

Southern voices on Dutch development cooperation

A comparison of the results from the VoiceOver 2015 questionnaire and the Dutch Barometer on development cooperation

What do people from developing countries think about development cooperation? Do the opinions of people from the south on development issues differ greatly from those of people living in the Netherlands? NCDO formulated the VoiceOver 2015 questionnaire on development cooperation to answer these questions. VoiceOver 2015 is a network of people from developing countries whose members contribute to the Dutch development debate with their opinions. A questionnaire, comparable to the Dutch Barometer, was distributed to members of the VoiceOver 2015 network in December 2009 (249 people from developing countries completed all questions). The Dutch Barometer is carried out once a year among a representative sample of the Dutch population. The underlying research paper presents the answers from VoiceOver members and compares them with the answers from the Dutch Barometer 2009. Since the VoiceOver questionnaire is not representative for people in developing countries the results should be read and interpreted as solely indicative. This summary presents the most salient results from the comparative survey.

Development cooperation does make a difference

An absolute majority of respondents in both the Netherlands and the southern countries think that it is important that people in rich countries help people in poor countries to develop themselves (see Table 1).

However, VoiceOver members have more confidence in the contribution development cooperation actually makes to the enhancement of living conditions in developing countries than the Dutch respondents (see Table 2).

Table 1: In your opinion, how important is it that people in rich countries help people in poor countries to develop themselves?

	Percentage VoiceOver respondents N= 298	Percentage Dutch respondents N=1546
(Totally) unimportant	8%	7%
Neither important nor unimportant	4%	23%
(Very) important	87%	68%
Don't know / no opinion	0%	3%

Table 2: Does development cooperation (by rich countries as the Netherlands) make a structural contribution to the improvement of living conditions in developing countries?

	Percentage VoiceOver respondents N= 256	Percentage Dutch respondents N=1546
Yes	50%	18%
In part yes, in part no	46%	60%
No	2%	14%
Don't know / no opinion	2%	8%

In addition, the vast majority (around 85%) of VoiceOver members is in favour of development cooperation in general:

'It assists the effort of poor countries to deal with their poverty problems.'
'It makes a difference but we need to be patient as the process of change is very slow'.

VoiceOver members are also more optimistic that poverty can be solved. The Dutch respondents are divided on this issue: equal numbers believe that it is possible or is not possible to solve the problem of poverty. VoiceOver members are generally of the opinion that poverty can be solved (80%): just 11% state that the problem will never be eradicated.

Richer countries should help poorer countries

VoiceOver members and the Dutch respondents are both of the opinion that the problems in developing countries are of a severity such that (richer) countries as the Netherlands must step in and do something. VoiceOver members also find this important when the rich countries have people living in poverty, while the Dutch respondents tend to attach less importance to development cooperation when there is also poverty at home. Nevertheless, over one third of the Dutch respondents regard donations to development cooperation as worthwhile. Both groups of respondents agree that developing countries cannot solve their problems on their own. Both also agree with the proposition that the poverty of poor countries is in part due to the richer countries' policies and actions. In addition, the two groups of respondents regard eradicating poverty in poorer countries as being in the richer countries' interest. VoiceOver members are divided upon the issues of aid addiction and corruption. More than one-third thinks that development cooperation leads to 'aid addiction' and one-fourth thinks that development cooperation enables corrupt leaders to stay in power.

Lack of good policy is a main problem

Many people from developing countries regard 'a lack of good policy and public administration' (51%) together with 'economic conditions' (20%) as the biggest problems confronting developing countries. Dutch respondents think that after 'a lack of good policy' (30%), 'a lack of basic facilities and natural resources' (27%) is the most urgent problem. Southern respondents have more confidence in all the strategies presented for the enhancement of development (for example financing projects, the secondment of experts and emergency aid) than the Dutch respondents. Dutch respondents and VoiceOver members both agree that professional development organisations are the most appropriate organisations for giving shape to development, whether they are based in developing countries, rich countries or at international agencies.

Different views on the Dutch development budget

Opinions on the level of the Dutch budget for development cooperation differ greatly between the Dutch respondents and the VoiceOver members. About two-thirds of the Dutch respondents are of the opinion that the budget should remain the same or be raised while considerably more VoiceOver members, 88%, have this opinion. Two-thirds of the respondents from developing countries are of the opinion that the budget should be raised, an opinion shared by just 10% of the Dutch respondents. This indicates that people from developing countries attach greater importance to a commitment from richer countries to development cooperation than Dutch people. In their own words:

'Needs are enormous in developing countries, especially in these times of economic crisis and natural disaster.'

However, some VoiceOver members think that development aid should be abolished or reduced (about 5%). For example:

'With the goal of eventually phasing out development aid and letting developing countries take charge of their own development.'

Will we attain the Millennium Development Goals?

Opinions on the likelihood of achieving the MDGs by 2015 are divided among both groups of respondents. There was no one specific goal that a majority of either the group of people from developing countries or the group of Dutch respondents expected would be achieved. However, in general the Dutch respondents appear to have less confidence in the achievability of all the MDGs than the VoiceOver members.

Individuals in action are considered positive

About 72% of the Dutch respondents took part in one or more development cooperation activities in the last 12 months. For example, they donated money or goods or bought fair-trade products. VoiceOver members think that it is generally worthwhile for the Dutch public to take part in activities of this nature. When asked, VoiceOver members regard the following three actions as very valuable to the enhancement of development: taking part in a development cooperation campaign or activity, carrying out volunteer work in a developing country and donating to one or more development organisations on a regular basis. A VoiceOver member comments upon the importance of volunteer work:

'Volunteers are key in promoting cross cultural exchange. Learning from different cultures and social experiences is vital for the world today so as to eradicate fears and myths between different cultures.'

Source

Woerds, ter S. & Mous, K (2010). *Southern voices on Dutch development cooperation. A comparison of the results from the VoiceOver 2015 questionnaire and the Dutch Barometer on development cooperation.* Amsterdam: NCDO.

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