

“Injecting optimism” in the UK

How DfID has wasted millions on the
Development Awareness Fund

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“Injecting optimism” in the UK

After coming to power in May 1997, the Labour government founded the Department for International Development (DfID). Whereas aid had previously been managed by the Overseas Development Administration of the Foreign Office, it was now to have its own department, headed by a cabinet minister.

DfID’s birth also marked a change in development policy, as the department “set out to make global development a national priority and *promote it to audiences in the UK and overseas...*” [emphasis added].¹

As soon as it set out targets for development, DfID underlined “the importance of building public support for development across the UK” in the 1997 White Paper on International Development.²

Clare Short, the first Secretary of State for International Development, stressed the importance of “building public support for development.” “Political will” – backed by a greater level of public support for and faith in the government’s work – was required to meet development targets.

In the 1999 DfID strategy paper “Building Support for Development Strategy”, she states:

“That means sharing the challenge of poverty elimination much more widely, and of raising awareness of its importance for all of us, of how far we have come, and of the progress that is now possible ... and to inject a greater sense of optimism and of progress into public understanding of development.”³

What is the Development Awareness Fund?

One central pillar of this policy is the Development Awareness Fund (DAF). The fund is “designed to

support not-for-profit organisations carry out projects which raise public awareness and understanding of global poverty and how it can be reduced.”⁴

DfID’s website states: “The Development Awareness Fund is primarily focused on UK audiences.” Projects that “focus on development project activities overseas” or involve “construction work” are therefore not eligible. The scheme primarily funds non-governmental organisations (NGOs) within the UK, to disseminate government-approved messages about international development.⁵

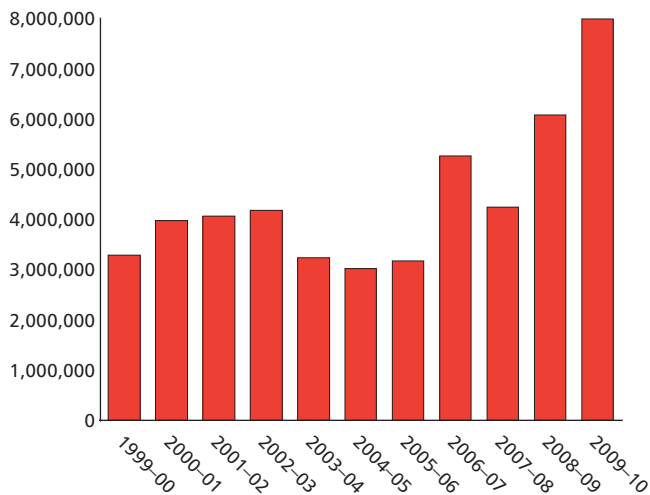
DAF projects are eligible to receive anywhere between £10,000 to a maximum of £100,000 per year, for a maximum of 3 years (most projects are 3 years long). DfID can cover up to 100 per cent of project costs.⁶

The Mini Grants Programme – a sub-section of DfID’s Development Awareness Fund – is also “aimed directly at organisations working at grass roots level across the UK.”⁷ Mini Grants provide between £1,000 and £10,000 per year, for up to 3 years.

DfID has announced that it plans to scrap the DAF. But this does not mean that we should stop questioning the programme’s utility or intentions. In its place, DfID will set up very similar funding programmes, targeted at seven to 14-year-old school children.⁸

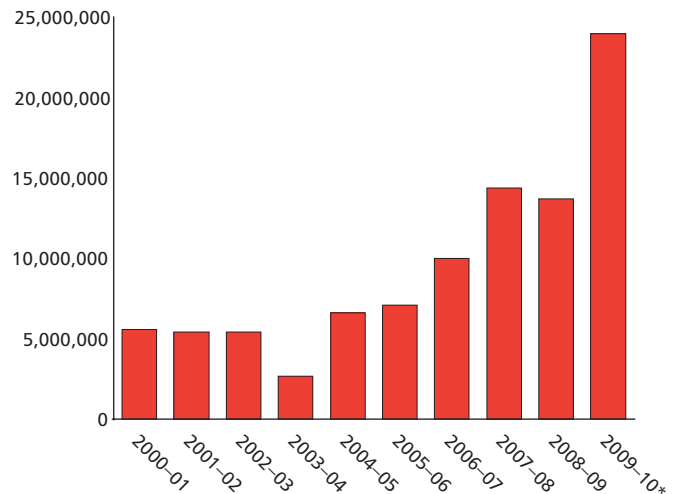
As the next section shows, budgetary projections foresee hundreds of millions of pounds from the “foreign aid” budget being spent on convincing British people to support the government’s work. As the budgets expand, it is more necessary than ever to examine and question DfID’s “development awareness” work.

