing countries
- MPs' expenses
- Migration
- Aid to Pakistan following the 2010 floods
- Electoral reform
- Climate change
- Poverty in the UK
- Changes to VAT
- Charity engagement
- The 'Big Society'
- Quality of life
- The role of the UK in the world.

Note that the UKPOM does not focus on aid issues alone. On the one hand, there is concern about biasing responses by only asking respondents about their attitudes towards aid. On the other, our interest is in how attitudes towards aid relate to broader social and political issues. This is an ongoing project and over time we will revisit many of the issues reported on here.

The UKPOM has a website, [www.ukpublicmonitor.org](http://www.ukpublicmonitor.org), which posts summaries of the survey results and includes a forum at which members of the panel can post comments. The UKPOM is a joint initiative between the Institute of Development Studies in the UK and the University of Guelph in Canada.

## Findings

Over time, the UKPOM aims to build up a detailed and unique picture of public attitudes towards development, and in particular the degree to which the UK public supports aid to developing countries, and how such attitudes change over time. This report presents some recent findings that add to this overall picture.

### 1. UK Government aid spending

One of the key ways in which we assess support for the UK Government's aid programme is to ask panel members how they would change Government spending in a number of different areas in order to address the budget deficit, with one of these areas being aid to developing countries. This question has been asked on three occasions.

#### Methodology

Most surveys of public attitudes towards aid touch on support for increases in spending. Respondents generally answer such questions, however, equipped with little or no information on the magnitude of the aid budget. Indeed, there is evidence that people tend to grossly over-estimate the amount spent by the Government on aid to developing countries. To overcome this problem, we provide respondents with the amounts spent per person on all major areas of Government spending. Further, to focus on real rather than hypothetical changes in aid spending, respondents are asked how expenditure on a range of Government services should be changed as part of current efforts to address the budget deficit.

#### Declining support for aid

In June 2010, 63 per cent of people thought aid should be cut in the context of addressing the deficit. By November 2010, this figure had risen to 71 per cent, indicating that support for the Government's aid programme is declining. On both occasions aid spending, along with broadcasting and cultural services, was the area where most people suggested spending cuts.

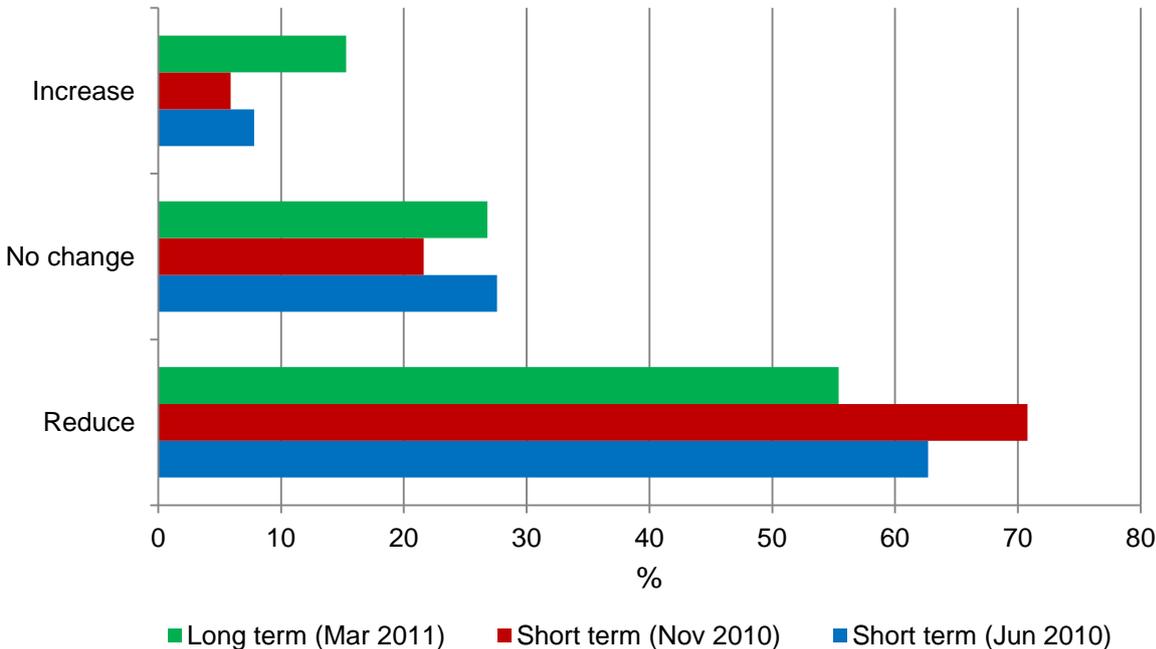
Given the high proportion of respondents considering that aid to developing countries should be cut, it is not surprising that over half did not support the coalition Government's policy of ring-fencing aid spending, when asked in June 2010. Indeed, only one third (33 per cent) supported the exemption of aid from spending cuts aimed at addressing the UK budget deficit. Respondents were not against the idea of ring-fencing as a general principle, however: 83 per cent were in favour of exempting the National Health Service from the expenditure cuts.

### Impact of economic situation

However, in March 2011 we asked respondents what they thought about aid spending in the longer term (5 – 10 years) rather than immediately. The response fell dramatically: 51 per cent thought aid should be cut in the longer term.

This downward trend in support of aid spending in the short term, but with greater support over the longer term suggests that views on aid spending are directly affected by the current UK economic situation, rather than indicative of an intrinsic opposition to the aid programme.

**Figure 1. Views on whether UK Government aid spending should increase, stay the same or reduce.**



### Key determinants of support for aid spending

Our research shows that the UK public firmly support the *principles* behind giving overseas aid, although the economic climate impacts on this support in *practice*. These issues are explored in depth in a previous UKPOM report (see *Aid to Developing Countries: Where does the UK Public Stand?* September 2010).

