

## *Understanding Public Attitudes to Sustainable Development*

# OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL SURVEYS

*Discussion Note: 14 November 2017*

## INTRODUCTION

This Note provides a short introduction to the world of international surveys on sustainable development. It outlines their value and shortcomings for development communicators (Section I), presents the main features of more than 20 relevant and recent surveys (Section II), highlights knowledge gaps and proposes ways forward (Section III). The Annexes show readers where to find specific survey data.

### Key messages

- ▶ International surveys are a **rich source of evidence** on what diverse citizens know and think about sustainable development, and on what can motivate them to change their behaviours.
- ▶ However, survey results **should be treated with caution**, since survey methodologies, the framing of questions and response biases can produce inaccurate pictures of public attitudes.
- ▶ The **geographic coverage of surveys is on the rise**, and more surveys are focusing on key development constituencies such as **youth** or **disenfranchised groups**.
- ▶ However, there are **major knowledge gaps** that need to be filled:
  - Global surveys are 20 times more likely to cover high-income than **low-income countries**.
  - Much is known about attitudes, but too little about people's **actions and motivations**.
  - Surveys focus on foreign aid at the expense of other **policies promoting development**.
- ▶ To help fill these gaps, DevCom could consider creating an **Observatory on Public Attitudes to Sustainable Development** and step up its collaboration with the **global education community**.

## I. THE BENEFITS AND SHORTCOMINGS OF INTERNATIONAL SURVEYS

International surveys and polls on sustainable development are abundant. There is good reason for this: policy makers, advocates and analysts need to know what citizens know and think. When used wisely, data on public attitudes can help shape better and more legitimate policies. Supportive data on public attitudes can also help defend development budgets.

For development communicators, international surveys can provide rich insights into audiences. Survey data can help communicators craft stronger narratives, tailor messages to specific constituencies, and measure the impact of their campaigns. By comparing public attitudes in different countries, surveys can provoke (healthy!) competition and encourage communicators to learn from one another.

International surveys cover enormous ground, highlighting what citizens know and think about:

- **Progress:** what are the major results and challenges, both at home and abroad?
- **Policies:** what are governments doing to promote development?
- **Global Promises:** how are multilateral agendas being implemented and tracked?
- **Personal Actions:** how can and do individuals engage with sustainable development?

Many surveys also provide rich **background information** on respondents, for example on their socio-demographic background or individual orientations and motivations. This can help communicators see where they stand with specific audiences, prioritise among them and craft more effective messages.

Yet, despite their high informational value, surveys need to be read with great caution. Here are three factors that can render survey results unreliable:

- **Survey methods.** For example, people might be willing to share their true opinion online, but not in a face-to-face interview. Also, online surveys may be cheap and easy to conduct, but exclude the opinions of people without internet access.

- **Framing.** The way questions are worded and ordered matters enormously. For example, a supporter of multilateralism may quickly become an opponent when forced to choose between global and local spending.
- **Biased answers.** People want to look good, even in anonymous surveys. This phenomenon, known as *social desirability bias*, is particularly persistent in surveys on aid and charity.

To make the most of surveys, communicators thus need to understand methodologies and inbuilt biases. They also need to complement survey insights with other forms of public attitudes research.

## II. OVERVIEW OF SURVEYS

This section presents a selection of recent surveys that development communicators need to know. It includes global and regional surveys, and distinguishes between general surveys and surveys specifically devoted to sustainable development. It also lists youth surveys, recognising that younger generations are a key audience for sustainable development.

### 1. Surveys with a global scope

Many of the world’s leading polling institutions conduct large-scale surveys with questions related to sustainable development. They ask citizens about their concerns for the future, their views on economic, social and environmental issues, and their attitudes towards institutions like government, the media, businesses and charities. Conducted at regular intervals, they highlight key trends over time.

