

Building public support for eradicating poverty in the UK

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A look at different ways of building public support for tackling UK poverty.

Public support is necessary to encourage Government action to tackle UK poverty. However, building public support for this can be challenging.

This study:

- looks at successful ways of building public support for tackling UK poverty, including the use of 'real life' stories, for example;
- explores how organisations measure the effectiveness of their initiatives;
- finds that only few initiatives explicitly aim to build public support for the UK poverty agenda – and these initiatives tend to change perceptions and behaviour rather than attitudes; and
- argues that the term 'poverty' needs to be clarified, and possibly avoided when first engaging people.

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Executive summary

Introduction

The overall aim of this research was to identify approaches and strategies that are successful in building public support for addressing UK poverty. This report is not another good practice guide on campaigning or measuring effectiveness. It aims to build on what others have done by starting from what is happening on the ground (as opposed to what should be happening) and what this tells us about the effectiveness of different approaches. The report does not linger on the absence of hard evidence of impacts. This lack of evidence is the starting point for the research, not its conclusion. The report aims to present a catalogue of the available hard data, anecdotal evidence and staff insights on impacts and effectiveness of activities aimed at building support for the UK poverty agenda. It offers a number of preliminary conclusions around what 'works' and invites other stakeholders to further build on these hypotheses.

Informing people about UK poverty

The research identified significant activity centred on *informing* people about levels of poverty in the UK and about what it actually means to live in poverty. Examples include poverty-awareness training sessions, the publication and dissemination of research on poverty in the UK and poverty-related documentaries and reality TV. There is fairly consistent anecdotal evidence of audiences, readers and recipients of information materials registering their surprise at quite how stark the UK poverty statistics or reality actually are. There is also some anecdotal evidence of information-sharing about UK poverty triggering individuals into wanting to do something about it, in particular donating. There is far less (anecdotal) evidence about information-sharing *alone* directly leading to increased support for the UK poverty agenda, for specific policy measures in favour of

people on low income or for a change in attitudes towards them.

Getting individuals to act

The research has explored a range of campaigns focusing on particular (policy) measures in favour of people on low income, such as increases in wage, benefit or support levels. The primary aim of most of these campaigns tends to be achieving policy change rather than addressing public attitudes. The public engagement component of the campaigns often focuses on demonstrating rather than building public support in order to put additional pressure on politicians. The public engagement strategies of these campaigns can reach fairly large groups of people who are willing to register their support for the campaign and of people who are willing to take direct action – typically a few hundred to a few thousand people. Even larger audiences are being reached through media coverage for the campaigns. Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, several of these campaigns are relatively effective in reaching out beyond the usual suspects – signing up supporters outside their existing donor base or getting the campaign message across to people who were not previously aware of the particular injustice the campaign is fighting. There is clear anecdotal evidence of audiences getting in touch with the campaigns to register their surprise or outrage at finding out quite how low benefit, wage or support levels are, or quite how stark the reality is for a particular sub-group of people on low income.

Increased awareness-raising does not automatically lead to increased support for anti-poverty action. However, unlike the first group of initiatives (which are about *informing* people about UK poverty and what it means to live in poverty), information-sharing in a campaign context offers a possible *outlet* for the surprise that people might

feel when discovering poverty facts. This gives people who wish to do so a direct chance to show their support. Moreover, the specificity of the campaigns and their focus on absurd situations of systemic injustice means that audience reactions are more likely to go beyond surprise and register levels of shock or outrage. Nevertheless, because of their focus on people living in poverty for whom the public is perceived as having more sympathy (such as working people on low incomes or children) and because they avoid messaging that suggests that the interests of the audiences and the interests of people on low income may not coincide, these campaigns do not necessarily build any public support for more unpopular anti-poverty measures. There is very little or no evidence of individuals who were initially opposed to a particular policy measure but changed their opinion as a result of an advocacy campaign. By and large, advocacy campaigns build support by alerting the public to *hidden* issues, rather than tackling *controversial* ones.

There is fairly strong evidence about the value of volunteering as a way to provide direct contact between people on low and higher incomes. Volunteering with people on low income in their own communities is arguably the most direct way to experience the power of real-life stories, making volunteers realise that poverty is not just about money but also about the experience of living in poverty.

Getting organisations to put poverty higher on the agenda

Finally, the research identified a range of successful initiatives focusing more generally on getting poverty higher on the political agenda or the agenda of other (mainly public sector) organisations. This often includes an element of awareness-raising among the organisations' staff. Unlike advocacy campaigns that tend to focus on highly specific policy asks, these activities are more generically trying to get organisations to consider a range of mechanisms and approaches all aimed at tackling UK poverty. Approaches include the development of anti-poverty strategies or anti-poverty toolkits, the drafting of anti-poverty challenge documents and the introduction of a dedicated member of staff, unit, agency or

external actor as an anti-poverty advocate. The overall impression created by these initiatives is that they can indeed have a fairly strong mobilising effect and can be quite effective in creating a certain 'buzz' and 'noise' around UK poverty. These initiatives often succeed in reaching beyond the usual suspects, in particular because many explicitly set out to reach departments, organisations or colleagues who may not initially think that they have a remit for tackling UK poverty. The 'weakness' of these initiatives in the context of this research is that they rarely have a strong public engagement component and as such do little to build support for UK action among the 'wider' public. Some initiatives succeed in generating significant media coverage for key milestones (such as the launch of a strategy or a challenge document). However, there was far less if any anecdotal feedback about readers or viewers reacting to this kind of media coverage.

What works?

The first step when trying to build public support for the UK poverty agenda is outreach and engagement – catching the attention of the audience. It is at this stage that use of the term 'poverty' can be problematic. 'Poverty' does not 'capture' audiences (other than UK poverty stakeholders) because individuals tend not to understand its relevance to the UK, to their jobs or to their lives. This means that audience engagement on UK poverty needs to happen:

- through stealth – hiding the poverty message in a format that does not at first appear to have anything to do with UK poverty, such as a tabloid-style free newspaper celebrating diversity that targets London commuters, reality television or leaflets mainly talking about international poverty;
- focusing on a more specific UK poverty-related issue that people find easier to understand and relate to, such as wage levels, debt or homelessness;
- using a champion – identify someone who is passionate about and committed to tackling

UK poverty, and is willing and able to convince colleagues, family or friends to engage with the UK poverty agenda.

The most effective mechanisms of outreach beyond the usual suspects, appear to be the following.

- To have a clear targeting strategy – organising events that are open to the ‘wider public’ or leaving information materials for the ‘wider public’ to pick up is likely to attract mainly people who are already interested in the topic. Targeting specific groups, not on the basis of their attitudes towards UK poverty, but on a particular interest or activity that they have in common (for example, social workers, employees in one specific company, London commuters, cinema-goers, football fans) can often offer an opportunity to engage people with varying initial levels of awareness, understanding, interest or support for the UK poverty agenda.
- To undertake *proactive* outreach – going out to the target audience rather than waiting for the target audience to discover the campaign, the materials or activities that are taking place; and generally making it easy for individuals to engage.
- To use a mix of different engagement mechanisms linking them to the different target audiences one is hoping to reach. Developing materials (leaflets, YouTube videos, a website) or setting up events does not, on its own, engage audiences. They have to be made aware and interested in the materials or events. Techniques as varied as YouTube or Google ads, lesson plans for schools and offering free thermometers in return for engagement can be effective in encouraging audience involvement.
- The importance of media coverage in reaching out to audiences appears to be confirmed by the research findings, although again the message seems to be that clear targeting and trying to go beyond broadsheet coverage (through channels as diverse as daytime

television, tabloid press or sports radio channels) can be effective.

- There is some limited evidence that social networking sites such as Facebook can see the fan base for particular charities grow quite rapidly. However, total numbers of fans for UK poverty-related campaign Facebook sites appear to be fairly modest and not to achieve more than more traditional website-based engagement tools (such as online petitions).
- Partnership working is yet another way of achieving broader audience reach, as partners’ supporters or members can be brought into play.

The budget that is available for the activity does not dictate how many individuals will be reached. There are examples of resource-poor activities or campaigns (even activities run entirely on a voluntary basis) reaching significant numbers. However, the opportunity cost of individuals giving up their spare time must be taken into consideration. Moreover, there does appear to be a link between financial and staff resources available and the width of the engagement mechanisms that are being used – more resources enable organisations to experiment with more varied outreach techniques.

The second step, once organisations have succeeded in capturing the audience’s attention, is making sure that the UK poverty message gets across.

- By and large, the research confirms the power of real-life case studies. There was consistent anecdotal evidence from the vast majority of stakeholders interviewed that real-life stories often lead to surprise and sometimes shock or outrage about how widespread or challenging living in poverty is; it may also lead to donations. Statistics may similarly surprise people but do not elicit the same emotion in reactions and may not be remembered. When targeting decision-makers (officials, politicians), real-life stories may strengthen their resolve to take action against poverty or even possibly change their position about the value of a

particular policy measure. Real-life stories do not, however, on their own appear to build support for specific policy measures among the wider public. There is very little if any anecdotal evidence of individuals who initially were against a particular policy measure and changed their views as a result of a story.

- There is a clear need to unpack what ‘poverty’ means. The messenger needs to make poverty relevant and give examples of the implications of poverty for daily life to make the audience *understand* poverty. Use of budget tools, where the audience is asked to make the kind of budget-allocation decisions a person living in poverty would be expected to make, can be effective. The audience almost inevitably decides that the income that is available is not sufficient to meet daily needs. Showing that people living in poverty are not different from people who are better off can be quite effective. However self-evident it may seem that people on either side of the poverty line are fundamentally the same, there does appear to be a tendency to forget this and reconnecting audiences with this truth is necessary. In the context of organisational engagement, starting from the organisation’s remit and priorities, and showing how the poverty agenda links with this remit appears to be the way forward.
- Specific messaging about a specific problem with a clear solution works – audiences want to see that the problem can be solved and want to be part of something that will (potentially) lead to a positive outcome. Messages about injustices that are so obvious that they do not need to be spelled out are particularly effective. Messages about people on low income for whom the public is perceived to have more sympathy – children, people in work – are easier to sell, especially when these people can be cast against a ‘villain’ such as an unfair employer. There is no evidence, however, that support for these messages also builds support for more unpopular policy measures for other sub-groups of people living in poverty.
- As with all communication, the message will get across more effectively if the messenger is

someone people trust and whose opinion they respect. Support for the message becomes the social norm and the expected behaviour. What this means in practice, however, can vary.