In June 2010, we asked a series of questions aimed at understanding the reasons behind people’s attitudes towards aid and development. Key findings from these questions include:

1. **The majority of respondents believe it is morally right for the UK to help developing countries.** 62 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement ‘It is our obligation as human beings to help the poor in the world’. Further, just over 51 per cent of respondents were of the view that ‘The UK should be prepared to share at least some of its wealth with the poor in developing countries’.

2. **The majority of respondents think that tackling poverty at home takes priority over tackling poverty in other parts of the world.** Over 64 per cent of respondents were of the view that it is more important for the UK Government to tackle poverty at home than in other parts of the world.
3. **A small majority of respondents (52 per cent) were of the view that most of the aid given by the UK to developing countries is wasted.**

Of course, many factors might drive the attitudes of the general public towards aid spending. For example, people may support the concept of aid to developing countries in principle, but believe it is of questionable effectiveness in practice. To explore these issues in some detail, the survey data were analysed statistically to identify the specific impact of a range of demographic and attitudinal factors.<sup>1</sup> Some key results are as follows:

- **Age.** Support for reducing aid spending increased progressively with the age of respondents. For example, respondents aged 55 years and older were 21 per cent more likely to propose reducing the aid budget than respondents aged 18 to 24 years.
- **Political views.** Conservative voters were 12 per cent more likely to support cutting the aid budget than Labour voters. Liberal Democrat voters, however, were no more likely to support cuts than Labour voters.
- **Wastage.** Respondents that were of the view that most of the aid given by the UK to developing countries is wasted were 15 per cent more likely to propose cuts in aid spending.

Taken as a whole, these results suggest that the moral imperative to provide assistance to developing countries and seeing the UK as having a global leadership role are key drivers of support for at least maintaining the aid budget. However, such support is undermined in part by views that assistance to the poor in developing countries is of lower priority than tackling poverty at home and that much aid to developing countries is wasted. Demographic factors, with the exception of age, are unimportant. These results also highlight a stark contrast in the views of supporters of the two political parties making up the coalition Government. While Conservative voters strongly support cutting the aid budget, the same cannot be said of supporters of the Liberal Democrats.

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically, a binomial probit model was estimated with support for cuts in aid spending as the dependent variable. The full results of this analysis is available in Henson, S. and Lindstrom J. (2011) 'A Mile Wide and an Inch Deep'? Understanding Support for Aid in the UK, *Draft IDS Working Paper*, Brighton: IDS, available [www.ids.ac.uk/mile-wide-wp](http://www.ids.ac.uk/mile-wide-wp).

**Viewpoint: Professor Lawrence Haddad  
Director, Institute of Development Studies**

These results show that some of the perceptions about aid are clearly linked to the current economic conditions in the UK, and in the longer term people feel more supportive of aid. But what will build support for aid right now?

Firstly, we should recognise the strong base we already have – the fact that 6 out of 10 people feel we have a ‘moral obligation’ to help the poor shows that the UK public feels the need to help.

Secondly, more evidence about when aid works is important – systematic reviews are beginning to marshal an important type of evidence, and the examples I have read show that there are plenty of interventions – many supported by aid – that are having a real positive impact on people's lives.

Thirdly, the UK Aid Watchdog (the Independent Commission for Aid Impact) is becoming more important as another avenue for citizens to ask questions about aid effectiveness and for aid's effectiveness to emerge.

Fourthly, those of us who have seen the sustainable support that aid can give to those living in the most desperate conditions must tell those stories to our friends, families, neighbours, communities and Members of Parliament.

Finally, and I think most important, we need to be more prepared to support those directly affected by aid in sharing their experiences of aid – these are the most authentic voices and testimonies to the strengths and weaknesses of aid.

Leadership is about doing the right thing, not necessarily the popular thing. But when will the gap between the leadership of the main political parties and the public on the commitment to aid become unsustainable? Those who believe that aid can do great things must support the leaders of the three main parties as long as the evidence supports us. For now, it does.

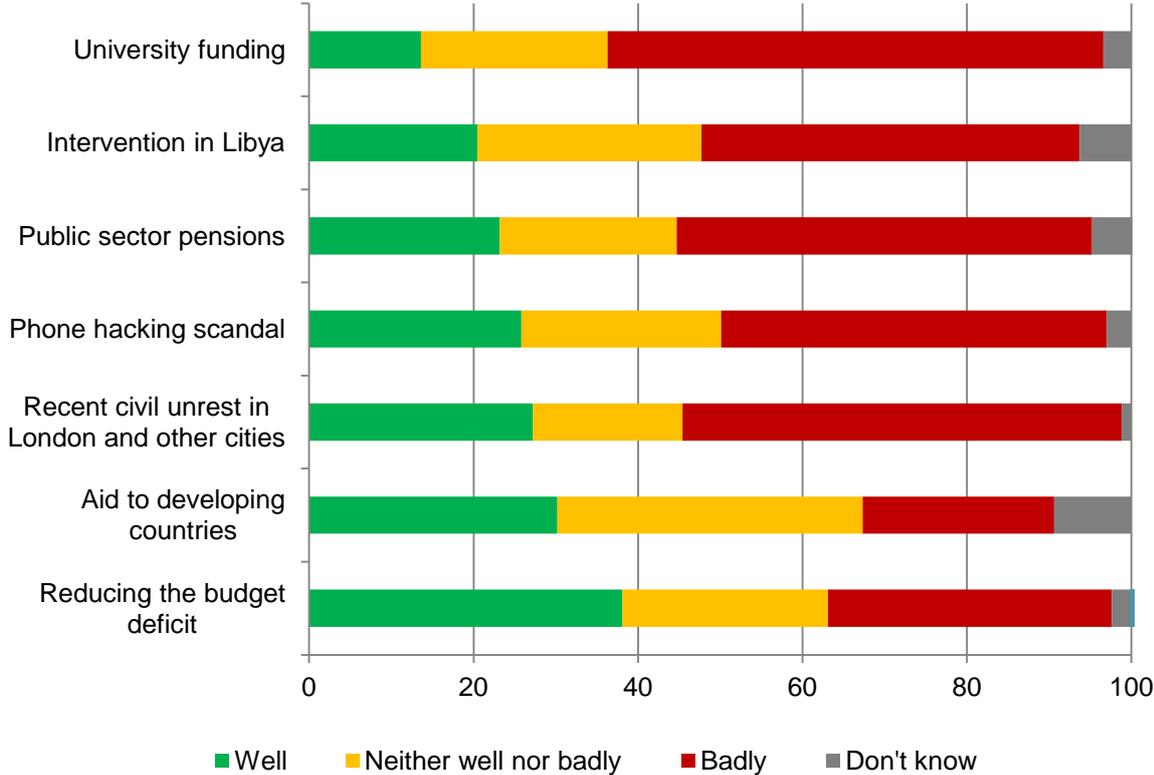
## **2. UK Government performance on aid**

