

# Perspectives

## CAMPAIGNING AND DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN THE ERA OF DIFFUSED KNOWLEDGE ARENAS

**Son Gyoh**

**Abstract:** This article revives the debate about campaigning and development education (DE), and challenges a widely held view that their distinctive approaches to public engagement are polar opposites, and their methodologies mutually exclusive. It highlights an increasing convergence of the wider objectives of the two endeavours, by arguing how DE and non-governmental organisation (NGO) campaigning target the same constituency. The article is inspired by the findings of a recently submitted doctoral thesis that explored the knowledge dimension of NGO campaigning, and the way virtual public arenas are used to sustain a network of social actors that generate and multiply narratives about development and global poverty.

The article develops a central argument made in the thesis on the complementary role NGO campaigning offers in addressing an inherent tension in DE around its political dimensions and the autonomy of the learning public. The opportunity for NGO campaigners to use their networks as public arenas for meaning making is argued to mitigate the issues of indoctrination associated with approaches to DE. The article makes particular reference to shifts in the way NGOs describe their campaigning as based on knowledge, understanding and values, and how these functions align with the foundations of DE to build public support and competency for action against global inequality (Bourn, 2008). The article further analyses the way the communication channels adopted in both endeavours to engage and mobilise autonomous actors have been harmonised by the digital information and communication era. Such momentous changes in the configuration of their audiences, the public share, and the resources for public mobilisation makes it imperative to review the long held positions that ignore shifts in the

dynamics DE and NGO campaigning operate in, as well as the changing environment and constitution of social actors they target.

**Key words:** Public perception; public deliberation; issue publics; counter-publics; knowledge catalysts.

The motivation to write this article came from my experience as a practitioner in development education (DE) in Ireland, and the contradictions I encountered in mainstream discourses as an actor associated with the inclusion of ‘global South perspectives’. The article aims to explore ways in which campaigners, as well as the perspectives of the assumed beneficiaries of non-governmental organisations’ (NGO) campaigning activities can be included in initiatives aimed at increasing public understanding about global inequality. It highlights new possibilities in NGO campaigning, and argues its complementarity with DE as endeavours that seek to challenge global poverty and inequality through engagement with the public. Campaigning shares common objectives with fields of global education (GE) such as DE and global citizenship education (GCE), to increase public awareness, influence attitudes and mobilise public action through the provision of information and education about development and global poverty. However, unlike campaigning, these fields of GE have their foundation in liberal education, and this presents the problem of how their objective to influence public perceptions and attitudes avoid accusations of indoctrination (Brown, 2013; Elliot, et al., 2010; Standish, 2012).

This article contributes to debates on the complementary role NGO campaigning can play in addressing contradictions in the political dimension of DE as a pedagogical endeavour that propagates normative attitudes and values. In exploring how the practices of both endeavours can work in mutuality, the article also examines common criticisms about campaigning as an activity that can change public perception and increase public knowledge about a defined problem. The arguments in this article draw on evidence from my recently submitted PhD research at the Institute of Education (IOE) in the University of London, in which I explored the knowledge dimension of

NGO campaigning about global poverty, and the way campaign issues are identified and communicated to campaign audiences. The research samples comprised two leading NGOs in the United Kingdom (UK) and one in Ireland, as well as two student-led campaign organisations in the UK that engage in development advocacy and educational programmes with schools. All the organisations were selected through a purposive sampling technique that considered their influence and experience in development advocacy and campaigning on global poverty. The rationale for adopting the purposive sampling technique was based on my background knowledge of the study population, which would enable me to quickly identify typical organisations that would provide rich data (Gomm et al., 2000).

I limit use of the term ‘campaigning’ to refer to activities that are undertaken by NGOs to create public awareness about social conditions they define as unjust, and for which they seek change through the provision of information to mobilise public action. In this definition, I exclude public appeals that are undertaken by NGOs to solicit donations even where such appeals are linked to the ‘unjust conditions’ they seek to change. Such a definition that makes a distinction between NGO charity appeals and their advocacy is important for analysing how campaigning can contribute to accomplishing these distinct but complementary interests.

### **Defining campaigners and campaigning**

Campaigners can be described as actors in the public domain that associate and organise around issues they define as unjust, and by which they mobilise, or are mobilised to take action in seeking change (Chapman & Fisher, 2000; Leipold, 2002). Campaigners are conceptualised in this article as a network of NGOs which interact with a range of audiences to communicate their message and extend their narrative to the wider public. On the other hand, *campaigning* is sometimes conceived of as an activity that takes place in the public sphere, and undertaken to achieve citizens’ awareness in mobilising action on a defined objective (Scheunflug & McDonnell, 2008). Campaigning is, therefore, a communication strategy adopted by NGOs or similar groups, in achieving citizenship outreach, and a means by which to

mobilise public support for their actions (Dechalert, 1999; Lang, 2013). My use of the term ‘campaigners’, therefore, includes actors in both membership and non-membership organisations. This conceptualisation of campaigners constructs them as co-opted actors that receive, disseminate and act on information that are framed by the organisation, with the aim of accomplishing a set of defined goals. It also provides the basis for understanding campaigners as NGO ‘issue publics’ that receive and extend a particular narrative of the campaign issue to the wider public.