- Messaging that does not undermine the audience’s own interest or, better still, anti-poverty proposals that are also likely to benefit the audience appear to be significantly more likely to be heard. This presents UK poverty stakeholders with a tricky dilemma. Some of the more unpopular messages are arguably the ones where most activity is required; however, these messages are perceived as going against the interest or values of audiences.
- Similarly, approaches that do not make the audience feel personally responsible or guilty appear to be preferable – although the message about the reality of poverty needs to get across, this can be done without preaching and generally keeping things enjoyable. Surprisingly, despite the broad consensus about the importance of keeping a positive slant on things, a lot of the information-sharing about poverty including stories, focuses on presenting the *hardship* of living in poverty rather than success stories of overcoming poverty.

Recommendations

The research formulates a number of recommendations, including the following.

- Suggestions for the Government to pay close attention to its (implicit) messaging on UK poverty. Benefit-awareness campaigns, campaigns alerting workers to their wage entitlements and campaigns to counter stigma and discrimination of people on low incomes send out the message that people living in poverty are worthy of, and have the right to, support and sympathy.
- Suggestions for the Government to consider funding elements of UK poverty activity that have the potential to build public support but do not undermine the independence of the voluntary sector advocacy campaigns, such

as poverty-awareness training, empowerment of people living in poverty, the promotion of volunteering opportunities in deprived areas, possibly core funding for the different anti-poverty networks and funding to help track and monitor achievements, such as, for example, subsidies to cover the cost of subscription to the Charity Awareness Monitor for smaller organisations.

- Suggestions for the voluntary sector to consider argumentation based on countering the *valid* concerns and claims of people who are not unequivocally in favour of an increase in wage, support or benefit levels – rather than dismissing these concerns as stereotypical discourse from individuals who do not realise what it is like to live on benefit or on the minimum wage.
- Suggestions for the voluntary sector to consider more opportunities for joint working. There appears to be particular scope for strengthening collaboration between, on the one hand, the different anti-poverty networks and, on the other hand, the voluntary sector organisations engaged in campaigning on specific policy issues and specific target groups. The success of issue-specific campaigns lies in their reach (often several thousand individuals); the added value of a lot of the work of the anti-poverty networks lies in their depth (going beyond the sub-groups of people on low income for whom the public is perceived to have more sympathy and being able to unearth and challenge negative attitudes towards people living in poverty).
- Suggestions for funders to encourage charities to be more explicit about the aims and objectives of the public engagement components of their campaigns and to no longer accept vague references to raising ‘public’ ‘awareness’ or challenging ‘public’ ‘attitudes’. Funders can challenge charities into specifying whether they are trying to *demonstrate* or *build* support – if *demonstrating* support, the number reached may arguably be the most important indicator; if *building* support, funders can encourage

charities to specify whether they are addressing perceptions, attitudes or behaviour and exactly which perceptions, attitudes or behaviours they will tackle and how.

- Finally, suggestions for funders to put in place the tracking and monitoring mechanisms required to evidence outputs or intermediary outcomes, either by directly providing financial support for the tracking and monitoring mechanisms to be put in place or by guiding charities to free-access monitoring mechanisms available. Similarly, funders may wish to invest (more) in capacity-building around evaluation for the third sector. Many funders, to their credit, are placing a strong focus on evaluation. However, all too often, evaluation is interpreted by organisations as an afterthought, built on the basis of data and findings that happen to be available when the frantic campaigning activity has come to an end and overworked staff are finally allowed some time to take a step back to consider their achievements. Placing a stronger focus on *monitoring* mechanisms may well be one small element that can support the cultural change required to get charity staff to think about effectiveness and impacts throughout the lifetime of an activity. Funders are also encouraged to be realistic in their expectations of what can be achieved in terms of building public support for the UK poverty agenda within short timetables. In some cases, succeeding in engaging people in a dialogue about controversial issues, irrespective of any outcomes of this dialogue, might well need to be considered an important achievement. This report also provides funders with some preliminary benchmarks around what can reasonably be expected of campaigns in terms of supporter reach.

1 Introduction

Background to the research

This research is part of the Public Interest in Poverty Issues (PIPI) programme, which is managed and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). PIPI starts from the premise that public support for the UK poverty agenda is necessary to ensure and sustain action by the Government and others to tackle poverty in the UK.

The overall aim of this research was to identify approaches and strategies that are successful in building public support for addressing UK poverty. The main research questions were the following.

- To what extent and how are organisations trying to build public support for addressing UK poverty?
- To what extent and how are they measuring whether their attempts are successful?
- What can we say about what ‘works’ in trying to build public support for addressing UK poverty – and what is the evidence base for this?

The research builds on other PIPI research, in particular a series of focus groups undertaken by Ipsos MORI aimed at exploring a number of different scenarios and mechanisms to engage audiences with the UK poverty agenda.¹

What is meant by ‘building public support’?

More than a quarter of the British public think that people living in poverty have only their own laziness or lack of willpower to blame. Another third of the population think that poverty is just an inevitable part of modern life.² Moreover, people are uncomfortable talking about UK poverty and

are unfamiliar with the terms of the debate. For most, the default association with poverty is the absolute poverty experienced in developing countries or the poverty found in Britain in Victorian times.³

Against this background, building public support requires bringing more people into an informed and constructive *debate* about UK poverty – giving them a better understanding of what being poor in modern-day Britain means and challenging their view that poverty is the result of laziness or just an inevitable part of life. A second aspect to building public support is encouraging more people to *act* on UK poverty.

Traditional voluntary sector ‘campaigns’, typically a combination of political lobbying, media work and popular mobilisation activities, are one possible mechanism of engaging the public with the UK poverty agenda and this type of activity is included in the research. The report does not look at the effectiveness of these campaigns in achieving policy change – the focus is on obtaining public *support* for action on poverty rather than the action of tackling poverty itself. The research also explores other mechanisms and activities by actors outside the voluntary sector.

The challenge of building public support for addressing UK poverty

UK poverty is a particularly challenging issue to work on. In other areas of social marketing it is fairly self-evident what audiences are asked to support – for example, anti-smoking legislation or healthier school dinners. It is not immediately clear what one signs up to when agreeing to support action to address UK poverty. It would arguably be difficult to find anyone who would be against tackling poverty. However, explanations of why poverty exists persist and its solutions are contested and political. A recent research report⁴ makes a distinction between campaigning on

valence and *position* issues. Valence issues refer to common values for which there is broad societal consent, such as peace or the environment. Position issues are topics on which groups in society can hold contrary positions (such as abortion). What arguably makes building public support for addressing UK poverty particularly complex is that UK poverty is both a valence issue (there is broad societal agreement that poverty is a bad thing) and a position issue (there are, for example, different opinions in society about benefit levels and also about the causes of and solutions for poverty).

Moreover, achieving *attitudinal* change is difficult and time consuming. There are limits to the attitudinal change any (voluntary) organisation can achieve on its own, in particular given the limited availability of funding for campaigning activities and the short time-frames of most funding streams. Most donors interviewed for this research, struggled to give examples of funding public support building activities in the field of UK poverty, pointing to the relative scarcity of applications in this field but also to their trustees' reluctance to get involved in activities where outcomes are difficult to measure or even simply difficult to achieve. A recent research report⁵ similarly comments that donors and funders are hesitant to support campaigning.

Finally, the stigma of the poverty label means that people on low income themselves often do not wish to be associated with it, further complicating the challenge. Researchers recall how a focus group participant realised that she was technically well below the poverty line when she heard the formal UK poverty definition but staunchly denied that this was a description of herself.⁶ UK poverty stakeholders similarly gave anecdotal evidence of individuals' reluctance to accept the poverty label.

What this research is and what it is not

Many other researchers have developed guides on effective campaigning and on how to evaluate social marketing activities.⁷ This report is not yet another good practice guide on campaigning or measuring effectiveness. It aims to build on

what others have done by starting from what is happening on the ground (as opposed to what *should* be happening) and what this tells us about the effectiveness of different approaches.

The report does not linger on the absence of hard evidence of impacts. The lack of hard evidence is unfortunate and widespread. However, the lack of evidence is the starting point for the research, not its conclusion. This report, while fully and explicitly acknowledging the limitations of its evidence base, makes no apologies for it. The report presents a catalogue of the available hard data, anecdotal evidence and staff insights on impacts and effectiveness of activities aimed at building support for the UK poverty agenda. It offers a number of preliminary conclusions around what 'works' and invites other stakeholders to further build on these hypotheses.

The research team did not undertake any primary evaluation research. All evidence presented in the report is evidence provided by the host organisations.

Structure of the report

The next chapter presents an overview of public support building activities currently taking place in the area of UK poverty. Chapter 3 looks at whether and how UK poverty stakeholders are measuring and evidencing the effectiveness of their activities. Chapter 4 briefly explores the theory of change that underpins the support building activities, assessing what is being achieved in terms of altering perceptions, attitudes and behaviour. Chapter 5 presents the research findings around what 'works' in building support for the UK poverty agenda. The final chapter concludes. The appendices present information about the research methodology (Appendix 1) and an overview of the 29 case studies that formed the basis of this report (Appendix 2). Appendix 2 is meant as a reference tool, presenting readers with the option to find out more about a particular case study mentioned in the report that they may be particularly interested in.

2 Mapping: who is doing what?

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the challenges involved in engaging the public with the UK poverty agenda, the research found relatively few examples of activity *explicitly* aimed at building public support with the UK poverty agenda. By and large, the focus of the voluntary and community sector is on lobbying policy-makers to achieve policy change and on empowering people experiencing poverty. Public and private sector organisations typically focus on attempting to improve the lives of people on low income rather than building support for anti-poverty action. Research institutes interpret their own activities in terms of researching poverty rather than explicitly aiming to build public support for the UK poverty agenda.

That being said, the research identified three categories of activities that are currently taking place and can, broadly speaking, be considered to fall under the heading of building public support for tackling UK poverty. They are activities focusing on:

- informing the British public about the prevalence of poverty in the UK and about what it means to live in poverty – this includes methods of one-way information-sharing (for example, through leaflets) and more interactive engagement mechanisms;
- getting individual members of the British public to do something;
- getting organisations to put poverty higher on their agenda – this typically includes building staff members' awareness and understanding of the UK poverty agenda.