Although views on *level of spending* on aid were particularly negative in relation to other areas of Government spending, the Government's *performance* on aid is actually seen more favourably than other areas of policy.

In August 2011, we asked respondents to judge how well the Government was performing in relation to a number of current high-profile issues. These included recent social unrest in London and other cities (riots), the military intervention in Libya and the phone-hacking scandal involving the *News of the World* newspaper.

Our research found that the Government was judged to be performing best with respect to reducing the budget deficit, followed by aid to developing countries, in comparison to the other issues. However, even on those areas of performance judged most favourably, less than 40 per cent of respondents considered the Government to be performing well (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Assessment of current performance of coalition Government with respect to selected issues**



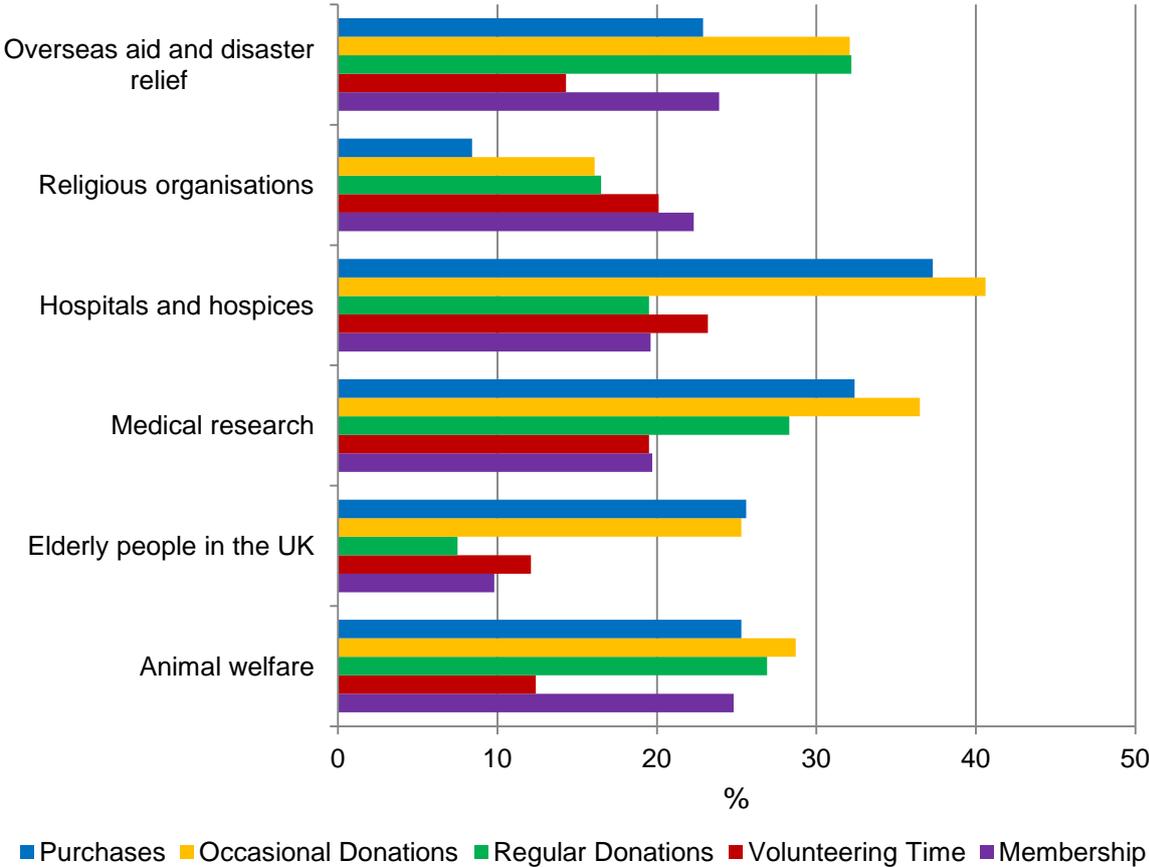
### 3. Engagement with development charities

In addition to examining the public’s view on UK Government aid spending, our surveys have also asked about personal donations and support for development charities. On a personal level, people are very engaged with overseas charities, particularly in terms of charity membership and giving.

In March 2011, the panel were asked about the level and nature of their engagement with charities in the UK in the previous 12 months. Our results show that charities working on overseas aid and disaster relief are very much supported by the public, being the most popular cause for regular donations. In addition, a high number of people were members of these charities (second only to animal welfare charities) (Figure 3<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>2</sup> This figure does not include the categories of Arts; Sports and recreation; Physical and mental health care; Disabled people; Homeless people, Housing and refuge shelters in the UK; Human rights; Conservation, the Environment and Heritage; Schools, colleges, universities and other education; and Children or young people in the UK that had less public engagement across all areas.

**Figure 3: Engagement with the most popular charitable causes in the last 12 months**



**Specific case study: Red Nose Day and Comic Relief**

We asked people about Red Nose Day ([www.rednoseday.com](http://www.rednoseday.com)) a specific fundraising event organised by Comic Relief ([www.comicrelief.com](http://www.comicrelief.com)), a fundraising and grant-making charity which strives to create a world free from poverty.

