Abstract

Political efforts to engage the public in global poverty and foreign aid appear ever more important. But there is cause to believe that efforts to secure charitable donations are actually undercutting political support for development assistance. Appeals made by international development NGOs have long made use of shocking, negative imagery and language to appeal to the public’s emotions of pity and guilt to elicit donations. While traditional appeals are known to generate revenue for NGOs by way of donations, there are growing concerns that they negatively affect other forms of engagement with international development, and reduce support for development in the long term. Despite emotions being central to this debate, there is little empirical evidence on whether different types of appeals can trigger different emotional responses, and whether the emotional responses produced by different appeals impact different forms of public engagement with global development. In this paper, we address this gap using a survey experiment (N= 701), where respondents are randomly assigned to one of three treatments. We find that the ‘traditional’ and ‘alternative’ appeals trigger positive and negative emotional responses and that emotional responses mediate respondents’ likelihood of making a donation and individual efficacy in addressing problems of global poverty.

Key Words: International development; NGOs; emotions; engagement; donation experiment
Introduction

On 25 September 2015, the 193 countries of the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda titled *Transforming our world*. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)–which replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)–set the international framework guiding international public policy towards global poverty, inequality and climate change. The launch of the SDGs was surrounded by significant efforts to engage the public in the goals through social media campaigns, public diplomacy, and celebrity (and Pope) backed efforts, e.g. a Global Citizen Festival featuring Pearl Jam, Beyoncé, Ed Sheeran and Coldplay, Project Everyone to publicise the goals, and the Global Goals project, spearheaded by film director Richard Curtis, to encourage general public engagement. One of the key messages the Global Goals is trying to communicate is embodied in a quotation from John F. Kennedy “‘Our problems are man-made, therefore they may be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings”. The concern that world leaders face is the problem of disengagement because Northern publics believe that nothing can be done to alleviate, let alone eradicate, poverty.

Efforts to engage the public with development are not new–they emerged in the 1970s as an attempt by donor governments and NGOs to foster greater understanding, and thus support, for development issues (Bourn, 2008). This is nicely captured by the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Office of Development Studies: ‘the system of international development cooperation – whether we think of the current existing one or a new, expanded one – cannot exist without broad-based political support. Building such support, of course, requires a basic understanding of the nature of people’s – the public’s – attitudes toward international development co-operation’ (Stern, 1998:v). Monitoring and trying to understand public support has become common practice for most donor countries and major international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Centre (Fransman and Solignac Lacomte, 2004; McDonnell et al, 2003), the European Union (EU) Eurobarometer surveys, the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) and the World Bank (Paxton and Knack, 2008).
What motivates people to engage with and act on global political issues? Efforts to answer this question have pointed to emotions playing a crucial role in promoting engagement with global issues, which has led to growing attention to emotions in the study of world politics (see Crawford, 2000; Ross, 2006; Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008; Mercer, 2010; Hutchison, 2014). This recent “emotional turn” has, in particular, focused on how representations of those impacted by global events can bring about emotional responses that lead people to act on behalf of others around the world. As Hutchison (2014, 2) explains, in reference to the images of human suffering during the 2004 Asian tsunami, there is a “growing focus on the affective elements of these kinds of representations and the idea that emotions may, in turn, be instrumental in shaping forms of action in world politics.” The recent global outcry in response to the images of the drowned body of three-year-old Syrian refugee, Aylan Kurdi, and the policy debate it prompted (see Kozlowska, 2015), provides an example of how such images can produce emotional reactions that motivate public engagement, action and political responses.

The relationship between representations, emotions and engagement has long been recognized within the international development sector. Development non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have traditionally relied on highly-emotive appeals to help secure donations. Since the 1980s, development charity campaigns have utilized shocking and dehumanizing text and imagery – so-called “pornography of poverty” (Plewes and Stuart, 2007) – to capture the attention of potential donors. The images of poor, malnourished, suffering, and typically African, children have been used “to induce emotions of pity and guilt on the part of potential donors” (Cameron and Haanstra, 2008, 148). Despite criticism of this approach (e.g. Lissner, 1977; Hilary, 2014), NGOs continue to try and understand how better to elicit such emotional responses from potential donors (e.g. Basil, Ridgway and Basil, 2006), precisely because they are so effective at fundraising acquisition (Huber, Van Boven and McGraw, 2010). As Burman (1994, 29) notes, “the poor starving Black child is so central to the idiom of charity appeals that aid campaigns depart from this convention only at the risk of prejudicing their income.”

