

# Public Attitudes to Official Development Assistance

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*In recent years an increasing number of attitude surveys have attempted to assess public attitudes to a host of development issues. In this article Colm Regan and Mary Sutton of Trócaire review the structure of and results obtained from such surveys. They then present the results of a recently commissioned Trócaire survey. They point to the limitations of the surveys undertaken to date and offer some thoughts on future studies.*

## Introduction

Official development assistance (ODA) has always been subject to criticism. In the 1960s and 1970s misgivings were expressed about, for example, the wisdom of funding large capital-intensive projects in countries with chronic unemployment; the feasibility of reaching the rural poor given administrative constraints and urban bias; the danger of creating dependency on aid and the indignity of the donor-recipient relationship; and the misuse of aid as a weapon in super-power politics.

But despite these misgivings it was widely accepted that on balance, the good effects of ODA outweighed the bad and that despite mistakes in the design and implementation of some projects, overall aid was contributing to genuine development in the Third World. Hardline critics of aid, such as Peter Bauer, could be politely dismissed as ideologically opposed to the concept of aid and overly pessimistic.

Of late however, aid has come under severe attack for other reasons and from other quarters. In an article that appeared shortly after his death, Dudley Seers, who as head of the British Overseas Development Administration and subsequently as a respected academic had argued throughout the 1950s and 1960s for more and better aid, proposed a new aid target of gradually *reducing* aid to 0.1% of donor GNP by the end of the century.<sup>1</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, another erstwhile influential advocate of aid, penned a joint newspaper article with Dudley Seers in 1982 which said that “Those who clamour for greater quantities of official aid might well stop and ask themselves: Aid of what type? For whom? And why? Otherwise they risk satisfying their own consciences at the expense of greater poverty at home and overseas.”<sup>2</sup>

Why the change of heart? The principal reason adduced by Seers and Myrdal is that typically aid goes to unrepresentative *governments* rather than to the poor. Seers argues that the “working hypothesis” that Third World governments represent the interests of their people is no longer valid. The characteristic form of Third World government is highly authoritarian.

Seers and Myrdal also note that humanitarian reasons carry diminishing weight in the North as motivation for giving aid. Citing in particular the attitudes of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations to aid they note that commercial and strategic considerations are increasingly to the fore. They also reject the Brandt Report’s attempt to rehabilitate the aid concept by emphasising the benefits to donors. For example they see its argument that aid creates demand for the exports of donor countries and thereby creates or preserves employment in those countries as an uncertain and roundabout way to that goal.

The aid debate continues among specialist academics and administrators of aid programmes. How much of its content penetrates to public consciousness? What is the public’s attitude to aid? Do the publics in the OECD countries consider that their governments give too much or too little aid? Do they believe that aid is a useful implement in alleviating poverty in developing countries? Do they consider that aid should be given with a view to maintaining employment in the donor countries? To what extent do public attitudes impinge on the politicians and aid administrators?

Over the years numerous surveys have been carried out in various OECD countries including Ireland by governments and by non-governmental agencies to gauge public attitudes to aid. Below, we look at the main findings of those surveys and their implications for the proponents of aid. We begin by considering surveys undertaken outside Ireland. We then consider the evidence from Irish surveys, including one by Trocaire in Shannon in 1983. Finally, we consider the limitations of the surveys and the implications of the survey results for information and development education programmes.

## **Attitude Surveys in OECD countries**

Polls on public attitudes to ODA have been taken since the 1960s. The data from these polls is not strictly comparable since they were taken at different times in different countries, with differing sample sizes and, most significantly, asking different questions. The commentary below is intended to give no more than a flavour of the attitudes and opinions uncovered.

A recent DAC synthesis of public opinion poll findings observes that most people appear to be favourably disposed towards aid, and that most people support aid primarily on humanitarian grounds. It notes that the polls “reveal a fairly wide ignorance of the amount of government aid, ... a concern to respond to the needs of the poorest population groups; a feeling, more widespread than in previous decades, that aid can also have positive economic effects for the donor, without their detracting from what might be called the ‘purity’ of aid; and sometimes, too, a marked preference for aid dispensed through private rather than government channels.”<sup>3</sup> It also observes that the higher the level of education of the respondent, the more positive attitudes tend to be to aid. Finally, on the basis

of comparison of polls taken in the 1980s with those of the 1970s, it observes that the current recession does not appear to have had an adverse effect on public attitudes to aid. Despite these positive attitudes towards aid, the DAC synthesis concludes that “on balance, however, the public is not particularly interested in the situation in the developing countries; in many cases the ‘positive’ attitude equates with benevolent neutrality or even indifference, rather than with active support.”<sup>4</sup>

Looking in a little more detail at the polls taken in the last decade amplifies these general comments. Most of the surveys undertaken covered the following issues.