Over 99 per cent of people had heard of Red Nose Day and 48 per cent had made a donation on Red Nose Day in March 2010. Additionally, over 10 per cent had organised or participated in a fundraising event for Red Nose Day in 2010, whilst just over 11 per cent were planning to organise or participate in a fundraising event in 2011.

Comic Relief uses the monies it raises to fund charitable activities both in the UK and overseas. We asked respondents for their views on where Comic Relief’s funds should be spent. Although most did not mind whether funds were spent in the UK or overseas, a significant minority (27 per cent) would donate more money if all grants were awarded in the UK. Only a small proportion (3 per cent) of respondents indicated that they would donate less if all the funds raised went solely to UK-based causes.

**Viewpoint: Karl Wilding**  
**Head of Policy and Research, National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)**

Mention of 'compassion fatigue' is a regular component of discussions about the philanthropic behaviours and attitudes of the British public, no more so than in relation to overseas development causes.

The evidence to support this assertion is, however, often found wanting. The philanthropic support for charities working in the overseas development field identified by IDS's UK Public Opinion Monitor is indicative of the unstinting support expressed in the CAF/NCVO UK Giving survey, where since 2004 (when the current time series began) overseas development has been one of the three most popular causes. We estimate that 24 per cent of British adults gave to an overseas development charity in 2009/10, giving a median gift of £10/month. The philanthropic impulse is alive and well in Britain today and despite difficult economic circumstances people are continuing to support the causes that they have an affinity with. And for many donors, this remains overseas development.

#### **4. Response to Humanitarian Crises: Haiti earthquake, Pakistan floods and Horn of Africa famine**

Over the last 18 months we asked respondents about their understanding of and responses to three humanitarian crises: the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, the flood in Pakistan in July/August 2010 and the on-going famine in the Horn of Africa.

##### **Levels of concern and perceptions of seriousness**

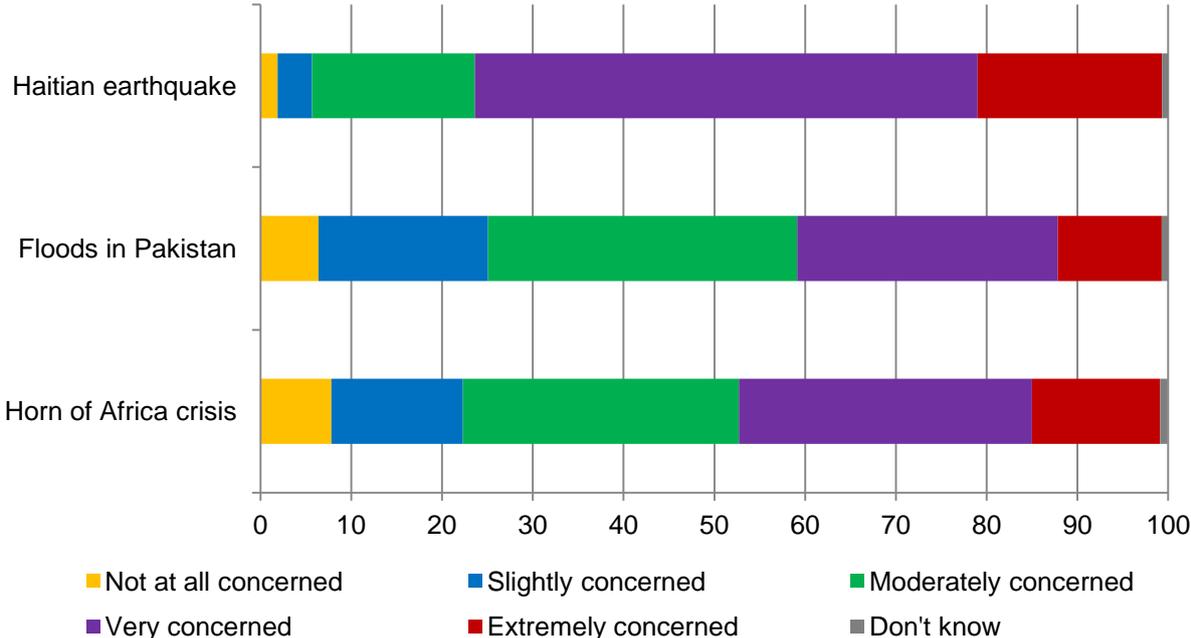
Our research seems to suggest that concern is greater for more sudden, dramatic crises (such as earthquakes) whereas more complex, multi-dimensional, slow-developing disasters gather less concern and support.

First we asked people whether they were concerned about the crises. The difference in the levels of concern for these three crises is quite striking. Around 46 per cent of respondents were 'very' or 'extremely' concerned about the current Horn of Africa crisis (Figure 4). This compares to around 40 per cent in the case of the floods in Pakistan in July/August 2010 and around 76 per cent in the case of the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Results on Horn of Africa crisis are from UKPOM's August 2011 survey (approximately 2 months after the crisis had had gained international media attention, although it had been brewing since December 2010). Results on floods in Pakistan are from UKPOM's October 2010 survey (approximately 3 months after the initial floods). Results on earthquake in Haiti are from UKPOM's April/May 2010 survey (approximately 3 months after the earthquake).