Informing people about UK poverty

One can reasonably argue that all UK poverty stakeholders are involved in providing their audiences with information on UK poverty in

one form or other. However, in some cases, the information-sharing is the main focus of the activity. Audiences are not asked to do anything with the information that is presented to them, they are (only) challenged into becoming more aware of UK poverty and into changing their perceptions about what it means to live in poverty.

A number of different approaches are being used.¹

- Research on the prevalence of poverty in the UK and on what it means to live in poverty. For example, the New Policy Institute Poverty website aims to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of officially available statistical information relating to UK poverty. The *Living with Hardship 24/7* research report explores the challenge of living and parenting on a low income.
- Production and dissemination of information materials about UK poverty, ranging from traditional printed leaflets to electronic newsletters and use of new media such as YouTube videos. Examples include *The New Londoners* newspaper, the Islamic Aid annual brochure and Oxfam's YouTube videos on UK poverty.
- Television programmes that have the potential (if not necessarily always the explicit objective) to inform people about what it means to be poor in the UK, such as *Evicted*, *The Secret Millionaire* or the *Spotlight Life Swap: Diamonds and Dole* documentary. Comic Relief has in the past broadcasted short videos about poverty-related issues (in particular homelessness) during the biennial Comic Relief BBC television show.
- The organisation of events where members of the public are invited to discuss, learn about or

even directly ‘experience’ poverty – this often involves direct contact with people living in poverty. One example is the workshops and sleeping rough events organised in the context of the Poverty and Homelessness Action Week.

- Poverty-awareness training events – these are particular types of events that more formally educate people about the prevalence of poverty in the UK and what it means to be poor. A number of different techniques are used, including statistics and research, real-life stories about poverty, video material presenting the perspective of people living in poverty, a ‘poverty trap’ game along the lines of snakes and ladders demonstrating the difficulties of escaping poverty and a ‘poverty budget’ tool asking training participants to make budget-allocation decisions that a person living in poverty might need to make. Poverty-awareness training activities are organised or facilitated by voluntary sector organisations (such as Poverty Alliance and the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network), but also by companies (for example, the Gateshead Housing Company), academics (for example, King’s College London) and local authorities (for example, Dundee Council, which has developed a poverty-awareness training DVD).

Encouraging individuals to act on UK poverty

The research also came across a range of initiatives focusing on encouraging individual members of the public to personally do something about poverty in the UK. This can take the form of *volunteering* in deprived communities organised by voluntary sector organisations (examples include the Dare to Care campaign and the Christians against Poverty volunteer centres) or by private sector companies (examples include Business in the Community’s Business against Homeless programme and the Fit4Finance financial education offered by branches of the Britannia Building Society).²

Individuals can also get involved in *activism*,³ demonstrating their support for anti-poverty action by various means, including the following.

- Wearing or displaying a sign of support (such as displaying an Anti-Water Tax campaign car sticker).
- Signing a petition – more innovative methods include collecting photographs of supporters instead of signatures (as in Shelter’s One Million Children campaign) or encouraging people to write a personal message rather than merely leaving their signature (as on the End Child Poverty website, which gives people the opportunity to enter a virtual march, carrying a banner with their own support message).
- Sending an email or letter to their MP, another politician or to the company whose policies need changing (as in Refugee Action’s Destitution campaign).
- Attending a rally or event – a recent example is the October 2008 End Child Poverty rally in Trafalgar Square. The Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network (NIAPN) Anti-Water Charges campaign similarly mobilised people to demonstrate outside the Northern Ireland Assembly in Stormont.
- No longer buying products or services from companies that have been exposed as exploiting their staff. The threat of a boycott is often implied rather than real – the focus tends to be on generating negative publicity for a company rather than explicitly asking the wider public to take their custom elsewhere. Campaigners adopt a ‘name-and-shame’ approach. Examples include the London Living Wage campaigns and the Daily Mirror’s Fair Tipping campaign.

There are also a series of actions targeting people living in poverty or at risk of poverty, encouraging them to try helping themselves. By being public campaigns or having a public engagement element, these actions may also have a positive impact on broader public awareness of poverty, causes and entitlements.⁴

- Benefit-entitlement campaigns, aimed at increasing benefit take-up and people’s awareness about the benefits they are entitled

to – examples include the annual Help the Aged Winter Deaths campaign and the large-scale and successful initiative currently run by Devon County Council.

- Campaigns to warn people at risk of or living in poverty against exploitation or the poverty trap. For example, the Scottish Government commissioned Poverty Alliance to run a poster campaign alerting migrant workers to their statutory rights. The Loan Shark campaign warns people on low income against the risk of spiralling debt when accepting a loan from a doorstep lender. The Gateshead Housing Company runs information sessions for new tenants on financial management to prevent tenants from falling into arrears.
- People living in poverty are being offered pre-employment or employment opportunities. Employment support covers a vast area of activity; directly relevant for this research are initiatives where people in poverty are given opportunities to share their life stories with the company's staff or customer base. Arguably the clearest example is *The Big Issue*, a magazine sold on the street by homeless people.

Encouraging organisations to put UK poverty higher on the agenda

A third broad category of activities focuses on encouraging governments, departments, agencies and other organisations to put UK poverty higher on their agendas. These initiatives are not championing one particular policy or demanding attention for one specific problem, but are trying to convince colleagues and partners at a more general level that poverty (or child poverty or rural poverty) in the UK is real and relevant for their organisations.

This is mainly the domain of public sector stakeholders involved in the UK poverty agenda. Different mechanisms and approaches are used.⁵

- The development of anti-poverty strategies – at local level (such as in Dundee, Bedfordshire and Stockport), at national level (such as the

Scottish Tackling Poverty strategy) or even in the context of a private sector company (such as the Gateshead Housing Company Anti-Poverty Strategy).

- The development and promotion of 'toolkits' to show organisations how they can take the poverty agenda forward in their own organisation. Examples include the Government of Ireland's Poverty Impact Assessment tool, the Wales Child Poverty Solutions online toolkit and the online Child Poverty Toolkit developed by the Child Poverty Action Group and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion. A poverty toolkit is being planned in the Borders; similarly, the Scottish Government's Tackling Poverty Framework announced the development of an online poverty toolkit in 2009.
- The development of 'challenge' documents – these documents are based on (local) research and consultation, but, unlike traditional research reports, they have the explicit aim of trying to challenge people into putting poverty higher on the political agenda. The documents are sometimes the work of poverty 'commissions', bodies bringing together stakeholders from different backgrounds to investigate poverty and challenge organisations into taking action. Examples include the challenge document produced by the Borders Poverty Commission and the Capital Gains report produced by the London Child Poverty Commission.
- The introduction of an (external) advocacy role – where an organisation, unit or individual member of staff acts as an advocate for people living in poverty. The role of advocate involves going out to colleagues and partners to inform them about what it means to live in poverty, to explain how poverty is related to their organisation's remit and encourage them to put poverty higher on their list of priorities. This can take a number of different formats including: a designated poverty or child poverty officer in a local authority; the advocacy undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions

(DWP)/Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Child Poverty Unit and the Commission for Rural Communities; voluntary sector advocacy campaigns such as the Get Fair campaign and the Campaign to End Child Poverty. These voluntary sector campaigns are different from more traditional campaigns in that they approach poverty (or child poverty) in a more general and comprehensive way, rather than focusing on one specific policy ask.

3 Evidencing effectiveness

The challenge of evidencing effectiveness

Evidencing the effectiveness of public support building activities in the field of UK poverty is challenging. First, there are a number of methodological constraints. Large-scale surveys of people's views on UK poverty can and do take place. However, they are costly and tend not to be linked directly to particular campaign publications or activities, making 'attribution' of impacts problematic – how can an organisation know that it is its activities that have made a difference? Organisations can use feedback forms or organise email surveys of their members to assess impacts, but these exercises reach only a particular subset of individuals and there are obvious difficulties in extrapolating findings for an organisation's membership to the wider population. Moreover, measuring an increase in knowledge or a change in behaviour may be fairly straightforward; detecting a change in attitude is more complex. Measuring the sustainability of a change in perceptions, attitudes or behaviour is arguably even more challenging.

A second barrier is resource constraints. Budgetary constraints may make the commissioning of an external evaluation difficult; limited staff resources mean not enough time is available in-house to invest in designing questionnaires or feedback forms and in collecting, collating and analysing responses.

It can be argued, however, that organisational culture is at least as important as the availability of resources or methodological constraints.¹ The research came across a number of examples where UK poverty stakeholders, including small and resource-poor voluntary sector organisations, were trying to systematically collect and collate evidence in-house, using very little if any additional resources. For example, organisations showed the research team examples of simple Excel sheets giving an overview of media coverage or Word

documents that presented an overview of partner or audience feedback, often simply cutting and pasting email content. Others explained how they used free-access online monitoring methods. This shows that, even in a resource-poor environment, monitoring and evaluation is possible.

Extent of evaluation activity

The research found few examples of formal impact assessments of support building activities in the field of UK poverty. Quite a few reports were notified to the research team as 'evaluation' reports, but most of these documents presented a summary of event proceedings with a limited number of conclusions regarding the process of organising the event, rather than any attempt to identify impacts on event participants. Outside the voluntary sector, relevant evaluation reports were even scarcer.

Case studies: formal impact assessments

The research looked at five examples of formal evaluations.

- A full-scale external evaluation of the work (including the impacts) of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) undertaken in 2007 – this involved a stakeholder survey to get stakeholders' views about the strengths and weaknesses and impacts of the CRC to date; a limited number of focus groups were held as well to get the views of the wider public.
- An external evaluation report of the poverty-awareness training undertaken by the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network and Save the Children – using evaluation booklets, feedback forms and focus groups with training participants.

- An internal evaluation by Help the Aged of the Winter Deaths campaign – using supporter survey responses and an analysis of the reactions received by DWP as a result of the GMTV Winter Deaths campaign.
- An in-house evaluation by Shelter of the One Million Children campaign – pulling together evidence and data from a range of sources, including MORI polling and market research, staff perceptions, media tracking, monitoring of supporter engagement and activity, focus groups with campaign supporters and feedback from politicians and other stakeholders.
- An internal evaluation by Community Service Volunteers (CSV) of the Dare to Care campaign – based on a detailed survey of participants, identifying participant characteristics and their attitudes to volunteering before and after the volunteering activity; media tracking and analysis, and feedback from partners.

