

## Policy Entrepreneurship

Ann Pettifor – Does Evidence Matter? – ODI – 11 June 2003

Thank you. I am just a campaigner, so I am a little nervous being here amongst all these policy people, but I welcome the opportunity to tell part of our story. I am busy writing a chapter for a book by Oxford University Press in which I will try to distil some of the lessons from Jubilee 2000, but I feel about Jubilee 2000 a little like Mao Tse Tung felt about the French Revolution: that it is really far too early to make any assessment about its impact. When we do assess what progress we made, we tend to feel that we could have done a great deal more than we did.

I wanted to begin by saying, somewhat provocatively that evidence on its own does not matter at all. I would like to illustrate this by showing that the evidence of the holocaust of AIDS in Africa is widespread and well-known. UNAIDS have produced the most extraordinary tomes, data and information on the AIDS crisis and yet it does not matter. We do not have people making movies about that particular holocaust. We do not have a Picasso painting pictures to illuminate it for us. The AIDS crisis is not part of what is happening here and the evidence is not mobilising the global community to take action. I am exaggerating, I must give President Bush some credit for his fifteen billion dollars, and clearly there are people doing things and I do not want to understate that. But what it shows me is that what is important is not the evidence, but making the evidence matter. I know that I have a quite tense relationship with some policy-makers, particularly those who live in 19th Street in Washington, and that some of the numbers we used and the way that we used them in the campaign caused intense irritation in Washington.

Having said that, evidence was incredibly important to the Jubilee campaign and there simply was not enough of it. When I was taken on by the Debt Crisis Network in 1994 and began this work, we knew an awful lot about the state of debtors and about what was happening in developing countries. The World Bank's annual Debt Tables, which cost three hundred dollars to purchase, was published every year, giving as much detail as it is possible to have on developing country debt. But there was no World Bank set of creditor tables. To be fair, at some point soon after we had started to make a fuss about the debt crisis, EURODAD did produce a set of creditor tables in one year.

In Britain we knew very well that there were lots of debtors and that there was a very big debt problem. There had been campaigns in Britain since the Mexican debt crisis in 1982, but there was no knowledge or understanding of the individual debtor nations and what their relationship to the British government had been, why they had been lent money and for what purpose.

So I began the really tedious but quite heroic task, in those days, of unearthing the details of the cumulative loans made by the British government to developing countries. I did that with the help of much lamented Joan Lester MP, who at that time was an opposition Labour MP. We tabled Parliamentary Question after Parliamentary Question to extract from the Export Credit Guarantee Department some detail of which country the British government had lent money to, and why. The World Development Movement (WDM) had produced a report at about that time on how much of export credit guarantee funding subsidies were being used to promote military exports. We had some rough idea, but I think we had approximate numbers because no-one, at that time, really got that amount of detail and evidence out of either the government or the Export Credit Guarantee Department. The latter are far more transparent and accountable today than they were then, but we still lack full information on those issues which are regarded as commercially sensitive.

Back in 1994, no non-governmental organisation in this country knew who Britain's sovereign debtors were and why and how much debt was owed by each of these countries. Finding that out was very revealing in terms of the analysis. So what is important about the evidence is the way that it is analysed. Evidence on its own matters not at all, but evidence analysed in certain ways produces results and actions.

The way in which the limited evidence then available was used, was then reflected in the debate conducted about the debt: that there were all these countries (and I am crudely summarising the debate here) in the deep south, most of them black, incompetent and corrupt, who had got themselves into a muddle. had very high levels of debt, and needed to be bailed out. We knew all about them, but little about why our government had lent money to these countries in the first place, these supposedly corrupt governments. The approach, instead was, despite all this, we ought to do something about resolving the crisis, in a charitable way. There was no approach of looking deeper, at how and why they had got into debt or at the role of the creditor in creating this debt; and that was reflected in the non-availability of much of the evidence.

No-one cared about the role of the creditor (which is generally held to be above reproach) or held the creditor responsible and that is why we did not have evidence about the creditors. Once this evidence began to be dug up, we began to see that the British government made loans and provided tax-funded subsidies for certain exports which it did not provide for domestic produce. If you grow armoured cars in Newcastle, you can be sure of taxpayer funds, but if you grow tomatoes in Lincolnshire you do not get taxpayer support for your work. That was for a good reason: to help boost employment; and to help with the balance of payments. Britain, like many other countries, has a trade deficit and needs to maintain some sort of balance in the balance of payments. Promoting exports is a big part of that.

