DEVELOPMENT ENGAGEMENT LAB

SHIFTING THE POWER: 2025 UPDATE

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/ 15 December 2025
// Comic Relief: Shifting the Power
/// www.developmentcompass.org
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ANNEXE 2

SHIFT THE POWER: WHAT DO THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK AUDIENCE INSIGHTS (2025)



ABOUT THIS DECK

- This deck reports findings from the 2025 follow-up survey of GB respondents. It follows on from, and was informed by, the 2023 survey and focus groups.
- The data for the survey were collected as part of YouGov's weekly online Omnibus. Fieldwork was conducted November 27-28, 2025 (base sample n= 2,084). Data are weighted to be nationally representative.
- The survey consists of 15 question items, including a repeat of the message testing experiment, and a new unit looking at concepts of power and value for money in more detail. Where appropriate, we compare 2023 and 2025 in the same visual for comparison.
- The research was designed and analysed by Professor Jennifer Hudson (UCL) and Professor David Hudson (Birmingham.



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1. KEY LEARNINGS & INSIGHTS



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SHIFT THE POWER FRAMING STILL ELICITS POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Hearing about Shift the Power's ambitions generates more positive (activated) emotions:

- 31% respondents report being hopeful, enthusiastic or optimistic
- 10% reported feeling proud, activated or encouraged
- However, more than a quarter of respondents say they 'Don't know' which is consistent with the 2023 findings

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STRONG SUPPORT FOR LOCAL DECISION-MAKING & PARTNERSHIP

- 37% of respondents said local development organisations should **take the lead**, with UK organisations taking a supporting role in delivering aid programmes; up 3pp from 2023.
- In 2023, 33% said there should be an **equal partnership** between local and UK organisations, but this has fallen to 27% in 2025.
- And 11% want UK organisations to lead, compared to 8% in 2023.

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VALUE FOR MONEY STILL MATTERS THE MOST

- Overall, there has been little change in the elements of the Traditional and StP models that the British public find most important.
- Similar to 2023, the 2025 data show that **value for money** in aid projects is the most important priority for the GB public, followed by **capacity building**.
- However, a key change has been a decrease in the percentage of people who say 'locally led decision-making' is one of the top three elements.
- Changing narratives is less important: don't lead / have conversations about StP that focus on the 'deficit model'.

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HOW TO COMMUNICATE SHIFT THE POWER

4 of the 5 top messages in 2023, are top messages in 2025.

The best performing messages were about **capacity building**, and **self-sufficiency.**

Themes that reinforce giving local communities skills, knowledge and resources were present in all of the top messages.

A strong emphasis on decision-making power with local communities was well-received by GB respondents.

Focus on **value for money** and **impact** as part of the Shift the Power agenda..



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DEEP DIVE: SHIFT THE POWER FRAMING

- Again, we see that using colonial legacies/power language and framing limits engagement and turns people off.
- Don't make StP about history, political issues, or legacies: focus on the future (capacity building) and first concerns (VfM).
- Lean into the VfM and impact frames to talk about StP in a way that will resonate with the British public.



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DEEP DIVE: VALUE FOR MONEY

- For the British public value for money means three things:
  - Impact & effectiveness
  - Responsible use & money spent wisely
  - Making sure money gets to where it needs to & minimizing corruption
- Organisations need to acknowledge the importance of VfM to their ways of working/decisions; show value alignment with British public
- *Acknowledge, align, demonstrate VfM*





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2. CURRENT CONTEXT

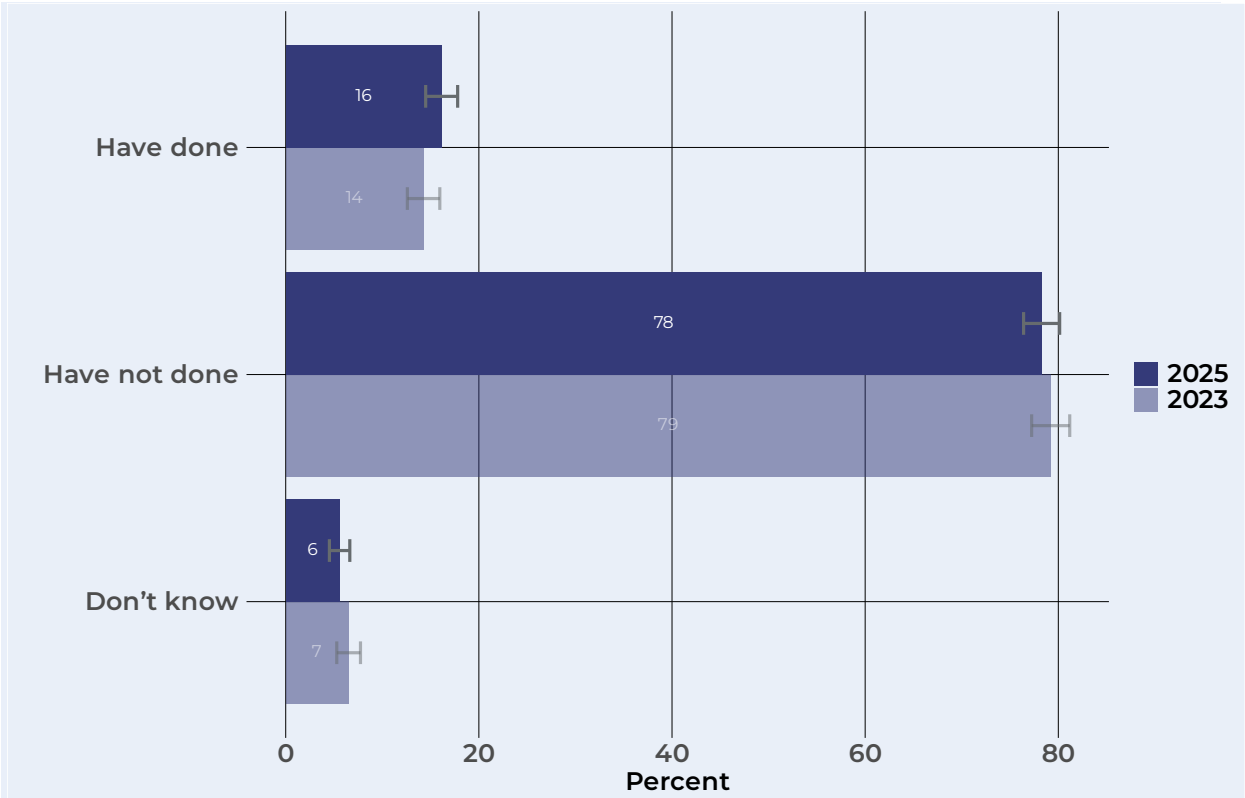
In context: A brief look at key DEL KPIs



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DONATIONS TO A DEVELOPMENT CHARITY/NGO



Thinking about global poverty and development, have you donated money to an international NGO or charity working on the issue in the past 12 months? Sample size 2025 n=2,084 & 2023 n=2,049 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

16%

of respondents say they have donated to a charity/NGO in past year

Data from 2023 showed that 14% of respondents said they had donated in the past 12 months.

The data here show a 2pp increase on 2023.

Overall, donation behaviour has ranged between 14-22% in the 2023 and 2025 period.

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CONCERN ABOUT POVERTY IN POOR COUNTRIES

47%

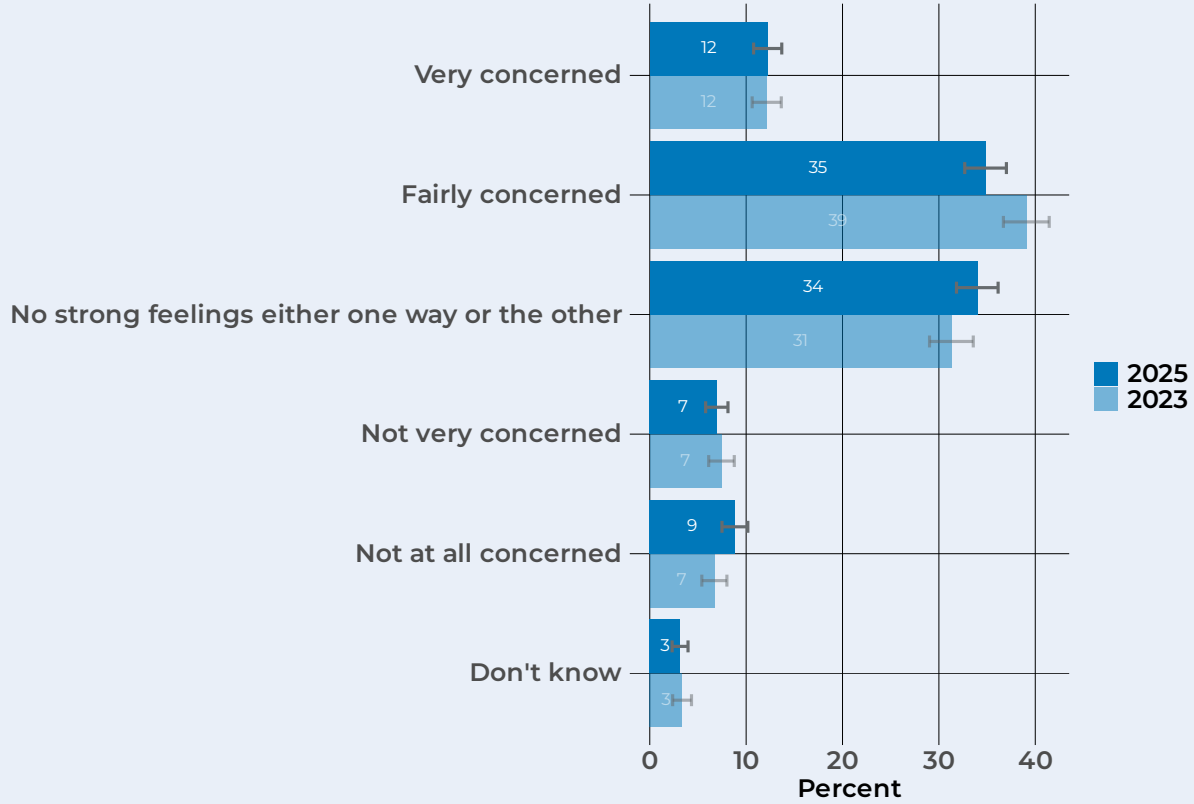
say they feel (very) concerned about levels of poverty in poor countries

Concern has been a consistent indicator of engagement and support for ODA in Britain.

In 2023, 51% of British respondents said they were fairly/very concerned about poverty in poor countries, compared to 47% in 2025.

This is the first time it has fallen below 50% in the UK.

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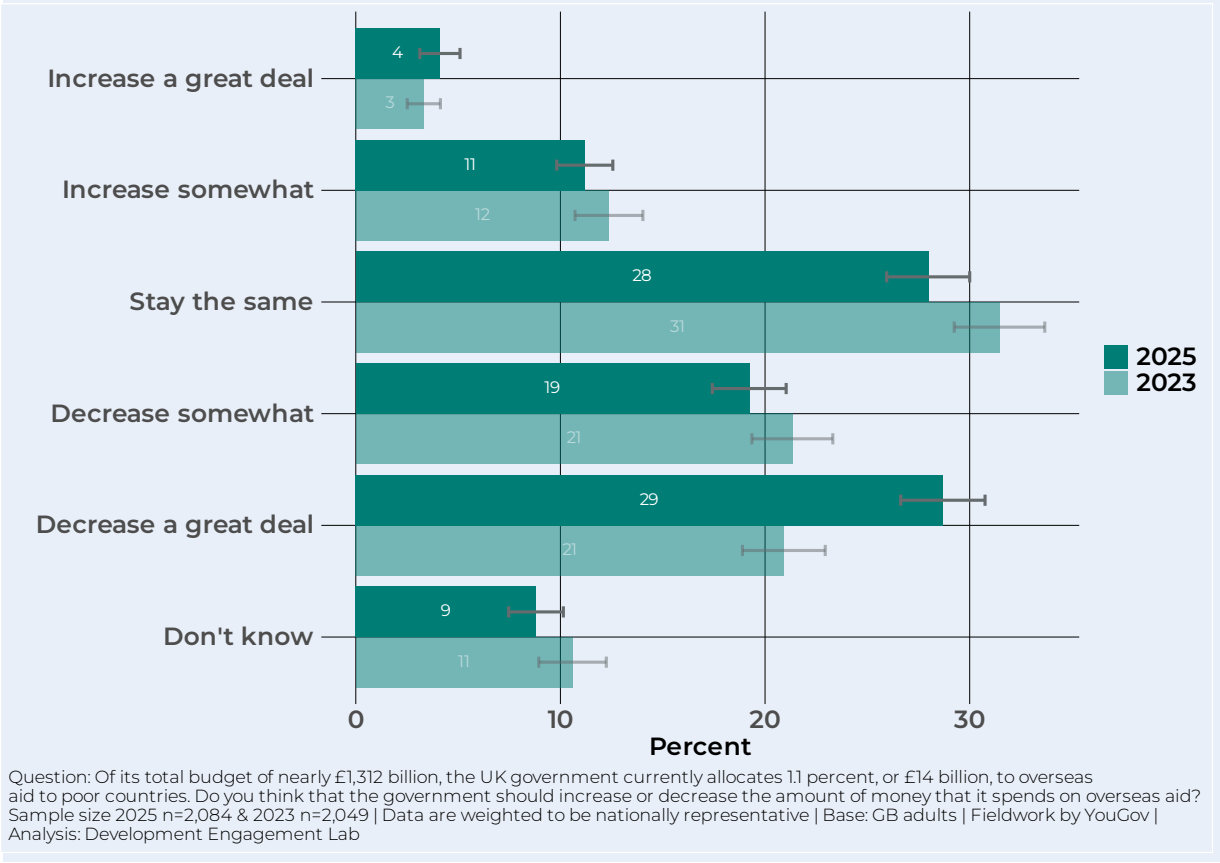
Question: Which best describes how you feel about levels of poverty in poor countries? Sample size 2025 n=2,084 & 2023 n=2,049 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