Figure 1 **Development Awareness Fund annual expenditure**
Amount granted to UK-based NGOs, £



The annual amount granted to NGOs to “raise public awareness” of development in the UK increased from just over £3 million in 1999-00, to over £8 million in 2009-10.¹⁴

Figure 2 **Total spending on “Development Awareness”**
Amount spent by DfID, £



The total amount that DfID allocated to “development awareness” has increased from little over £5 million in 2000-01, to nearly £14 million in 2008-09, and a projected £24 million in 2009-10.¹⁵
*Projection

Increasing budgets

In 2009–2010, DfID spent a total of £8.1 million in Development Awareness Funds (see Figure 1) while total DAF spending since 1999 has almost reached £50 million. A *Daily Telegraph* article in February 2010 (“£50m of Government’s international aid budget spent in the UK”) stated:

“Figures show £45.6 million was spent by DfID directly on projects based within the UK in the past five years, with almost half of that – £22.7 million – spent on the Development Awareness Fund...”⁹

The article refers not only to the DAF, but also to a larger budgetary allowance which is presented in DfID’s accounts as “development awareness”. While this paper focuses specifically on the DAF, Figure 2 shows the considerable increase in overall amounts spent by DfID on “development awareness”. It has increased from around £5.6 million in 2000–01¹⁰, to £13.7 million in 2008–09, with a huge expenditure of £47 million projected for 2009–11.¹¹

According to a DfID departmental report, these funds are spent within the UK:

“DfID spent approximately £14 million in 2008/09 on projects in the UK aimed at increasing public awareness of global poverty and of how donors including DFID are working to reduce it.”¹²

Overall – including grants other than the DAF – DfID has spent over £70 million on “development awareness” from 2000 to 2009.

Furthermore, this section of the budget is merely one part of DfID’s spending on “communications”. Other categories include “strategic grants” and “media & marketing”. Overall DfID spent £95.6 million under these budgets between 2003–04 and 2008–09.¹³

Examples of recipient programmes

Some examples of DAF grants made by DfID are as follows.

In the 2009–10 round of funding, a group named Brighton Peace & Environment Centre were granted £183,375 to “use photos provided by Oxfam, alongside those of local Brighton and Hove residents to show how individuals in different parts of the world are

intrinsically linked through the challenge of climate change.”

The project’s description also explains: “Workshops will be offered to local groups with the aim of empowering people to take action and become Community Champions.”¹⁶

This project claims that it increases awareness of climate change, interdependence of communities and what action people can take to contribute to poverty reduction. But it is difficult to see how £180,000 spent on a glorified photo exhibition will help the world’s poorest people deal with poverty and climate change. Even at best, this smacks of propaganda and feel-good self-indulgence.

Another DAF grant seeks to turn school teachers into “global agents of change.” To achieve this, the National Union of Teachers was granted the maximum amount allowed for a DAF grant (£300,000) in the same 2009–10 round. The programme is a pilot project “to equip and support teachers in meeting the government’s global learning expectations.”

Over the years the DAF has funded various other trades unions in the UK:

- Prospect, 2008–09, £190,460
- Transport and General Workers Union, 2007–08, £192,600
- NIC ICTU (Irish Congress of Trade Unions, N.I. Committee), 2005–06, £80,040
- General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU), 2004–05, £199,950
- General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU), 2003–04, £29,327
- Trades Union Congress (TUC), 2002–03, £31200¹⁷

Another project in 2009–10 saw almost a quarter of a million pounds (£241,500) granted to the Arcola Theatre Production Company in Hackney, east London. Their project will teach Capoeira, a Brazilian form of dance. This may be an enjoyable activity for the participants, but like the other projects listed above, it is difficult to see how it aids development in poor countries.

A full list of grants can be found on DfID’s website.¹⁸

Bankrolling NGOs

Recipients can receive several DAF grants at any one time, significantly boosting their income from the scheme. One organisation, Global Education Derby, have received almost one million pounds in DAF funding since 2004–05, sometimes securing two grants in the same year.

The organisation is a small registered charity in the midlands, employing ten or less full time staff.¹⁹ Their reliance on DAF funding over six years appears to contradict DfID guidelines, which state: “The DAF Fund will give priority to new projects, not repeat projects. All must clearly demonstrate how sustainability will be achieved.”²⁰ It is unclear how the group’s activities are sustainable, as their latest accounts (at the time of print) show that 62 per cent of income was derived from DfID (£178,533). The accounts list voluntary income at just £640 (from membership fees). Other sources of income include the Development Education Association, which itself received over half its income (£444,335) from DfID.²¹

Their grant for 2009–10 was aimed at teaching primary school children that “unequal development fosters poverty and conflict, which undermines community cohesion in communities in the South and which in turn, through population migration or the destabilising

Figure 3 **Global Education Derby, DAF grants received**

2009–10:	£209,455
2008–09:	£251,830
2008–09:	£10,000 (Mini Grant)
2007–08:	£90,011
2006–07:	£62,640
2006–07:	£178,420
2004–05:	£111,286
Total:	£913,642

DAF grants to a single organisation in Derby have totalled almost one million pounds.

effects of failed states, raises tensions and threatens local community cohesion in the UK.”