In 1994, we had a Tory government which, surprisingly, wholeheartedly supported these forms of subsidy. So what we did initially was to unearth this evidence of the total relationship, not just the partial relationship. In doing so, we developed a very different picture, which then informed the way that we developed the campaign. I will be forever grateful to Ed Mayo who hired me in 1994. He said that he did not expect me to do anything except to go away and think, read, learn and understand and to come back in a year's time when we would think what to do about it. This was a great privilege. So we began to assemble the evidence, some of which was already in the public domain and some of which was not, and put it all together.

The second analogy or illustration which I want to give is that assembling the evidence and analysing it so that it can be recognised by a wide audience is a bit like looking at a diamond before you cut it. The diamond is a big lump which is dug out of the earth somewhere and it is probably ungainly when you are looking at it, but if you are a diamond cutter you may well spend two years looking at it before you decide to make the cut and, when you do, you cut the stone in such a way as to maximise the reflection of every facet of the true stone, and that is the genius of the diamond cutter. That is the only analogy I can make to explain how, having collected all the evidence, one analyses it in such a way as to invite recognition and understanding from those who are looking at it.

I am generalising and perhaps being unfair, but on the whole the campaign on the debt had been run as a campaign which was a problem for countries in the south to which we had the solution. As a result of the way in which we cut this total evidence - looking at debtors and creditors - we switched the campaign to say that actually the problem was here and not there. The problem was with lending policies and the desperate effort to promote military exports, with the petrodollar crisis of the 1970s where money had to be exported in order to stabilise inflation here, and so on.

When you looked at the problem in that way, you immediately empowered people here. The analysis said to Joe Bloggs who was an active member of their church, who supported the Jubilee principle and had a conscience about what was happening to people in Africa or Latin America, not that he must do something about a starving child in Africa, but that he must do something about what is going on here, on our doorsteps. And that you can do it by going to your own Member of Parliament, and by addressing your own economy and your own lifestyle and actions. That is empowering in a way that talking about victims in far away places is not. Feeling guilty only makes one feel paralysed and immobilised.

What I think Jubilee 2000 succeeded in doing was mobilising people by saying that this was something that they could do something about. They could go and do their homework about something called the Export Credit Guarantee Department and find out where this department was. So, for example, we briefed Mark Thomas, the comedian, on export credit guarantees and sent him out there to make people laugh about this. Sure enough, he did. He hired an old rusty tank and he drove it up to the front door of the Export Credit Guarantee Department and claimed to be Saddam Hussein, saying that they had sold him the tank some years ago and demanding his money back. Mark Thomas took this even further and wanted to find out who was on the Board of the Export Credit Guarantee Department. He discovered that there were a lot of people in corporations receiving the export subsidies who were also on the Board, making the decisions. He rang the Chair of the Board one morning, live on television, and said that he believed she was on the Board, to which she agreed. He said that he believed she was also on the Board of twelve companies that had benefited from export credit guarantee. She denied this, creating the biggest story we had had on export credit guarantees for some time, because her denial was an outright lie. She did not realise that she was live and it would be broadcast. (The lesson is clearly not to tell fibs, especially to comedians.) The whole thing exploded and she had to resign.

The point is that we got this fairly arcane piece of evidence about an obscure department (which tried hard to be very obscure), and we got ordinary people really exercised about it. My proudest moment, I think, was when the man from the Treasury came up to me at the end of the campaign and said he had had to hire people to deal with the correspondence of individuals from the postcard and letter campaigns. He told me stories of receiving letters on pink flowered paper with roses in one corner, detailing debt-export ratios in Uganda and arguing that he had made a misjudgement about setting those ratios, when fixing the debt relief. He could not believe that these letters were coming from Mrs Bloggs in Sussex, etc. They received thousands of letters like that, which were not from your average activist but from people who wrote on pink paper with roses in the corner. That was telling them something.

We tried never to patronise our supporters. We told them that it was not complicated, it was not rocket-science, even if the Treasury would like them to think it was. We told people that that elite club of policy people from aid agencies and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank who gather twice a year in Washington (as I did) were talking in arcane language, but that really you can understand that, you can be part of that too and you can also write. We explained about debt-export ratios. These middle-aged women who wrote their letters to the Treasury felt respected and empowered and the Treasury had to write them careful and detailed letters back, which they would then forward to us so that we could point out what was being avoided in the way that it had been drafted so that they could send back a rebuttal. Eventually they just became really smart about all of this and felt as though they could (and were) doing something.