- (i) should we aid developing countries?
- (ii) why?
- (iii) if yes, to what extent?

In addition, some of the surveys asked:

- (iv) which countries/groups should we aid?
- (v) what are the reasons for poverty in developing countries?
- (vi) what is the best way to help developing countries?

The responses reveal the following broad pictures on these five issues.

#### **(i) The majority of people support aid.**

A survey taken in 1983 covering the ten EEC countries found that eight in ten of those surveyed were “in favour” or “very much in favour” of aid to developing countries.<sup>5</sup> The same level of support was found in Norway (1983)<sup>6</sup> and Japan (annual surveys 1977–1980).<sup>7</sup> In New Zealand 70% are in favour (1979)<sup>8</sup> compared to 65% in Australia (1983).<sup>9</sup> The United States is the exception among OECD countries with public support for aid hovering around 50% ever since the 1960s.

#### **(ii) For most people the primary motivation for supporting aid to developing countries is moral or humanitarian.**

For example, in the extensive qualitative and quantitative survey undertaken by the British Ministry of Overseas Development in 1978 (the Bowles survey)<sup>10</sup> it emerged that those in favour of British overseas aid were primarily influenced by moral and humanitarian considerations. Such considerations were spontaneously mentioned by 42% of respondents, with a “one-world view” (it helps to get together) mentioned by 14% and “conscience” arguments (we owe it to poorer countries/the Commonwealth) mentioned by 15%. By contrast economic and political reasons were cited by only 7%.

In an Australian survey in 1983, of those in favour of aid humanitarian reasons were cited as the most important reason for supporting overseas aid by 50% of respondents. For the other six reasons suggested as the most important the highest proportion was 18% (who opted for “to promote world unity”).

#### **(iii) How much aid should we give?**

As the DAC synthesis pointed out, there is a tendency to overestimate how much aid the government is giving. This is true both by comparison with what

other donors are contributing (particularly in the United States) and by comparison with other areas of public expenditure.

The 1978 Bowles survey in Britain found that three-quarters of the sample were aware that the Government spent money on aid. Before answering detailed questions on aid, one-third expressed the view that the Government was spending "the right amount" on aid, and 10% that spending should be less or zero. Respondents greatly overestimated the actual level of government expenditure on aid. For example, people suggested levels of weekly, per capita expenditure that were three and a half times higher than actual levels in 1976. On being told actual expenditure on aid relative to other areas such as defence, education and housing, the responses were dramatically different. Whereas 10% had initially been in favour of increased expenditure, 33% now took the view that Government spending on aid should be increased. There was no change in the support for the current level of expenditure.

An interesting finding is that in three of the so-called front-runner countries Netherlands (1982),<sup>11</sup> Norway (1983) and Sweden (1984)<sup>12</sup> who are alone in having exceeded the UN target for ODA (0.7% of GNP) roughly three-quarters of the respondents are in favour of maintaining aid at these relatively high levels or increasing it. In the fourth "front-runner" country, Denmark,<sup>13</sup> 60% of respondents are in favour of an aid target of 1% of GNP.

Some surveys enquired into the willingness of respondents to pay additional tax to aid developing countries. In Belgium<sup>14</sup> although 51% of respondents considered that western countries ought to make greater efforts to help the Third World, only 25% would be prepared to pay additional tax to this end. A poll taken in Germany<sup>15</sup> in 1981 showed 44% of respondents prepared to sacrifice a proportion of any increase in their income to aid.

The EEC-wide survey taken in 1983 revealed that one in two respondents would be prepared to give 1% of their salary to help developing countries. On the other hand, it also found that were living standards in the EEC countries to stop rising 51% of respondents would favour reducing or stopping aid.