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SUPPORT FOR THE UK OVERSEAS AID BUDGET



Question: Of its total budget of nearly £1,312 billion, the UK government currently allocates 1.1 percent, or £14 billion, to overseas aid to poor countries. Do you think that the government should increase or decrease the amount of money that it spends on overseas aid?
Sample size 2025 n=2,084 & 2023 n=2,049 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

43%

support current or increased levels of government spending on overseas aid

- Support for increasing the UK aid budget or keeping it at existing levels has ranged from 44-56% since DEL's Tracker began in 2019.
- However, in 2025 we see a 3pp from the 2023 mark of 46%.
- In particular, the percentage of respondents who say decrease a great deal has jumped from 21 to 29%.

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3. SHIFT THE POWER

Attitudes towards a new movement/ model/ approach to international development



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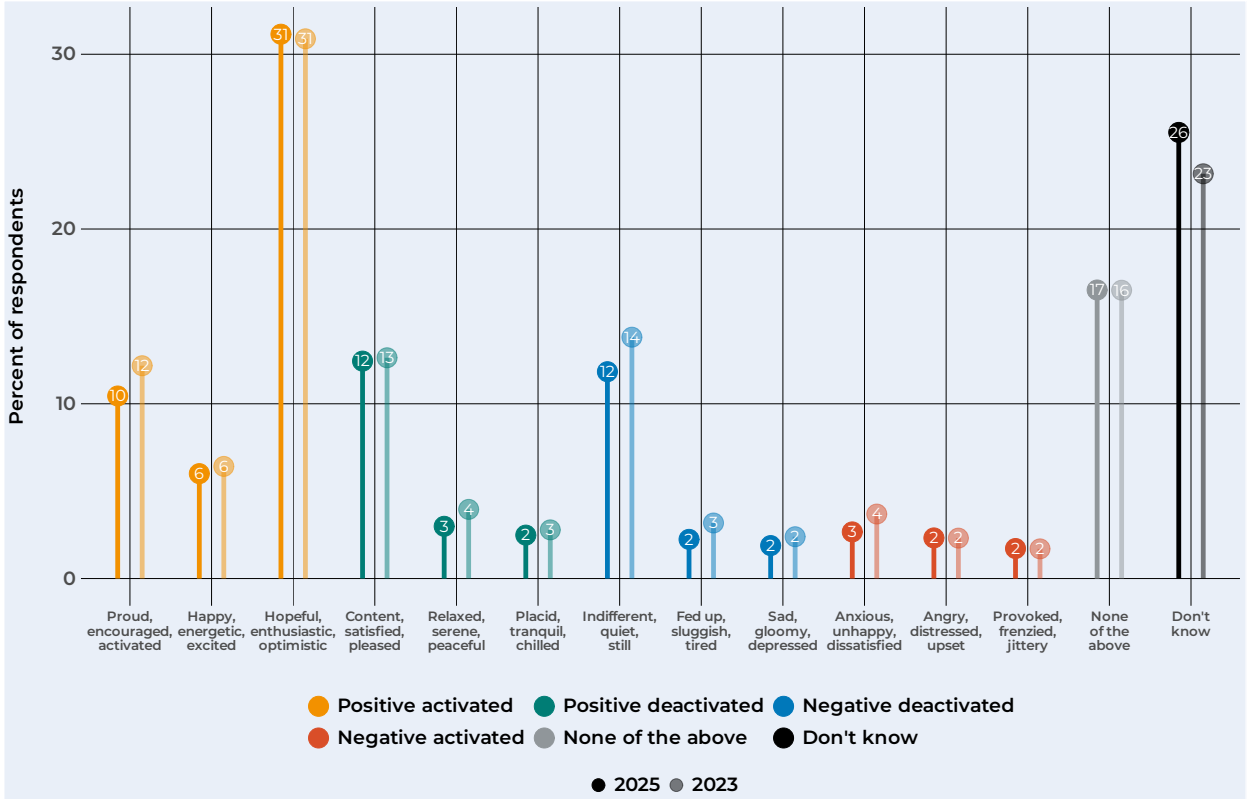
RESPONDENT *FEELINGS* ABOUT SHIFTING THE POWER

31%

report being hopeful, enthusiastic or optimistic when they hear about Shift the Power

Similar to 2023, there were far more positive-activated emotions associated with the statement about the Shift the Power model and very few negative-activated emotions.

Like 2023, there is a sizeable group who say they 'Don't know' how they feel (25%, up 2pp).



Question: In the overseas aid sector there is a call to 'Shift the Power'. This is about enabling local development organisations to take decisions for their local communities, with international aid organisations playing a supporting role. It recognises the expertise of local organisations and allows them to mobilise local resources and build capacity for long-term development. Which, if any, of the following words generally describe your feelings about the movement to 'Shift the Power' (Please tick up to four options). | Sample size 2025 n=2,084 & 2023 n=2,049 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

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WHO SHOULD TAKE LEAD IN DEVELOPMENT?



Question: Which of the following statements comes closest to your view? | Sample size 2025 n=2,084 & 2023 n=2,049 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

37%

say local development organisations should take the lead, with UK organisations taking a supporting role

11% of respondents think the UK Government should lead in delivering aid programmes, with local organisations playing a supporting role; up 3pp from 2023.

27% think a partnership between UK and local organisations is the best way to deliver aid programs, down from 33% in 2023.

In sum, respondents are moving more to either UK or local leadership, with fewer citing partnership.

Again, 26% of respondents say they 'Don't know'.

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SHOULD LOCAL ORGANISATIONS TAKE DECISIONS?

42%

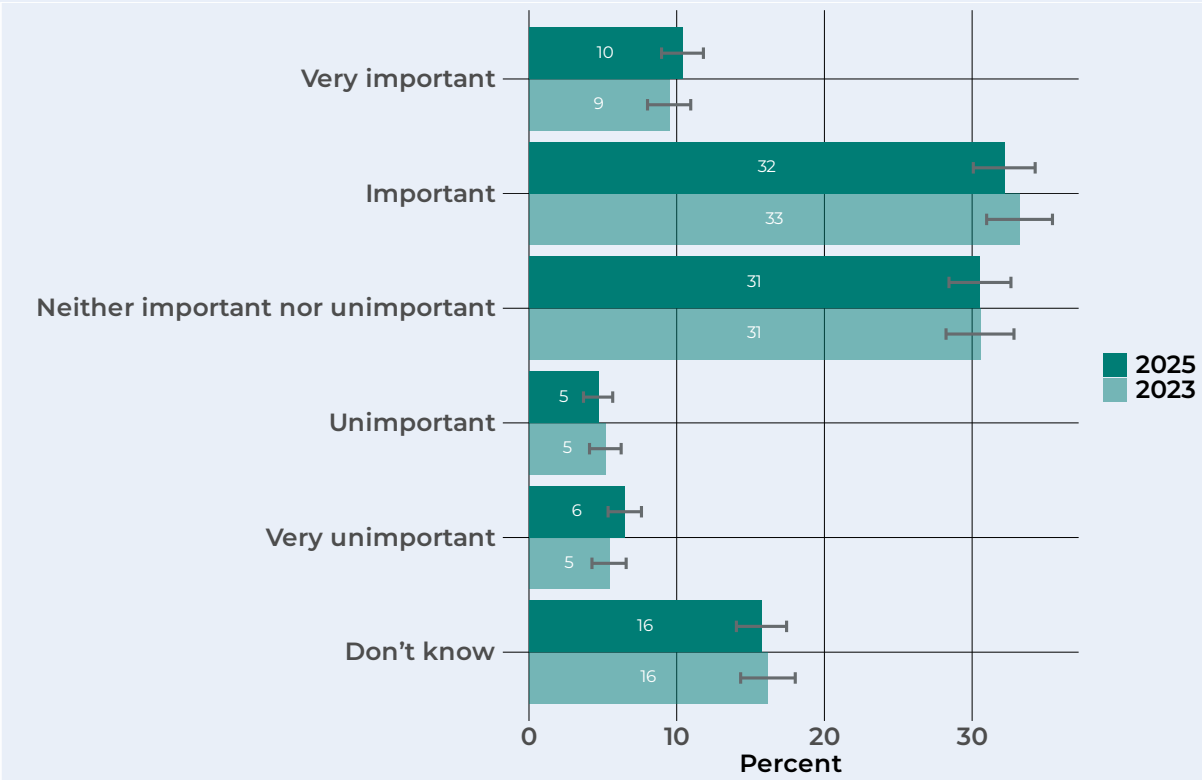
say it is (very) important for local development organisations to take most of the decisions on how aid is spent

There is good support among the British public for local leadership and decision making.

More than 4 in 10 say that it is (very) important for local organisations to take most of the decisions on how aid is spent.

There has been very little change in attitudes since 2023.

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Question: How important is it to you personally, if at all, that local development organisations working in poor countries take most of the decisions on how aid is spent? | Sample size 2025 n=2,084 & 2023 n=2,049 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

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UNDERSTANDING SUPPORT FOR SHIFT THE POWER

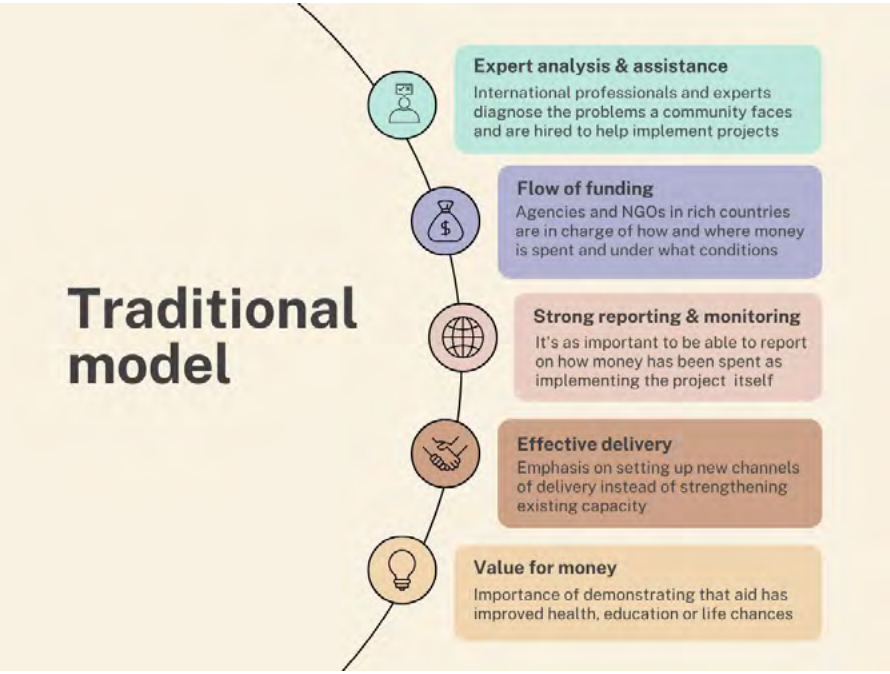
- To better understand the extent to which respondents support the shift the power approach, we identified 5 key dimensions of the 'Traditional' model (TM) – i.e. the current model of aid – and of the 'Shift the Power' model (StP) for comparison.
- We randomly assigned respondents into three groups
  - 1. Saw dimensions of the Traditional Approach
  - 2. Saw dimensions of the Shift the Power Approach
  - 3. Saw dimensions of both approaches
- The aim was to see, within each model, what is most important to respondents, and when putting the TM and StP head-to-head, which features did respondents think are most important.

