



Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2019

MEDIA, MEDIA USE AND REPORTING ON GLOBAL POVERTY

Executive Summary

2019

Imprint

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Design

MedienMélange:Kommunikation!, Hamburg
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Translation

exact! Sprachenservice und
Informationsmanagement GmbH

Photo credits

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Bibliographical reference

Schneider, S. H., J. Eger, P. Morini, D. Hudson and J. Hudson (2019), Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2019. Media, Media Use and Reporting on Global Poverty. Executive Summary, German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), Bonn.

Printing

Bonifatius, Paderborn

© German Institute for Development
Evaluation (DEval), 2019

Published by

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This is an excerpt from the publication "Meinungsmonitor Entwicklungspolitik 2019 – Medien, Mediennutzung und Berichterstattung zu weltweiter Armut". Download the full report in German here:
http://www.deval.org/files/content/Dateien/Evaluierung/Berichte/2020/DEval_Studie_2019_Meinungsmonitor_Entwicklungspolitik.pdf

SUMMARY

In recent years and at present, the general public has been showing great interest in issues relevant to development policy. Such issues include, for example, the global challenges of war and conflict, climate and climate change, and flight and migration. In this context, development cooperation (DC) is put forward as a possible remedy to curb the effects of wars and conflicts, slow down climate change, reduce global inequalities, and thereby facilitate sustainable economic activity around the world. The 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) particularly emphasise the role of citizens and their contribution to sustainable global development. At the same time, the general public is poorly informed on the topic, while large parts of the population consider development cooperation ineffective and presume that corruption is common in recipient countries.

It is therefore necessary to provide citizens with information on this subject area. The media are the most extensive information channel for the purpose. They have the potential to reach large sections of the population and thus address knowledge gaps and misperceptions.

This is where the *Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2019 – Media, Media Use and Reporting on Global Poverty* comes in, investigating which media the general public uses, the extent to which people trust the media and those broadcasting development policy information (e.g. the Federal Government or development organisations), and the degree to which they come into contact with the central issue for development policy – namely global poverty – through the media. It also examines how the media coverage of global poverty is perceived. The findings of the study are intended to help development policy actors obtain evidence-based information in terms of the objectives, measures, and effects of development policy and development cooperation, and also communicate the associated challenges more effectively and appropriately to the general public.

Previous studies have devoted themselves solely to partial aspects of this – content wise strongly interrelated – thematic complex. The *Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2019 – Media, Media Use and Reporting on Global Poverty* is the first study to analyze media use, media perception and perception of content relevant for development policy as interlinked phenomena.

The main findings of the study can be summarised as follows:

Sources of international news: Nearly 70 % of citizens agree to the statement that they read, see, or hear news on international events at least once a day. Public television (56 %), newspapers (45 %), and radio (40%) are the main sources of information here, followed by private television channels and internet-based media. Social media play an important role, especially for young adults. Just under 30 % of 18- to 29-year-olds cite them as a major source of international news. In contrast, the older population groups (40 to 59 years and 60 years and older) are more likely to use traditional editorial media. Differences in media usage are also apparent with regard to political orientation. People who consider themselves further to the right on the political spectrum are more likely to use social media and less likely to use public television as their main source for this type of news.

Trust in the media: Generally, the general public trusts the media, with only just over 10% having little confidence in the overall media offering. However, there are considerable differences. People who see themselves on the political right are more likely to doubt the trustworthiness of the media. In addition, the population distinguishes between different media. For example, while public television broadcasters are highly trusted, other media formats (including Twitter and tabloid newspapers such as *Bild*) are less trusted. Trust poses a challenge beyond the media, as well. While large sections of the population trust the media, less confidence is placed in those sending out development policy messages (e.g. the Federal Government and non-governmental organisations). Again, there are significant differences here between different population groups. On average, people who see themselves further on the right of the political spectrum exhibit a lower level of trust in all areas.

Perception of reporting on global poverty: Around 60 % of the population claim to be aware of media reporting on the issue of global poverty. News and documentaries are the main points of contact. War and conflict, flight and migration, and climate change are the issues that are most frequently encountered. In contrast, the general public barely registers reports on development policy initiatives, income inequality, or gender equality. In addition, sections of the population perceive the presentation of development policy and relevant related issues as distorted. Depending on the issue concerned, this applies especially to those who consider themselves to be more to the right on the political spectrum.