**Table 1: General global surveys that include questions on sustainable development**

Name	Coverage	Frequency
Edelman Trust Barometer	28 countries (2017)	Annual since 2011
Gallup World Poll	Over 140 countries (2016)	Annual since 2005
Globescan Radar	23 countries (2017)	Annual since 1997
International Social Survey Programme	37 countries (2015)	Annual since 1984
Pew Spring Global Attitudes	38 countries (2017)	Annual since 2006
World Values Survey	57 countries (wave 6, 2010-2014)	Six waves since 1981

Going beyond these general surveys, several recent global reports have provided deep survey insights into how citizens engage with sustainable development. IPSOS and the Gates Foundation (2017) provide detailed *country-by-country comparisons* on what people think and know about development progress, and on their main concerns for the future. Motivaction International (2016) takes a different approach, dividing respondents not into different national groups, but into audience segments, for example in accordance with their values (e.g. “creatives”, “conservatives”).

The *MYWorld* survey is “opt-in”: anyone can choose to complete the survey online (and could even do so multiple times). As such, the overall results may not accurately reflect opinion in a particular region or country. However, having attracted 10 million participants in *MyWorld 2015*, *MYWorld 2030* promises to produce a rich dataset on public attitudes to sustainable development.

**Table 2: Global survey reports focused on sustainable development**

Publisher	Name of Report	Coverage	Date
IPSOS & Gates Foundation	Perils of Perception: Global Impact of Development Aid	28 countries	2017
Motivaction International	Towards 2030 without poverty (Glocalities survey)	24 countries	2016
Gallup	Global Civic Engagement Report	>140 countries	2016
Charities Aid Foundation	World Giving Index (using Gallup data)	>140 countries	Since 2010
UN SDG Action Campaign, UNDP & ODI	MYWorld 2030	All people!	Ongoing

### 2. Surveys looking at regions or subsets of countries

A number of surveys take a deeper look at public awareness and attitudes in specific regions. The most longstanding of these surveys is the *Eurobarometer*, conducted annually since 1984. A series of *Special*

*Eurobarometers* have gauged public perceptions on development and development co-operation. Other regional surveys include *Afrobarometer* and *Latinobarómetro*.

**Table 3: Regional surveys that include questions on development**

Name	Coverage	Frequency
<b>Eurobarometer</b> [ <i>Special Eurobarometer 441 (2017)</i> ]	European Union members	Annual since 1984
<b>Afrobarometer</b>	Africa	Annual since 2005
<b>Latinobarómetro</b>	Latin America (18 countries)	Annual since 1997
<b>European Social Survey</b>	Europe	Every 2 years since 2002

Drawing on their global data collections, polling institutions like Pew and Gallup publish frequent reports on regions and smaller subsets of countries. These are particularly valuable in shedding light on public perceptions in developing countries. The OECD and Ground Truth Solutions are collaborating to survey perceptions on humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, Haiti and Lebanon.

Meanwhile, the Gates Foundation has, since 2013, supported the *Aid Attitude Tracker (AAT)*, an in-depth longitudinal study of attitudes to foreign aid in four major donor countries: France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. The data collected has provided evidence to support development advocacy in all four countries and informed research projects by institutions like Bond (UK) and the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval).

**Table 4: Survey reports on specific subsets of countries**

Publisher	Name of Initiative / Report	Coverage	Date
<b>Ground Truth Solutions / OECD</b>	A field perspective on the Grand Bargain for humanitarian aid	3 countries	2017
<b>Pew Research Center</b>	Top priorities in Sub-Saharan Africa	9 countries	2015
<b>Gates Foundation / YouGov / University College London</b>	Aid Attitudes Tracker	4 countries	Every 6 months (2013-2018)

### 3. Surveys focusing on younger generations

Young women and men are an important and growing constituency for sustainable development, with many international surveys seeking to understand, for example, *Millennials* or *Generation Z*. The surveys include general questions about young people’s outlook on life and hopes for the future. From the point of view of the SDGs, they also provide insights into how young people engage with their communities, and what can motivate them to become global citizens.