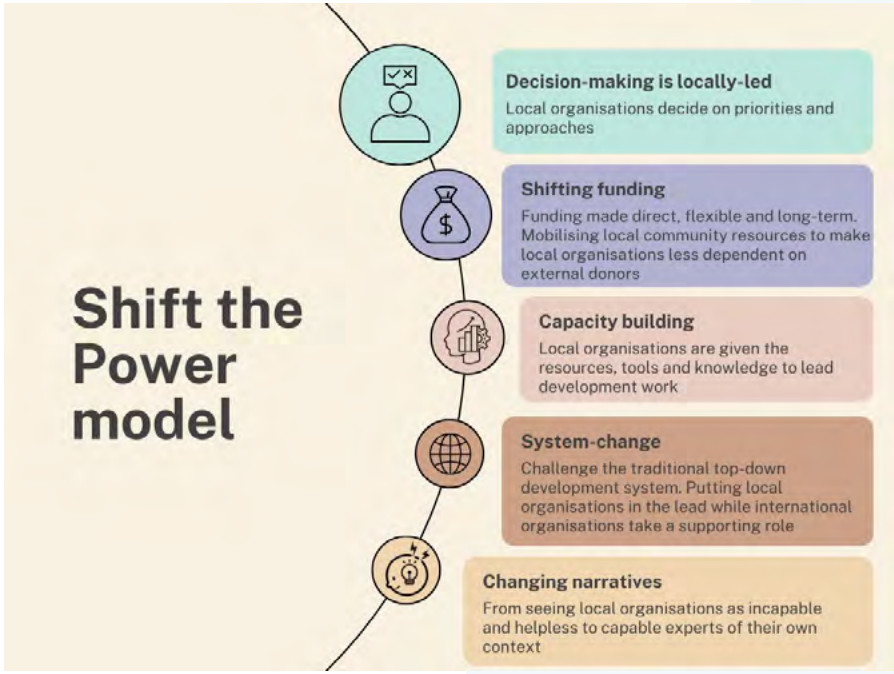


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SIDE BY SIDE COMPARISON OF THE TRADITIONAL MODEL AND THE SHIFT THE POWER MODEL





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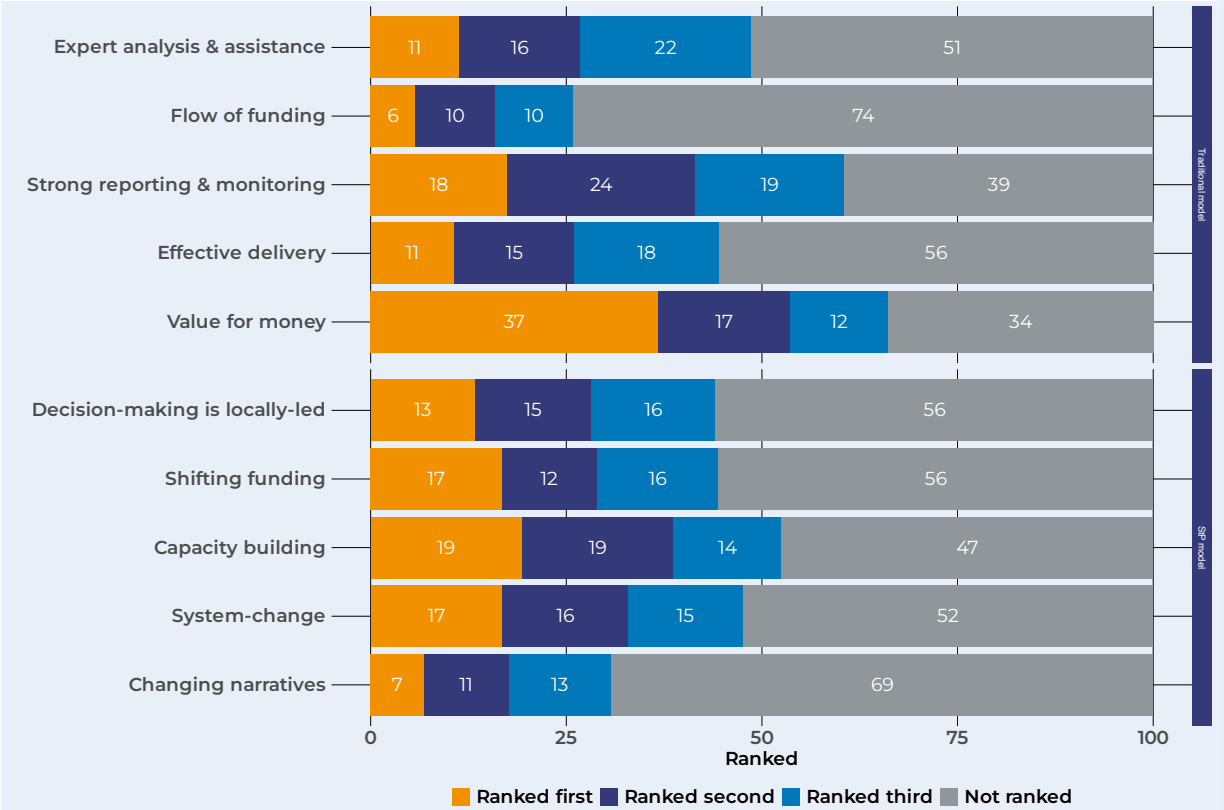


SUPPORT FOR ASPECTS OF DIFFERENT MODELS

The top block shows which dimensions of the **TM** respondents ranked as first, second and third most important. Value for money (37%) came top of the list, followed by strong reporting and monitoring (18%) (top two in 2025 and 2023). There is slightly stronger preference for expert analysis and assistance in 2025, however as shown in the next slide, none of these changes are statistically different.

In the bottom block, respondents ranked the dimensions of the **StP model**. At top was capacity building (19%), followed by system change and shifting funding both at 17%, but most top choices were equally clustered. Changing narratives is not seen as an important aspect of the StP approach with just 6% of respondents ranking it first. As shown in the next slide, the importance of locally led decision making fell by 10pp (aggregate across all 3 top ranked).

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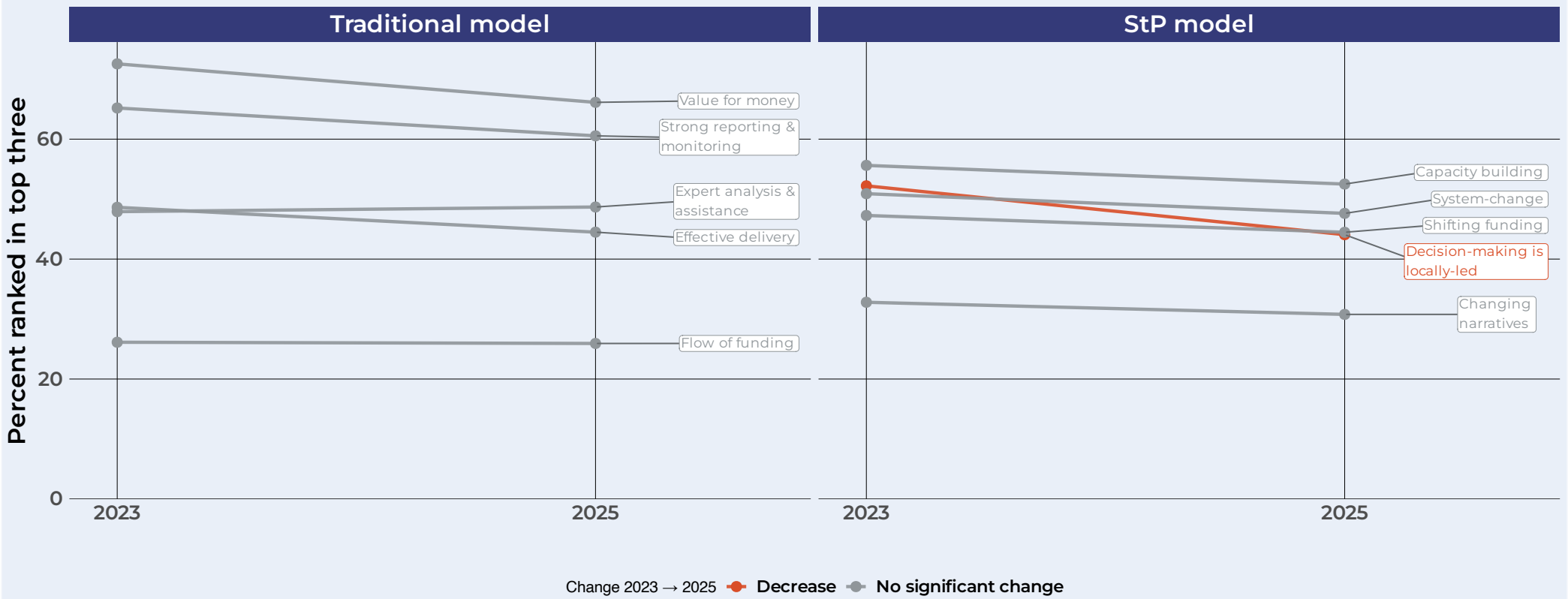
Question: Thinking about the different aspects of how overseas aid can be delivered, please indicate which you think are the three most important | Sample size n=2,084 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

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MOSTLY NON-SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN IMPORTANT ELEMENTS



Question: Thinking about the different aspects of how overseas aid can be delivered, please indicate which you think are the three most important (share ranking each in their top three). | Sample size n=2,084 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

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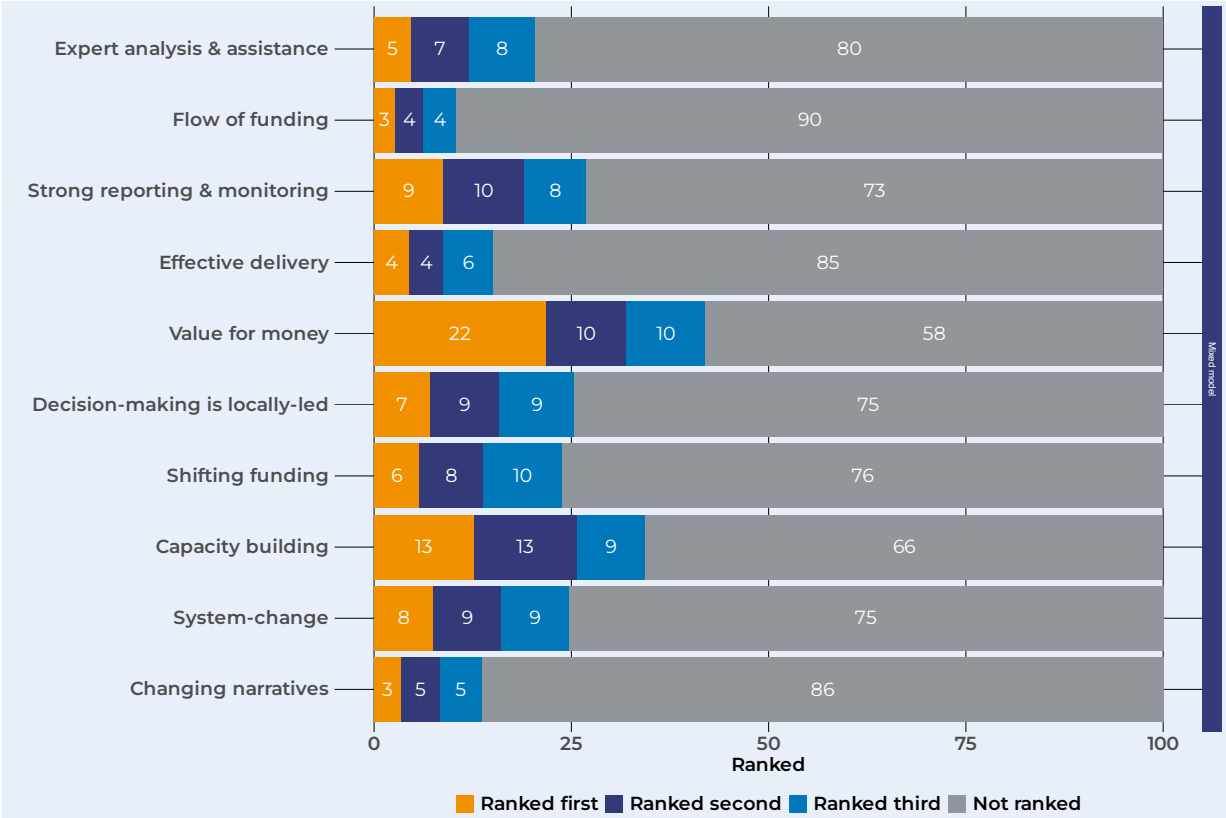
SUPPORT WHEN ALL ASPECTS SHOWN

In this plot we combined the 10 elements of the Traditional and StP models and again ask respondents to choose the three most important.