That being said, most if not all organisations hold some evaluation evidence, which tends to be either:

- output data such as attendance figures, or intermediary outcomes such as media coverage – often based on fairly systematic and comprehensive tracking; or
- anecdotal evidence about impacts – in the vast majority of cases unrecorded and only identified by asking interviewees about their evidence for particular statements around what ‘works’.

In terms of impact assessment, then, the challenge is not so much that the information is not there, but that it is not easily accessible or collatable and risks disappearing when the member of staff involved leaves the organisation.

Nature of evaluation activity

Market research and developing baselines

There were a number of examples of organisations trying to develop market intelligence on public attitudes towards UK poverty. This was mainly the case among larger organisations. Organisations commented that they tried staying informed about existing research on public attitudes towards UK poverty.² In a limited number of cases, organisations undertook their own primary research on public attitudes. For example, the Get Fair campaign recently inserted a question about public support for political action on UK poverty in a YouGov poll.

In most cases, market research is done with the objective of putting pressure on politicians, improving fundraising or sales, or understanding what might work in a new campaign – rather than explicitly developing a baseline against which impacts can be measured at a later stage. For example, Poverty Alliance undertook an interesting piece of research with their members, local authorities and others to test market demand for additional poverty-awareness training – discovering that there was some demand for additional training but that this demand would not bring in enough revenue to pay for an additional member of staff.

Examples of development of campaign baselines are rare and the few examples that could be identified tend to focus on baselining exercises for specific events rather than a more strategic campaign baseline. The research did, however, come across an interesting example of a charity using MORI polling to compare the percentage of the British public who were aware of one of their key campaign messages (a key statistic on UK poverty) before and after their two-year campaign.³

Case study: baselines

The research came across a limited number of examples of organisations developing baselines for their activities.

- The external evaluation of the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network’s Poverty Awareness Programme used participant questionnaires. These compared participants’ knowledge and confidence to

talk about poverty before and after training sessions. Participants were recontacted three months later to discuss longer-term impacts.

- The Dare to Care campaign, which aimed to encourage individuals to take up volunteering to contribute to ending child poverty, tested whether attitudes or knowledge on child poverty had changed by asking volunteers identical questions before and after their volunteering experience.

An interesting example of market research is the *Charity Awareness Monitor*, to which a number of larger charities are subscribed. The Monitor allows charities to include their name as well as the name of a campaign in an annual representative opinion poll, enabling them to compare name recognition of their organisation and campaigns with that of others and any changes over time.

Monitoring supporter/participant characteristics, activity and feedback

Most voluntary sector campaigns have clear policy asks but surprisingly many are vague on the numbers and types of people they are aiming to reach. There are some interesting examples of organisations trying to better understand or segment their target audiences, but they are not directly linked to building public support or to the UK poverty agenda.⁴

Similarly, relatively few voluntary sector organisations have a clear understanding of the audiences they do reach. Organisations often collect participant/supporter contact details but rarely ask for more detailed information.

Examples of identifying support characteristics

- One children's charity mentioned a tick-box option for supporters younger than 18, enabling them to assess the number of under-18s in their supporters' base.
- Some petitions ask signatories for their postcode.

- Shelter has developed comprehensive monitoring data on its supporters in terms of both personal characteristics and the extent of their involvement. This allows for later identification and prioritisation of recruitment mechanisms that are most likely to attract active supporters.
- Dare to Care similarly collected detailed information on supporters, mainly via local partners.

Many organisations attempt to track their supporters' involvement in a particular campaign. Organisations mentioned use of online tracking software⁵ to monitor e-campaigning action – for example, tracking how many individuals had opened their electronic newsletter or responded to their request to email their MP. Other organisations had set up an internal logbook to encourage their staff to log achievements or had involved their interns or volunteers in chasing activists for information on what they had done locally. Some organisations kept track of the number of campaign materials requested by the public or campaign activists. Organisations tend to monitor the number of individuals registered as supporters or who have subscribed to their electronic newsletter. In several cases, information about numbers reached is posted on the website to demonstrate success.

Case study example: Poverty and Homelessness Action Week

The first Poverty and Homelessness Action Week was organised in 2008 by Church Action on Poverty. The campaign aimed to encourage grass-roots activists to develop their own local poverty-related events. To find out what is happening on the ground, Church Action on Poverty includes a form to log activities in the campaign pack. It asked a number of volunteers to call local activists to encourage them to return the forms.

A significant number of organisations monitor online traffic on their websites, in some cases including fairly detailed information about

unique visitors, which pages were visited, which documents were downloaded and how long visitors stayed on the site. Organisations using new media try to keep track of the number of viewings of their YouTube videos, visits to their blog pages, subscribers to their RSS feeds or members of their Facebook sites, but further analysis beyond numbers reached is rare. The Dare to Care campaign is an interesting exception. The campaign organised a survey of its Facebook site members, resulting in detailed information about whether they had also visited the Dare to Care website or had encouraged others to sign up to the Facebook site. Commentaries on blogs, potentially a rich source of anecdotal feedback of impacts and reactions (if not necessarily from a representative sample), tend to receive only very partial analysis.

Some (larger) organisations set up focus groups with their supporters' base – to test reactions to fundraising techniques or campaigning messaging, or to understand why someone no longer supported a particular organisation or campaign.

Case study: *The Big Issue*

The Big Issue street newspaper is published on behalf of and sold by homeless people with the objective to highlight issues around homelessness. *The Big Issue* uses market intelligence to better understand why someone no longer buys a magazine and to test public understanding of *The Big Issue* and homelessness in the UK. The company buys in services from a marketing company to undertake focus groups of *The Big Issue* readers and donors.

In a limited number of instances, organisations use feedback forms to get participants' views about a particular event and, in some cases, about the event's impact on their knowledge or views about poverty. This tends to happen, for example, in the context of poverty-awareness training events. Perhaps surprisingly, few if any organisations indicated that they were using free-access online survey software, which would bring participant survey within easy reach of most voluntary sector organisations.⁶

Case Study: Seeing is Believing

Business in the Community's The Prince's Seeing is Believing programme invites senior business leaders to see for themselves how business can play a role in tackling Britain's most pressing social issues. After a visit to a deprived area, each participant is asked to write a detailed report on what they have learnt and consider what their business can do to tackle some of the most pressing social issues. The feedback form also includes questions about possible changes in attitudes and behaviour as a result of what they had experienced through the programme.

A limited number of organisations reported collecting and collating unsolicited and informal feedback about their awareness-raising activities from the wider public (such as letters to the editor following their own letter to the editor) – in some cases proving that monitoring impacts is also possible in situations of severe resource constraints. Most organisations, however, only recalled the anecdotal feedback when they were explicitly asked for this evidence by the research team and did not have any *record* of the feedback.

Case study: *The New Londoners* newspaper

The New Londoners newspaper is produced by refugees and asylum-seekers and aims to present a positive portrait of them. Following publication, the Migrants Resource Centre, which supports the production of the newsletter, receives a number of reactions by letter, email, telephone and from people walking in. Some of the feedback is collated into a simple Word document, presenting a snapshot of some readers' reactions.

Tracking media coverage

Media tracking appears to be relatively widespread across voluntary, private and public sector organisations and is done either in-house (ad hoc, as and when staff come across a reference or through more systematic use of the Google news search engine) or by a professional media tracking

company. This includes both simple monitoring of coverage and sophisticated analysis including a review of the readership for a particular article, using 'weighted opportunity to see' analysis – also looking at the tone of the article.

Case study: *Living with Hardship 24/7*

The November 2007 report *Living with Hardship 24/7* presents the findings of research that explored the relationship between living on a low income and parenting. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty against Children developed a simple overview document, not only recording references to the publication in the media, but also tracking radio interviews, shorter articles about the report written by the organisation and presentations about the report by the organisation. Although not necessarily comprehensive, it presents a useful overview of the reach of the dissemination.

Parliamentary and policy monitoring

A few (predominantly larger) organisations are signed up to the *Charity Parliamentary Monitor*, which monitors mentions of an organisation or a campaign in the Houses of Parliament. Others undertake this type of policy monitoring in-house. The Give Me Five campaign described how it monitored parliamentary activity by logging into a free-access parliamentary monitoring site every day and did a quick wordsearch of the parliamentary debate of that day.

Organisations also pointed to anecdotal feedback from politicians or officials, or to quotes from politicians in the media about the campaign or activity. An interesting example is feedback from decision-makers on the One Million Children campaign. They found that the campaign had been effective in making bad housing and homelessness a greater public priority, even if polling data does not necessarily support this observation. In some cases these quotes or reactions from politicians were recorded either as posts on the website (to highlight success) or as part of internal strategy documents to discuss tactics and next stages.

Informal debriefing and partner feedback

By and large, the most used method to assess effectiveness is to simply conduct informal debriefings at the end of an activity or campaign. This was reported particularly where an activity was carried out by a partnership. Organisations also referred to partner feedback by email, telephone or face to face. For example, the Campaign to End Child Poverty was able to present the research team with a series of unprompted congratulatory emails from members of the End Child Poverty coalition network, commenting about the success of the October 2008 End Child Poverty rally. However, partner feedback is rarely collated and thus is difficult to analyse or use.

Way forward?

Collectively, UK poverty stakeholders were able to present a significant number of interesting and sometimes innovative approaches to trying to research and evaluate their activities. The central challenge appears to be twofold: very little activity focuses on assessing *impacts* (as opposed to outputs or intermediary outcomes) and, where anecdotal evidence of impacts is available, it is rarely systematically collated.

The first step towards a clearer focus on assessing impacts is being clear about objectives. When considering indicators to measure effectiveness of public awareness-raising, it is important to specify whether the activity is trying to *demonstrate* or *build support*.

If *demonstrating* support, numbers reached may arguably be the most important indicator. In that case, organisations can and in many cases already are evidencing success by tracking supporters' involvement and looking at website traffic.

If *building* support, it is necessary to specify who the target audiences are and whether the activity is challenging perceptions, attitudes or behaviour. The way forward appears to be investing more in collection and collation of feedback of participants or audiences, anecdotally or otherwise (through feedback forms, email or telephone surveys) – testing individuals' starting positions and any changes from this baseline. This

implies that organisers and funders must allow sufficient (financial or staff) resources for this type of activity, including if and when capacity-building support is necessary.