Media use and perception of the different DC attitude types: The four attitude types established in the *Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2018*, namely *supporters*, *sceptics*, *opponents* and *undecideds*, are characterised by clearly identifiable patterns in their attitudes towards development policy and DC. The analyses in this report show that people with certain types of attitudes also differ in terms of the media they use and how they perceive them. DC supporters and DC sceptics are active media users. Both groups frequently come into contact with the topic area of global poverty. News and documentaries are the central information formats. In contrast, DC opponents are harder to reach. Their rather low level of trust in the media poses a challenge for communication concerning development policy. Those who are undecided on DC also do not see their opinion on international issues reflected in the media. They perceive the portrayal of global poverty as distorted. All four attitude types encounter the subject of global poverty mainly through the issues of war and conflict, flight and migration, and climate change. However, they differ with regard to how often the individual topics are perceived in proportionate terms.

Implications: The study concludes with implications for development policy communication and educational work. Development policy communication should revolve around reaching the population with relevant and evidence-based information that is perceived as trustworthy. At the same time, both successes and failures in development cooperation should be reported on in a transparent and fact-based manner to avoid giving the impression that the reality of development policy is being presented in a distorted way. This could be backed up by political/development policy education programmes designed to increase the general public's media literacy and enable people to appropriately assess information provided by the media. At the same time, the potential of communication with particularly critical groups should be realistically assessed based on findings from psychology and communication science. For example, people who generally distrust development cooperation measures or are convinced that they are largely ineffective can be expected to assess information offerings from the perspective of their current attitude – and reject them if they do not correspond to their own opinion.

In order for communication of development policy content to be aimed at specific target groups and meet people's needs, it is also necessary to consider the media usage behaviour of different population groups. Social media constitute an important information channel, especially for young adults. Due to their increasing relevance, corresponding information offerings should be further expanded. In addition, the use of social media and the public discussions that take place on them should be continuously monitored. At the same time, it is important not to neglect older population groups, which rely more on traditional sources of editorial information (such as TV and newspapers).

Target-group-specific implications for DC attitude types

- **Supporters:** This group sees the greatest opportunities to actually contribute to a more sustainable world through its own actions. The people in this group are probably the most open to intensive efforts to confront development policy issues and are generally easy to reach through the media. This also makes them the primary target group for development policy education. The aim for this target group should be to provide easy ways for people to get personally involved in development policy and encourage them to turn positive attitudes into tangible actions.
- **Sceptics:** This group is relatively easy to reach through the media. Criticism and reservations with regard to development cooperation – the assumption of a high level of corruption, for example, or of ineffectiveness and inefficiency – should be addressed transparently and discussed in a self-critical manner. In this way, the scepticism can be dispelled in the event of success, or people can at least be encouraged to accept that a certain amount of risk (for example, with regard to the failure of individual projects) is part of purposeful DC. This could be achieved particularly effectively if sceptics can be encouraged to confront the complex reality of development cooperation by offering them development policy education with low barriers to entry.
- **Opponents:** The question arises as to whether this attitude type should be actively addressed in communication work at all, or whether the goal should simply be to correct any gross misperceptions. This group is not only hard to reach through the media, but also difficult to convince due to its comparatively high level of mistrust in the media and broadcasters of development policy information. The relatively strong presence of the group on social media presents DC with the challenge of penetrating ‘filter bubbles’ with relevant information. Influencers who have both a positive attitude towards DC and access to these filter bubbles may offer a possible communication channel.
- **Undecideds:** This group is not easy to reach through the media. When it comes to actually providing those who are undecided with regard to DC with basic development policy information, the creative use of alternative – and more entertainment-oriented – media offers could be a promising approach.

Despite the differences in the use of media and the resulting implications, care should be taken in specifically tailoring the content of development policy communications to individual target groups. After all, it should always be borne in mind that media are not exclusively consumed by individual target groups and that any information transmitted will potentially reach larger sections of the population – i.e. people with different political/development policy attitudes. Reciprocal effects and side effects are therefore possible. In short, there is a risk that communication tailored to a specific segment will provoke negative reactions in other population groups.

This report is part of the series Opinion Monitor for Development Policy. The report follows the Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2018, in which attitudes towards development cooperation and sustainable development were analyzed. The upcoming report Opinion Monitor for Development Policy 2020 will focus on analyzing media content and media effects.