Similar to 2023, 'value for money' is the most important element followed by 'capacity building'.

Similar to 2023, flow of funding, changing narratives and effective delivery are seen as the least important elements of overseas aid funding models.

As shown in the next slide, the only significant change is in locally led decision-making, which was third in 2023, but now sits as fourth most important overall.



Question: Thinking about the different aspects of how overseas aid can be delivered, please indicate which you think are the three most important | Sample size n=2,084 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

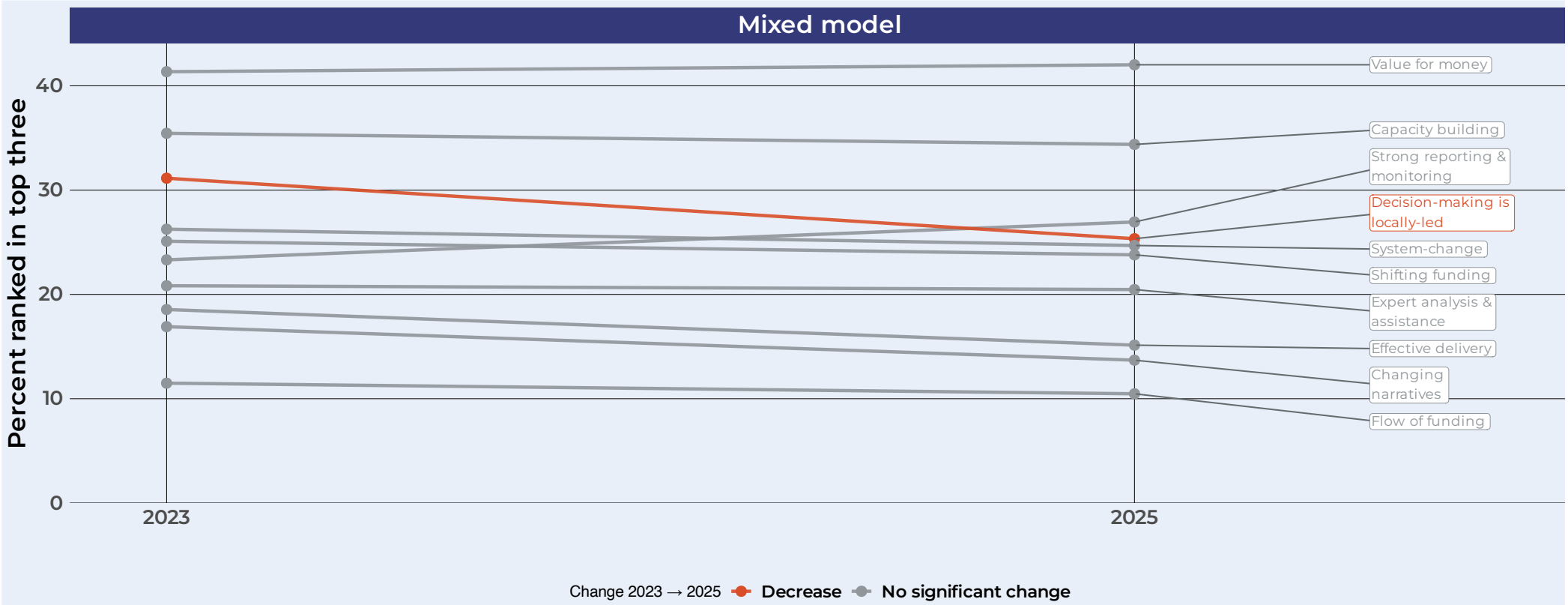
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MOSTLY NON-SIGNIFICANT CHANGE
SAME ITEM: DECISION-MAKING IS LOCALLY LED



Question: Thinking about the different aspects of how overseas aid can be delivered, please indicate which you think are the three most important (share ranking each in their top three), Mixed model. | Sample size n=2,084 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

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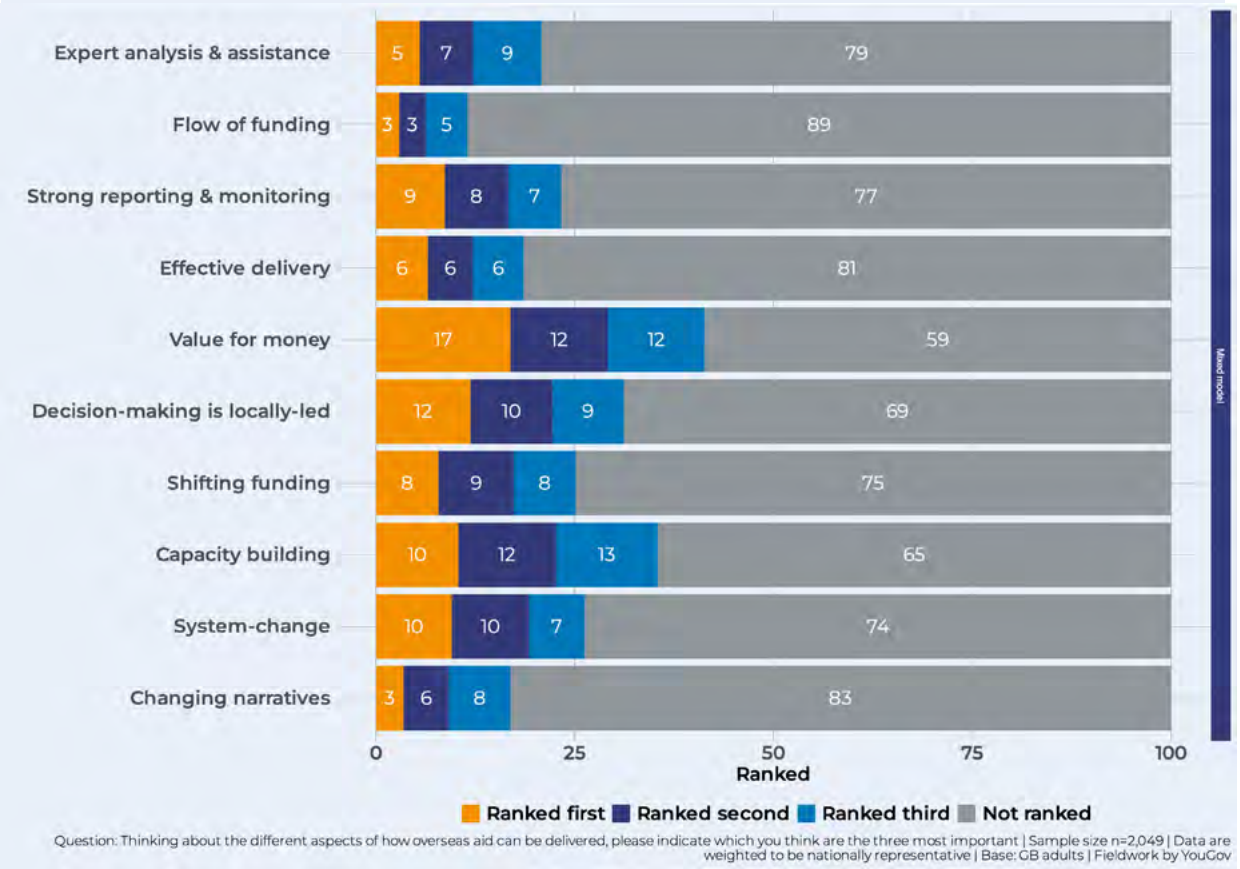
SHIFT THE POWER: WHAT DO THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK
AUDIENCE INSIGHTS (2025)



SUPPORT WHEN ALL ASPECTS SHOWN (2023)

Note: this is the 2023 data for comparison purposes.

- When the traditional and StP model characteristics are combined, people indicate 'value for money' as the most important element.
- However, the next 3 most important dimensions come from the StP model: decision-making is locally led (12%); capacity building and system change (10%). This is followed by strong reporting and monitory (9%) and shifting funding (8%).
- These findings correspond with reservations expressed during the focus group discussions concerning the fear that money would be wasted due to, for instance, corruption.
- However, it also suggests with reassurances around VFM, the StP model aligns well with existing public preferences.



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4. MESSAGE TESTING

Which messages work best and for which audiences?



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MESSAGE TESTING METHODOLOGY

- We tested 54 messages covering each aspect of the Shift the Power model, contributions from Comic Relief, as well as messages designed by the research team drawing on the focus groups and DEL research.
- Respondents were shown two randomly selected statements from a total pool of 54. The question was repeated five times, each with randomly generated messaged.
- Respondents were presented with a short preface and then asked:
  - *"Please tell us whether you agree more with the first statement or the second statement – even if neither is exactly right."*



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WHAT RESPONDENTS SAW: MESSAGE TESTING SET-UP

YouGov

Which statement do you personally agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?

Statement A	Statement B
It doesn't matter whether UK or local organisations deliver aid, as long as decisions on how aid is spent are transparent, aid is effective, and the results are measurable.	We need to mobilise local community resources in developing countries to make local organisations less dependent on external aid donors like the UK.

Thinking about you personally, which statement do you think is most convincing, even if neither is exactly right?

- ○ Statement A
- ○ Statement B

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SAMPLE MESSAGES

- We need to shift decision-making power to local organisations in developing countries that are better placed to deliver aid where it is needed over the long-term.
- We need to embrace a vision of a 'good society' built around core values of equality, democracy and sustainability. We need global solidarity and shared leadership in overseas aid.
- UK aid organisations have the advantage of seeing the 'bigger picture' when it comes to implementing aid programmes. If local organisations were in charge, they would only pay attention to what their local community needs.
- UK development organisations who deliver overseas aid are more transparent, efficient, and accountable than organisations in developing countries.
- It's good that donations from the UK public to Comic Relief's Red Nose Day appeal will be doubled by the UK government and will go towards empowering locally led organisations in Ghana, Zambia and Malawi.
- It's good that the UK government will match fund up to £6m of public donations to Comic Relief's Red Nose Day appeal. Thanks to your generosity locally led organisations across Ghana, Zambia and Malawi will be able to bring lasting change to communities supporting women and girls to fulfil their potential.

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SAME THREE WILD CARDS / CLICHES

- Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.
- Charity begins at home.
- Charity begins at home, but doesn't end there.

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RANKINGS

Ranking of all 54 messages from most to least popular



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AUDIENCE INSIGHTS (2025)

MESSAGES LEAGUE TABLE DISTRIBUTION (2025)

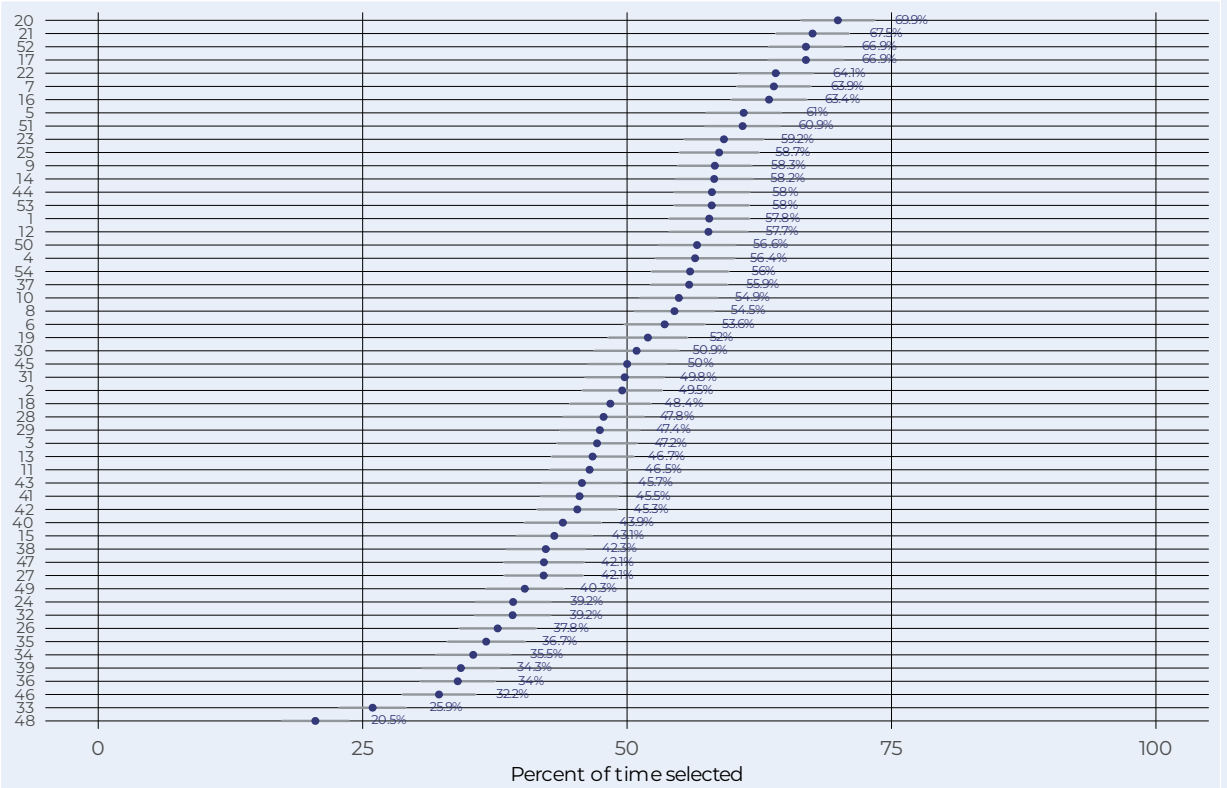
This figure shows all 54 messages in rank order. The percentage is the percentage of time that a message was chosen against any other message. Messages above 50% performed better than average; messages below 50% performed worse than average.