**Table 5: Survey reports that focus on younger generations**

Publisher	Name of Initiative / Report	Coverage	Date
<b>AIESEC International</b>	YouthSpeak Global Report	160K people worldwide	2016
<b>Varkey Foundation</b>	Generation Z: Global Citizenship Survey	>20K people in 20 countries	2017
<b>Foundation for European Progressive Studies</b>	The Millennial Dialogue Reports	21 countries	2015/2016
<b>Motivaction International</b>	The Disruptive Mindset of Millennials Across the Globe (Glocalities)	48K young people in 20 countries	2014
<b>Deloitte</b>	Deloitte Millennial Survey	8K millennials in >29 countries	Annually since 2015

## III. KEY MESSAGES AND WAYS FORWARD

To launch its work on *Listening Architectures* in early 2017, DevCom designed a *Framework for Understanding Public Attitudes to Sustainable Development*, spelling out questions that development communicators might have about citizens in the “SDG era”. The Annexes of this Note map out exactly how major international surveys address questions in each of the three pillars of the Framework: *awareness, attitudes and actions*.

This mapping exercise reveals that surveys answer many of the DevCom Framework questions. They are particularly useful in answering the following questions:

- How do citizens feel about progress towards sustainable development at home, abroad and globally? Do they know about achievements? How confident are they about the future?
- What goals do people think governments and development organisations should prioritise? About what particular challenges are they most concerned?
- What do citizens know and think about the volume and usefulness of foreign aid? Is foreign aid money being spent wisely, or being lost to corruption?

However, the DevCom mapping also reveals important knowledge gaps, and shows how there is a need to improve collective understanding about citizens in the SDG era.

1. First, **many people’s voices are missing** from international survey data. The surveys examined span continents and their coverage is increasing. However, supposedly “global” **surveys are in fact about 20 times more likely to cover high-income than low-income countries.**<sup>1</sup>
2. Second, **much more is known about attitudes than actions.** If the SDGs require people to change their behaviours, then more knowledge is needed about how people engage with sustainable development at a personal level, and about **how public awareness, positive attitudes and supportive actions are linked.**
3. Third, how people feel about foreign aid is relatively well known, but communicators also **need to learn more about public attitudes in policy areas like migration and trade.** Communications narratives need to align with the reality that development paths are complex and multi-dimensional, and aid is but one policy among many.

## What’s next?

Some of these gaps can be filled through **further efforts to bring together survey findings and research**, including those conducted at national level. A possible DevCom **Observatory for Public Attitudes to Sustainable Development** could help bring together survey findings and other forms of public attitudes research: what can be learned from big data, social media analytics or policy consultations?

There is also scope for **greater collaboration with the international education community**, which has begun measuring progress towards SDG target 4.7, which calls for all learners to acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development. In 2018, the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) will begin measuring whether students have such skills. Meanwhile, UNESCO has been analysing how teacher education programmes, school curricula and textbooks promote awareness, positive attitudes and actions for sustainable development.

### Background: DevCom work on *Listening Architectures*

The term “listening architecture” describes the diverse tools and methods that public institutions use to better understand the knowledge, opinions and motivations of their many audiences.

The assumption is that, by collecting and analysing feedback and data from citizens, public institutions can improve not only their policies and practices, but also their strategies for public engagement.

Launched in 2017, OECD DevCom’s work on *Listening Architectures* aims to help public institutions improve their listening skills.

- ✓ Our **Framework** sets out what communicators might want to know about public awareness, attitudes, actions and motivations for sustainable development.
- ✓ Our **DevCom Survey** shows how members and partners approach public attitudes research.
- ✓ Our **Overview of International Surveys** shows readers where they can find relevant data about public awareness and attitudes in different countries.
- ✓ Our **Video** proposes five ways for development communicators to become better listeners.

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<sup>1</sup> We looked at 7 major international surveys, counted how often they covered each income group and found that high-income countries were covered 122 times, while low-income countries featured only 6 times.

