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COMMENT TO "FINDING FRAMES: NEW WAYS TO ENGAGE THE U.K. PUBLIC IN GLOBAL POVERTY"

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Andrew Darnton with Martin Kirk.

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Finding Frames is a report on the ways in which UK citizens are committed to issues related to global poverty and how NGOs and other actors could delve deeper into and expand upon this commitment. The author is Andrew Darnton (a researcher who had conducted work on citizens' perceptions on poverty), in close collaboration with Martin Kirk (Oxfam UK) and a support team made up of people from other NGOs and universities in the UK.

The report (chapter 1) begins by performing a thorough analysis of the data available on UK citizens' commitment levels (including sensitivity, understanding and engagement) with global poverty, showing that these are static or falling when looking into the trends concerning these attitudes in British society, despite the efforts of many awareness campaigns conducted by various NGOs.

The report provides a further analysis going on to describe British citizens' "engagement model" with global poverty, which is characterised by a poor understanding of the political causes that generate global North-South inequalities (i.e., believing that the causes of poverty are primarily internal to poor countries). It also casts the UK public in the role of 'dominant givers' and Southern publics in the role of 'grateful receivers'. Based on this model, all British citizens can do is *give money to or support (by collecting signatures)* NGOs, who act as mere conduits in a predominantly transactional model of cooperation that thoroughly fails to have an effect on the root causes of inequality. In this regard, the report takes the issue a step further to analyse how, to some extent, the very NGOs have been the ones to have *fuelled and strengthened* the "little engagement" model, incorporating business practices and prioritising fundraising and campaigning, which indirectly have raised the dilemma of "cheap participation" (many people doing/giving very little -very low fees, ad hoc support- putting in very little effort -signing with just one click, etc.).

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The report seeks to provide elements for analysis to understand how we reached this point. Hence, it begins by harnessing the full theoretical and empirical background of the value theory (chapter 2), which helps to understand how different values are interrelated; above all, however, it helps to identify how those values that would favour a strong commitment to global poverty (intrinsic values such as a sense of equality, social justice, or unity with nature) are opposed to the kind of values that are strengthened by the commercial and transactional models most frequently used by NGOs in awareness campaigns and fundraising. Thus, unknowingly, many NGOs have, through their model of cheap participation, promoted a value system opposed to the ideal/need to deeply and truly engage citizens with global causes.

In the third chapter, the report delves deeper into the analysis based on the values theory, incorporating the Frames Approach as a crucible to understand how campaigns and the very actions conducted by NGOs convey messages that somehow "set", at subconscious level, the way people understand and relate to global poverty. Building on the work of George Lakoff, the Frames Approach is much more than just an analytical tool, since it helps to visualise or imagine alternative routes, necessary changes and risks to be considered if NGOs really want to take on the challenge of "re-engaging" society in the fight against global poverty. This more propositional part was not created on the basis of theory or intuition, but rather it was drawn from a collective analysis of the (surface and deep) Frames present in the work and in the practices of many NGOs, in addition to building, based on this analysis, possible alternatives to refocus the discourse and the ways in which NGOs relate to citizens and empower them to become engaged with the causes they promote (chapter 4).

In chapter 5, some of the implications for the NGO sector are discussed concerning the challenge of calling oneself into question from the point of view of the value theory and the frames approach; striving to change the concept of "aid" or "charity" often associated with NGOs; reaching a balance between raising funds for immediate needs and longer term donor relationship and management strategies (to reduce drop-out rates); generating campaigning models capable of providing more opportunities for engagement and dialogue that go beyond "easy participation"; strengthening networking both among NGOs and active citizens; as well as giving real opportunities for participation to citizens that are engaged, etc.

However, the report does not "prescribe" solutions, since both the values theory and the frames approach have to be contextualised within the appropriate time and place to ensure the *socio-cultural* relevance of the analysis of the problem and the search for alternatives of change. And this is precisely the reason why the report may represent a significant contribution beyond the borders of the United Kingdom, because it offers a theoretical and methodological structure (and even offers political foresight) that can be replicated in other social and cultural contexts. In fact, chapter 6 ends by defining a series of possible steps or routes to go further and deeper, experimentally, into the analysis of the state of civic engagement and the establishment of new hypotheses of transformation.

The report can be downloaded for free from [www.findingframes.org](http://www.findingframes.org).

**CONTENTS** 1. The state of public engagement in global poverty 2. The role of values in public engagement 3. A frames approach to public engagement 4. Towards positive frames for development 5. Implications for practice 6. Next steps Annex A: Surface frames for the UK development sector 1 Annex B: Selected references