The best performing message was selected 70% of the times it was shown to respondents.

The worst performing message was selected just 21% of the times it was shown.

Of the 54 messages: 23 performed better than average or random; 12 did not perform significantly different from average (as shown by confidence interval crossing the 50% line); 19 messages performed statistically less well on average.

For a full list of messages (with accompanying message number) please see the accompanying spreadsheet 'DEL_StP_Message_Testing_Sept2025.xlsx'



Question: Respondents were shown 5 random pairs of statements and each time were asked: 'Which statement do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?'| Sample size n=2,084 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

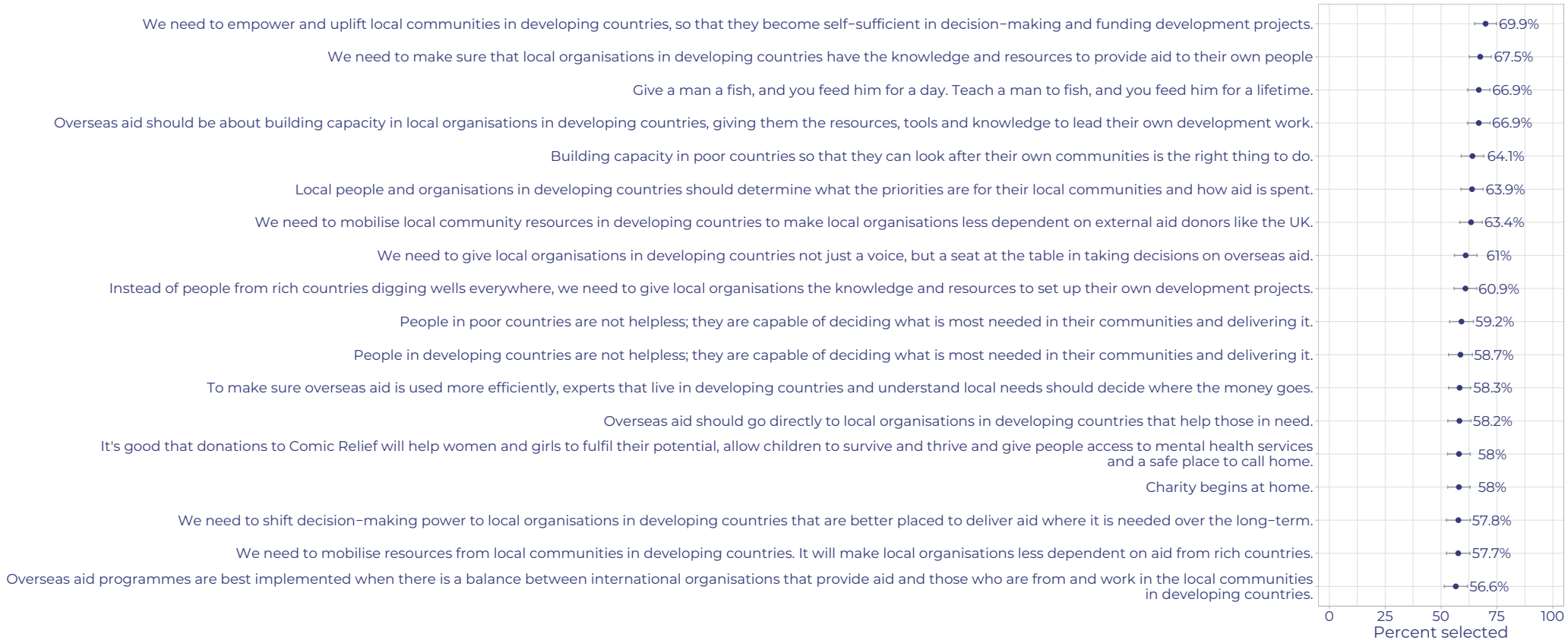
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BEST PERFORMING MESSAGES: 2025



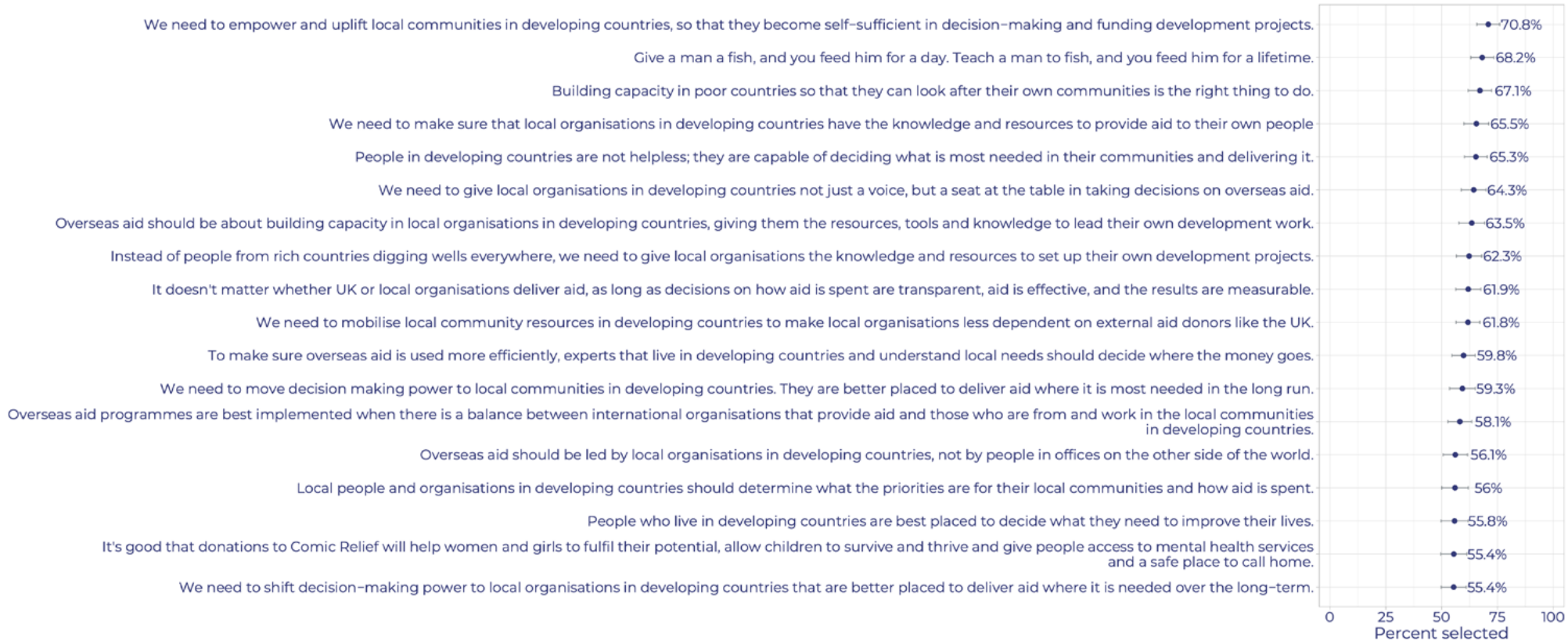
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BEST PERFORMING MESSAGES: 2023



Question: Respondents were shown 5 random pairs of statements and each time were asked: 'Which statement do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?'| Sample size n=2,049 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov

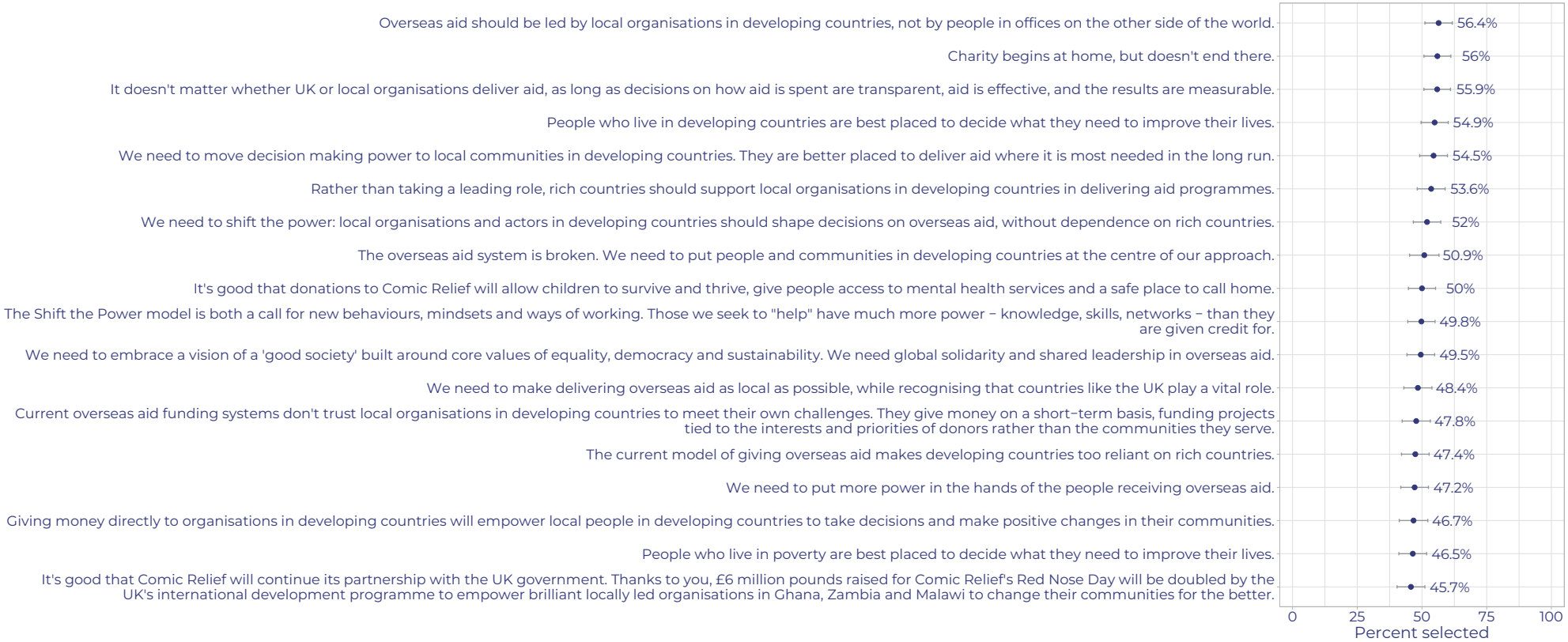
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AVERAGE PERFORMING MESSAGES: 2025