**(iv) The majority of people want to see aid targeted on the poorest people, or at least on the poorest countries.**

For example, in the EEC-wide survey seven respondents in ten believed that priority should be given to the poorest countries. In the 1978 UK survey the majority of the sample, and particularly those in favour of aid, favoured aid allocation on the basis of the degree of need in the receiving country. The responses indicated that people believed British aid to be more self-serving than it should be. The 1983 Australian survey also found that most respondents believed aid should go to the poorest countries. Of those in favour of aid 57% believed that most aid should go to the very poorest countries. Just over one-fifth considered that most aid should go to countries geographically close to Australia.

**(v) The surveys do not provide much useful information on the perceived reasons for poverty in the developing world.**

The 1983 EEC-wide poll did try to classify respondents' impressions and

prejudices about developing countries by asking them to agree or disagree with a number of statements and then ranking them by order of importance. For the Community as a whole, the statement "their populations are increasing too rapidly" ranked first, and in all of the member states it ranked first, second or third out of fifteen statements. The statement "the people are exploited by a rich minority" ranked second; "their governments are unstable" ranked fourth; "they are faced with problems it took Europe centuries to overcome" was fifth in importance; "they have a very bad climate" was sixth; "their colonial past prevented them from developing" was tenth; and "they are exploited by developed countries like ours" ranked eleventh.

**(vi) According to the EEC-wide survey the best way to assist developing countries is by promoting small projects that have a direct impact on the lives of people, and by training people to become self-reliant.**

The most useful aid was felt to be provided by the United Nations (26% of respondents) and private organizations (25%). Their own governments and the EEC were nominated by only 12% and 9% of respondents respectively. The UK (1978) survey found the same preference for helping people to help themselves through training. It also found that respondents overestimated the role played by the non-governmental agencies relative to the government. The Australian survey (1983) found a strong belief that aid should not just go to the governments of developing countries to distribute as they see fit. It should be distributed in ways that will be most effective in reaching the poorest people. It should go to governments committed to helping such people. Over 40% of respondents saw UN agencies and voluntary bodies as useful avenues for distributing aid.

## **Irish Attitudes**

We turn now to those surveys which have either directly or indirectly examined Irish people's attitudes to the wider world and to the Third World in particular. Here we will be concerned with discussing the methods, format and evidence from three recent surveys and presenting the results of a small study carried out for Trocaire. Initially we will examine the European Omnibus Survey conducted on behalf of the Commission of the European Community's Directorate General for Development in 1983. The most extensive survey to date is that carried out by the Advisory Council on Development Cooperation in 1980 and this will be examined prior to presenting the results of the Trocaire study.

## **European Omnibus Survey**

The overall results for the EEC revealed by this survey have been dealt with above.

The results relating directly to Ireland indicated a pattern of response broadly in line with other European states with a few interesting exceptions. Those surveyed in Ireland appeared to be much more aware of the influence of colonialism as an important factor and gave a higher priority to the moral argument for aid as against the self-interest one. Irish people expressed a desire to help the Third World on a par with other Europeans but expressed a higher than

average concern for defending our interests against the superpowers.

These results would seem to confirm the findings of other surveys and indeed popular belief. The belief in the importance of the colonial factor and our concern for defending our interests against the superpowers acknowledge the reality of our own history in the last three centuries and perhaps underlie to some degree our view of neutrality. The emphasis on the moral imperative for aid has interesting implications for the debate on increasing aid as discussed in the previous article.

### **The Advisory Council on Development Cooperation Survey**

Conducted in 1980, this survey remains the most extensive review of attitudes to date at least in terms of questions asked.<sup>16</sup> The ACDC is currently undertaking an update of this survey to compare results.

Some of the more interesting results which emerged from the study and which correspond roughly with some of the previous results are summarised below.

One important result obtained was that more than 60% of respondents perceived Ireland to be a relatively "poor" country, which, of course in western terms is true but in world terms is not. Despite this, 52% of the population argued that the government should give more in aid than at present (29% thought it should be doubled while 34% thought it should remain the same). When asked how Ireland might best respond to poorer countries 32% felt that this could best be done by sending out "skilled experts", 10% felt that supporting NGOs was best and 12% argued for sending out teachers. Other high response rates were recorded for methods which involved us in aid or in sending out personnel. Only 3% cited purchasing products from the Third World as an important way.

Results recorded throughout the survey indicate a heavy emphasis on aid and assistance, an attitude which is turned into practice through the high volume of support for voluntary bodies. However there is clear evidence from the survey that people were responding to a dominant image of and impulse towards the Third World.