These theories, being taught to young children, are certainly debatable, and arguably controversial – particularly the assertion that migration “raises tensions and threatens local community cohesion”. Yet spreading ideological messages to children is at the heart of the DAF’s purpose, as explored in the following section.

The fund uses the education system to influence attitudes to development, as shown by three grants awarded to the Institute of Education in 2009–10. The group was awarded £653,172 in total for this year alone. One grant, entitled “Students as Global Citizens”, was aimed at university level students; another was aimed primarily at teachers; the third project targeted college students aged 14–19 years old.

Targeting children

Of the DAF’s 35 large grants for the year 2009–10, 24 target school-age children, and a further six target university students or young adults. Thus 86 per cent of DAF grants are now aimed at influencing the views of children, young adults or university students.

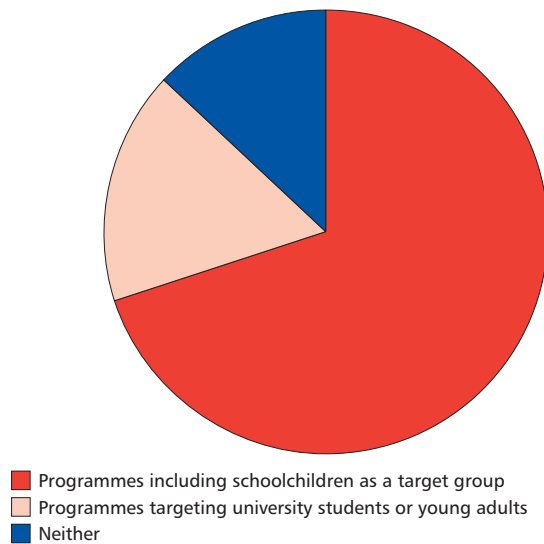
An organisation named Scotdec (the Scottish Development Education Centre) received £190,000 over 3 years from the DAF. As well as focussing on staff at further education colleges, the programme targeted very young children on Early Education and Childcare courses. It explained this policy:

“The target group [early education and childcare staff] is potentially in a very influential position with regard to the development of children and their understanding. Attitudes begin to develop at a very young age and the experiences and social environment which very young people are exposed to have a profound effect on their developing understanding and behaviours. It will enable FE college staff to ensure that their Early Years Education courses develop students as global citizens...”

A similar example is a Mini Grant of £30,000 made to Devon Development Education. The intention of this programme is as follows:

“To ensure that pre-school children in Devon receive their

Figure 4 DAF’s target groups for 2009–10



Two thirds of DAF grants are aimed at influencing the views of school-age children, while six out of seven are aimed at either schoolchildren or university students (or in some cases, both).²²

entitlement to learn about Global Citizenship, through developing and enhancing capacity of Early Years Practitioners (EYPs), in achieving this goal by working with children, EYP umbrella groups and nurseries in Devon.”

The Scotdec grant and Devon grant listed above are particularly revealing of the government’s intention to target children when they are young so that they can mould their ideas and views on international development. Just how pre-school children can be taught about ‘global citizenship’ is another question.

Conclusion

Given the government’s confessed objectives of using schemes such as the DAF to boost “public support for the government’s objectives”, and to create “more faith” in their policies, it is concerning that most of the programmes are targeted at children. Is it really acceptable that children are taught from a young age to support the government’s policies?

Awareness of international issues is of course important for a child’s intellectual development, and it is healthy

for all of us to be aware of the world we live in. However, there is a huge difference between presenting objective information about the world and allowing people to develop their own views, and preaching government-endorsed views.

The latter is not education, not even “raising awareness”, but is blatant government propaganda.

In shutting down the DAF, DfID is not ending these policies – rather, it is just siphoning them off elsewhere. Their website explains that a “new scheme will be up and running later this year”, for “not-for-profit organizations that are seeking funding to raise public awareness and understanding of global poverty.”²³

Spending considerable and increasing amounts of “foreign aid” on awareness projects within the UK must be questioned. Prior to the 2010 General Election, the Conservative Party promised that their “top priority [for international development] will be to ensure that every single pound of taxpayers’ money delivers the maximum impact...”²⁴

Following their formation of a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, the new government announced a freeze on new funding for “awareness projects” in the UK.²⁵ The announcement was welcome, but the government must question the spending on all these projects, and the ideology behind them. Spending hundreds of millions of pounds may help government promote its own views, but it fails to help any of the world’s most vulnerable, impoverished people.

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