## ANNEXES I – III

### MAPPING INTERNATIONAL SURVEYS

Upon launching its work on *Listening Architectures*, DevCom reflected on what development communicators might want to know about citizens in terms of their awareness, attitudes and actions for sustainable development. The result is the *DevCom Framework for Understanding Public Attitudes to Sustainable Development*, which proposes a comprehensive set of questions that communicators might have in each of the three areas. The Framework also identifies background information that communicators could gather to help define different audience segments in accordance with socio-demographic characteristics and personal orientations.

The Annexes below map specific questions from international surveys to our DevCom Framework.

The aim is:

- To help readers find survey data on specific questions they have about public awareness, attitudes or actions in their countries.
- To reveal gaps in global knowledge about public awareness, attitudes or actions (see Section III above).

The mapping exercise was conducted in June/July 2017 and thus does not include more recent surveys. Furthermore, it only includes internationally comparative surveys for which full results and information on the specific survey question are publicly available.

DevCom welcomes references to further surveys and proposals on how to deepen this work ([Dev.Com@oecd.org](mailto:Dev.Com@oecd.org)).

## ANNEX I

### International Survey Questions on AWARENESS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Theme	Poll	Question
Situation in developing countries	Glocalities (2016)	<i>In the last 20 years, the proportion of the world population living in extreme poverty has...?</i>
Their country's support for development	IPSOS Global @dvisor (2015)	<i>What % of your country's national budget do you think is currently spent on aid?</i>
	YouthSpeak Global Report (2016)	<i>Are you familiar with the sustainability policy of your country/territory?</i>
	Eurobarometer (2016)	<i>Would you say that you feel more informed, less informed, or equally as informed about development aid in 2015 than you were in 2014?</i>
Multilateral agendas and institutions	Aid Attitudes Tracker (2015)	<i>How well do you know the Sustainable Development Goals/Global Goals?</i>
	Eurobarometer (2016, 2015)	<i>Have you ever heard or read about the Sustainable Development Goals agreed by the international community?</i>
	YouthSpeak Global Report (2016)	<i>Do you know what the Sustainable Development Goals are?</i>
	Glocalities (2016)	<i>How much would you say you know about the Sustainable Development Goals, also called the Global Goals for Sustainable Development?</i>
	Globescan (2016)	<i>Leaders of 193 countries meeting at the United Nations in 2015 agreed on a series of 17 goals to end poverty in the world and protect the planet by the year 2030. These goals are known as the <b>Sustainable Development Goals</b> or the <b>Global Goals</b>. Before today, how much have you seen, heard, or read about these Global Goals – a lot, some, a little, or nothing at all?"</i>
Their potential for engagement with sustainable development?		