This image becomes clear from results of those questions which asked people to identify those countries which make up the Third World. By far the three most often cited were Cambodia/Kampuchea (27%), India (27%), Africa (21%), followed then by Bangladesh (16%), Biafra (11%), Uganda (11%) and Ethiopia (11%). This profile is heavily weighted towards those countries where large scale disasters have occurred, where TV and newspaper coverage has been extensive, where aid is seen as a direct and immediate need and where apparent helplessness and misery were predominant. It is most interesting to compare these results with those in the Trocaire survey presented below.

This image and response were further investigated in those questions which sought to identify perceived reasons for poverty in the Third World. The three most often-cited explanations were lack of trained personnel (25%), overpopulation (19%), "natural" disasters (15%) followed by "better off countries take advantage of Third World" (10%), "Third World leaders are corrupt" (8%) and "lack of natural resources" (6%).

What is clear from the ACDC survey is that most Irish people have a clear image of what the Third World is, what its major problems are, and how best

they might be tackled. Emphasis is on disasters, helplessness, misery, lack of skills or resources, while the response is more aid, trained personnel and skills transfer. There appears to be little awareness of, or interest in, other areas like trade reform, financial restructuring, debt. The response is seen very much in terms of Irish people and Irish agencies becoming directly involved.

### The Trócaire Study

This survey was conducted among workers in manufacturing industries in Limerick City and County Clare as part of a larger study of Free Trade Zones.<sup>17</sup> Workers were interviewed in their workplace or at home and a total of 560 interviews took place between February and October 1983, two-thirds inside the Shannon Free Zone and one-third in counties Limerick and Clare. While the results of this survey are not strictly comparable with those of the ACDC survey (the latter was national while the former only interviewed people in the Shannon area) a number of interesting similarities in response emerged.

Again there was a strong tendency for respondents to underestimate just how well off Ireland is in world terms: 59% of those interviewed placed Ireland in the top 60 to 120 countries with only 26% correctly locating Ireland in the top 30. Again the pattern already identified in the ACDC survey of correlating the Third World with particular countries, images and perceptions is clear. In the Shannon survey Ethiopia headed the list followed by India, Africa, Bangladesh and Kampuchea.

**Table 1. Awareness of Third World Countries**

Country	FTZ	non-FTZ	1980 National Omnibus%
Ethiopia	29	23	9
India	22	26	27
Africa	16	16	21
Bangladesh	15	15	15
Cambodia/Kampuchea	13	9	27
Nigeria/Biafra	11	14	14
El Salvador	9	9	9
Chile	9	2	1
Rhodesia/Zimbabwe	8	5	2
Pakistan	7	8	6
China	5	3	2
Lebanon	5	1	—
Peru	4	3	4
Zambia	4	3	3
Brazil	4	1	2
Philippines	3	2	1
Vietnam	3	2	3
Other Countries	40	49	37
Dont't know/no reply	16	24	25

In this regard it is worth noting the comments of the surveyors:

“The influence of media attention is perhaps best demonstrated in the case of Ethiopia and Cambodia/Kampuchea. The former recorded a fairly low level of awareness in 1980 but that figure has increased significantly since then. The latter, a subject of considerable media attention in 1980, has obviously lost some of its newsworthiness since ... India and Africa are also noteworthy. India, one would suspect, is the quintessential Third World country, springing forth to many minds when poverty is discussed ...”

As regards the reasons why Third World countries are poorer than Ireland the survey confirmed the 1980 results: lack of trained labour power (39%), overpopulation (28%) and a proneness to “natural disasters” (13%) were cited as the top three reasons. The only significant difference from the 1980 study was that those citing the reason that better off countries take advantage of the poorer ones had increased from 6% in the 1980 ACDC survey to 11.5% in the Trócaire survey.

Again, the provision of trained personnel is viewed as the *most* worthwhile way to assist the Third World — the percentage citing this method in 1980 was 49% whereas in the Shannon survey the figure was 62%. In the Shannon survey the provision of funds through international organisations was regarded as a more effective means of help than the donation of money to Irish voluntary agencies. The actual figures were 17% as against 3.5% (it should be noted that these are the percentage citing this as the *main* or most effective way to assist). Those citing fairer trade as a means had increased since 1980, from 2% to 5.5%. This appears to be higher than citing donations to Irish agencies but this may arise from confusion between what respondents viewed international organisations to be as against Irish agencies.

