

# Research Summary Document: Towards Finding Frames

## Introduction and Aim

This research was commissioned by Dochas on behalf of the Development Education Working Group (DEG), and inspired by 'Finding Frames in the UK in 2011 and 'Finding Danish Frames' in 2013.

The aim of this project was to explore **how Ireland's NGOs inform the public about development and the subsequent actions these NGOs call for.**

## Background

Dochas strives to enable NGOs become proactive agents of change who have the relevant skills and knowledge to mobilise society to address global poverty and inequality through informed action. A recent study conducted by Amarach (2013) on behalf of Dochas, found that Irish people are ill informed about the underlying, structural causes of global poverty. The study found that 53% of 1000 respondents feel that poverty resided with the developing countries themselves, and that 'my day to day actions don't really affect people in the third world'. The study also found that over half of the respondents felt that Africa was in a similar or worse position than over 2 decades ago, with 55% of respondents felt that it was pointless donating aid due to the high levels of corruption in the recipient countries which results in the aid being wasted.

## The Research Exploration

UK 'Finding Frames' found that, **despite positive progress in development, the public continue to relate to poverty as they did in the 1980s.** The information NGOs provide to the public through their communications and campaign materials is a contributing factor to the low levels of public understanding and subsequent limited engagement that the NGOs evoke to address poverty, (Darnton and Kirk (2011)). DEG, therefore, based this research upon the premise that Irish NGOs are contributing to limited public knowledge about development progress and the causes of poverty, through partial information provided in communications and campaign materials.

## The methods

- i. Through content analysis, evaluate specific pieces of communication that the NGO uses to engage the public.
- ii. Identify the surface and deep frames applied to these communications.
- iii. Present key findings in relation to Frames and Values.

- iv. Make recommendations.

Terms of Reference were drawn up by the DEG and all Dochas member organisations were invited to take part. Eight organisations agreed to have their communications material assessed through content analysis.

The communication relevant to this research includes NGO websites, video communication, advertisements material, social media and written materials such as reports, articles, direct mail and e-news.

## The results

A summary of the five key findings are outlined below:

**Key finding (1):** Surface Frames found to dominate this analysis include; charity, help the poor, and poverty, which are all linked to the triggering of the moral order deep frame.

**These frames are considered negative because they situate people from developing countries in constant need of saving.** The researcher highlights how this raises cause for concern about how NGOs are communicating with the public. Throughout the findings, the researcher draws on literature to explain how the triggering of the moral order deep frame only serves to emphasise a divide between rich and poor, black and white, or superior and inferior. The findings suggest a need for urgent reflection by the NGO sector on how it has come to be fundamentally defined by frames that trigger the moral order, which in turn are linked to values associated with self-enhancement, further undermining the pursuit of equality and social justice.

**Key finding (2):** Images of Poster Children are dominating communication materials.

**Are these images an extension of the Live Aid Legacy** although the children now used are demure and smiling, is this appropriate images to depict a developing nation? Do these images simply serve to infantilise developing countries?

**Key finding (3):** Images of Women either with children or working in fields are so dominant in the materials the researcher assigned a new category, 'Gender Frame'.

The Gender Frame raises concern about the portrayal of women from developing countries. **They are shown to be needy and dependent on instruction from the west on how to best fulfil care-giving tasks.**

Materials that are intended for direct fundraising appeals are much more likely to use personal stories of women in a way that depicts the causes of poverty as internal to the developing country or even the fault of the beneficiary herself, such as not knowing how to cook properly, or leaving her children or long periods without food while she goes off to work in the fields; and reducing all women from developing countries to a specific role.

Furthermore, there were limited images of men throughout the materials. As the researcher points out, 'overall in the analysis there appeared 146 images of women in comparison to 36 images of men'.

**Key finding (4):** Transaction is the dominant call to action.

The transaction frame is the dominant depicted solution to poverty, with the overriding message that **by donating money, the potential donor could help change the lives of the world's poorest**. When making appeals for donations, an NGO is less likely to mention working in partnership with organisations in the specific country. Annual reports that are more likely targeted at major funding donors are told of impact, progress, capacity building and partnership.

**Key finding (5):** 'Finding Deeper Frames' emerged as an unexpected collapsed theme.

'Finding Deeper Frames' as a collapsed theme refers to **data which emerged that would merit deeper analysis before being assigned to relevant frames**. As the researcher states, 'data around volunteering programmes, the IF Campaign, and the Act Now Campaign require an exploration from a rigorous post-colonial lens that could ask if such programmes might be based on a modernisation framework that is ultimately driven by Western agenda or if instead, such programmes are focusing attention on the need for structural change'.