Recent research, however, has shown that public interest and engagement with development is decreasing (Hudson and VanHeerde-Hudson, 2012; Henson and Lindstrom, 2013), and these traditional appeals seeking to elicit pity among the public are thought
to be a key driver of the decline (Sireau, 2009; Darnton and Kirk, 2011; Dogra, 2012). Indeed, within the development sector, there is a widespread belief that campaigners face a trade-off between seeking donations using traditional pity-based appeals and promoting public engagement with development and global poverty more generally. In other words, the strategies that generate income via donations may harm other forms of engagement, such as cognitive engagement (awareness, knowledge and interest); behavioural engagement (buying fair trade, volunteering, campaigning); and, importantly, people’s sense of whether poverty has or can even be alleviated at all. This is what many point to as the biggest casualty of the unrelentingly shocking and dehumanizing framing of global poverty, that it undermines people’s sense of efficacy in addressing problems of global poverty and consequently, their engagement.

Despite the fact it is widely accepted that emotions play a fundamental role in NGO appeals’ attempts to secure public engagement, there has been surprisingly little empirical analysis of the relationship between such appeals and different emotional responses. In this paper, we address this gap and consider whether different types of NGO appeals can indeed trigger different emotional responses, and whether the emotional responses produced by different appeals affects public engagement with global poverty.

To do this, we design a survey experiment that tests two types of messaging used by development charities – what we term “traditional” and “alternative” appeals – on different negative emotions (pity, guilt, repulsion, and anger) and positive emotions (hope and solidarity). In addition to estimating the direct effects on the emotions, we also estimate – using multiple mediation (see (see Preacher and Hayes, 2008; MacKinnon, 2008)) – the indirect effects to understand how the emotional responses produced by the different treatments impacts the likelihood of donating and personal efficacy (measuring respondents feelings towards making a difference to the problems of global poverty).

Our findings show that different appeals do trigger different emotional responses. We find that while the traditional appeals tends to trigger negative emotions, such as pity and guilt, the alternative appeal leads respondents to report more positive emotions, such as hopefulness. The analysis also demonstrates that there are a variety of emotional pathways to public engagement with global poverty, and importantly, the different emotional responses that respondents feel tend to cancel each other out with regard to overall effects.
of the appeals on donations and efficacy.

The paper is structured as follows. We first review the existing literature on representations in development NGO appeals and public engagement with issues of global poverty. The subsequent section lays out our main theoretical argument on how alternative forms of NGO appeals can trigger more positive emotional responses, and in doing so, generate testable hypotheses. We then describe the survey experiment used to test our hypotheses, detailing the design and results of the experimental analysis. This is followed by a discussion of the results and implications for efforts to promote public engagement with global poverty, before offering concluding remarks.

**Development appeals and public engagement**

In recent years, there has been growing criticism of the use of shocking images of the global poor in development NGO appeals (see Hilary, 2014). Such criticism has a long history. Over three decades ago, Lissner (1977) questioned the prevalent use of “negative” images in NGO fundraising campaigns, in the form of shocking depictions of malnourished young children, without any broader context provided. He argued that this objectification of those living in the global South – which has come to be termed “the pornography of poverty” (Plewes and Stuart, 2007) – was demeaning, inaccurate, unethical, and likely to foster negative perceptions of those in the global South.

A significant literature has considered how such representations shape public perceptions in wealthier nations of those living in developing countries (see Lidchi, 1999; Plewes and Stuart, 2007; Dogra, 2007, 2012; Cameron and Haanstra, 2008; Chouliaaraki, 2006). These studies have pointed how the framing and images of NGO appeals aim to invoke emotional responses based on pity and guilt, which in turn fosters paternalistic attitudes towards those living in the global South. As such, the emphasis on pity and guilt reinforces negative racial stereotypes; they present a narrow view of developing countries that ignores the progress made; they ignore the role of domestic actors in the global South; they reinforce the perception that more charity is required rather than fundamental political and economic change; and they lead to “a sense of hopelessness and...
hellessness” (Plewes and Stuart, 2007, 7).\

As a result, traditional, pity-based appeals restrict broader public engagement with global development, such as cognitive engagement in the form of awareness, knowledge and interest about development issues; behavioural engagement in the form of volunteering and campaigning; and people’s sense of efficacy in addressing problems of global poverty (Darnton and Kirk, 2011; Tallon and McGregor, 2014; BOND, 2014).

There have been efforts within the NGO sector to move away from using such images in their appeals by regulating the types of images used by NGOs and establishing codes of conduct. However, despite these efforts, development NGOs have returned to using images that seek to provoke pity (Hilary, 2014). This is because of a prevalent view among development NGOs that moving away from such an approach risks lowering donations to development NGOs. The growing empirical literature on predictors of charitable giving provides support for this view.

Several studies have demonstrated that people are more likely to donate more when faced with a single identifiable victim than so-called ‘statistical victims’, i.e. large numbers of anonymous victims (Small and Loewenstein, 2003; Small, Loewenstein and Slovic, 2007; Kogut and Ritov, 2005; Cryder, Loewenstein and Scheines, 2013). It is theorized that focusing on individual victims induces a greater emotional response – specifically evoking sympathy, which in turn, makes donations more likely. Dickert and Slovic (2009) find that subjects report greater sympathy for a victim when they are pictured alone than when they are seen in the presence of other victims. Furthermore, people report greater emotional distress when appeals describe victims in detail than when victims are described without detail, again leading to increased donations (Kogut and Ritov, 2005).

