



COMMUNICATION CHALLENGE ID

When global research group InterMedia conducted research into the most effective methods to optimise engagement with international development among key target audiences, key findings emerged that are relevant to TV broadcasters worldwide. **Dr. Gerry Power**, Managing Director and Head of Innovation at **InterMedia Europe** and Associate Director **Klara Debeljak** share insight from their study

International development – in other words what governments do to alleviate poverty and improve living conditions in the poorest developing nations – is a complex issue. It involves aid, trade, debt, foreign assistance and corruption.

So for television broadcasters the challenge to communicate international development stories in news and information programmes is multi-faceted and further needs to take into account the plethora of other information sources available to audiences globally. This raises key questions: What assumptions are made about what audiences understand about international development in contemporary society? Where does

television fit within the over-loaded global online and offline information environment? How can TV broadcasters communicate about international development more effectively?

TV'S CENTRAL ROLE

InterMedia was commissioned by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to conduct a research study to understand the most effective methods to optimise engagement with international development among key target audiences. In response, we created the 'Building Support for International Development' research initiative (2012), where we spoke to nearly 4,000 interested citizens across China, France, Germany, the US and the UK to ►

explore engagement in international development. We also consulted with policy-makers, opinion leaders and bloggers to understand where they get their information from and the sources they trust. Informed by the results of national urban surveys and discussions with citizens in all five countries, we learned a great deal about the central role that TV broadcasters play in how citizens understand international development. Across all five countries, TV channels were cited as one of the main sources of information on international development by the largest proportion of interested citizens.

KEY FINDINGS

In the West interested citizens pointed to channels such as CNN, Fox News, NBC, ABC (US), BBC, Sky News and ITV (UK), ARD, ZDF, RTL (Germany), TF1, France 2 and BFM (France) as sources of information on international development.

In China, Chinese Central Television (CCTV) and provincial TV stations were mentioned most often as key sources by respondents.

Online news sources play a prominent role in France and the

UK — about four in 10 respondents in these two countries cited news websites as one of the main sources of information on international development. Although the use of news websites among interested citizens in the US is somewhat lower, still one in ten US respondents also reports using the Internet to obtain information about development issues.

Social media are not prominent sources of information on international development in Western countries, but were cited often by Chinese respondents. While fewer than 10% of interested citizens in each of the four Western countries said they use any type of social media for this purpose, 8% of all respondents in China said they use blogs (such as Tianya social net), and 15% cited other social networks such as Baidu, Weibo, Tencent and RenRen to obtain information on development issues.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR TV

Key findings which emerged in the course of this study lead us to offer the following considerations for TV broadcasters covering international development.

- *Primary lens*
International development is largely viewed through the primary

TV plays a central role in how citizens understand international development

lens of TV news coverage of and on-air appeals for humanitarian and disaster relief efforts – floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and famines. This angle contributes significantly to the audience assumption that the problem is short term and fixable by delivering food and health supplies to affected populations. Consider reminding viewers that people in developing countries are more vulnerable during disasters because of broader structural and political problems.

- *Providing context*
Knowing the economic and political conditions or circumstances of a developing country is key to the audience’s understanding of an international development story. Citizens in our research talked about how their own country’s national priorities dictated their government’s commitment to helping other countries. Consider providing a contextual focus to enable audiences to see how situations in developing countries evolve and how they vary for different countries.

- *Multiple angles*
As a news story, it is important to give audiences a variety of reasons or options to be interested in international development. Our research suggests that the motivations for citizens to become interested in international development are as varied as are the activities they engage in - volunteering, donating, petitioning, protesting etc. Consider offering audiences a number of angles or entry points into the issue, not just one.

