“Injecting optimism” in the UK

How DfID has wasted millions on the Development Awareness Fund

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“Injecting optimism” in the UK

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IPN hopes that as a result of its programs, individuals will be better able to achieve their aspirations, regardless of race, color, creed, nationality or human condition.

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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].

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.

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.”

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.”

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.

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.

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.” 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.

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.
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…”

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 2000–01, to £13.7 million in 2008–09, with a huge expenditure of £47 million projected for 2009–11.

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.”

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.

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.”

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, £31200

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009–10</td>
<td>£209,455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–09</td>
<td>£251,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–09</td>
<td>£10,000  (Mini Grant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007–08</td>
<td>£90,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006–07</td>
<td>£62,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006–07</td>
<td>£178,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004–05</td>
<td>£111,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>£913,642</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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…”

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. 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.
References

3. ibid
5. ibid
6. ibid
12. ibid. Page 49
13. ibid. Page 67
15. Calculated by adding up the actual expenditure listed as ‘Development Awareness’ according to the following DfID departmental reports:

Mini-grants 2005–06: Not included
Mini-grants 2004–05: Not included
Mini-grants 2003–04: Not included
Mini-grants 2002–03: Not included
Mini-grants 2001–02: Not included
Mini-grants 2000–01: Not included
Mini-grants 1999–2000: Not included
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17. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) was later awarded over £3.6m by DfID under different schemes. See our paper “A Closer Union, the Political Abuse of Foreign Aid” for more details. http://www.policynetwork.net/accountability/publication/a-closer-union


21. Figures are taken from the accounts for financial year end 31 March 2009 for Global Education Derby (registered charity 1049591), and accounts for financial year end 31 March 2009 for Development Education Association (registered charity 291696). Both sets of accounts are available at either www.guidestar.org.uk or www.charity-commission.gov.uk. Global Education Derby’s total income is listed as £288,843, and the accounts declare various grants from DfID, which total £178,533. From these figures we calculated that 61.8 per cent (rounded to 62 per cent) of income was derived from DfID. All these grants are listed as “DfID DAF” or “Department for International Development – Mini Project”. It is not clear that the grants to Global Education Derby from the Development Education Association came in turn from funds received from DfID.