## ANNEX II

### International Survey Questions on ATTITUDES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Theme	Poll	Question
<b>The situation in developing countries</b>	Eurobarometer (2017)	<i>From the following list, what are the main obstacles which can prevent successful development in developing countries?</i>
	Eurobarometer (2017, 2016)	<i>Which of the following challenges do you consider as most pressing for the future of developing countries?</i>
	Afrobarometer (2015)	<i>A votre avis, quels sont les problèmes les plus importants auxquels le pays fait face et auxquels le gouvernement devrait s'attaquer? » « À votre avis, si le gouvernement de ce pays pouvait augmenter ses dépenses, lequel des secteurs suivants devrait être la priorité de ses investissements additionnels? Lequel serait la seconde priorité?</i>
	IPSOS Global @dvisor (2015)	<i>To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree too much foreign aid money goes to corrupt governments?</i>
	Pew Research Centre Spring Global Attitudes Survey (2015)	<i>Corruption' describes programs in our country funded by foreign aid well</i>
	UN MyWorld Survey (interactive)	<i>Which six of the following Global Goals are of immediate concern to you or your family?</i>
	Eurobarometer (2016)	<i>Tackling poverty in developing countries has a positive influence on EU citizens as well</i>
<b>Country support for development</b>	IPSOS Global @dvisor (2015)	<i>What % of your country's national budget do you think should be spent on aid?</i>
	Eurobarometer (2016)	<i>The EU has promised to increase the level of its aid to developing countries. Given the current economic situation, which of the following statements best describes your opinion?</i>
	Eurobarometer (2017)	<i>The EU and its Member States provide financial assistance to developing countries. Which of the following best describes your opinion?</i>
	Pew Research Centre Spring Global Attitudes Survey (2016)	<i>Would you support/oppose increasing foreign aid to developing countries?</i>
	YouGov EuroTrack Survey (2013)	<i>Do you think the government should increase or decrease the amount of money it spends on overseas aid to developing countries?"</i>
	Eurobarometer (2016)	<i>Tackling poverty in developing countries:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>is also in the EU's own interest (e.g. by creating trade opportunities or better access to energy and raw materials)?</i></li> <li>b) <i>contributes to a more peaceful and equal world?</i></li> <li>c) <i>is an effective way to tackle irregular migration?</i></li> </ul>
	Eurobarometer (2017)	<i>Tackling poverty in developing countries:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>has a positive influence on EU citizens as well?</i></li> <li>b) <i>is also in the EU's own interest (e.g. by creating trade opportunities or better access to energy and raw materials)?</i></li> <li>c) <i>is a moral obligation for the EU?</i></li> </ul> <i>Providing financial assistance to developing countries:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>contributes to a more peaceful and fairer world?</i></li> <li>b) <i>is an effective way to address irregular migration?</i></li> <li>c) <i>is an effective way to tackle poverty in these countries?</i></li> </ul>
	IPSOS Global @dvisor (2015)	<i>To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree that:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>foreign aid is beneficial to the global economy?</i></li> <li>b) <i>foreign aid helps to prevent international conflict?</i></li> <li>c) <i>spending on foreign aid gives my country influence in the global community?</i></li> <li>d) <i>foreign aid spending is beneficial to the domestic economy?</i></li> <li>e) <i>we have no moral obligation to help those less well off than we are?</i></li> </ul>
	YouGov EuroTrack Survey (2013)	<i>Overall, on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'very ineffective' and 10 means 'very effective', how effective do you think Government spending on overseas aid is?</i>

	<b>Eurobarometer (2017)</b>	<i>Please tell me how effective or not you think... EU and Member States' actions (development policy and financial assistance) [are] in helping to reduce poverty in developing countries? Providing financial assistance to developing countries: a) is an effective way to address irregular migration? b) is an effective way to tackle poverty in these countries?</i>
	<b>Edelman Trust Barometer (2017)</b>	<i>For each one, please indicate how much you trust that institution to do what is right using a nine point scale, where one means that you 'do not trust them all' and nine means that you 'trust them a great deal': government</i>
	<b>World Values Survey (2010 – 2014)</b>	<i>For each [organisation], could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: a) government b) environmental organisations c) charitable or humanitarian organisations d) the United Nations"</i>
	<b>IPSOS Global @dvisor: Power to the People (2016)</b>	<i>How much confidence, if any, do you have in: the government</i>
<b>Multilateral agendas and institutions</b>	<b>UN MyWorld Survey (interactive)</b>	<i>Which six of the following Global Goals are of immediate concern to you or your family?</i>
	<b>IPSOS Global @dvisor (2015)</b>	<i>How important, if at all, do you think each of the following goals is?</i>
	<b>Glocalities (2016)</b>	<i>Which [of the SDGs] do you think are most important for improving the quality of life for people around the world?</i>
	<b>Glocalities (2016)</b>	<i>Ending global poverty by 2030 is: very unlikely to rather unlikely, neither likely nor unlikely, or rather likely to very likely?</i>
	<b>IPSOS Global @dvisor: Power to the People (2016)</b>	<i>How much confidence, if any, do you have in international institutions?</i>
	<b>World Values Survey Wave 6 (2010 – 2014)</b>	<i>For each [organisation], could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: the United Nations</i>
	<b>IPSOS Global @dvisor (2015)</b>	<i>Who do you think should take responsibility for paying for programs and policies that work towards these sustainable development goals?</i>
<b>The impact of personal behaviours and practices</b>	<b>YouthSpeak Global Report (2016)</b>	<i>Who do you think has the strongest ability to influence society?</i>
	<b>Eurobarometer (2016)</b>	<i>As an individual, [can you] play a role in tackling poverty?</i>
	<b>Pew Research Centre, Global Attitudes Survey (2016)</b>	<i>Ordinary citizens can do a lot to influence government if they are willing to make the effort vs. there's not much ordinary citizens can do to influence government</i>
	<b>Glocalities (2016)</b>	<i>In helping to end global poverty, my actions can make: little to no difference, some difference, or a significant difference?</i>
	<b>Eurobarometer (2017)</b>	<i>For each of the following, please tell me how effective or not you think they are in helping to reduce poverty in developing countries: a) Donating to organisations that help developing countries b) Volunteering in organisations that help developing countries</i>
	<b>Pew Research Centre, Global Attitudes Survey (2016)</b>	<i>How likely are you personally to take political action on: a) poverty? b) poor health care? c) poor quality schools? d) government corruption? e) discrimination against ethnic, religious, racial, vulnerable or disadvantaged groups?</i>