This view that representations provoke feelings of pity are likely to lead to increased

1See also Cameron and Haanstra (2008); Dogra (2012); Baker (2015).
2There have been a number of efforts by the NGO sector to regulate its own members. The 1987 report Images of Africa started the debate and has been followed by a series of codes of conduct, for example the 1989 General Assembly of the Liaison Committee of Development NGOs to the European Communities, Code of Conduct: Images and Messages relating to the Third World, the 1994 The Code of Conduct of British Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, and the 2006 CONCORD: the European NGO confederation for Relief and Development, Code of Conduct on Images and Messages.
donations also finds strong support in Baker (2015). Using survey experiments, he finds that white Americans tend to be more favorable toward aid when the global poor are represented as being of African descent than when they are shown as being of East European descent. This, he argues, is due to an underlying racial paternalism – borne out of pity – whereby Africans are seen as lacking in human agency.

Existing research confirms the dilemma set out above. The prevalence of appeals that seek to provoke feelings of pity impact negatively on levels of public engagement and efficacy. Yet these pity-targeting appeals are widely viewed as being fundamental to NGOs’ fundraising efforts.

In order to move past the current impasse, it is necessary to address a fundamental gap in the extant research. This is the absence of evidence on whether different types of appeals produce different emotional responses in people, and the relationship between these different emotional responses and different forms of public engagement on global poverty. The growing literature based on experimental analysis on the relationship between representations and donations is based on the assumption that there is a single emotional response that leads people to donate to charity – namely, pity. As such, these studies have largely focused on examining the relationship between the amount of pity respondents feel and their propensity to donate to charity. There has been little consideration of how other emotional responses impact donations and other forms of engagement with global poverty.

In order to address the gap, we consider whether different types of appeals – in terms of the representations of those living in the global South – provoke different emotional responses, and the effect of different emotional responses triggered by NGO appeals on different forms of public engagement with global development. To do this, it is necessary to consider further the different forms of emotional responses that development appeals can trigger and how these impact people’s likelihood to act with regard to global poverty. In particular, we address the growing calls to for NGOs to move away from appealing to “negative” emotions, such as pity, towards appeals that seek to promote more “positive” emotions.
Representations, emotions and efficacy

In order to consider how development appeals can move away from focusing on “negative” emotions towards tapping into alternative, positive, emotional pathways to engagement with global poverty, it is first necessary to consider what is meant by “positive” and “negative” emotions (see Green, 1992; Solomon and Stone, 2002). In the psychology literature, positive emotions are distinguished from negative emotions on the basis of experiential, cognitive, and behavioural criteria. Positive emotions are those that can produce pleasant experiences (experiential criterion), desirable beliefs (cognitive criterion), or lead to desirable behaviours (behavioural criterion). This includes emotions, such as hope, gladness, joy, pleasure, and solidarity. Negative emotions are those that produce undesirable beliefs, produce unpleasant experiences, or lead to undesirable behaviour. These include, fear, envy, pity, resentment, repulsion, guilt, and anger (Green, 1992, 171-3).

The use of the terms “negative” and “positive” in the existing discussion of development appeals and engagement with global poverty specifically refers to the experiential criterion and considers how these impact cognitive and behavioural responses. For example, Huber, Van Boven and McGraw (2010, 180) argue, “people give more to those whose suffering is more upsetting compared with those whose suffering is relatively less upsetting.” Hence, the argument is that the negative emotions, in the form of an unpleasant (or “upsetting”) experience, can lead to positive behavioural responses, in the form of donations.

However, these negative emotions may also produce a negative cognitive or attitudinal response. As Chouliaraki (2010) notes, in the context of NGO appeals this can occur through two processes: the ‘bystander’ effect and the ‘boomerang’ effect (see also Cohen, 2013). The former refers to people becoming indifferent to acting on suffering “as a reaction to negative emotion that ultimately leaves people feeling powerless” (Chouliaraki, 2010, 112). The latter refers to people feeling contempt towards NGOs themselves because of the upsetting emotional experience that traditional NGO appeals create.

We focus here on the first process, the feelings of powerlessness that negative emo-
tional responses to NGO appeals can lead to. As Darnton and Kirk (2011, 18) explain, this efficacy or sense of agency is a “key dimension of public engagement”. NGOs are seen to have contributed to this sense of powerlessness because they have continued to use negative appeals over several decades that show shocking depictions of conditions in the global South and present those living in developing countries as helpless. After 30 years of such appeals, the public has a sense that no progress has been made, think there is a lack of accountability for the money that has been donated, and importantly, feel a loss of personal efficacy in fighting global poverty (Darnton and Kirk, 2011).