4 What do these activities achieve?

Theory of change

When assessing the achievements of UK poverty-related activities, it is useful to make a distinction between success in changing perceptions (or raising awareness), changing attitudes and changing behaviour. The interaction between perceptions, attitudes and behaviours is a complex one.

Perceptions, attitudes and behaviour can change independently of one another. Crucially, a change in perception does not automatically lead to a change in attitude or behaviour – knowing more about an issue does not automatically mean that people feel any different about it. For example, studies on public health campaigns suggest that simply providing information and increasing knowledge about an issue is not enough to achieve (sustainable) attitude or behaviour change.¹ Similarly, behavioural change – in particular a decision to participate in an activity – can come about without any change in perception or attitude. For example, some of the eight million UK residents who wore the Make Poverty History wristband in 2005 may have done so because it became the fashionable thing to do.

If and when there is a link between changes in perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, this change is not necessarily unilinear. Increased awareness may lead to action, but action may also lead to increased awareness – for example, when volunteering in a deprived area makes people realise quite how stark the reality of UK poverty is.

All of this means that it is particularly challenging for UK poverty stakeholders to develop theories of change for their activities. Information-sharing about the prevalence of poverty and about what it means to live in poverty may or may not lead to attitudinal or behaviour change. Encouraging individuals to act on UK poverty may or may not *require* and may or may not *result* in an increase in awareness about UK poverty or a change in attitudes towards UK poverty or people on low income.

All of this also means that it is particularly important for UK poverty stakeholders to be clear about what they are *aiming* to achieve. A lot of UK poverty-related activity is about informing people about the prevalence of UK poverty and what it means to be poor. The assumption that there is a direct line of causality between a better understanding of UK poverty and increased support for anti-poverty (policy) measures is rarely tested or even made explicit by the organisers of information-sharing activities. To be fair to these organisers, building support for action on UK poverty is seldom an explicit objective of their activities. Still, it is surprising that the research came across only one example of an organisation stepping back to question the effectiveness of informing people about the prevalence of poverty in the UK.

Oxfam

Oxfam is currently developing a public awareness-raising component for its UK Poverty programme. The development process is ongoing but preliminary plans are to move beyond questions about whether and how much poverty there is in the UK and focus instead on examples of people living in poverty who are contributing positively to society. This approach would directly try to counteract stereotypical views of people on low income as ‘scroungers’. The rationale for this is that it is unclear what change in attitudes is ultimately achieved by simply convincing people that there is indeed poverty in the UK.

Raising awareness – changing perceptions about UK poverty

Stakeholders reported almost without fail that their audiences react to information about UK poverty by saying that they had not previously realised how stark the reality was. There is a widespread

stakeholder consensus about the fact that large groups of the population are simply not aware about the levels or nature of poverty in the UK – which is also confirmed by research evidence suggesting that less than one in five of the British population recognises relative poverty as poverty.² There were even a number of examples about internal stakeholders (staff or trustees of the organisation involved) being shocked to learn about UK poverty statistics or the reality of poverty in the UK. In some cases, audience reactions went beyond surprise to reflect real outrage. Evidence was mainly anecdotal but it was consistent across case studies. Examples were found across all three categories of support building activities identified in Chapter 2 (informing people, encouraging individuals to act and encouraging organisations to put poverty higher on the agenda).

Anecdotal evidence about audiences registering surprise, shock or outrage

- About 200 phone calls received by Islamic Aid after it had sent out its annual brochure from Muslim families, with many commenting that they were shocked to learn about poverty and social exclusion among UK Muslims.
- A few dozen letters and emails and countless phone calls received by the Migrants Resource Centre following the publication of the *The New Londoners* newspaper, many registering surprise and shock.
- Verbal feedback from participants in poverty-awareness training sessions.
- Reactions from the public at the launch of research reports, including, for example, the *Living with Hardship 24/7* report.
- Several hundred readers writing to the Daily Mirror in the context of its Fair Tipping campaign, commenting that it was the first time that they had actually thought about

how little waiting staff got paid and that it was an outrage that they did not get their tips either.

- Anecdotal evidence of football supporters expressing their outrage during the phone-in following the Fair Pay League radio interview on the national TalkSport radio channel.
- Anecdotal feedback from the Destitution campaign that individuals are shocked to learn about the extent and levels of deprivation among rejected asylum-seekers.
- Anecdotal feedback from businesses participating in the Business Action on Homelessness that the volunteering experiences do raise staff members' awareness of the challenges faced by the people they support.
- Reactions from business leaders following their participation in Seeing is Believing visits (recorded in the feedback report they are asked to write after the visit).
- Anecdotal feedback that local anti-poverty strategies or local challenge documents lead to surprise – people tend to think that they know their local area and are shocked that there are such stark statistics or stories of hardship for their own area. These reactions were noted in London, Dundee, Scottish Borders and Wales.
- Finally, the Commission for Rural Communities commented that journalists and other stakeholders tend to report that they did not realise how much disadvantage there is in rural areas.

As most of this evidence is anecdotal, there is little hard information about the *number* of individuals whose perceptions of UK poverty are being challenged in this way. However, the overall impression is that it seems fairly straightforward to get people to (briefly) realise that their knowledge or perception of UK poverty is limited or flawed.

Feedback forms used during poverty-awareness training allow for slightly more systematic screening of (short-term) impacts. Some people comment that the session confirmed what they already knew; others register their surprise at finding out quite how widespread or challenging living in poverty is. The before and after scores used in external evaluation of the NIAPN poverty-awareness training programme show that most participants score their knowledge and understanding of poverty higher after the training sessions than before. Dare to Care campaign monitoring data shows that one-third of volunteers recognised before their volunteering experience the statistic that 3.8 million children live in poverty in the UK. After the volunteering experience and following training, the figure who knew that the correct answer was between 3.5 and four million had gone up by a third and those who got the answer wrong tended to be closer to the correct answer.³

Changing behaviour – encouraging people to act on UK poverty

There were only a very limited number of examples of individuals being moved to act on UK poverty without explicitly being asked to do something. Following the publication of *The New Londoners* newspaper, the Migrants Resource Centre received a series of telephone calls from people asking how they could provide financial support to asylum-seekers; four individuals called to offer accommodation to one of the asylum-seekers whose story was presented in the newspaper.

Staff from a charity commented that holding a pub talk about some of the people on low income they work with frequently results in a fairly substantial amount of (unprompted) donations. Islamic Aid recalled people asking after they had read its annual brochure what it was going to do about the levels of poverty and social exclusion among Muslims in the UK. Unprompted phone calls or reactions by letter were also recorded in the context of the Fair Pay League and Fair Tipping campaigns.

In most cases, people act on UK poverty as a direct result of UK poverty stakeholders inviting them to take action. Table 1 presents an overview of the number of people engaged in different types of activity on UK poverty (covering selected activities only). The table does not allow for any direct comparison between activities – they differ in their aims and objectives, resources, timescale and target audiences. Still, a limited number of preliminary conclusions can be reached.

- Event-based activities (workshops, training sessions) typically attract fairly limited numbers of participants, from about a dozen to about 150 individuals. The Poverty Alliance theatre play *Heat or Eat* was considered to have been particularly successful (about 100 participants). Early evidence from the 2009 Poverty and Homelessness Action Week similarly suggests that theatre can be a good engagement tool – about 300 individuals watched a performance of the theatre play *Voices from the Edge* in Leeds.

Table 1: Numbers reached by selected support building activities

Organisation/activity	Numbers reached
Workshops or events	
Poverty Alliance poverty-awareness training sessions	On average about 12–15 participants
Poverty Alliance theatre play on fuel poverty	About 100 attending (quoted as fairly high)
Poverty and Homeless Action Week sleeping rough (to raise money) in Chatham	More than 150 people (mentioned as one of the week's highlights)
Poverty-awareness training DVD (Dundee Local Anti-Poverty Strategy)	Used by about ten to twelve local agencies
Borders challenge document launch	About 90–100 participants (in the run-up to Christmas)
London Child Poverty Summit	About 75 participants

Organisation/activity	Numbers reached
Volunteering in deprived communities	
Fit4Finance (Britannia Building Society)	175 volunteers
Dare to Care (CSV and Campaign to End Child Poverty)	39,000 volunteers (target of 35,000)
Business Action on Homeless (Business in the Community)	Over 350 companies
Petitions	
Living Wage petition (Downing Street e-petition)	1,272 signatories
Campaign to End Child Poverty	2,500 banners/participants in the online rally
Give Me Five campaign (FOCUS)	3,500 signatures
One Million Children campaign (Shelter)	6,000 photographs of supporters in the 'Red Chair' (overall 100,000 registered as supporters of the campaign)
Writing to MP	
Make Child Benefit Count (Child Poverty Action Group)	4,000 emails/letters
Destitution campaign (Refugee Action)	400 emails/letters
Wearing sign of support/applying for campaign materials	
Anti-Water Tax campaign (Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network)	10,000 car stickers distributed
Winter Deaths campaign (Help the Aged)	75,000 action cards and 120,000 free thermometers distributed
Participation in a rally	
Keep the Promise Trafalgar Square rally (Campaign to End Child Poverty)	10,000 participants
Newsletters	
Monthly CRC newsletter	A few hundred subscribers
Facebook sites	
Fair Pay League Facebook site	134 fans (to date)*
London Living Wage Facebook site	204 fans (to date)
Dare to Care Facebook site	440 fans
End Child Poverty Facebook site	3,090 members
Oxfam's recent End UK Poverty and Inequality Now Facebook site	1,309 members (to date)
Other online resources	
London Child Poverty Pledge YouTube video	About 7,500 viewings (to date – most popular video on the DCSF YouTube channel)
CRC Financial Inclusion YouTube video	About 70 viewings (launched about six months ago)
Child Poverty Solutions Wales website	1,516 unique visitors between its launch in September and December 2008
Get Fair campaign website	2,677 unique visitors between its launch in May 2008 and January 2009
CRC RSS feeds	About 6,000 subscribers
Other	
Scottish Government Tackling Poverty Framework consultation	138 responses (the total number of responses is low compared to, for example, the Scottish Government consultation about the introduction of anti-smoking legislation, which attracted more than 50,000 responses. The vast majority of responses (106) to the poverty consultation came from organisations rather than individuals)
Campaign to End Child Poverty	More than 150 member organisations
London Child Poverty Pledge	About 20–30 organisations signed up (to date)

* 'To date' refers to January 2009 data.