The Shannon Survey also sought to measure people’s perceptions of the benefits to Ireland of contact with the Third World. This was an issue not addressed by previous surveys.

**Table 2. Benefit to people in Ireland of contact with Third World**

Benefit:			WAYS	FTZ non-FTZ*	
FTZ	non-FTZ	%		%	
Yes	39	30	We learn how well off we are	36	37
			Make us caring/less selfish	8	17
			Through trade in both directions	14	13
			Doctors/nurses get experience there	8	8
			Buy cheap/resell at vast profit	6	8
			Build a good relationship	4	8
			Helps our religion/to feel, look good	4	6
			From what we import from them	3	2
			From the relief we give them	3	2
			One always benefits	1	4
No	61	70	Make sure we don't end up that way	—	2
			Other answers	13	8
			Don't know/no reply	9	2

\* Note: Small base.

Respondents were also asked to identify the principal imports and exports involved in Ireland's trade with the Third World. Imports most frequently noted tended to be raw materials rather than finished products while those exports most often cited were agricultural produce and agriculture related products. It should also be noted that those "don't know" responses were consistently higher as a percentage of responses than for most other questions.

**Table 3. Third World Trade**

	IMPORTS		EXPORTS	
	FTZ %	non- FTZ %	FTZ %	non- FTZ %
Rice	19	29	Meat/dried meat	27 31
Tea	18	22	Dairy products	21 27
Coffec	17	18	Powdered milk	19 15
Fruit	14	18	(Farm) machinery	16 14
Oil	12	14	Butter	12 10
Clothes	9	6	Food	12 8
Sugar	7	3	Medicines	10 13
Rubber	6	8	Clothes	4 5
Toys	6	7	Grain/Cereals	4 3
Shoes	5	2	Animals/animal products	4 3
Handicrafts/souvenirs	4	2	Expertise	3 1
Tobacco	3	3	Tinned foods/baby food	3 4
			Vegetabls	2 6
			Sugar	2 4
Other items	33	34	Other items	24 17
Don't know/no reply	34	31	Don't know/no reply	28 28

One of the principal objectives of the research in Shannon was to establish whether workers in the Free Trade Zone perceived Third World competition as undermining their livelihood. In this context, respondents were asked to spontaneously nominate factors which they saw as endangering their jobs and then to place, in order of importance, a number of prompted factors including Third World imports. Significantly, respondents both inside and outside the zone did not spontaneously identify Third World imports as threatening their jobs.

**Table 4. Perceived Job Threats**

			Main    Other			
	SPONTANEOUS		PROMPTED			
	FTZ	non-FTZ		FTZ	non-FTZ*	
Recession/state of economy	26	16	Recession	56	74	49 65
Imports	11	18	Greater use of machinery			
Redundancies	11	9	in your factory	13	30	22 38
Amount of business	8	2	Productivity schemes/			
Technology/computers	7	16	job losses	9	30	11 31
Lack of orders/marketing	7	4	Third World imports	9		15
Cheaper production elsewhere	6	5	Other answers:			
Competition	6	2	— Main	2		—
Multinational company	5	4	— Other	1		2
Customers cannot afford goods	—	9	None of these/			
Other answers	22	19	don't know:			
Don't know/no reply	2	1	— Main	16		15
			— Other	37		31

\* Note: Small base.

As a final question, all were asked whether their company's products compete with products from the Third World. Overall, only 12% claimed that their company was in competition with the Third World, confirming evidence that direct competition is not perceived to exist, except by a minority. Contrary to what might have been anticipated, it is also apparent that those within the Zone are less likely to feel involved in competition with the Third World than those outside.

The overall results of many of the above surveys raise a number of important questions for those interested in such surveys and in development co-operation in general. We now turn our attention to such issues and questions.

### So, Where to?

Our review of the various surveys of attitudes to the wider world has revealed a number of common trends and attitudes. In general there appears to be a high level of support for aid to the Third World and for a more humanitarian approach in general. Clearly, humanitarianism is the central motivating force for this — the self-interest argument, while still powerful in certain countries, does not appear to be widespread.