The question that follows, then, is how can appealing to more positive emotions address this issue of efficacy? In considering this question, we focus on the emotion of empathy, given that much of the recent criticism of NGO appeals has called for a move away from appeals that foster pity towards appeals that generate feelings of empathy (Tallon and McGregor, 2014; Darnton and Kirk, 2011; Dogra, 2012). As Gerdes (2011) notes, however, the emotions of sympathy, pity, and empathy are often confused – both in everyday usage and in academic research. Therefore, it is important to clearly distinguish between the concepts. Sympathy refers to “expression of concern or sorrow about distressful events in a person’s life”, pity refers to a “condescending, or contemptuous form of feeling sorry for someone”, and empathy is “the psychological experience of feeling what another person is feeling and the cognitive processing of the experience” (Gerdes, 2011, 233).

The key distinction between pity and empathy, then, is that while pity centres on a sense of difference and inequality between people, empathy reflects feelings of equality and shared experiences. This has been explained in the growing attention given empathy in studies of world politics. Lebow (2005, 304), for example, argues that empathy “encourages us to see others as our ontological equals and to recognize the self-actualizing benefits of close relationships with others.” Similarly, Head (2015, 8) explains that “empathy is generally accepted as a mode of being which connects us to others and which promotes intersubjective relations, enabling the individual subject to move beyond the limits of her own knowledge”.

Therefore, the argument is that if NGOs are able to generate feelings of empathy rather than pity, they will encourage the public in wealthy nations to see those living in
the global South as their equals, rather than emphasising the differences between people in the global North and South. As such, rather than making the public in the global North feel powerless to do anything about changing a situation that they are unable to relate to, appeals that generate empathy lead to a positive feeling of solidarity with those living in the global South, which in turn can promote greater engagement. In the context of government and NGO efforts to build a greater sense of global citizenship, OECD aid donors attempts to boost public support for foreign aid, and international efforts such as the recent UN Sustainable Development Goals, demanding a “global partnership for sustainable development”, this is very much in line with existing political efforts.

We consider the negative emotions: anger, guilt, pity and repulsion; and the positive emotions: solidarity and hope. We do not include the emotions sympathy and empathy due to the common confusion over the meaning. We effectively use solidarity in the place of empathy.

Having considered the different emotional responses that development NGOs could look to induce in order to promote different forms of engagement, it is necessary to consider how NGOs can produce these different emotional responses. In other words, we ask what type of appeal can lead to more positive emotional responses, such as empathy and hope, and thereby promote different forms of engagement? It is worth noting that NGOs have tried to move away from the traditional ”negative” appeals towards more “positive” appeals, by replacing images of suffering children with those of smiling children (see Lidchi, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006; Dogra, 2012). These images, however, have been criticised for the failure to address the lack of context provided regarding those living in the developing world, and as such, they continue to reinforce the “othering” of those in the global South (Lidchi, 1999). Hence, such ”positive” appeals do not address the problematic features of traditional NGO appeals that have been highlighted.

As such, our approach to developing an alternative appeal is to consider the specific problematic features of traditional appeals that have been discussed in the literature on representations in NGO appeals, and to develop an appeal that overcome these issues. There are several features of traditional appeals that have been highlighted in this literature. This includes the pervasive use of children who are generally pictured alone with no broader context provided (see Lissner, 1977; Burman, 1994; Manzo, 2008; Do-
the use of shocking and dehumanizing depictions of the poor; the absence of voice and agency in the representations of people living in developing countries; and the way these appeals emphasize differences between people in the global North and the distant “other”, often along racial lines (Harrison, 2010; Dogra, 2012).

Therefore, we consider more carefully how to develop an alternative appeal that triggers more positive emotions. In order to do this, we address the key problematic features of traditional appeals. This includes avoiding the use of shocking and degrading images. An alternative appeal would also avoid the use of images of solitary children devoid of broader context. In addition to providing context, an alternative appeal would also seek to demonstrate the agency of people living in the global South. Finally, it is also important to avoid the use of language based on divisions between people in the global North and South, and instead to incorporate more inclusive and unifying language. We discuss the specific design of the alternative appeal in the next section.

We compare the effects of this alternative appeal to a more traditional NGO appeal (based on the characteristics discussed) on people’s emotional responses. We hypothesise that the traditional appeals is more likely to produce negative emotional responses, while the alternative appeals should lead to positive emotional responses. We also consider how the emotional responses triggered by the different appeals impacts engagement in the form of donations and personal efficacy – the extent to which respondents feel they can make a difference to the problem of global poverty. Based on the conventional wisdom within the development NGO sectors, we expect to find that the negative emotions triggered by are more likely to lead to donations than the positive emotions triggered by the alternative appeal. However, this same conventional wisdom leads us to hypothesise that the alternative appeal is more likely to lead to a greater sense of personal efficacy through the positive emotions it generates than the traditional appeal.
Appeals, emotions and engagement experiment

Experimental design

To test our hypotheses we designed an embedded survey experiment, fielded December 2014, using YouGov’s online panel of British adults (N = 701). We adopt an independent samples design where respondents are randomly assigned to one of three groups. We create a baseline measure to compare against our two treatments: a traditional appeal and an alternative appeal.