Source: stakeholder interviews, evaluation reports and campaign websites.

- Activities aimed at putting UK poverty higher on the agenda of organisations appear to attract more modest numbers, similarly up to about 150 (organisations rather than individuals). However, through online resources, these activities can reach several thousand individuals.
- Requests to activists to demonstrate support for a particular policy measure can typically hope to reach a few thousand activists, although the range varies between a few hundred (Destitution campaign) and a hundred thousand (Shelter's One Million Children).

Who is being encouraged to act, is often unclear. In particular in the context of campaigns, the objective is often to *demonstrate* rather than build public support – *who* is reached is less important than the *numbers* that are reached and can be presented to politicians. That being said, several advocacy campaigns succeeded in reaching beyond the 'usual suspects' – if mainly in the sense that they engaged individuals who had not previously been involved in volunteering or activism (rather than individuals who were initially less likely to support anti-poverty measures).

Direct evidence of organisations reaching out to individuals who had not previously been involved in campaigning or volunteering in deprived communities

- The in-house evaluation of the Dare to Care campaign shows that almost three-quarters of volunteering activities organised by local groups were part of an ongoing programme (as opposed to being organised just for Dare to Care). Interestingly, two-thirds of volunteers indicated that they had not previously been involved in volunteering (Dare to Care could also present data on the age and qualification levels of volunteers, showing a bias towards younger volunteers).
- A number of individuals participating in the Keep the Promise rally in October 2008 were captured on video saying that they had never previously participated in a rally or demonstration. The video also showed

that some participants had travelled from Wales and Scotland.

- Refugee Action had never previously asked its donors and supporters to get involved in advocacy. Although signatories to the Destitution campaign petition might have been involved in other campaigns, it was the first time that they had signed a Refugee Action petition.
- The in-house evaluation of the One Million Children campaign shows that more than half of campaign supporters were recruited outside Shelter's existing donor base.

Activities aimed at encouraging *organisations* to put poverty higher on the agenda often explicitly aim to reach those organisations not yet convinced about the reality of UK poverty or its relevance to their organisation. Documents and interviewees tend to point to the *breadth* of engagement as implicit evidence of their reach – rather than to detailed and systematic background knowledge about the starting positions of the organisations they had reached.

Evidence of the breadth of engagement

- For example, signatories to the Child Poverty Pledge include Conservative-led, Labour-led and Liberal Democrat-led councils, the Jobcentre Plus office and local health boards.
- The 140 organisations signed up to the Campaign to End Child Poverty include not only the traditional children's charities but also organisations that had not previously worked directly on child poverty (such as trade unions).
- No less than 29 out of 32 Scottish local authorities joined the Local Authorities Tackling Poverty Network, which was set up to provide an input to the Scottish Government Tackling Poverty consultation.

- The Capital Gains launch conference attracted delegates from a wide range of organisations and agencies including MPs, central, regional and local government, housing organisations and a range of voluntary, community and charity organisations.
- The London Child Poverty Commission also succeeded in engaging with (private sector) employers.
- Since 1990, more than 6,000 business leaders have participated in more than 450 Seeing is Believing visits.

Unsurprisingly given the challenges involved in tracking individuals' involvement over time, there was only limited information about the extent to which UK poverty stakeholders sustained engagement. That being said, there was some anecdotal evidence that a campaign could trigger existing supporters or participants into becoming real *champions* for the cause.

Evidence of more in-depth or sustained engagement on UK poverty

- In the context of the Give Me Five campaign, the initial signatories to the petition tended to be individuals who were directly affected by the low permitted earnings threshold. A number of these first supporters became very active campaigners who recruited people to sign the petition in local communities – some of these new activists succeeded in collecting more than 150 signatures.
- A chief executive of a major corporation participated in a visit to a hostel where he had a chance for the first time to talk to some homeless people. The experience made him commit to becoming more active and he is now an active member and chair for Business Action on Homelessness.

- Business in the Community survey evidence on Seeing is Believing participation indicates that about 70 per cent of those taking part report that they changed the way they do business as a result of their Seeing is Believing visit and 80 per cent became personally more active in the local community.
- Dare to Care evidence showed that more than 90 per cent of volunteers reported that they were planning to continue to volunteer in future – this figure needs to be seen against the finding that two-thirds of volunteers were new to volunteering.

More generally, the overall impression is that many of the initiatives aimed at putting poverty higher on the agenda of organisations have a fairly strong *mobilising* effect and succeed in creating a certain 'momentum' around UK poverty among organisations and staff (as distinct from the wider public). The impression is that there is currently a certain 'buzz' around child poverty across the UK and around poverty in Scotland – possibly linked to the existence of hard government targets in the child poverty area that are missing elsewhere.

For example, the Campaign to End Child Poverty, the London Child Poverty Commission, the Child Poverty Unit and the Child Poverty Solutions Wales toolkit all appear to be both manifestations of the UK-wide child poverty 'buzz' and contributing to this trend. Other manifestations include the fact that local authorities across Wales and England are working around child poverty targets and, in Wales, Communities First and Children and Young People partnerships have included a child poverty dimension. Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are echoing the Government's commitment to end child poverty by 2020. For most initiatives, there was some (anecdotal or indirect) evidence that they had indeed contributed to increased interest in the child poverty agenda.

Case studies: evidence of contributions made by child poverty initiatives to placing child poverty higher on the agenda of organisations/politicians

- Interviewees frequently referenced each other's initiatives as factors that had contributed to making their own child poverty activity more effective. For example, the work of the London Child Poverty Commission was felt to have prepared the work of the London Child Poverty Pledge.
- The popularity of the Child Poverty Solutions Wales toolkit – and, importantly, a number of (unprompted) requests for training and support in using the toolkit. Project staff generally feel that it had been relatively easy to engage local authorities with the toolkit – contrasting local authority interest in child poverty now with limited take-up by local authorities of the Quids for Kids scheme a few years ago.
- The number of website hits for the Child Poverty Pledge YouTube video (almost 6,000 in the first month and a half).
- Willingness of politicians to engage with initiatives, showing they take them seriously – for example, the Prime Minister agreeing to receive an End Child Poverty delegation, the Mayor of London attending a London Child Poverty Commission conference, the Minister for Welfare Reform launching the London Child Poverty Pledge.
- Similarly, policy documents referencing these initiatives (for example, the London Child Policy Commission being mentioned in HM Treasury Budget documents; End Child Poverty being credited by politicians in the press and in the House of Commons as having contributed to placing poverty higher on the political agenda).

- Partner organisations being willing to reference and promote initiatives (such as the End Child Poverty or the London Child Poverty Pledge) on their websites.
- The 'buzz' created by the End Child Poverty Trafalgar Square rally among End Child Poverty member organisations as evidenced by several (unprompted) congratulatory emails to the End Child Poverty staff team. Members talk about never having seen anything like the rally '*in all the 26 years*' they have worked in childcare issues and the rally having given '*a real boost*' to staff and everyone involved.

There is some evidence that these initiatives have succeeded, not just in making more 'noise' about poverty at organisational and political level, but also in getting national, regional and local governments and partners to put poverty higher on the list of priorities in more practical ways.

Case studies: examples of more practical manifestations of organisational support for the poverty agenda

- The Dundee Local Anti-Poverty Strategy has succeeded in getting certain elements of the initial anti-poverty strategy mainstreamed in policy and practice.
- There are examples of Welsh local authorities putting child poverty on the scrutiny committee following the publication of the Child Poverty Solutions Wales scrutiny guide.
- The Borders challenge document contributed to creating an environment where funds could be ringfenced to fight poverty despite budget constraints.
- Gateshead Housing Company's Anti-Poverty Strategy has succeeded in increasing awareness of staff and changing

the way they work with tenants. Since the introduction of new procedures advising tenants on benefits and finance, the number of arrears have fallen by half within the group of new tenants because of extra preventative work with those most at risk.

- A number of the Capital Gains report recommendations have been taken on board by the Government – for example, a London dimension has been introduced to the DWP/DCSF Child Poverty Unit.
- The London Child Poverty Pledge asked organisations, not only to pledge their support for the child poverty agenda, but also to develop action plans demonstrating how their organisation would do more to contribute to the eradication of child poverty in the capital. Organisations were asked to take at least one action that was additional to what they were already doing. All signatories to date have developed action plans.

Changing attitudes

Although one should be careful with arguments from silence, there was significantly more (anecdotal) evidence about individuals changing their perceptions (registering their surprise) or changing their behaviour (participating in a UK poverty-related activity) than about changes in attitudes. Changing attitudes is particularly complex – people’s attitudes towards UK poverty may not be particularly strong or well defined and may not even be internally consistent.

Changing attitudes towards policy measures

The research came across very little if any anecdotal evidence suggesting that people have become more supportive of anti-poverty measures simply as a result of being told how much poverty there is in the UK or what it is like to live in poverty. There was some anecdotal feedback about *decision-makers* changing their position on a particular policy measure when learning more about UK poverty. More frequently, feedback about politicians referred to a change in

perceptions (surprise) and a more general renewed or strengthened resolve to improve the situation of disadvantaged communities.

Examples of decision-makers changing their position on a policy measure in favour of people on low income

- A senior church official became more supportive of the efforts of a church grass-roots worker supporting people in poverty as a result of a testimony by a person on low income. The church official had previously believed that efforts and (staff) resources should be focused on church attendance/survival.
- One interviewee recalled how, during the early days of the Debt on our Doorstep campaign, the testimonies from a number of people on low income to the relevant parliamentary committee had powerfully affected some Labour backbenchers. The backbenchers were no longer prepared to follow their Government on a proposed bill (warranting sales in a situation of debt).

There was only one example of a member from the wider public changing his attitude towards a particular policy measure. A local authority managing a benefit-entitlement awareness-raising campaign recalled an angry call from a former colonel who did not want his tax money to be spent on benefit take-up campaigns. His position changed dramatically after he was told that a former serviceman had been helped through the campaign; he ended the phone call by commending the council for its action and encouraging a continuation of the campaign.

