



Report

Brainstorm session with Kate Nash (Goldsmiths, University of London)

Meeting	:	Brainstorm session on global citizenship and building global solidarity
Attending	:	Lobbyists and campaign officers working at or interested in Dutch NGOs
Date	:	21 June 2011, 09.30-13:00

Marieke Hart (NCDO) welcomed the participants and explains that the purpose of the morning is to explore opportunities to build global solidarity from an approach beyond charity.

Speech Kate Nash

Nash started reflecting on classical ways of campaigning to raise money for international cooperation. She explained that earlier campaigns were designed to create a particular kind of emotion, to make people feel bad; you should help or you will feel guilty. She assumed that the audience is familiar with the kind of campaigns that, unwillingly, increase the distance between 'us' and 'them'.

The British Make Poverty History Campaign (MPH) of some five years ago was a campaign designed to do things differently. Campaigners had an explicit political aim: talking about justice, not about charity and creating the idea that *you* have an obligation because *you* share the same world with people in the South. It also had a national dimension. The assumption was that the UK government is responsible in part for the situation in poor countries, for example by indebting these countries. The campaign was designed to make people feel responsible for their government's actions and lobby for a more just situation. The starting point, though, was justice and no longer caritas.

Make Poverty History was very different from other campaigns, since it did not try to shock and make people feel guilty, on the contrary; it tried to empower citizens! The campaign was very broadly outlined in the media; there were drama and comedy programs and informative actions and even the tabloids laid out what the aims of the campaigns were. Many celebrities were strongly involved, even as politicians who gained political capital through the campaign's popularity and by saying: we are in this together; there is a single world and a single humanity. To underline this, Nash showed a short campaign film with many celebrities clicking their fingers every three seconds to make people aware of the fact that that is the frequency a child dies somewhere in a poor country. The campaign aimed to build suspense, ensuring individuals that they are the change, they can make a difference.

The campaign used ambiguous language when talking about 'the public'. The suggested global world government and henceforth a global public do not exist. The idea that that the world is one place is merely a moral creation; it concerns an imagined global community of fate. A world in which all people live together, a well established place. Normally when we say 'the public', we are talking about people within our own country. In contrast, the campaign used the term *global public*.

Since the campaign did not reach its goals, politically nor publicly, at best it created a sense of temporary solidarity. So it was highly criticised. The main problem was that it was not inclusive enough: while empowering the people of Northern countries, there were no voices of the people who were supposed to be helped; only gratitude was allowed as a Southern voice. It was rather about feeling good about yourself, than about helping 'them'.

The British campaign organisation World Development Movement (WDM) was extremely critical on this campaign, primarily because it got hijacked by celebrities. The WDM pleads for building global

solidarity from below, making it more inclusive. Realising this, however, is quite difficult. The campaign was full on for about a year, but it was very hard to maintain the public's interest and there was little or no follow-up. What did happen, though, was that Oxfam grew enormously. Their campaigns kept injustice as a starting point, and the world as a single place in which you take your position, but did not have the same emotional appeal, assuming that people already know what the problems are; campaigns just serve to take action.

Points for discussion by Johan te Velde, (PSO)

While preparing for today, Te Velde was not aware of the fact that campaigning has so many side-messages. He repeated Nash message on the contradiction in what she called in her paper *international solidarity versus cosmopolitan nationalism*. By which she means that solidarity appeals to feelings of being responsible, which is a good feeling, whereas cosmopolitanism leads to charity which has negative impacts; there is some narcissism.

For this meeting te Velde suggests that it could be interesting to look at our own Dutch campaigns; what is our own place in this dichotomy?

The manner in which concepts are used in the Netherlands is changing, also due to a changing political tide. The term 'international solidarity' used to appeal to people. Now, notions of (enlightened) self-interest are more used. This is about realism. The Dutch public is not inclined to solve the financial crisis of Greece out of solidarity, but also because it is in our own interest. This is the way it is sold to the public. This is an approach that is quite different than before.

Furthermore, this discussion today is also related to the Global Public Goods (GPG) discussion, a discussion that is being developed in the Netherlands at the moment and which also starts from self-interest. Countries can not solve issues like migration, the financial crisis and the environment on our own. We are in this together. This GPG discussion is however less about morals and more about realism.

Te Velde finished concluding that we have heard (and will hear) all kinds of concepts, such as international solidarity, justice, charity, global citizenship, denunciation and cosmopolitan nationalism. He asked the audience to reflect this morning on, when looking at their own campaigns, what their organization's own position in dealing with these issues is: What kind of messages do you convey in comparison to the message you *want* to convey?