The analysis proceeds in two steps. The first step is to establish whether there are indeed emotional responses to NGO appeals. We identify six emotions from the literature thought to be triggered or primed by traditional and alternative appeals: pity, repulsion, guilt, anger, solidarity, and hope. Following Gross and D’Ambrosio (2004), we operationalize the ‘affective effects’ of the appeals by asking respondents the extent to which they felt any of the six emotions, using a 5 point agree-disagree scale.

The second step is to test whether emotions are the mechanisms, or intervening processes, linking appeals to engagement (Mahoney 2000). We argue that appeals triggers one or more emotional responses, of varying intensity, which influence engagement with global poverty, measured as donation behaviour and personal efficacy. We observe two outcomes: whether or not a respondent made a donation and respondents’ sense of personal efficacy, asking ‘how much difference do you think you can make to the problems of poverty in the world today’ (0-10 scale where 0= “I can’t make any difference at all”; 5= “I can make some difference”; and 10= “I can make a great deal of difference”.

Respondents were introduced to the survey on ‘current events’. In addition to YouGov’s standard incentivization, they would be given an additional £10 upon completion of the survey.

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4 The two treatment NGO appeals and the baseline appeal are shown in Figures 1a, 1b, and 2 respectively. The survey questionnaire, summary statistics, robustness checks, and X are provided in the Online Appendix.

5 Imai, Keele and Yamamoto (2010) have shown that identification claims can be made stronger by randomizing the mediator, however, we are unable randomly manipulate respondent’s emotional reactions.

6 YouGov incentivizes respondents through a points system weighted to the length/demands of the survey that can be redeemed at certain thresholds.
from the Jaago Foundation after which we would ask a few questions about what they had read. Immediately following the treatments, we asked whether respondents would like to donate any of the additional £10 they received for their participation in the survey to the Jaago Foundation. We provided a statement about the Jaago Foundation to assure respondents that donations were going to a legitimate charity and then indicated the decision to donate was entirely voluntary: respondents could donate none, any or all of the £10 to Jaago.

**Experimental manipulations: Treatment design**

The appeals were designed with two factors in mind: first, to incorporate the key features of traditional and alternative appeals described in the previous section, and second, to ensure they were externally valid or representative of the wider body of development appeals citizens encounter. We take each of these in turn.

The traditional appeal, shown in Figure 1a, utilizes the image of a sick, malnourished and impoverished child, ubiquitous in development appeals in recent years. The image is typical of traditional appeals: there is no context, child’s parents, family or community. The child is not named. The appeal uses language that emphasizes division or separation between the donor and recipient and is paternalistic in nature “you can save a child’s life”; “With your help, we can provide clean water and food to stop them dying”. There is also an absence of agency “there is no one there to help them; their lives are in your hands”.

The alternative appeal, shown in Figure 1b aims to give voice and agency to the actor. This is difficult to achieve in a still image, but we approximate this by using an image of child, ‘Amadi’, holding a sign, which says ‘future doctor’. The appeal shows the recipient in the context of their daily life, in school, surrounded by other children and a teacher. The text emphasizes shared commonalities between donor and recipient ‘families in poor countries work hard to provide the same things for their children as we do’; ‘we all want to be able to look after ourselves and our families’) and unifying language, ‘we’ and ‘sharing’.

The traditional and alternative appeals are measured against a baseline appeal, shown
JAAGO Foundation is a registered non-profit organization. Established in 2007, we work in low income countries to improve living environments and social conditions.

The lives of innocent children are plagued by starvation and disease. They have no food, clean water or toilets. Their situation is desperate. There is no one there to help them—their lives are in your hands. With your help, we can provide clean water and food to stop them dying.

Please donate before it’s too late.

Living conditions are improving around the world, but over one billion people still live in poverty.

You can save a child’s life or TEXT “give” to 76492 to donate with your smartphone.

DONATE NOW

All of us sharing a little more can make a big difference.

Figure 1: Traditional and alternative treatments
in Figure 2, which provides respondents with a single statement on global poverty, “Living conditions are improving around the world, but over one billion people still live in poverty”. Our aim in creating the baseline appeal was to provide respondents some context to poverty alleviation efforts: that measurable progress has been made in recent years (particularly with regards to the Millennium Development Goal 1), and second, to remind respondents of the scale of the problem and need for action.

The extent to which the treatments in our survey experiment reflect those used by development sector charities is important. We tested the appeals using focus group participants who were asked, amongst other questions, how typical each of the appeals was; whether they see this kind of material in their daily lives and how they feel about organizations who use such images and words. Qualitative data from the focus group suggests the treatments are externally valid. Focus group participants cited the “typical nature” of the traditional appeal; that both appeals “looked like most of the appeals... you see in the press... and on the Tube”; and importantly – as we are aiming to tap respondents’ emotional responses, “they all pull at heartstrings”.