Hard evidence on a change in ‘attitude’ came from the Dare to Care survey of volunteers. The number of volunteers who strongly agreed that it is important for the UK to end child poverty had increased by 3 per cent and there was also a 10 per cent increase in volunteers who believed that individuals could contribute to ending child poverty.

A change of attitudes towards people on low income

There is relatively limited evidence to what extent information-sharing alone about the prevalence of poverty and about what it means to live in poverty can change people's attitudes towards people living in poverty and in particular benefit claimants (perceived by some as 'scroungers'). Poverty-awareness training sessions in particular are considered to be effective in allowing these negative or stereotypical attitudes to surface, which is seen as a necessary first step in tackling stereotype. However, poverty-awareness training organisers warn that allowing prejudices to surface does not automatically mean that more positive views of people living in poverty will prevail. People's reactions can go in either direction. For example, people living in poverty themselves can react quite negatively to hardship stories, commenting that they are or were in a similar position and quite able to cope without additional support. During poverty-awareness training sessions targeting social workers, there is often a minority view that the stories present a distorted picture and that parents on low income should not be allowed to use poverty as an excuse for bad parenting. This is seen as discrediting the many people in poverty who are doing a good job at parenting. The Spotlight documentary *Life Swap* might have triggered significant public debate in Northern Ireland, but some phone-in reactions to the BBC Northern Ireland's *Nolan* show were quite negative.

5 What works?

Capturing the audience

The first challenge appears to be ‘capturing’ the audience. Once people are listening or reading, there is a fair chance that they will improve their understanding of UK poverty – given that initial levels of understanding of what UK poverty means are low. Using the term ‘poverty’ appears unlikely to work at this stage, except when targeting partners in the UK poverty sector or, to some extent, public sector stakeholders. For example, King’s College London secured significantly less interest for a conference with ‘poverty’ in the title targeting social workers than for a conference addressing the issue of neglect. The case studies suggest three broadly effective approaches of catching an audience.

- Working by stealth – ‘hiding’ the information in a format that at first sight has nothing to do with informing people about UK poverty. Examples include the light tone and tabloid style of *The New Londoners* newsletter, reality TV programmes such as the *Life Swap: Diamonds and Dole* documentary, the Islamic Aid newsletter, which is predominantly about *international* poverty, or even attracting people to a poverty-related event through the presence of politicians or celebrities.
- Working through a champion – identifying someone in an organisation or community who is passionate about doing something on UK poverty and getting this individual to help organise a poverty-related event and encourage others to attend the event. This is, for example, true for the Poverty and Homelessness Action Week activities, which depend on local grass-roots volunteers to take an initiative, and for many of the poverty-awareness training sessions, where one individual can be instrumental in getting colleagues, friends or neighbours interested.

- Focusing on a more specific sub-theme of UK poverty, such as homelessness, low wages or debt.

Paradoxically, activities open to the *wider public* may risk attracting mainly individuals who are already interested in the poverty agenda; events targeting *specific sub-groups* (such as the King’s College London poverty-awareness training targeting social workers, the Poverty Alliance poverty-awareness training targeting Culture and Sport Glasgow staff, the Fit4Finance volunteering scheme targeting employees in Britannia Building Society, *The New Londoners* newsletter targeting London commuters, the Fair Pay League campaign targeting football fans) are arguably more random in their audience selection and thus more likely to capture a cross-section of the population in terms of awareness of and attitudes towards poverty. This is reflected in staff feedback about participants in the Poverty Alliance and King’s College London poverty-awareness training sessions. Participants were reported as (sometimes) having fairly negative or stereotypical views about the causes of poverty or people living in poverty.

A number of case studies are particularly interesting because their targeting strategies are both highly specific and quite wide. For example, Islamic Aid sends its brochure not only to its donors and supporters, but also to 500,000 UK Muslim households. *The New Londoners* newspaper aims specifically to catch the attention of commuters looking for a light read on their train journey home, not only people already interested in poverty or in asylum issues. The Fair Pay League campaign specifically targets football fans, but tries to reach out to large audiences through media work.

The most successful campaigns in terms of reach had a clear targeting strategy and used a mix of channels to reach their target audience(s). Successful outreach methods were mainly proactive

outreach methods – where the campaign is taken to supporters rather than waiting for supporters to discover the campaign.

Case studies: importance of targeting and proactive outreach

- Outreach activity for the One Million Children campaign included a substantial campaign presence on the Shelter website, which attracted over 119,000 visits; a Google ad words grant promoted the site; and innovative online campaigning tactics such as the Big Brother viral, the Shelter sit-in online photo gallery and the big Shelter Housing Poll built supporter involvement. The 'Red Chair' photograph 'petition' was taken to 25 towns and cities across the UK and campaign adverts were set up in the Westminster tube station. Finally, significant media work (generating more than 600 million opportunities to view) increased the visibility of the campaign. The success of the campaign is evidenced by the 100,000 supporters who were recruited to the campaign and the fact that more than half of the supporters were recruited outside the existing Shelter donor base.
- The Winter Deaths awareness-raising campaign likewise used a number of mechanisms to proactively reach out to audiences. GMTV daytime programming was used and 'props' were offered to individuals who engaged with the campaign. About 50,000 greeting cards were distributed – individuals were encouraged to apply for a greeting card, which they could send to an older person they knew; the greeting card included a voucher for a free benefit check. Moreover, a total number of 120,000 free thermometers were given away by the campaign. People phoned the dedicated phone line during the GMTV show to request the thermometer and a card. In addition to the TV campaign, the organisers ran an advertisement pilot featuring June Whitfield in 32 Life Channel broadcasts in GP surgeries, post offices and similar public places. Evidence of the success of this approach to outreach is not just the number of cards and thermometers distributed, but also the results of DWP analysis, which compared different engagement methods and concluded that the card scheme scored quite well.
- The Dare to Care campaign used a range of mechanisms to promote volunteering, including distribution of 600,000 campaign postcards at cinemas and universities, London bus and tube ads, a sustained media relations campaign and a range of email, web (including a Facebook site) and telemarketing methods. Key audiences (including youth clubs, children's centres and voluntary and public sector organisations) received direct mail and email invitations to workshops introducing the campaign. A second direct mailshot was sent out to approximately 10,000 organisations. To engage with younger volunteers, lesson plans were written to support learning in Key Stages 3 and 4 around the key themes of the campaign. This mix of outreach mechanisms helped the campaign secure almost 40,000 child poverty volunteers.
- The Living Wage online petition, unlike many of the Downing Street e-petitions, did not just wait for potential signatories to find the petition; the organiser set up a separate dedicated Living Wage website, obtained support for his petition (and web links) from key UK poverty stakeholders – including, for example, the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network – and, crucially, sent out several thousand emails to individuals whom he felt might be supportive of the living wage concept. The contact details for these several thousand individuals were obtained through simple Google searches. There are currently 95 closed Downing Street e-petitions that refer to 'wage' in the

title; about two-thirds of these secured less than 25 signatories and only about one in ten reached the 200 signatures threshold required to get a written government response. The online Living Wage petition is one of only two petitions (with 'wage' in the title) that succeeded in reaching more than 1,000 signatures.

Messaging

Unpacking the term 'poverty'

Initiatives that do use the term 'poverty' agree that it is important to take time to 'unpack' what is meant by the term. People need practical examples of the kind of choices those on low incomes have to make. Different tools to challenge people in considering how they would cope on a low income appear to be widely used and are thought to be effective. Audiences almost inevitably conclude that the budgets available to people on low income (minimum wage, benefit levels) are not sufficient. Examples include the street survey by *The New Londoners* newspaper asking people on the street how they would cope on the £5 per day vouchers that rejected asylum-seekers receive from the Government, budgeting exercises used in poverty-awareness training sessions and recent JRF research where focus group participants were asked to calculate minimum income standards for different household structures.¹ Stories about how poverty affects children's ability to fully participate (for example, go on a school trip) and parents' feelings of guilt about this were also quoted as effective. Stakeholders targeting public sector colleagues or partner organisations similarly felt that making the poverty agenda relevant, taking organisations' own remit and priorities as a starting point was key to engagement. For example, some trade unionists were initially not keen on getting involved in the child poverty agenda, but could be brought on board by linking it to the gender discrimination agenda.

Specific messaging, focusing on absurd situations of systemic injustice that can be resolved – not undermining the public's interest

The overall impression is that audience reactions are more likely to go beyond *surprise* and register real *outrage* when the messaging is more specific and focuses on absurd or extreme situations of systemic injustice with an achievable solution – something that can be 'resolved'. For example, reactions of outrage were noted in the context of *The New Londoners* newspaper (with its messaging of a government-sponsored voucher scheme expecting rejected asylum-seekers to cover all their costs with £5 per day, seen as absurd by the people who reacted) and the Islamic Aid newsletter (referring to the systemic injustice of higher levels of poverty and social exclusion among UK Muslims). Reactions of outrage were also noted in the context of the Fair Pay League campaign (which contrasts the low wages of cleaners with the astronomical wages paid to star footballers). Interestingly, these were also the case studies most likely to present evidence of (unprompted) activity on UK poverty. Previous PIPI research² similarly suggests that messages that include clear and simple ideas for policy interventions are seen as more worthy of attention – focus group reactions suggest that, without clarity about solutions, the problem seems incoherent, intractable and hopeless, and individuals worry that their well-meaning support might be used for ends they disagree with.

In addition, sub-themes linked to social inequality and to those people for whom the public is perceived to have more sympathy (such as working people on low incomes) resonate significantly better with the wider public, especially when the messaging positions those people on low income against a 'villain'.

Case studies: specific messaging about an obvious injustice linked to a clear solution and casting working people on low incomes or others for whom the public is perceived as having more sympathy against a ‘villain’

- The wide appeal of the Living Wage campaign is testimony to the effectiveness of its highly specific messaging, its focus on working people on low incomes, the simplicity of its argument and the absurdity of the injustice – the wage differentials between bankers or footballers and cleaning staff working for financial institutions or premiership football clubs. Evidence to support the wide appeal of the living wage includes the fact that more than 120 US cities and states have passed living wage legislation since 1994; within the UK, living wage campaigns are being managed in London, Cambridge, Oxford, Norwich, Glasgow, Scotland-wide and elsewhere. Similarly, none of the recipients of an email message about the Living Wage Downing Street e-petition reacted negatively about the living wage concept – there were some negative reactions, but they related only to concerns about how the petition organiser had got hold of their email address.
- Another example is the *Daily Mirror’s* Fair Tipping campaign, which highlighted the loophole in the law that allows companies to pay restaurant staff less than the minimum wage and then make up the difference with tips – resulting in reactions from several hundred readers. The campaign messaging again relates to something that is highly specific, has a clear solution and casts the hard-working waitress against an ‘evil’ manager.
- The Northern Ireland Anti-Water Tax campaign was similarly very specific about

an obvious injustice, presented as absurd. Northern Irish people would be asked to pay twice for their water, given that their household rates (which are equivalent to the English council tax) already cover water and sewerage services. Moreover, people on a low income would suffer disproportionately from the introduction of a water tax. Trade unionists raised concerns about the privatisation of water services, effectively casting private water companies in the role of ‘villains’ to some extent.