Kate Nash added that also in the Make Poverty History campaign politicians were indeed addressing the issue of Global Public Goods, especially with regard to migration. It was quite clear that 'we' in the North are linked to other people. For example regarding positive effects development has on the creation of markets abroad. So enlightened self-interest was also already an issue then, but in limited sense. The problem, nevertheless, remains that we are also still gaining from the under-development of Southern regions and we are not willing to really change that. These interests are not sufficiently explicit in the Western political debates.

Remarks and questions from the participants

Even if voices from the South were included in the campaign's activities, would there have been a different outcome?

Participants also wondered what difference development cooperation really makes to the people in the South.

Some of the participants asked why the campaign focused so much on stimulating 'the public' to pressure the government in making changes, while we as consumers already have much power.

Kate Nash: Campaigns should try harder to make a real dialogue between different groups in the North and the South possible. What is needed is the recognition of the other as someone who has something to say, not someone who is solely in need of help. The MPH campaign completely missed the opportunity to make use of voices from the South (of footballers, for example, who are celebrities in London and the UK). Because of the popularity of the MPH, politicians wanted to be

involved. Moreover, in the UK voters surely set a certain tone. This is demonstrated by the fact that the actual government has not cut on aid, despite large cuts in other areas.

Results are mixed, though, the political goals got ambiguous and the campaign did not really move towards justice. Nevertheless, and not unimportantly, the percentage of 0.7 GDP for ODA remained.

After these interesting reflections, participants focussed in small groups on their own campaigns and looked at how they could move beyond charity; What message do you convey in your campaigns and do you think this should change?

Brainstorm on the organizations' position in dealing with international solidarity vs. charity

Feedback from the group discussions on existing practices

The notion of citizenship and its international dimension is a result of a change in policy in the last couple of years. It is intriguing to look into the differences between international solidarity and charity and see whether the first is actually better than the latter. A question is e.g. why should we value people who are non-citizens differently from citizens? Maybe the latter group is acting well in its own area. Charity, just as international solidarity, has its place and use. We need to turn the idea around; charity is linked to money, so maybe we should create involvement/awareness first and then charity.

In line with this, some participants were confused about the reason why there should be a distinction between charity and international solidarity, because they seem related to each other with only a vague distinction. While Nash talked much about empowering people and influencing government policy, our objective is more related to fundraising and involvement in our organizations. Reacting on this, Te Velde stirred up the discussion by wondering whether charity is less harmless than we think. Some campaigns have the objective to achieve international solidarity, but charity reaches the opposite, namely a short-term good feeling about oneself, contradicting long-term solidarity. Reactions included asking what the actual results from international solidarity actually are.

Kate Nash: The political approach to justice and assuming 'one world' is organized around structural issues like indebtedness, corruption and issues that are unjust from the very beginning, while charity is aimed at disasters.

The participants expressed their worry that the recent Dutch budget cuts might cause the (re-)emergence of easy ways of getting money and old ways of campaigning. Many organizations do have passion for root causes, but under budget pressures they might feel tendencies to find easy money. People within fundraising departments also say that we need to show the big need for money. Nevertheless a mayor shift is occurring; new campaigns (as Groene Sinterklaas) do not ask for money, but receive a lot of support. It was suggested that NGOs should give people the opportunity to show that they care; this is not about money then, but about shared responsibility.

Talk Roeland Ramakers (former strategic advisor for the Dutch EEN campaign)

Roeland started by explaining the focus of his presentation: "When do good ideas lead to good results?" As campaigning fundamentally is about trying to get people to work with you to create a connection between poor and rich people, we need to find ways to get to know each other. The Netherlands used to be a pillar based society in which it was clear what actions were expected from people. Now, we have grown into a network society which is very fluid. In the old days, social connections were evident, because people were often bounded through churches, work, sport clubs etc. Since some decades, the role of the government has grown. As a result, charities moved their work towards influencing the state from a rights-based approach, instead of classic charity. Nowadays, businesses and media are gaining more and more influence. Now, for example, as a critical consumer we can have influence on businesses and thus on policy changes.

Roeland believes EEN did use new ways to try and realise change and reach out to the people in the South. The results were achieved despite the enormous amounts of paper work that comes with it. He thinks the network approach is successful in making changes. The Arab Spring, a.k.a. the Facebook (FB) revolution, showed that it is possible to make huge changes without enormous amounts of money. It worked because of 4 strong steps: 1. This is us; 2. Our cause is just; 3. Things are happening here; 4. Join us.