More practically, each appeal included a ‘call to action’ (the donation ask), instructions on how to donate and information on the charity itself, the Jaago Foundation. Our choice of using the Jaago Foundation was important for three reasons. First, we had established a relationship with the charity for a previous lab-based experiment, which was critical because any donations respondents made were given to the charity. Second, the charity could not be an existing grantee of our funder, which ruled out working with many of the major development organizations in the UK. Third, it was important that the charity was not well known, as we did not want the reputation or view of the NGO in

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7The Jaago Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to addressing the educational needs of less privileged children in Bangladesh (see http://www.jaago.com.bd/).
the minds of respondents to unduly influence the decision to donate or not. As such, we avoided using large and well known development NGOs.

**Treatment effects**

We report here three different types of effects. First, the direct effect of the treatments on subjects’ emotional responses. Second, the indirect effect of the treatments on subjects’ donation behaviour and sense of efficacy, mediated through the emotional responses. These are the net effects. Third, we report the decomposed indirect effects showing the step-by-step effects from treatments to emotions to our two measures of engagement.

Our first task is to determine which, if any, of the six emotions respondents reported feeling after seeing the various treatments. We identify four negative emotions, anger, guilt, repulsion, and pity, and two positive emotions, solidarity and hope. Based on the received wisdom among development campaigners, we would expect the traditional appeal to trigger negative emotions and the alternative appeal to trigger positive emotions. The results in Figure 3 show that the treatments generally work in the way we expect. Respondents who received the traditional appeal were statistically more likely to say they felt anger, guilt, pity, and repulsion – the latter against the alternative appeal, but not against the baseline.

Respondents who received the alternative appeal were significantly more likely to say
they felt hope compared to those who received the traditional treatment – though there was no statistical treatment between the alternative appeal and the baseline. We find no statistical evidence of the alternative appeal triggering solidarity. Although, the pattern of response is as expected, i.e. respondents receiving the empathy appeal were more likely to say they felt solidarity compared to the baseline and the traditional appeal, but we cannot treat the results as meaningfully different from random. The results here provide evidence of an emotional response to development charity appeals. We now turn our attention to the second part of the analysis, whether the emotional responses produced by our appeals influence public engagement with global poverty.

**Mediation analysis: Pathways to engagement**

To estimate the effects of emotional responses to the traditional and alternative appeals impact on donations and efficacy, we employ mediation analysis. Multiple mediation analyses show the total effects of predictors, decomposed into direct and mediated effects (MacKinnon, 2008b). “Mediation analysis moves away from estimates of ‘average treatment effects’ and instead seeks to quantify the effect of a treatment that operates through a particular mechanism” (Hicks and Tingley, 2011, 2). It also allows for inconsistent mediation (Zhao, Lynch and Chen, 2010; Hayes, 2009; Baron and Kenny, 1986) where we may (not) observe direct effects of X on Y, but significant mediation or indirect effects (X on M on Y). Mediation analysis allows us to explicitly test our argument that emotions are the mechanism linking appeals to engagement. We provide two pieces of evidence to assess our hypotheses – a net effects model and a decomposed model, the latter of which allows us to demonstrate inconsistent mediation.

Table 1 shows the impact of the traditional and alternative appeals (net effects) on likelihood of donation through the different emotional pathways. There is a positive relationship between respondents receiving the traditional appeal treatment and donating

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8We consider solidarity in more detail in the conclusion.

9To estimate the models we use the ‘lavaan’ package in R (Rosseel, 2012; R Core Team, 2015) and report the standardized beta coefficients in the path diagrams.

10Inconsistent mediation illustrates relationships where X on M may be positive (negative) and M on Y may be negative (positive). The decomposed models show how positive and negative relationships interact to produce a net effect, which may be cancelled out or show no relationships in models which only estimate direct effects.
(compared to the baseline) via the emotions of anger and guilt. These findings provide some evidence to support what development NGOs have known for decades, namely that by tapping into donors’ emotions of anger and guilt, such appeals have a positive effect on donations. However, the evidence here indicates that negative emotions as pathways to donations do not work uniformly. As shown in Table 1, there is a negative relationship between the traditional appeal and donation via repulsion. Contrary to the positive effect of negative emotions (anger and guilt) on donations, repulsion has a negative impact on donation.

Table 1: Net mediation effects on donation decision

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<td>0.763</td>
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The results from the decomposed model shown in Figure 4 help to illustrate the differential effects negative emotions, or inconsistent mediation. Here we see the effect of the traditional appeal on donation, as it operates through anger, guilt and repulsion. However, repulsion which are negatively related to donation. Thus, development charities reliance on images of isolated, starving African children run the risk of alienating donors by triggering negative emotions that work to reduce donations. In other words,

11 The decomposed models show the traditional and alternative appeals (=1) against the baseline appeal (=0).
there are unintended consequences – i.e. unintended emotional responses – to charities’ use of traditional appeals. Traditional appeals can both win you, and lose you, donors and thus, provides some initial evidence of the collateral damage of traditional appeals.