- The Destitution campaign is an interesting example. The campaign covers a specific issue (destitution among rejected asylum-seekers) and offers a clear solution (the Australian approach of offering counselling support to rejected asylum-seekers) and presents the destitution as a clear and systemic injustice. The destitution is caused through a government-managed scheme that expects human beings to survive on £5 per day. Still, asylum-seekers are not necessarily perceived by the wider public as deserving sympathy. This may help explain why the campaign, which has been successful in engaging its donor base (previously not engaged in campaigning) in advocacy and has already achieved some results in its dialogue with policy-makers, has not generated the levels of mass public support seen in similar campaigns. The more modest campaign budget and the clear campaign focus on policy advocacy (mass public outreach is not a campaign objective) may also be relevant in this respect.

Approaches that highlight the benefits of the campaign proposals to the audience or at least do not undermine the audience’s own interest tend to be more effective. Improving life for people on low income is rarely highlighted as the (only) reason to get involved.

Evidence supporting the importance of not undermining the public's own interest

- In the context of volunteering, arguments of career development or enriching one's own life tend to be used as well.
- The Anti-Water Tax campaign proposals allow *everyone* to gain (by not having to pay water charges), not just the people living on low income.
- Initiatives such as the Living Wage, Fair Tipping and Loan Shark campaigns allow the audience to be outraged at an injustice without fear that they will have to give up any personal privileges; rather, it is banks, football clubs, restaurant managers or doorstep lenders who will need to give up some of their profits.
- Interestingly, anecdotal feedback from the Fair Pay League campaign suggests that people readily agree with the principle of the living wage; football supporters' only concern is that the living wage might increase their ticket price. This suggests, indeed, that campaign engagement becomes much more difficult only when personal interests are under threat.
- This is similarly supported by recent research findings³ that a large and enduring majority of the public feel that the income gap is too large, but support for redistribution does not match this. The research explains that theories based on the role of self-interest have long been championed by economists. The argument, taking redistribution as an example, is that people will support or oppose action depending on the extent to which they personally benefit or lose out financially. Individuals may feel that the income gap is too large, believing that they do not receive their fair share compared to higher income earners, but may fear that redistribution could leave them worse off.

- Similarly, extensive research by the Ford Foundation (2001)⁴ on public perceptions in the United States about working people on low incomes suggested that campaigns should speak in terms of ways to plan the economy so that it works for all Americans.
- Conversely, individuals who have a clear stake and will directly benefit from campaign proposals are more likely to 'act' and get involved. For example, the earliest and most active Give Me Five campaigners were those who were directly affected by the £20 permitted earnings threshold.

Keeping things light

Finally, innovative, light-touch approaches, ideally peppered with some humour, appear most effective in capturing popular interest (and media coverage). Although stakeholders agreed that there was a huge need for information-sharing given low levels of awareness about UK poverty, many stressed the need to keep the message light and positive, and to avoid 'preaching'. Making the audience feel guilty or personally responsible was thought to be counterproductive. This is not to say that creating a sense of injustice cannot be effective – the point is not to cast the audience or readers in the role of 'villain'.

Evidence supporting the importance of light-touch approaches and humour

- The annual Peanuts for Benefits campaign found that it achieved most of its media coverage when someone dressed up as a gorilla literally delivered a wheelbarrow of peanuts to benefit agencies.
- The Anti-Water Tax campaign used the TV programme *Little Britain's* 'The computer says no' T-shirts during one of its demonstrations.
- The Keep the Promise rally organisers tried to generate a carnivalesque atmosphere – and succeeded in their attempts, as explicitly evidenced in the

unsolicited complimentary feedback emails from member organisations and rally participants. More generally, End Child Poverty (and others) have focused on developing a positive brand identity – for example, through the Keep the Promise logo, making audiences associate the campaign with positive messaging.

- The 2008 Refugee Week was launched through the Celebrating Sanctuary music festival on the London South Bank – focusing on positive messaging (*celebrating* sanctuary) and aiming to also attract people looking for a fun day out on a sunny Sunday.
- The One Million Children’s ‘Red Chair’ photograph petition is another example of a fun, innovative approach, as is Save the Children’s ‘Door on Tour’, which literally saw a door (representing 10 Downing Street) travelling the country to engage the public and local politicians in the child poverty agenda.
- The NIAPN poverty trap game was mentioned as a fun and effective method of getting messages across, based on focus group responses during the external evaluation of the NIAPN poverty-awareness training.
- Similarly, the Poverty Alliance multiple-choice quiz was introduced following anecdotal feedback from participants and from an external evaluator observing the training sessions that just presenting the ‘dry’ statistics risked turning people off from the start.
- *The New Londoners* newspaper makes a number of points about the stark reality of destitution among asylum-seekers through a tabloid-style paper with a positive tone – in this case even avoiding the use of poverty or destitution terminology altogether.

Perhaps surprisingly, given this point about keeping the message light and positive, most information-sharing about UK poverty focuses on presenting (only) the hardship and stark reality of living in poverty. Success stories are perhaps more common in the context of *campaigns* than in other public support building activities (such as poverty-awareness training). Campaigns sometimes use case studies to show how a change in approach would indeed lead to a better life for the target group. For example, living wage campaigns compare and contrast employees who do and do not receive the living wage. Even in campaigns, however, the focus often remains on portraying the hardship of living in poverty.

Risk of focusing on obvious injustices and not undermining the audiences’ interest

It is unclear whether messaging focusing on obvious injustices and not undermining the public’s own interest can generate support for the UK poverty agenda at a more general level – in particular, support for more unpopular policy measures aimed at helping people on low income towards whom the public may be less likely to have a positive attitude (unemployed or inactive people). This type of messaging tends not to challenge, in any way, public attitudes towards some people on low income as ‘scroungers’.

Interestingly, there are only a limited number of campaigns focusing on direct increases in the amounts of money (wages or benefits) received by people on low incomes and these tend to focus on the people living in poverty who are more likely to receive sympathy from the wider public – in particular, children, older people or working people on low incomes. Examples are the Make Child Benefit count (championing an increase in child benefit) and the different campaigns linked to wage levels (the Living Wage petition, the Fair Pay Network, the Fair Tipping campaign). Although there are charities that are campaigning for a better benefit regime for other groups (such as lone parents), the research did not identify benefit-linked campaigns for these other groups based on *popular* mobilisation. The Give Me Five campaign, which focuses on incapacity benefit claimants is an exception, but even there the campaign ask does not relate to an increase in the benefit level, but to an increase in the threshold of permitted

work pay. Indirectly, then, the focus is again on individuals for whom the public is perceived to have more sympathy – incapacity benefit claimants *who work*. The only real exception is the Peanuts for Benefits campaign, which aims to raise awareness of jobseekers' benefit levels and build public support for an increase in benefits. However, the campaign cannot be considered to have been a complete success. Although it generated media coverage, the coverage was by no means entirely supportive.

Messaging vs. dialogue

Research on communicating asylum to the public⁵ suggests that bringing people into a dialogue on controversial issues is likely to be more effective than simply sending out messages towards a 'passive' audience. There is only limited evidence from the UK poverty sector on this issue. UK poverty sector stakeholders often shy away from controversial issues and much activity is messaging rather than dialogue. Clear exceptions are poverty-awareness training and volunteering in deprived communities, which offer direct opportunities for interaction and discussion; Business in the Community's Seeing is Believing visits similarly provide a platform for dialogue.

Poverty-awareness training indeed appears to be powerful in unearthing stereotypical attitudes, but participants' reactions can go in either direction. On volunteering, there is fairly strong evidence that the direct interaction between the volunteer and the individuals living in poverty can have a significant and lasting impact on perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of the volunteer. For example, Dare to Care evidence showed that more than 90 per cent of volunteers were planning to continue to volunteer and there was a 10 per cent increase in volunteers who believed that individuals could contribute to ending child poverty. Business in the Community survey evidence on Seeing is Believing participants indicates that about 70 per cent of those taking part report that they changed the way they do business as a result of their Seeing is Believing visit and 80 per cent became personally more active in the local community. It may well be that it is the *informal* but in-depth dialogue with people living in poverty rather than the more *structured* interaction in the context of poverty-awareness training that 'works' best.

Channels and mechanisms for getting the message across

Statistical information vs. stories

Reactions of surprise were recorded both when audiences were presented with statistical information about the prevalence of poverty and when organisations provided them with real-life 'stories' about UK poverty. For example, the annual Islamic Aid brochure uses only statistics and succeeded in generating quite strong responses from recipients. However, by and large, the available evidence suggests that stories are more effective – in particular with the wider public. This confirms earlier research findings from focus group discussions showing that stories are effective in making poverty tangible and immediate, and getting people to talk about poverty-related issues in a more animated, personalised and empathetic way.⁶ At one level, one may even argue that Islamic Aid's success through use of statistics is exceptional and may be explained by the story *behind* the statistics. The reactions of recipients of the brochure did not focus on specific statistics but on the fact that UK Muslims scored worse than the population at large.

Evidence suggesting that statistics turn audiences off

- Poverty Alliance used to start its poverty-awareness training sessions with a series of statistics about UK poverty, but feels its new approach, presenting poverty statistics through a multiple-choice quiz, works better in engaging with the audience.
- Research found that a majority of focus group participants were surprised to learn that 3.4 million people in the UK were living in poverty. They were generally unmoved by this.⁷
- Research by Ipsos MORI showed that focus groups expressed initial surprise and shock when statistics about UK poverty were shown, but this surprise gave way to scepticism and groups found it easy to 'brush off' statistics and argued about the validity and provenance of the facts.⁸