**Figure 4. Level of concern about Horn of Africa crisis and other recent humanitarian crises**

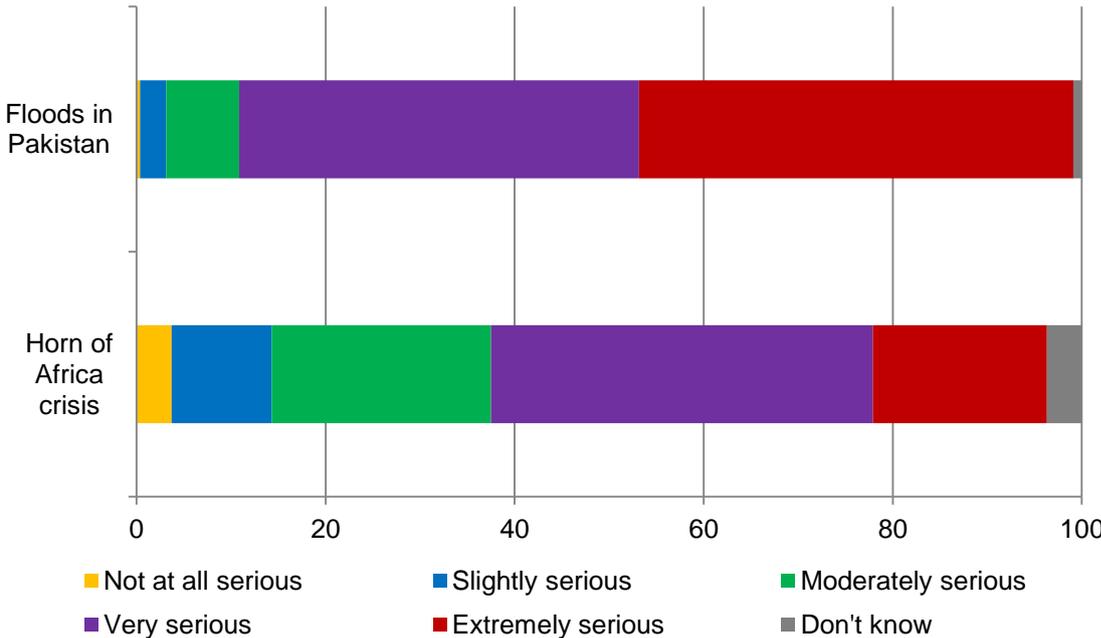


Secondly, we asked people whether they thought the crises were serious. In comparing specifically the floods in Pakistan with the Horn of Africa crisis, only 59 per cent of respondents considered the Horn of Africa crisis to be ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ serious (Figure 5), whereas a much greater proportion (88 per cent) of respondents considered the floods in Pakistan to be ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ serious.

These results on levels of concern versus levels of seriousness seem contradictory and require further analysis. It may be that asking about people’s concern for a particular issue is just not a reliable indicator of their attitude towards that issue, as has been pointed out previously in relation to the UK Government’s assessment of public support for aid.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For further information, see House of Commons (2009) Aid Under Pressure: Support for Development Assistance in a Global Economic Downturn, HC-179-I, International Development Committee, London: House of Commons

**Figure 5. Perceived seriousness of 2011 Horn of Africa famine and 2010 floods in Pakistan**



**Individual donations to relief efforts**

We have also consistently asked about panel members’ own donations to organisations providing help to people impacted by these crises. Our research shows that there is a decline in the number of people donating in response to these crises, but that there are still a significant number of committed donors making up the numbers.

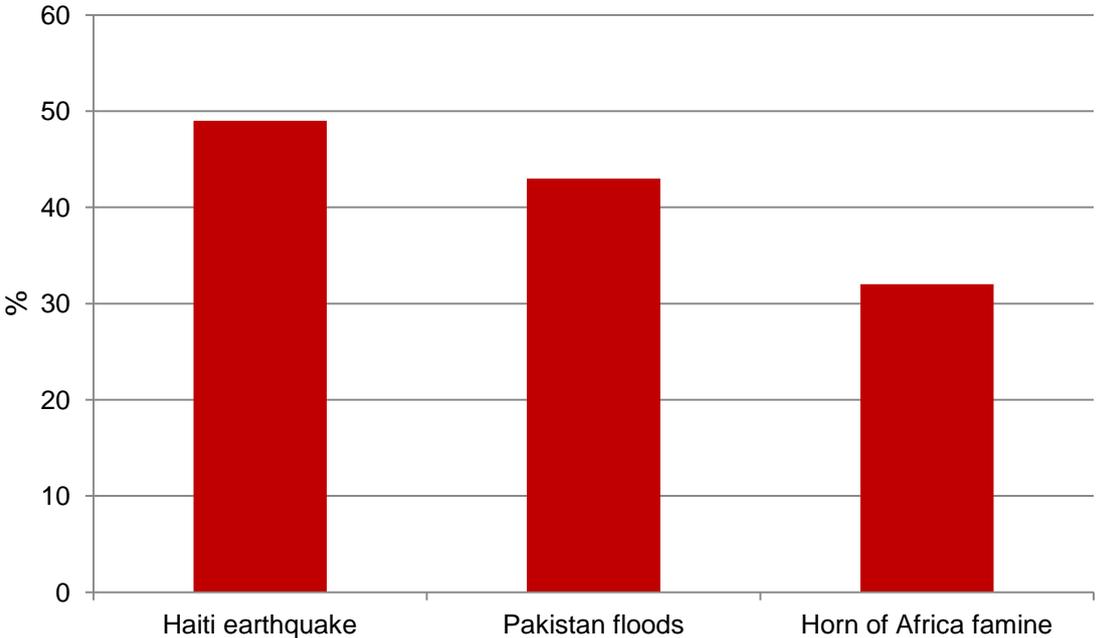
Just over 32 per cent of survey respondents had made a donation in relation to the current Horn of Africa famine. This compares to the 43 per cent who had reportedly made a donation to organisations providing relief to people impacted by the floods in Pakistan, and the 49 per cent who had reportedly made a donation to organisations providing relief to people impacted by the earthquake in Haiti (Figure 6).

Interestingly, whilst fewer people say they have made donations in the case of the Horn of Africa famine, the average donation was significantly greater (£73, compared to £35 for Pakistan). This reflects the fact that there had been far fewer small donors in the case of the Horn of Africa; larger donors had tended to donate roughly equivalent amounts to organisations working to provide relief in both these two crises.