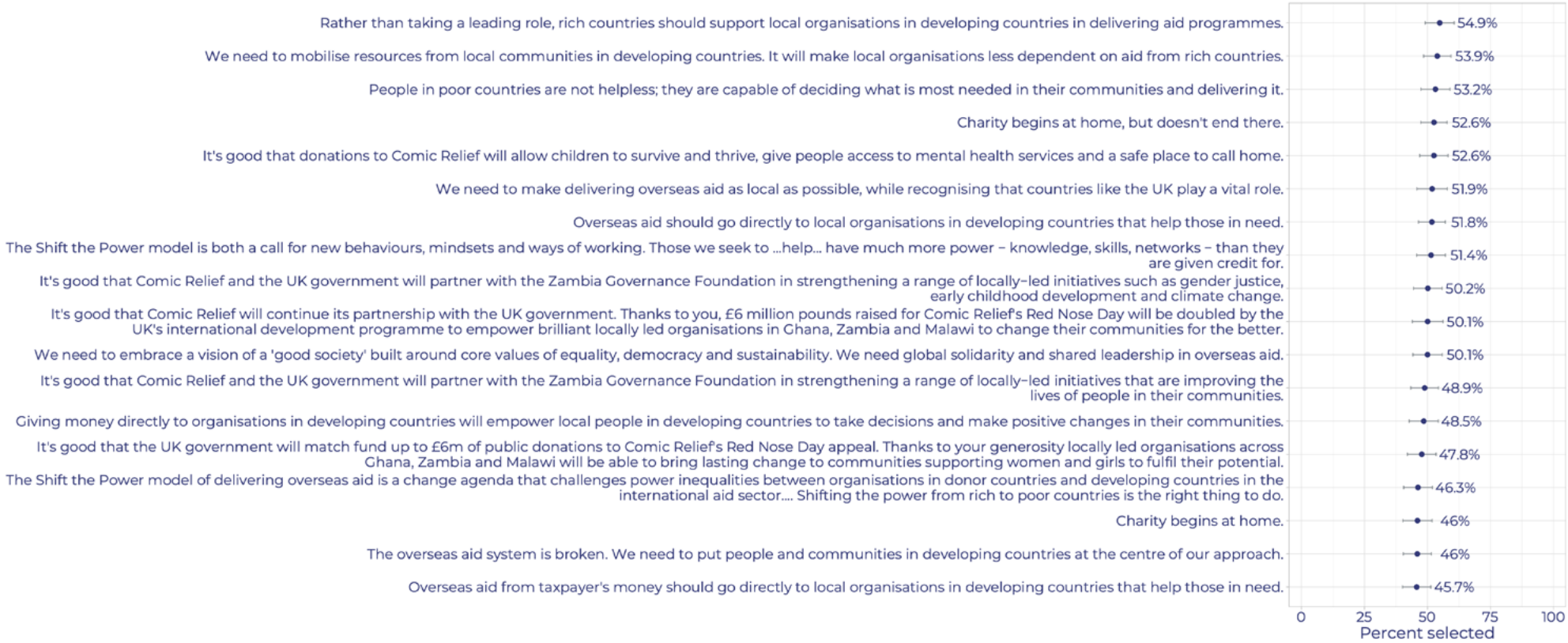
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AVERAGE PERFORMING MESSAGES: 2023



Question: Respondents were shown 5 random pairs of statements and each time were asked: 'Which statement do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?'| Sample size n=2,049 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov

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WORST PERFORMING MESSAGES: 2025



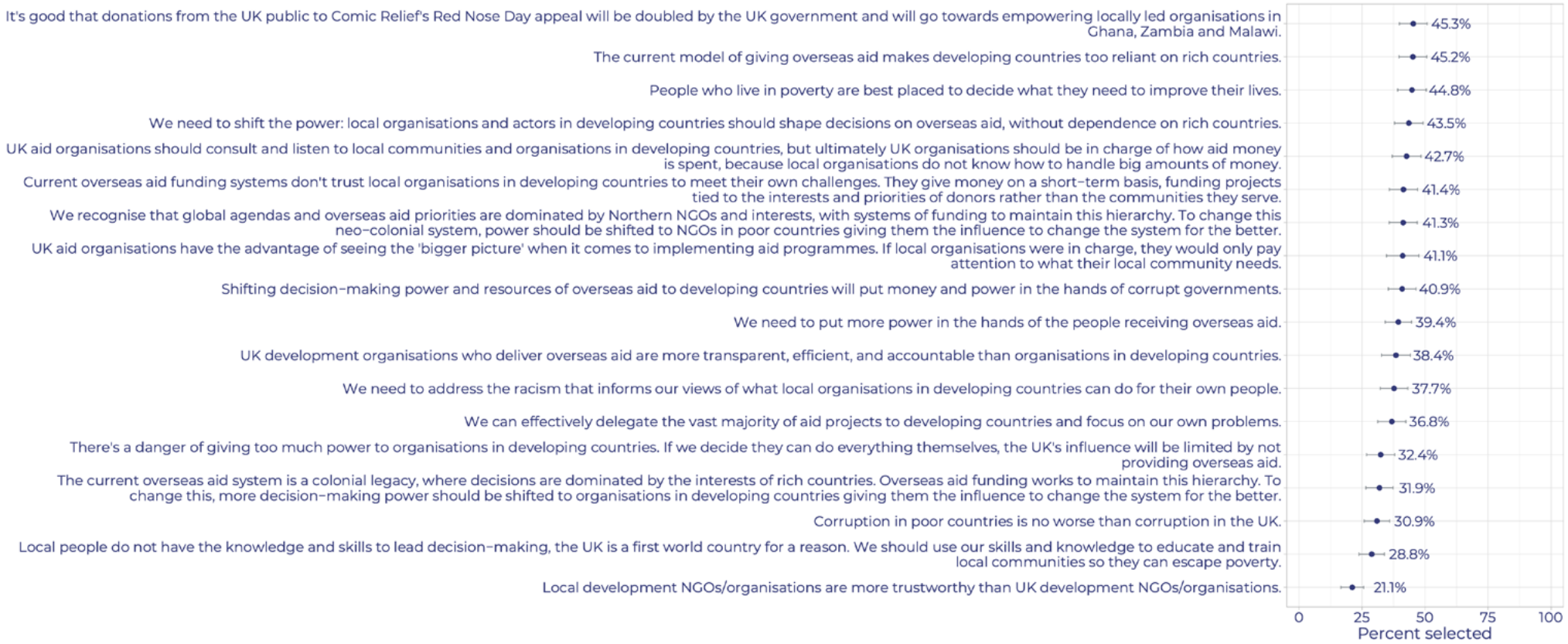
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SHIFT THE POWER: WHAT DO THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK AUDIENCE INSIGHTS (2025)



WORST PERFORMING MESSAGES: 2023



Question: Respondents were shown 5 random pairs of statements and each time were asked: 'Which statement do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?'| Sample size n=2,049 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov

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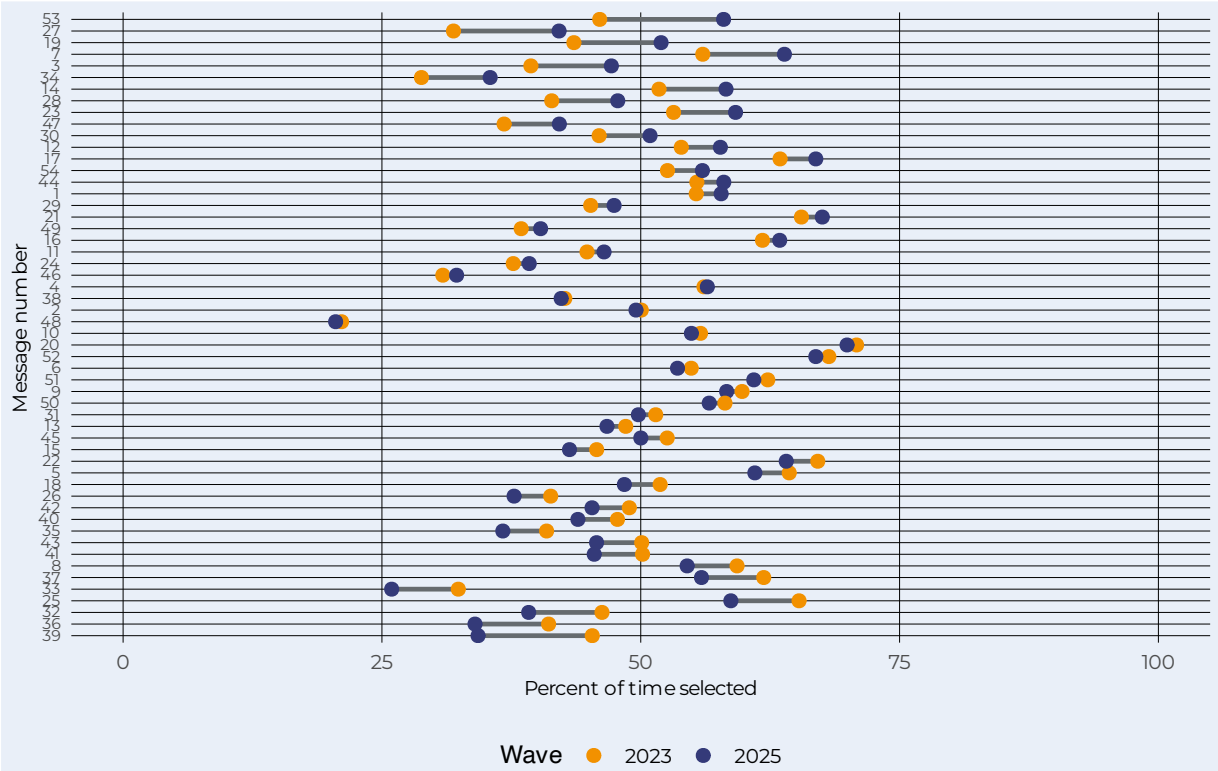
CHANGE IN MESSAGE PERFORMANCE: 2023 *VS* 2025

This plot shows each message's performance in 2023 versus 2025. The closer to the top the bigger the positive change from 2023 to 2025. The closer to the bottom the greater the negative change from 2023 to 2025.

It also shows, though, that some big changes, e.g. message 27 (*The current overseas aid system is a colonial legacy, where decisions are dominated by the interests of rich countries. Overseas aid funding works to maintain this hierarchy. To change this, more decision-making power should be shifted to organisations in developing countries giving them the influence to change the system for the better.*), the second largest increase, started from a low level in 2023.

For a full list of messages (with accompanying message number) please see the accompanying spreadsheet 'DEL_StP_Message_Testing_Sept2025.xlsx'

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Question: Respondents were shown 5 random pairs of statements and each time were asked: 'Which statement do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?' Results show the share of pairings where each message was chosen, by wave (2023 vs 2025). | Sample size n=2,084 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

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AUDIENCE INSIGHTS (2025)



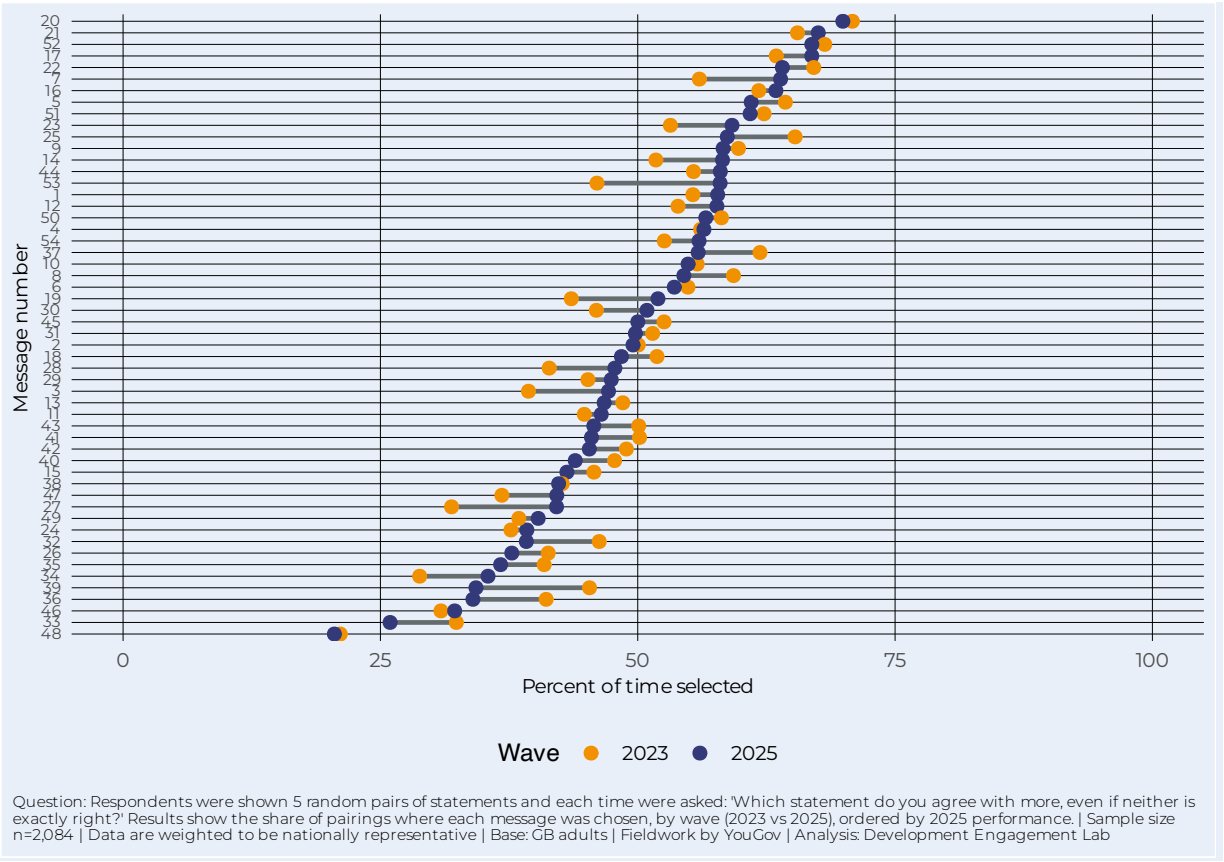
CHANGE IN MESSAGE PERFORMANCE: 2023 *VS* 2025

This plot provides an alternative view of change in message performance from 2023 to 2025.