On the other hand, Genoeg = Genoeg (Enough = Enough) was a collective campaign carried out by Dutch NGOs, with the goal to challenge the budget cuts. It proved to be difficult to really make a change and alter the image that NGOs' work is easy and aid workers are rich and inflexible. This image is a pr-problem. It could have been changed by the brilliant idea that NGO- officers would start living on one Euro a day for a week. This could have created a lot of positive media attention.

In our present network society it is difficult for people to position themselves. It depends on their willingness to connect and the power to move. MPH used celebrities to make a broader outreach, including the tabloids, which Roeland thinks was quite smart and necessary. However, he believes that it is urgent to find new ways to build our networks on friendship in order to make sure it will still work in the long run. Honesty, openness, (willingness to connect) and friendship are essential ingredients. Enlightened self-interest can play a role. This is a position in-between charity and self interest. The better actors are able to make friends, the better they are able to connect. People in our line of work are situated on the left wing side, but there should be more willing to bridge the gap with the right wing, reaching a broader public, and make use of tabloids and other broader media. In making friends, furthermore, the interpersonal connections should really be win-win for both sides. Dutch NGOs have been spoiled by government subsidies for years and their connection with society has decreased. It is necessary to re-establish their relations with the Dutch public.

Plenary discussion on: New ideas and possibilities to involve people and realise interconnectedness, using different concepts as charity and justice to create a win-win situation.

Nash added to the discussion the contradiction between networking societies versus actual poverty. A question is which level/actor one can appeal to for claiming justice: the United Nations, friends etc.? Roeland said that defining when or whom to focus on can vary per cause.

Concerning NGO practices Nash adds that larger organisations seem to develop marketing strategies that are followed by smaller NGOs. And with success: even though Britain has a neo-liberal government and the actual policy is all about self-interest, as a result of NGO-lobby no cuts have been made on the aid budget. And she also learned that in the Netherlands the "Groene Sint campaign" worked out well. Social media does indeed have a role to play, but it is slightly overestimated. All in all, it is extremely important to be clear about the message you actually want to bring across.

One of the participants added that the problem with the Dutch Genoeg = Genoeg campaign was that Dutch citizens were not interested. The Dutch development sector is very much internally focused. Another participant agrees by saying that the development sector should stop feeling better than 'usual citizens'.

Nash stated saying that how to bring across messages to a larger public is a difficult question. Populism is not wrong per se; it is possible to put much information in a campaign message of only three minutes. It is important to transfer messages quickly and efficiently.

Marieke Hart suggested that we should explain realistically to the public that if one structurally wants to change things, development work can always merely play a small part. In our campaigns we make the people believe that we can solve more problems than is realistically possible. A participant reacted by saying that being realistic about the goals is difficult because there are so many organizations competing which do use the old rhetoric. Budget cuts worsened the competition and many operating organizations refuse to cooperate.

Marieke suggested we should not talk to citizens, but involve them, to give them a platform.

A participant explained that Facebook (FB) is a good concept. Via FB, for example, his organisation challenges people to pass their ideas through dialogue. Organisations sometimes hesitate to use FB for fear that they lose control over the message. This need not be the case. Questions NGOs could address are for example: how to connect the quality of young Twitter groups to knowledge on what works and what does not within organisations?

Roeland added that even citizens giving negative reactions, for example online, are an opportunity, the fact that they are reacting means that they are at least interested.

A participant suggests that NGOs should start reacting at de Telegraaf, a newspaper where a lot of discussion on development cooperation goes on without professionals being engaged in the debate. Or, GeenStijl, another participant suggests, that website has a million visitors a day. Roeland agrees that NGOs have to experiment with those forums. Less nuanced messages for one million people makes more sense than extremely nuanced messages for a small amount of already involved people.

Kate Nash concluded the UK is the most neo-liberal country in Europe, there is not such a tradition of philanthropy as in the US, and you would not necessarily expect to find a lot of support for charities there. There is however so far continuing support for development organisations and spending on development. Kate Nash believes though campaigns can change things, and the participants should have faith in that.

Marieke Hart concluded that after an inspiring morning many challenges were raised, concerning reconsidering our position beyond charity like:

- . How should we deal with (enlightened) self-interest versus solidarity?
- . What is the message that we want to get across with our campaigns? And which ones are we conveying?
- . How can we relate better to our constituency and how is that related to relaxing your own point of view?
- . How do we make friends for win-win-win situations?

She hopes that, although there are many issues that could not be solved this morning, we can continue this dialogue in the near future.