Our findings support and enrich recent evidence from the Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) that shows that the appeal for the Horn of Africa famine is the third most generously supported in DEC history after 100 days (£72 million), with the Asian tsunami on top (£390 million), the Haiti earthquake second (£107 million) and Pakistan floods fourth (£71 million).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For further information see the DEC website, <http://www.dec.org.uk/blog/public-give-%C2%A372m-east-africa>

Figure 6. Percentage of respondents who personally donated to the three crises.



**UK Government aid and public donations**

These perceptions are also evident in relation to people’s assessment of the levels of aid for the relief efforts for the Pakistan floods and Horn of Africa famine. We asked what people thought of both the official aid from the UK Government and the level of individual donations to the Disaster Emergency Committee.<sup>6</sup>

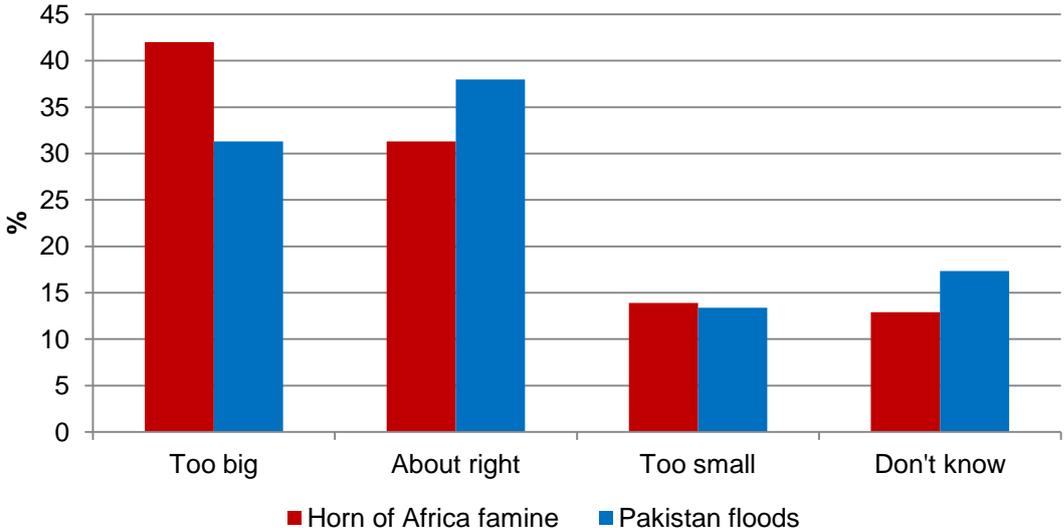
*UK Government aid*

Respondents were informed that, at the time of the survey, the UK Government had allocated £95 million to support humanitarian relief in the Horn of Africa. Around 42 per cent of respondents considered the amount allocated by the UK Government to be too big (Figure 7), with 31 per cent considering the amount to be ‘about right’ and only 14 per cent of the view that it is too small.

Amongst respondents to UKPOM’s October 2010 survey, 31 per cent were of the view that the UK Government’s allocation amounting to £31.3 million (in addition to bringing a £10 million project to build bridges forward) to the floods in Pakistan at the time of the survey was too big, whilst 38 per cent considered it to be ‘about right’ (Figure 7).

<sup>6</sup> It must be noted that as panel members were asked to judge whether a specific amount of money was too big, enough or too small, partly their assessment is related to the actual amount presented.

**Figure 7. Views on size of UK Government allocation for relief for the 2011 humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa and 2010 floods in Pakistan**

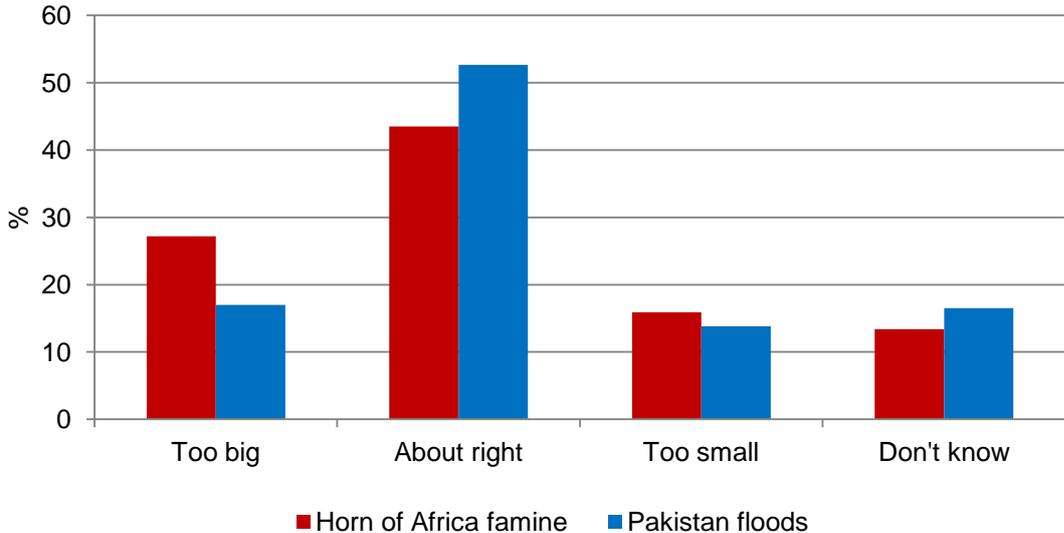


*Public donations*

Again for public donations, the Pakistan flood is deemed to be in more need. At the time of the survey, the UK public had donated £44 million to the Horn of Africa famine. Whilst only 17 per cent of respondents considered public donations at the time of the survey to be too small, 43 per cent were of the view that they were 'about right' (Figure 8). Around 28 per cent of respondents considered the level of public donations to be too big.

For the Pakistan floods, 53 per cent considered the amount of public donations (£29 million at the time of the survey) to be 'about right', whilst 14 per cent and 17 per cent considered it to be too small and too big, respectively (Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Views on size of public donations for relief for the Horn of Africa and 2010 floods in Pakistan**



## Concluding thoughts on crises

When all these results above are taken into consideration, it seems that the Haitian earthquake and, to a certain extent, the floods in Pakistan are deemed as more serious and in need of greater support from the UK Government, the UK public as a whole and individual panel members, than the Horn of Africa famine. However, there are clearly some very committed individuals that see this crisis as very serious and deserving of support.