So the campaign was about assembling the evidence and analysing it properly. I think this is more of an art than a science, as the diamond cutter's skill is an art, but it is something which you can perfect if you know who you are talking to. If you are taking complex evidence and making it available to ordinary people and you know, hear and talk to those people and know what they can understand, then it is possible to know the language that they speak and to draft it for them. It is not complicated and we had clever people with us like Jo Hanlon who is a journalist (and also in the audience today), who went out and found people to help us to communicate.

It still annoys me that there are elites in both institutions and agencies who work on research and policy issues and do so almost with the intention of being exclusive. They like talking to their peer group about these issues because that is stimulating, but do not want to be forced to talk to someone who is not as knowledgeable about these issues as they are because they might have to explain A, B and C before they could have a proper conversation about where to go from here. The Bank and the Fund are past masters at inventing language which is incomprehensible and which disguises what is really going on. It is a profoundly anti-democratic instinct. Even in universities, there are very few academics who work on the debt issue. We were perfectly aware that we were up against three thousand men (they were mostly men), all of whom had one or two PhDs, and that we were just a group of activists trying to take them on and challenge their way of thinking. We would have loved intellectual ballast from people within the universities to help us in running our campaign, but we found that unless you could afford to hire an economist you could not have one.

Worse still, some of the people who worked for us would go to the London School of Economics (LSE) afterwards to do Masters' courses and be told that debt was not a problem and that it would not be covered there, since the LSE agreed with the position of the IMF and, at that time, the Department for International Development (DFID), that debt was not a problem.

The next part was communicating what you were trying to do. What we worked out was that just communicating to people that there was a big problem and making them feel bad about it would not empower them. Poverty reduction has become a hackneyed phrase and some people only get money because they work on poverty reduction. What happened with Jubilee 2000 was that we felt that it was far more an issue of economic justice. We also felt that economic justice was an issue which could fire people up and was the reason our campaigners got out of bed in the morning, because they felt the whole thing was so unfair. Quite a lot of our evidence was mobilised to explain that.

DFID attacked us vehemently throughout the campaign and Clare Short was never supportive, arguing that we had got it wrong. DFID may have had a point in arguing that aid flows had collapsed over the time that the Jubilee 2000 campaign was running, but for us the key issue was the injustice in the relationship between powerful creditors and vulnerable debtors and the absence of any mechanism whereby that relationship could be resolved or negotiated out of crisis. Some people may not have thought it unfair to lend money and extract enormous amounts of money back in the form of debt repayments and compound interest, but we did find that there was a very imbalanced relationship which allowed the creditor to exploit the debtor and impose other policies on them. That was a vital point in the campaign.

I want to say a word about managing campaigns, general lessons and ensuring legitimacy.

We made several key decisions right at the beginning. The first such decision was our resolve never to demand that a bureaucracy change its ways, because we do not believe that the IMF or World Bank are capable of being anything but a bureaucracy. We insisted instead that we would take a massive demonstration to the G7 summit in Birmingham, which we did long before they even thought about doing so in Seattle and it was a much bigger demonstration, even though it never got the same attention. Our target was the decision-makers. We did not particularly want to engage with the IMF (and they did not particularly want to engage with us), who are fundamentally civil servants who are doing what their shareholders tell them to do. The shareholders had spent the last twenty years hiding behind the cover of their civil servants, so the IMF was taking the brunt of all the attacks whilst the decision-makers were sat behind their Treasuries and sheltered from blame for IMF policies.

The second thing we resolved was that it would not be possible to have a democratic international campaign and that because there were so many northern creditors, the campaign needed to be international. We aimed instead to develop the autonomy of local and national campaigns. Looking at Simon Maxwell's models of alliances: the Microsoft model, the McDonalds model and the airline-alliance model, I think we were pretty much the McDonalds model. We had a brand, a style of organising on the basis of a coalition and we had a franchise which we offered to whoever wanted it. To our astonishment, people did like it and it did get picked up. The IMF travelled to over one hundred and sixty countries around the world and kept coming up against Jubilee 2000 chains. It must have terrorised them and made them think that we were powerful and huge. We were not. We were a coalition of some very wobbly campaigns and some much more effective campaigns (largely because of the churches) in some sixty countries, who shared a single mission statement which was the petition that we wanted the debts cancelled by the year 2000 under a fair process, and who shared a logo, which had been something that honestly had been developed in the most primitive way. When I think about branding and how advertising agencies come up with logos and so on, ours was never so sophisticated. But I am very proud that in four years we turned this simple brand into a global brand and here at headquarters in the United Kingdom, we had spent only three million pounds over a four year period.

How effective we were is another discussion. We have already had a discussion with the World Bank at this table about how effective we were, but I wanted to point to some of the methods we used to make the campaign a success.