The next question then is what is the impact of alternative appeals on donations? Do appeals designed to trigger positive emotional responses influence donations? Table 1 shows positive effects for the alternative appeal on donations via hope and repulsion. Again, Figure 4 helps to illustrate. The case of hope is positive as expected: alternative appeals trigger feelings of hope which are positively related to making a donation. Interestingly, the magnitude or impact on donation (standardized betas) is the same as that of anger and larger than guilt, via traditional appeals. Thus, respondents who reported feeling hopeful after receiving the alternative appeal were no less likely to make a donation that those who received the traditional appeal and felt angry or guilty. One advantage of alternative appeals however is that there is less likely to be negative, unintended consequences, of using them. On the contrary, the evidence here shows that the alternative appeal reduces feelings of repulsion, which is in turn, positively related to donation behaviour.

We now turn to the question the impact of the appeals on personal efficacy. It has long
been thought by development campaigners that while traditional appeals are successful in raising donations, their ubiquitous use over the past 30 years may have negative consequences for other forms of engagement: routinely exploiting stereotypes of starving African children has reinforced sentiments of a lack of progress, donor/compassion fatigue, and a sense that despite decades of giving, “things haven’t gotten any better”. Yet another unintended consequence of charities’ use of the traditional appeal is that it may undermine individuals’ sense of efficacy in fighting global poverty.

Table 2 shows some evidence for these expectations. We see the two relationships between our appeals and personal efficacy. First, the effect of the traditional appeal on personal efficacy is negative (p=.04), but via the positive emotion of hope: we observe no net effects for any of the negative emotions. Second, we see a positive relationship between the alternative appeal and personal efficacy, again via hope (p=.04).

Table 2: Net mediation effects on personal efficacy

<table>
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<th>lhs</th>
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<th>b</th>
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The decomposed model shown in Figure 5 helps to shed light on these findings. The traditional appeal lowers respondent’s feelings of hope, which is positively related to personal efficacy in addressing problems of global poverty. Again, evidence of inconsistent
mediation. In contrast the impact of the alternative appeal is positive—it makes respondents feel more hopeful, which in turn, is positively related to a sense of personal efficacy. Thus, there is some evidence for the trade-off feared by campaigners: traditional appeals lowers respondent’s sense of personal efficacy by making them feel less hopeful. In contrast, the alternative appeal increases respondents sense of personal efficacy, by making them feel more hopeful.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the role of emotions as mediators of engagement in more detail, and how this helps to illustrate the potential unintended consequences of traditional appeals. As shown above, there is limited evidence for the impact of both appeals on efficacy (net effects). However, looking only at net effect relationships provides a narrow view of the impact of the appeals. As shown in Figure 5, the traditional appeal triggers all four of the negative emotions: it makes respondents feel more angry, guilty, repulsed and pitiful. This doesn’t in turn effect respondents’ sense of personal efficacy, but they are left feeling angry, guilty, repulsed and pitiful from exposure to the traditional appeal. In contrast, the alternative appeal makes respondents’ feel more hopeful and less repulsed. Only the former impacts respondents’ sense of personal efficacy, but the alternative appeal has a positive unintended consequence, by making respondents feel less repulsed. The implication here is that it is difficult to have control over respondents’
emotional responses; what helps can also hurt.

The effects of traditional and alternative appeals on donations and efficacy

In this final section we look at the impact of the traditional and alternative appeals on the decision to donate, average donations, and personal efficacy. Figure 6 shows the results of the effects for the three outcome variables. Drawing on the received wisdom of development organizations and contrary to our expectations, we find no evidence that respondents receiving the traditional appeal are more likely to donate or in terms of the average donation made. Respondents who received the alternative appeal donated more on average (£2.25) than respondents who received the traditional appeal (£1.97) but the difference is not statistically meaningful.

We also do not find evidence for the traditional and alternative appeals on respondent’s sense of personal efficacy in making a difference to the problems of poverty in the

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12 Average time spent looking at the appeal varied significantly between the Baseline-Alternative treatment pair and the Traditional-Alternative treatments, but not between the Baseline-Traditional pairing. The times spent looking at each appeal were: Baseline (19.3 seconds), Traditional (21.6 seconds) and Alternative (26.4 seconds) treatments (p < .05). We calculated pairwise comparisons between group levels with the Holm (1979) correction for multiple testing.
world. Respondents who received the traditional appeal reported lower personal efficacy on average (£2.64) compared to respondents who received the alternative appeal (£2.95), but again these differences are not statistically meaningful.

The results on Figure 6 show homogeneous treatment effects, but do the treatments work differently for different groups? There is good reason to think that there may be heterogeneous treatment effects amongst donors, particularly among men and women (Wiepking and Bekkers, 2012) and by level of education (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2011). Our analyses show no evidence of heterogeneous treatment effects for sex, party identification, racial attitudes, or by respondents who had donated to any organization in the past 12 months. The only evidence for group differences we observed are for respondents with the lowest level of education, ‘no formal qualifications’: respondents who received the pity appeal donated £2.50, compared to respondents who received the empathy appeal who donated £0.47 on average.