- *Interconnectedness*
Demonstrating how political decisions, cultures, countries and economies are interconnected is a key element in communicating the complexity of international development. Not surprisingly, a personal focus on the experience of an individual is key to connecting with audiences emotionally. Consider illustrating the connection between the TV viewer



Top three sources of information on international development					
Percentage of interested citizens who mentioned this as one of their main sources					
	China	France	Germany	UK	USA
Newspapers	58%	44%	51%	44%	25%
News websites		40%		38%	22%
TV	82%	71%	74%	70%	41%
Radio			22%		
Friends and family	50%				

Most frequently quoted sources of information on international development					
	China	France	Germany	UK	USA
TV channels	CCTV; Provincial TV stations; Local/city TV stations	TF1; France 2; BFM	ARD; ZDF; RTL	BBC; Sky; ITV	CNN; Fox News; NBC; ABC
Radio stations	Local radio stations; CNR	France Inter; France Info; RTL	BR; WDR; NDR; SWR	BBC; Local radio stations	NPR; Local radio stations; PRN’s Rush Limbaugh Show
Print media	Local/city newspapers; Southern Daily; People’s Daily	Le Monde; Le Figaro; Le Point; Liberation	Der Spiegel; Focus; Die Zeit; Stern	The Times; The Guardian; Daily Mail; Daily Telegraph	New York Times; Wall Street Journal; Local newspapers
News websites	Sina; Baidu; Tencent	Le Monde; Google; Yahoo!	Der Spiegel; Google; MSN	BBC; The Guardian; Sky	CNN; New York Times; MSNBC; Yahoo!



and the individual in the news story to highlight the nature of the interconnectedness.

● *Seeing is believing*

TV images that convey the essence of the complexity of international development are infinitely more powerful than isolated and impersonal statistics – images that show the impact of foreign assistance, such as students in schools learning, roads built, people working etc. Consider showcasing the impact of foreign assistance in addition to responding to the appetite for transparency noting where international development activities have not worked.

INFORMATION PUSH

● *Information push*

The effective communication of international development issues will be driven by a focus on supply by TV broadcasters rather than by a demand from consumers. In our study, citizens did not report actively seeking out information about international development but rather describe how they are exposed to it as part of their regular consumption of general news and information programming. Consider appealing to viewers' interest in international development by promoting feature stories on the issue.

● *Simple terms*

The technical and formal language of international development is often not understood by audiences. Most people that we spoke to in our research do not understand the insider vocabulary of the international development sector, including terms like international development, food security, global health, climate change and governance. Consider using simple language and explanations and definitions for technical terminology.

● *Values over demographics*

Interest in international development as an issue is determined by what TV viewers care about more generally, their value priorities (money, family, religion, security) rather than their age or sex or social class. Our research uncovered that those interested in international development as an issue had developed an interest at a young age because of their family upbringing, their school experience as well as their involvement in faith-based organizations. Consider marketing programme and content offerings about international development and similar issues based on tastes and issue priorities rather than demographic profile.

● *The force of public opinion*

Traditionally, public opinion about

▲ **Top left** Flood in China's Shaanxi Province
 Lower left Market economy in Gulu, Northern Uganda
 Main picture Clean water for Sindh, Pakistan
 Previous page The bin men of Aceh dealing with tsunami and earthquake waste

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international development was heavily influenced by emotional, uninformed superficial reactions of the citizenry. Increasingly, TV viewers are more sophisticated and demanding in their assessment of public affairs. Consider the programme and content expectations of an audience that is increasingly exposed to a broader range of perspectives on international development and other issues than ever before.

● *Global perspective*

In order to differentiate one's ability to cover international development news stories and features in a manner that reflects a global perspective, it is essential to draw directly on a greater diversity of sources and viewpoints. There was a significant imbalance in the sources mentioned, particularly by the opinion leaders and the policy makers in our study, where few cited media or institutional sources from developing countries. Consider the benefits of covering international development and other stories from a global and Southern rather than a national and Northern perspective.

Do you have thoughts to share? Ideas? Join the discussion about effective engagement on international development issues at AudienceScapes. ■