## ANNEX III

### International Survey Questions on ACTIONS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Theme	Poll	Question
<b>Their personal actions</b>	Eurobarometer (2016)	<p><i>Regarding your personal involvement in helping developing countries, please let me know which of the following apply to you [multiple answers possible]:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>You are not involved in helping developing countries</i></li> <li>b) <i>You give money to an organisation that helps developing countries</i></li> <li>c) <i>You give money directly to projects that help developing countries</i></li> <li>d) <i>You are a volunteer in an organisation that helps developing countries</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Would you be prepared to pay more for groceries or other products from developing countries to support people living in these countries (for instance for fair trade products)?</i></p>
	Eurobarometer (2017)	<p><i>Are you personally involved in helping developing countries in any of the following ways?:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>You do voluntary work, individually or for an organisation</i></li> <li>b) <i>You give money to an organisation</i></li> <li>c) <i>You give money directly to projects</i></li> <li>d) <i>You make ethical choices when you shop for groceries, clothing etc.</i></li> <li>e) <i>you are not involved in helping developing countries</i></li> </ul>
	World Values Survey Wave 6 (2010-2014)	<p><i>For each organisation, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organisation?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Environmental organisation</i></li> <li>b) <i>Humanitarian or charitable organisation</i></li> </ul> <p><i>During the last 2 years have you given money to..?:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>an ecological organisation</i></li> <li>b) <i>a humanitarian or charitable organisation</i></li> </ul>
	Gallup Global Civic Engagement Report (2016)	<p><i>Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Donated money to a charity</i></li> <li>b) <i>Volunteered your time to an organization</i></li> <li>c) <i>Helped a stranger or someone you didn't know who needed help?</i></li> </ul>
	YouthSpeak Global Report (2016)	<p><i>Are you a volunteer? Would you volunteer abroad?</i></p>
<b>Taking on leadership roles</b>		
<b>Learning and advocating</b>	Eurobarometer (2016, 2017)	<p><i>Regarding your personal involvement in helping developing countries, please let me know which of the following apply to you [multiple answers possible]:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e) <i>You are politically involved in helping developing countries, e.g. by being a member of a political party of an NGO or taking part in demonstrations</i></li> </ul>
	World Values Survey Wave 6 (2010 – 2014)	<p><i>During the past two years have you participated in a demonstration for some environmental cause?</i></p> <p><i>I'm going to read out some forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never under any circumstances do it:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>attended a peaceful demonstration</i></li> <li>b) <i>signed a petition</i></li> <li>c) <i>joined in boycotts</i></li> <li>d) <i>joined strikes</i></li> <li>e) <i>any other act of protest</i></li> </ul>