It is also likely that the Horn of Africa famine and the Pakistan floods are not considered as clear cut as the earthquake in Haiti. For instance, one of the key points emerging from additional questions asked on Pakistan was the concern that flood relief would end up in the hands of terrorists. Similarly, there has been a lot of recent media attention of the complexity of the drought and resulting famine in the Horn of Africa that could be a key factor in the UK public being less supportive of efforts to deal with this multi-dimensional and slow-developing disaster. In such situations political issues may play a significant role in the public imagination and there might be more concerns with wastage of funds, which we have identified as a key determinant of driver of public support (see Section 1).

### **Viewpoint: Dr Matthew Lockwood Climate Change Team Leader, Institute of Development Studies**

This section suggests there is some evidence for 'crisis fatigue'. There are some definite differences between perceptions of the Haiti earthquake in early 2010 and the Horn of Africa drought this year – strikingly higher levels of concern about the former than the latter; almost half respondents giving for the Haiti appeal, with less than a third giving for the Horn. Last summer's floods in Pakistan are somewhat between these two. These contrasts may also be due to the economic situation in the UK, which has worsened markedly since last year.

However, we should be cautious about reading too much into three examples over two years. The BBC recently reported that the UK public have donated £72 million for the crisis in the Horn of Africa – the third highest sum since the Disasters Emergency Committee was established 45 years ago. No sign of aid or crisis fatigue there.

Another issue specific to the Horn of Africa is that the appeal went out ahead of really large scale starvation, and media coverage has lacked the dramatic images following the Haiti earthquake and indeed the Pakistan floods. Haiti also happened shortly after Christmas, and like the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004, this proximity doubtless plays a role in the complex nature of our responses to disasters.

Crisis fatigue is a constant fear of NGOs and UN agencies, and although the latest UKPOM data from IDS do raise the question of whether we are entering such a phase, each event is in fact different and responses are shaped by a range of factors unique to each, including media coverage, timing and so on. I think we need to keep an open mind for now and keep looking at the data.

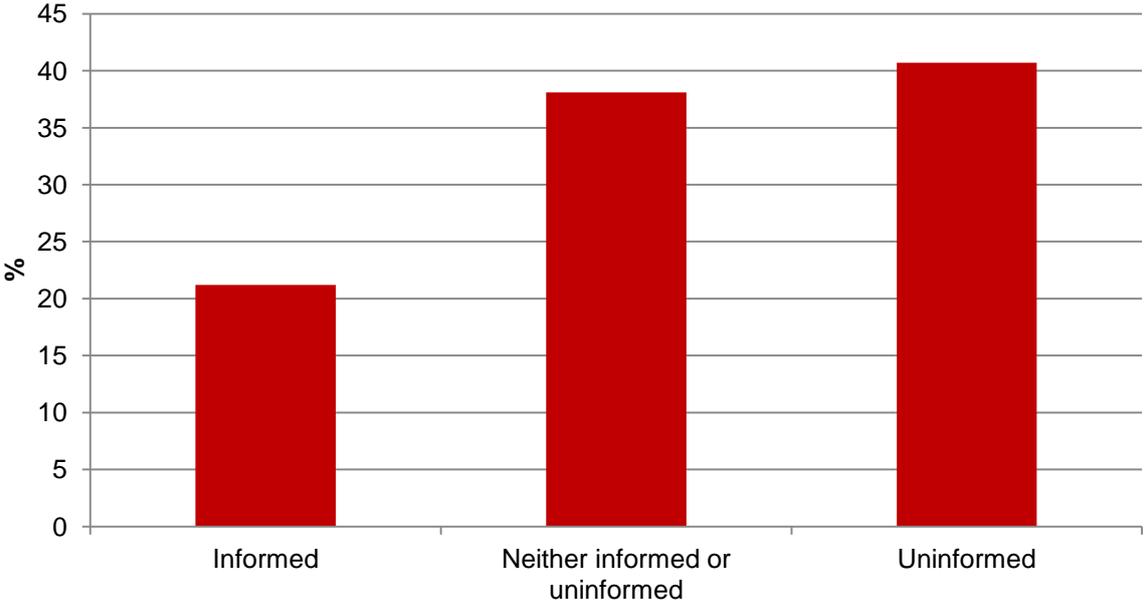
## 5. Awareness of development issues

As the results above show, the economic crisis has had a bearing on public support for aid and development. Another possible key factor in public support is the level of awareness of development issues.

Our survey results show that the level of awareness is low. In March 2011 we asked people whether they considered themselves to be informed about the aid given by the UK to developing countries. Only 1 in 5 people considered themselves informed about UK aid and 41 per cent of people considered themselves uninformed (Figure 9).

This lack of awareness could be a key factor in explaining previous UKPOM results. For example, in summer 2010, 52 per cent of respondents thought that most UK aid to developing countries is wasted (see *Aid to Developing Countries: Where does the UK Public Stand?* September 2010). Yet IDS research has consistently shown the value of aid in making a real difference to the lives of poor people around the world.

**Figure 9. Self-declared level of awareness of UK aid to developing countries. Only 1 in 5 people reported themselves as informed about aid.**



**Viewpoint: Mark Galloway**  
**Director, International Broadcasting Trust**

The relatively low level of awareness of development issues is a key finding of the UKPOM research and one which suggests that we need to take urgent action in a number of areas. In some ways, the fact that only 1 in 5 people feel that they are well informed about aid is not surprising. IBT's own research has demonstrated that most people in the UK find out about aid and development issues from the media – particularly television news. This coverage largely concentrates on bad news about developing countries and does little to facilitate a wider understanding of how aid works. The coverage of the recent famine in the Horn of Africa is a case in point. Once the story had hit the headlines, it took only a few days before the media story changed to 'why is it taking so long for the aid to get through?'