It is ordered by the best performing messages in 2025 and shows that the best performing message, 'We need to empower and uplift local communities in developing countries, so that they become self-sufficient in decision-making and funding development projects', remains the best performing message and has changed very little.

However, message 53, 'Charity begins at home', was one of the biggest movers. In 2023, this message scored below average (46%), but in 2025 scored better than average at 58%.

For a full list of messages (with accompanying message number) please see the accompanying spreadsheet 'DEL_StP_Message_Testing_Sept2025.xlsx'



Question: Respondents were shown 5 random pairs of statements and each time were asked: 'Which statement do you agree with more, even if neither is exactly right?' Results show the share of pairings where each message was chosen, by wave (2023 vs 2025), ordered by 2025 performance. | Sample size n=2,084 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

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WHICH MESSAGE FOR WHICH AUDIENCE?

Which sub-groups in the populations preferred certain messages and turned off by others?



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HOW YOU CAN DIG IN

- We have created an interactive Excel spreadsheet that shows the aggregate score for each message and allows you to reorder the more or less successful statements for different audiences.
- The spreadsheet contains cuts by age (generation), gender, region, education, income class, political voting, supporter or opponent of aid spending, donor, and racial attitudes.
- There are a number of significant differences among the different groups.



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SHIFT THE POWER: WHAT DO THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK
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USE EXAMPLE: REFORM UK

Statement Overall Rank	Statement Text	Reform UK	Green
14	Charity begins at home.	93	53
3	Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.	84.8	49.9
7	We need to mobilise local community resources in developing countries to make local organisations less	78.2	58.1
5	Building capacity in poor countries so that they can look after their own communities is the right thing to	77.2	38.3
4	Overseas aid should be about building capacity in local organisations in developing countries, giving them	75.9	81.1
13	Overseas aid should go directly to local organisations in developing countries that help those in need.	69	59.4
9	Instead of people from rich countries digging wells everywhere, we need to give local organisations the kn	68.2	61.2
6	Local people and organisations in developing countries should determine what the priorities are for their	66.9	39.3
32	The current model of giving overseas aid makes developing countries too reliant on rich countries.	66.6	55.1
20	Charity begins at home, but doesn't end there.	66.3	67.3
1	We need to empower and uplift local communities in developing countries, so that they become self-suffi	65.6	51.7
41	UK aid organisations should consult and listen to local communities and organisations in developing cour	64.6	16.6
17	We need to mobilise resources from local communities in developing countries. It will make local organis	63.4	69.8
8	We need to give local organisations in developing countries not just a voice, but a seat at the table in taki	62.5	64.2
2	We need to make sure that local organisations in developing countries have the knowledge and resources	61.8	49
43	We can effectively delegate the vast majority of aid projects to developing countries and focus on our ow	61.8	16.1
21	It doesn't matter whether UK or local organisations deliver aid, as long as decisions on how aid is spent ar	61.5	24.6
12	To make sure overseas aid is used more efficiently, experts that live in developing countries and understa	61.2	54.2
11	People in developing countries are not helpless; they are capable of deciding what is most needed in thei	60.9	64.1
10	People in poor countries are not helpless; they are capable of deciding what is most needed in their comn	58.9	79.5
22	People who live in developing countries are best placed to decide what they need to improve their lives.	56.4	38.9
18	Overseas aid programmes are best implemented when there is a balance between international organisa	55.6	69.6
16	We need to shift decision-making power to local organisations in developing countries that are better pla	54.1	79
24	Rather than taking a leading role, rich countries should support local organisations in developing countrie	53.6	54.3
31	Current overseas aid funding systems don't trust local organisations in developing countries to meet thei	51.9	42.1

93%

93%

of Reform UK voters agree that charity begins at home with only 58% overall

To pick an example, looking at those who voted Reform UK, they are much more positive (overindex) on the notion that 'Overseas aid should go directly to local organisations in developing countries that help those in need.' 69% versus 58% in the general population.

But they are much more likely to agree that 'Charity begins at home' (93% versus 58% for the population overall).

These insights are useful for microtargeting of messages, but equally to **see which messages cut through across groups and are suitable for broadcasting**.

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SHIFT THE POWER: WHAT DO THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK AUDIENCE INSIGHTS (2025)

5. POWER & VALUE FOR MONEY

How to people respond to colonialism, local-led, and shift the power?



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SHIFT THE POWER: WHAT DO THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK
AUDIENCE INSIGHTS (2025)

A CLOSER LOOK AT COLONIAL LEGACIES & VALUE FOR MONEY

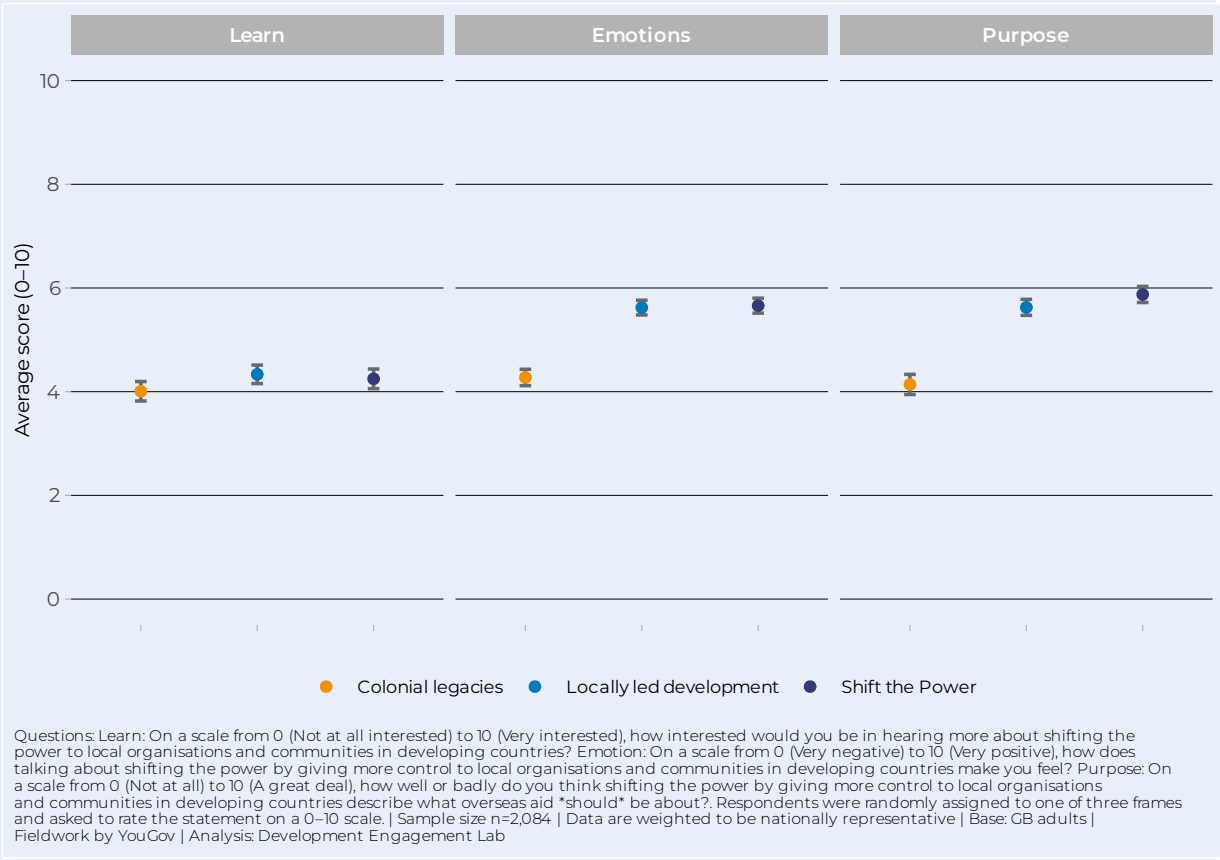
- Two key findings from Wave 1
  - Avoid use of the word and reference to colonial legacies and power; it turned off audiences who didn't want to engage in the broader political history and consequences of the traditional aid model
  - Value for money is the most important element of any aid funding model
- In this wave, we explored these concepts further to understand if the allergy to explicitly talking about power remains & what is behind the British public's thinking on value for money (VfM)



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SHIFT THE POWER: WHAT DO THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK
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COLONIAL LEGACIES VS LOCALLY-LED VS STP



Questions: Learn: On a scale from 0 (Not at all interested) to 10 (Very interested), how interested would you be in hearing more about shifting the power to local organisations and communities in developing countries? Emotion: On a scale from 0 (Very negative) to 10 (Very positive), how does talking about shifting the power by giving more control to local organisations and communities in developing countries make you feel? Purpose: On a scale from 0 (Not at all) to 10 (A great deal), how well or badly do you think shifting the power by giving more control to local organisations and communities in developing countries describe what overseas aid *should* be about?. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of three frames and asked to rate the statement on a 0–10 scale. | Sample size n=2,084 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

In this plot we wanted to understand how different frames – colonial legacies, shifting the power, and locally led development – affect respondents' 1) willingness to learn more, 2) how it makes them feel, and 3) whether this is what overseas aid should be about.

It is clear that the language of addressing colonial legacies depresses respondents' positive **sentiment** towards support for development efforts and agreement with what overseas aid **should be for**.

There is no effect for learning. None of the frames made respondents want to learn more.

Locally-led development and shifting the power both elicit significantly greater agreement with **the purpose of development assistance and how people feel about it** (more positive).

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SHIFT THE POWER: WHAT DO THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK AUDIENCE INSIGHTS (2025)

VALUE FOR MONEY: FREE TEXT RESPONSES

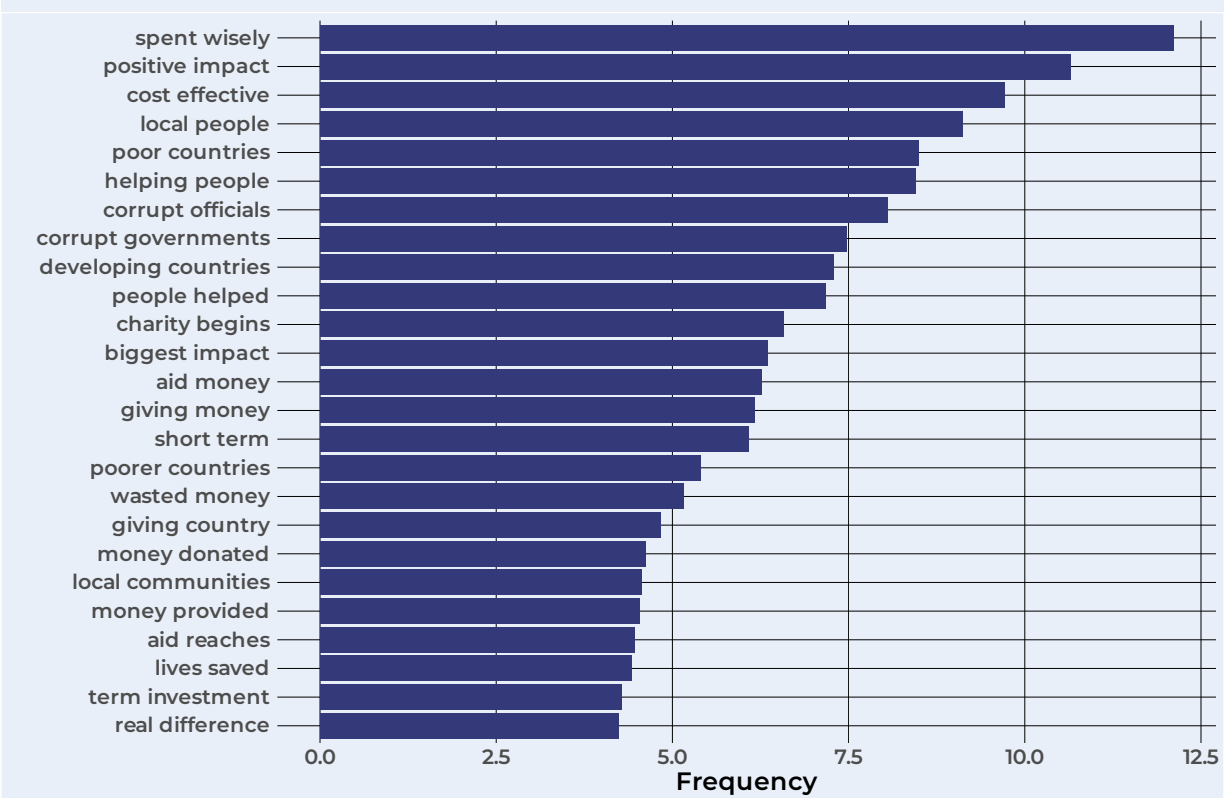
We asked respondents, *Thinking about overseas aid, what comes to mind when you hear the phrase 'value for money'*? The plot shows word pairs and the frequency of mention. This approach captures how people naturally articulate value for money, using their own language rather than predefined terminology.