What is also clear is that people do have a number of perceptions as to the cause of underdevelopment and of the most effective ways of tackling them. This we believe is directly related to people's images and perceptions of what exactly the Third World is and what the characteristics of its people are. In this regard it is worth reiterating the comments of the surveyors in the Shannon Survey. Having noted the tendency among those surveyed to nominate countries such as

Kampuchea, Ethiopia and India as quintessentially Third World, they comment: "Similarly, the tendency to nominate Africa as a Third World country is probably indicative of an inherited view of the continent in general as *underdeveloped, poverty stricken and without firm national boundaries* (italics)" (our emphasis). This trend is clearly related to media coverage of Third World events which, in the main, continues to emphasise the disasters and helplessness side of events. It is also reinforced by many fundraising campaigns which continue to employ well-trying and trusted images guaranteed to pull at heart strings and to produce a cash response. The experience of recent months during the African famine may serve to strengthen this view even more.

The surveys also reveal a high level of "ignorance" or confusion about wider world issues and how they may be tackled. For example, the surveys reveal little support for or understanding of key areas other than aid and humanitarianism — trade in particular, or changes in international financial institutions or structures evoke little response.

The question is where do we go from here? What are the implications of this for future surveys, for development education work, for agencies or for government?

Initially we need to discuss the nature and format of surveys such as those reviewed, whether they are properly structured, whether the questions are phrased properly in terms of eliciting the information sought and the nature of the agencies commissioning them. The history of attitude surveys in general over the past two decades should give us cause for concern. As has been noted there is sufficient evidence to suggest that interviewees are often anxious to give those responses they feel the interviewer desires — the problem of "courtesy bias" is very real. This, we feel, is especially true in surveys about the Third World. Most people are aware that voluntary agencies, many governments and even large sectors of public opinion believe that we should have positive attitudes and respond positively towards the developing world.

This must surely influence questionnaire responses especially if people are aware of the testing of these attitudes through the framing of questions. Some of these difficulties can be overcome with more extensive cross referenced questioning or with qualitative surveys. This is an approach to which we shall return shortly.

In a number of the surveys we were struck by the fact that questions were framed in such a way as to almost preclude certain types of responses. For example in the European Omnibus Survey, respondents were asked to respond to a number of statements e.g. "We must encourage them to develop in their own way rather than to try to imitate us", or "They have a very bad climate". In the absence of "check" questions or of qualitative follow up, these questions may simply lead respondents to particular answers. There is also a heavy emphasis in almost all the surveys on aid and related issues with only passing reference to trade or financial matters for example. Only in the 1978 Bowles Survey and the 1983 Shannon Survey were such questions introduced. This most probably reflects the fact that it was usually aid agencies or development co-operation ministries who had commissioned the surveys. One possible way to overcome this would be to link such surveys into wider ones asking a whole range of questions on topics other than the Third World.

In our view all of the above indicates the crucial need for properly structured qualitative surveys, perhaps with smaller groups whose responses can then be tested against those obtained in a broader quantitative survey. In this regard we could do well to re-examine the detail and approach of the Bowles Survey — its approach has not been surpassed in the last seven years of work.

There is also a need to compare responses in “Third World” surveys with those obtained from more general attitude surveys such as the European Value Systems Study.<sup>18</sup>

This survey conducted on behalf of a charitable foundation, the European Systems Study Group, set out to analyse the moral and social value systems prevailing in Europe. Although the report of the Irish study contains only one table which refers to the wider world, the entire study has much to tell of Irish self-images within the context of others’ images of themselves in Europe and beyond. Of particular interest also, and perhaps of more relevance to understanding Irish attitudes than many of the direct surveys, are the commentaries on the findings by Professors Fogarty, Ryan and Lee.

From the results and observations throughout the study, it is clear that Irish people remain closely identified with their locality or town — more so than in Europe. Our perception of ourselves as belonging to Europe or the world at large is clearly lower than in continental Europe. Other values and attitudes measured in the rest of the survey suggest that we are more conservative on many matters, have a more “moral” approach (at least verbally) to many issues, and that we do not favour radical transformation in society.

One of the implications drawn from the study is that Irish people have a clear sense of their identity, even separateness, from “mainland” Europe and have found it difficult to adjust to membership in a wider community of people; that changes are currently in train but that no clear or popularly understood “new” identity has emerged. However the one issue which is of interest in this context (attitudes to the Third World) is the often cited gap between what Irish people say and what they do. Our spoken concern for those in the world less well off than ourselves is evidenced in public responses to appeals and to voluntary organisations. However this must be contrasted with the total lack of a structured approach at government, trade, financial and economic levels. While there is considerable voluntary support there is little public pressure or demand for the development of a planned and positive foreign affairs policy especially as it affects the Third World.