So what explains the null findings with respect to likelihood of making a donation and average donation given the evidence from development charities that traditional appeals work? We offer two explanations. First, we need to consider the evidence from the sector itself. Charities have used traditional appeals because they work, and because they work the sector has become risk averse. But this obscures the fact that very few studies exist comparing the impact of traditional and alternative messaging. Second, the null effects here may be due precisely to the countervailing emotional effects shown above. Triggering emotions in respondents may motivate people to donate, so long as you trigger the ‘right’ emotions—i.e. anger and guilt. But as shown here, emotional responses are not uniform and consequently, have unintended consequences. Triggering repulsion and hopelessness make respondents less likely to donate. In short, you may win some donors, but you may also lose some.

Conclusions

In this paper we ask what motivates people to engage with and act on global poverty? It is an issue that we are sorely lacking an evidence-base. In the context of considerable political efforts to build public support for development assistance this is all the
more problematic, especially given that there is considerable theoretical and anecdotal evidence to suggest that many of the practices of international development NGOs may well be undercutting long-term public engagement with the issue. In this paper we turned to an experimental setup to test the emotional impact of charitable appeals on donation behaviour and perceptions of global poverty, specifically people’s sense of efficacy.

We demonstrate three key findings. First, the alternative and traditional appeals trigger positive and negative emotions in respondents and emotions are significant factors mediating the relationship between appeals and engagement. We show that traditional appeals trigger a range of negative emotional responses: anger, guilt, pity and repulsion. However, the mediation analysis demonstrates that negative emotional responses do not uniform effects–while guilt and anger increase the likelihood of donation–repulsion decreases it. Thus, one risk of traditional appeals is that they generate unintended consequences–they can prime emotions that lead to engagement via donation, but they also prime other emotions (i.e. repulsion) that drive away potential donors.

Second, traditional appeals lower respondents’ sense of efficacy in addressing problems of global poverty, which may serve as a barrier to deeper forms of engagement with global poverty. This finding speaks directly to trade-off that has occupied development campaigners and illustrates another unintended consequence of the sector’s use of traditional appeals: messages that generate revenue via donations may serve to reduce other forms of engagement by generating feelings that there is little that can be done to address problems of global poverty. However, the news is not all bad. We show that by activating the emotion of hope, alternative appeals increase the likelihood of donation and increase respondents’ sense of personal efficacy. Alternative appeals may help bridge the tradeoff between fundraising and engagement.

Finally, we find no effect of the two appeals on likelihood of making a donation, donation amount or efficacy. This null finding is less surprising in light of the countervailing effects of the appeals, mediated by emotion, shown above.

Going forward, there are limitations to this design that should be addressed in future research. While the experimental survey design provides a more robust set of inferences than observational data, there are shortcomings in terms of external validity. First, development NGOs rarely solicit donations from the public at large. They have identified
stakeholders with whom they seek to develop long-term relationships. Thus, the extent to which our findings here would hold with an already engaged sample is unknown. Second, NGOs have repeated contact with their donor base, whereas our experiment was based on a single ask. It is possible that the impact of traditional and alternative appeals may vary over time, and as such we should design studies accordingly. Third, we don’t interpret our findings here to suggest that development NGOs should adopt alternative appeals at the expense of traditional appeals; campaigns and messaging must employ a variety of tools and techniques to appeal to donors. Consequently, testing the balance of traditional and alternative appeals on donations and efficacy over time will provide a more robust evidence base.

Finally, further investigation of solidarity and anger as emotional responses is warranted. Solidarity exhibited poor effects as an emotional pathway. This result is surprising given the emphasis on it in the political theory literature and the literature on representation. It may be that alternative appeals do not activate solidarity, or simply that our design didn’t tap into the emotion sufficiently.

There is also cause to delve deeper into how anger works to motivate action. Anger is generally considered as one of the negative emotions, but the mechanism with which anger works is not yet well identified. Anger can take the form of ‘anger towards the charity’ for what is believed to be an intentional play on people’s emotions in using images of starving children. This, according to Chouliaraki (2010), is the ‘boomerang effect’. In contrast, anger may take the form of ‘anger at the injustice of global poverty’ that motivates action.

In sum, the political implications of the paper and its findings is that the development community–Northern governments, Southern governments, international organisations, NGOs–are facing an acute collective action problem. While all are actively seeking to engage publics in global poverty, their differing strategies and goals is leaving the average individual non-plussed about whether efforts to eradicate poverty are worth it. They may well keep giving, but the irony is that the attempts to extract ever more money from northern publics is not only contributing to compassion fatigue, but increases replusion, undercuts hope and ultimately a belief that poverty can actually be alleviated.
References


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URL: http://www.jstatsoft.org/v48/i02/