On the one hand, many respondents frame value for money in outcome-focused terms such as "spent wisely," "positive impact," "cost effective," and "real difference." This suggests that public audiences are receptive to messages that emphasise tangible results, effectiveness, and visible benefits.

On the other hand, concerns about misuse remain prominent, with phrases like "corrupt governments," "corrupt officials," and "wasted money" appearing frequently. These phrases reflect an underlying scepticism about whether aid reaches the right people.

Value for money cannot be treated as a narrow financial concept or assumed to be self-evident. Effective communication needs to address both sides of the public's thinking: demonstrating impact and outcomes and showing how waste and corruption are prevented. Messages that focus solely on efficiency or cost-cutting risk reinforcing scepticism, while narratives that clearly link spending to real-world improvements — particularly for people and communities — are more likely to resonate.

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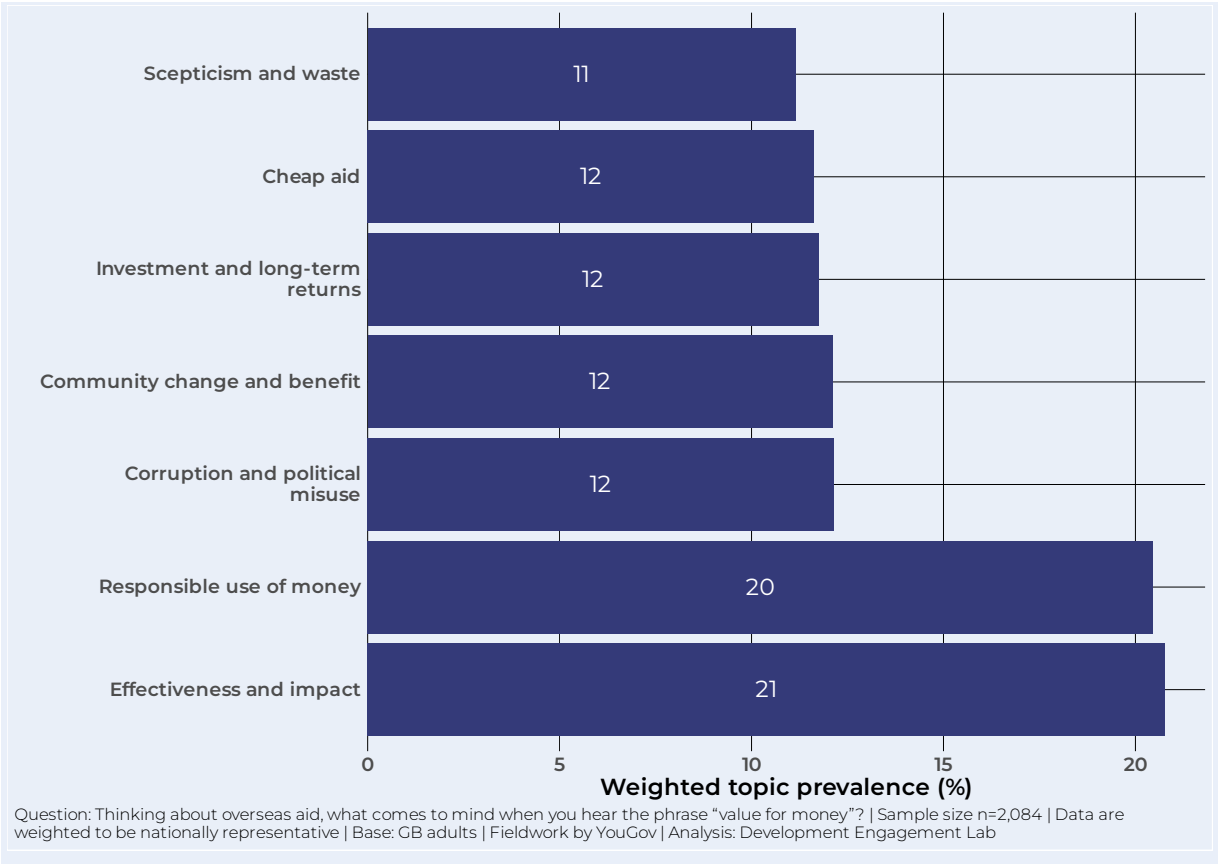
Question: Thinking about overseas aid, what comes to mind when you hear the phrase "value for money"? (Removed 'overseas aid' and 'money spent' as top two answers) | Sample size n=2,084 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

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SHIFT THE POWER: WHAT DO THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK AUDIENCE INSIGHTS (2025)



WHAT DOES ‘VALUE FOR MONEY’ MEAN?



Question: Thinking about overseas aid, what comes to mind when you hear the phrase “value for money”? | Sample size n=2,084 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

When asked what ‘value for money’ in overseas aid means to them, respondents did not converge on a single interpretation. Instead, seven distinct understandings emerged, ranging from sceptical views that the phrase is meaningless or associated with waste, to more positive frames emphasising effectiveness, long-term investment, and sustained community benefit.

To analyse responses to the open-ended question, we used a topic modelling approach that groups together answers using similar language and ideas. This allowed us to identify the main themes that respondents associate with “value for money” in overseas aid, without imposing predefined categories.

7 clear topics emerged. The prevalence is shown in the graph here, and the topics are further described on the next slide.

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SHIFT THE POWER: WHAT DO THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK
AUDIENCE INSIGHTS (2025)

THE SEVEN ‘VALUE FOR MONEY’ TOPICS

- Cheap aid
  - Core idea: Value for money as getting something decent at a low price
  - Respondents thinking in consumer terms: low cost, reasonable quality, basic service provision. A very transactional, consumer-logic frame.
- Scepticism and waste
  - Core idea: “Value for money” is meaningless, wasteful, or unmeasurable
  - A rejection frame: people doubt that value for money exists or can be demonstrated. Aid means and can achieve nothing.
- Effectiveness and impact
  - Core idea: Aid should actually help and produce real outcomes
  - Value for money as effectiveness — whether aid makes a real difference. The the classic “what works?” frame.
- Community change and benefit
  - Core idea: Durable, locally beneficial outcomes for communities
  - Value for money as sustained community-level change, not short-term projects. Aligns strongly with StP and localisation narratives.
- Responsible use of money
  - Core idea: Spending wisely, fairly, and proportionately
  - Value for money as careful, ethical use of public money. This is a fiscal responsibility frame, not anti-aid.
- Corruption and political misuse
  - Core idea: Aid is lost to corruption, government, or the wrong places
  - Value for money is undermined by corruption, elites, and misallocation. Distinct from Topic 2 — people believe in the concept but think it fails in practice.
- Investment and long-term returns
  - Core idea: Aid as investment rather than charity
  - Value for money as investment with future payoffs, not immediate savings. One of the most normatively positive frames.

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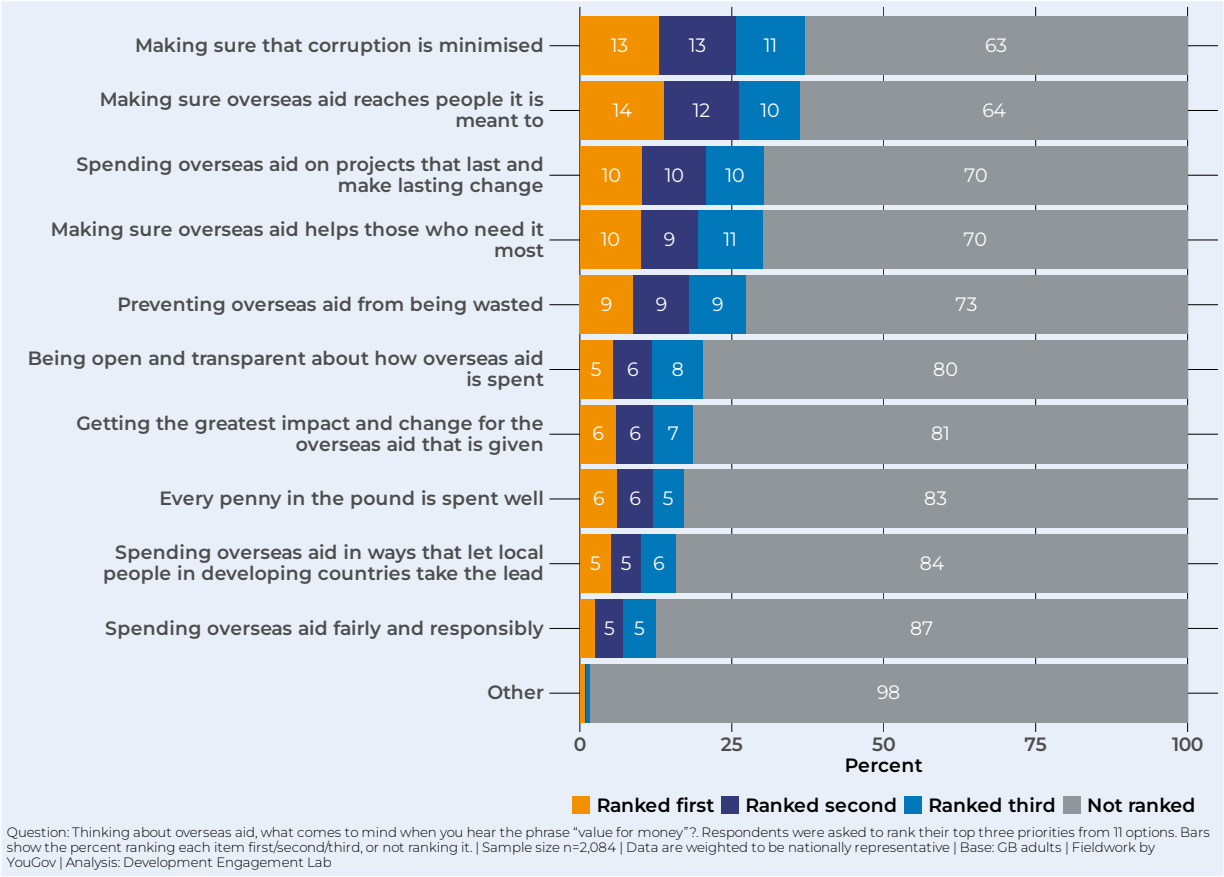


VALUE FOR MONEY (VFM)

Finally, in addition the free text responses, we asked respondents, 'Which of the following, if any, do you think the UK government should prioritise to get "value for money" in their approach to overseas aid? Please rank up to three, with the first being the most important priority, second being the second most important priority and third being the third most important priority'.

The plot those that 'making sure overseas aid reaches the people it is meant to' (14%) received the highest number of first ranked preferences, followed by 'making sure that corruption is minimised' (13%). However, the latter was ranked top overall, by the smallest margin.

Public understandings of 'value for money' centre less on cost-cutting and more on trust, outcomes, and integrity in delivery. Relatively low prioritisation of transparency and localisation suggests these are not intuitive public entry points for thinking about value for money, even if they matter operationally.



Question: Thinking about overseas aid, what comes to mind when you hear the phrase "value for money"?. Respondents were asked to rank their top three priorities from 11 options. Bars show the percent ranking each item first/second/third, or not ranking it. | Sample size n=2,084 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Base: GB adults | Fieldwork by YouGov | Analysis: Development Engagement Lab

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The Development Engagement Lab (DEL) is a five-year study of public attitudes and engagement with global development in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States (2018-2023).

DEL is a partner focussed research programme, convening and co-producing research and insights with over 30 international development NGOs and government agencies to understand the drivers of engagement and inform development communications.

Fieldwork is carried out by YouGov and surveys are weighted to be a nationally representative of the adult population. DEL is a grantee of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and led by Professor Jennifer Hudson (University College London) and Professor David Hudson (University of Birmingham).

The **Development Engagement Lab** (Aid Attitudes Tracker Phase 2) has three goals:

1. Co-production of an evidence base for development campaigning
2. Enabling collaboration across the sector
3. Increasing advocacy capacity through the sharing of research and strategic insights

You can find out more information about DEL research at www.developmentcompass.org, follow us on Twitter @DevEngageLab or by contacting del@ucl.ac.uk.

Image on title slide:: Vidushi Yadav
https://www.instagram.com/p/CpkYgwYSicS/?img_index=1

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