Another issue is the varying interpretations that can be put on survey results. One striking example occurred when, commenting on the European Omnibus Survey, European Development Commissioner Edgard Pisani said he was pleased to see that “EEC development aid comes closest to the ideal pattern set by the European public”. This conclusion seems to fly in the face of the results of the survey which noted that the European public viewed EEC aid programmes as the least useful means of helping developing countries.

This, in turn, leads to a central question, perhaps the most important one of all in relation to attitude surveys — why are such surveys conducted at all? What exactly do we hope to learn? Are the surveys so loose in format that they can provide evidence to support all arguments and none? In surveying many of the

surveys we were led to the conclusion that there is by now a tendency to do surveys for their own sake. We could find very little evidence to suggest that where useful evidence was accumulated it was acted upon.

For example, in those Irish surveys conducted to date, the evidence consistently indicated that Irish people clearly wished our government should do more and yet Irish politicians consistently argue, even in recent months, that there is little public support for increasing aid. Likewise, most surveys revealed a high level of confusion or ignorance on what exactly is being done, how decisions are made, why certain countries are chosen etc. Yet there is only limited commitment to disseminating such information.

This question is also raised in the general area of development education. Ritually, the results of each survey and the commentaries upon them re-iterate the need for education work. Yet, our thinking and practice in this area continues to be woolly and indecisive. Is it sufficient to identify the "public" as our "target group"? Should this not have been broken down into specific groups or sectors and having done this, should we not establish organised programmes of development education in partnership with those groups? There seems to be very little of this consistently happening. Surveys may yet end up being sophisticated measurements of our inactivity.

To take but one example; many of us who have been involved with the situation in Africa and particularly in Ethiopia since summer 1984 have commented on the central role of the media in both positive and negative terms. And yet, there appears to be little attempt to monitor what exactly their role has been, to enter into dialogue with them on that role or to equip people with the skills necessary to evaluate the role of the media. Currently, there is an active media studies programme in post-primary schools, but to date, the development education lobby is not involved.

We offer many of the above comments not as a dismissal of attitude surveys but as a contribution to a discussion on their role in our work. We invite others to join in this discussion and, perhaps, to consider some of the questions raised in their own surveys and work.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Dudley Seers, "Time for a Second Look at the Third World", *Development Policy Review*, Vol. 1 (1983), pp. 35-46

<sup>2</sup>Gunar Myrdal and Dudley Seers, "The Buck Stops Here", *The Guardian*, July 2, 1982, p. 8

<sup>3</sup>Development Assistance Committee, "Public Attitudes to Aid and the Information Effort", *Development Cooperation 1984 Review*, OECD, Paris, November 1984, p. 127

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>Press and Information Office of the European Communities, Press Release, "Europeans and Development Aid", 5 April, 1984. The survey was conducted in October 1983 and covered a sample population of roughly 1,000 in each of the Member States, except the UK, where 1,300 were interviewed and Luxembourg where 300 were interviewed.

<sup>6</sup>Reported in Development Assistance Committee synthesis, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 130

<sup>9</sup>Australian Council for Overseas Aid, *Overseas Aid - What Australians Think*, September 1983. The survey was undertaken in 1983 with a sample size of 1,055.

<sup>10</sup>T. S. Bowles, "Survey of Attitudes towards Overseas Development", HMSO, 1978. The survey carried out in 1977 combined qualitative research (group discussions with eight groups, each having 8-10 members) and quantitative research (a questionnaire survey of a random sample of 908 adults).

<sup>11</sup>Reported in Development Assistance Committee synthesis, *op. cit.*, p. 129

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 130

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 128

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 127

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 129

<sup>16</sup>Advisory Council on Development Cooperation, "Survey of Irish People's Attitude to Development Cooperation", carried out in 1980 with a sample size of 1361 adults, interviewed at 50 locations.

<sup>17</sup>The survey was carried out, on behalf of Trocaire, by Irish Marketing Surveys.

<sup>18</sup>Michael Fogarty, Liam Ryan, Joseph Lee, "Irish Values and Attitudes", Dominican Publications, 1984