Recent polling by the British Red Cross found that the public has very little understanding of how aid is delivered in an emergency. The British Red Cross research also found that most of the public would like to know more about how aid is delivered – and particularly, basic facts such as how long it takes to deliver food to people who are starving and how long it takes to rebuild homes that have been destroyed by natural disasters. The public also expressed an interest in knowing how disaster-affected communities are coping three, six and twelve months after a disaster.

The media and NGOs have a key role to play in telling the story of how aid works and explaining some of the complexities and limitations of aid to the general public. It's time for us to be much more honest with the public about the limitations and complexities of aid.

The low levels of public understanding help to explain why the UK public often holds what appear to be contradictory opinions. For example, people give generously when they hear about a disaster, but they also express the view that much aid is wasted.

## 6. UK Government aid to India

A specific example shows that lack of awareness is of key importance to public attitudes.

During early 2011 the International Development Select Committee held an inquiry into UK Aid to India. In March 2011, we asked people what they thought about the level of aid the UK gives to India.

We started by telling people that the UK Government had decided to continue to provide £280 million per year to India. Two-thirds of people disagreed with this amount, and only 15 per cent agreed.

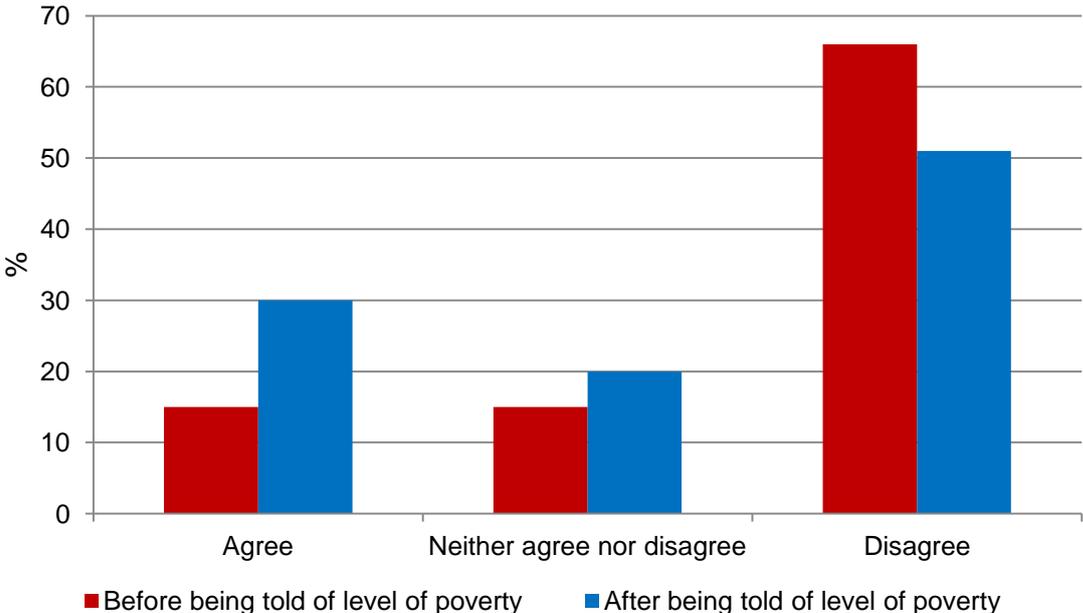
In fact, 58 per cent thought the UK should not give any aid to India at all. When asked for the reasons behind this decision, the top reasons given were:

- 1. Little evidence that aid to India works
- 2. India has space programme and nuclear weapons
- 3. India has many rich people

We then told respondents that India has more poor people than any other country in the world, and more than the whole of Sub Saharan Africa. 6 out of 10 people were not aware of this.

After informing respondents of this fact, 30 per cent of previously unaware respondents then agreed with the commitment of £280 million. However, over half (51 per cent) of previously unaware respondents still disagreed with the decision (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Views on aid to India



**Viewpoint: Nick Perkins**

**Head of Research Communications, Institute of Development Studies**

I am struck by a number of features of this line of inquiry in the research. First, it underscores the political courage of the coalition government in following through our commitments to development assistance.

It is also worth noting how many people feel uninformed about the aid budget and policy. This is reflected elsewhere in the report.

There are also a number of contradictions that the research appears to reveal. On one hand, there is a feeling that development assistance does not work, even though many of the same respondents appear to believe that India has somehow graduated from needing our help. It is also clear that the coalition government is struggling to express a rationale for its investment in aid that connects with the British public, even as individual giving remains relatively high.

This suggests that the government needs to expand its understanding of accountability to the British electorate beyond demonstrating results; they need to also demonstrate need. We must also better understand what is driving the apparent contradictions in attitudes. This is not to suggest we should be simply polling the public or building an agenda by focus groups. Instead, this is learning about how the public understands our mission so that we are gathering data not to undermine the moral courage of government but whether to build responses to sustain it. A simple solution to this would be a series of sustained and structured dialogues with the public. This could be elevated from vague public meetings to rigorous research if we have clear learning outcomes for both the public and policymakers.

## Next Steps

The UKPOM aims to build up a detailed and unique picture of public attitudes towards development, and in particular the degree to which the UK public supports aid to developing countries. The UKPOM positions these attitudes within broader views on economic, political and social issues, in order to understand what drives people's attitudes and how they change over time.

The findings presented here represent the part of an ongoing programme of research using the UKPOM and over time we will revisit many of these issues, as well as presenting more detailed analysis. This research aims to support donors, development NGOs and other stakeholders to engage more effectively with the public on development issues.

To find out more information about this ongoing programme of research, please visit [www.ids.ac.uk/go/idsproject/uk-public-opinion-monitor](http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/idsproject/uk-public-opinion-monitor). There you can find previous UKPOM reports (see *Aid to Developing Countries: Where does the UK Public Stand?* September 2010 and *What Should Drive UK Aid to Developing Countries?* December 2010) and more detailed analysis of results.