As argued later in this article, the success of campaigning as an activity that can mobilise action and bring about change is not necessarily determined by how campaigners organise as membership or non-membership organisations. The landmine campaign is an example of a campaign action that influenced attitudes and change at both institutional and transnational levels, and in which campaigners were mobilised both as membership and non-members actors. Similarly, more radical campaign organisations such as youth-led campaign groups have been able to accomplish their objectives in challenging the activities of multinational corporations and policy institutions they perceive as unjust (Cox, 2011; Leipold, 2002). The common feature in these definitions is the description of campaigning as a communicative tool for achieving citizens’ outreach and action, and as a way of introducing new narratives that can provoke public deliberation (Dechalert, 1999).

While the focus of debates in the global poverty and **public engagement** discourse has been around the methodologies adopted in DE, and for NGO campaigning, the fundamental distinction between the two endeavours can be argued to reside in the principles that underline the approaches **deployed** in communicating the values they propagate. These principles can broadly be described as participatory and transformative *learning* in DE, and actionable and pertinent *knowledge* in campaigning (Gyoh, 2015). In examining the implications of these principles and the methodologies they promulgate, it is important to examine how campaigning and DE aim to achieve similar goals in reaching out to their audiences. DE emphasises the centrality of adopting a pedagogical process in programmes

and activities designed to promote public engagement and understanding about global poverty and inequality (Irish Aid, 2006; Tallon, 2013). Implicit in this approach to DE is the need to recognise the autonomy of the individual or learner, and the liberty of independent thinking. Ironically, it is these considerations and principles that are used in arguing the dichotomy between DE and campaigning that also provide the basis for the suggestions of indoctrination sometimes made about DE, in the way it promotes normative values (Standish, 2012).

Quite similar to the objectives of DE, NGO campaigning is planned and undertaken to influence public perceptions of global issues, create change in public attitudes and to spur public action. Both DE and NGO campaigning adopt approaches that propagate normative social conditions, and therefore, adopt particular narratives by which information and knowledge about global poverty is framed and communicated to the public. It is also important to state that the issues and structural reforms both endeavours are concerned with are of a political nature, and therefore, require the interrogation of institutional structures that sustain conditions they define as unjust. The liberal education foundation of DE means that the power imbalances in the production of development knowledge are insulated from interrogation and retained in framing the issue of conflict (Elliot et al., 2010). While it is uncertain how the programmes and methodologies adopted in DE are strengthening action against global poverty, it is even more difficult to discern how the type of actions they propose can accomplish change (Ní Chasaide, 2009). It is also unclear how detached individual actions contribute to challenging the root causes of global inequality.

Available literature indicates that campaigning is under-theorised in both DE and development NGO literature, where it is often described as a subset or the ‘action’ component of advocacy (Cox, 2011; Leipold, 2002; Medsin, n.d.). Similarly, the recent shifts in the way NGOs describe their campaigning as based on ‘values’ and ‘knowledge’ has not received adequate attention in DE literature. For example, Ní Chasaide (2009) has noted that campaign groups that have become professionalised categorise their

operations into skill sets that broadly include public education, policy analysis/lobbying and popular campaigning. These thematic classifications represent a strategic shift from the singular focus on action, and also highlight the importance of knowledge and values as the basis of campaign initiatives. With regard to the peripheral attention campaigning has received from researchers in the development and global justice community, Ní Chasaide suggested that the difficulty in documenting evolutionary experiences could be explained in part by the operational delineation between DE and campaigning (ibid). This dichotomy is further accentuated by the use of funding guidelines by state policy institutions to influence the trajectory of practices, discourses, and the methodologies adopted in DE. For example, both the Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK, and Irish Aid do not include campaigning in their funding programmes for building public support and raising awareness about development issues (COI, 2011; Irish Aid, 2007).

### **The convergence of principles and objectives**

Although the need to understand possible overlaps between DE and campaigning has been discussed by some authors (see for example, Hilary, 2013; Ní Chasaide, 2009), the greater focus has been on exploring how learning can strengthen action for social justice. In examining such overlaps, it is also important to give attention to the principles that underline their distinctive methodologies in which DE is deployed through *learning*, and campaigning through *informing or knowing*. While the theory and practice of DE has incorporated social learning theories in its approach and discourse, NGO campaigning has only recently begun to define its foundation on values understanding and *informational* knowledge (Gyoh, 2015). These qualities emerged as principles that underpin approaches to campaigning about global poverty adopted by both the international NGOs and the student-led campaign organisations that were included in the thesis sample. In this regard, campaigning is as much about *raising* public awareness of an action as it is about *increasing* public understanding about the root issue. In the common aim to challenge global poverty and inequality, both DE and NGO campaigning draw on the same stock of knowledge generated from NGO

field experience, and by policy institutions. While this stock of knowledge is framed and delivered through formal and non-formal DE programmes designed and delivered through learning, campaigning proceeds from actionable information, in which knowledge is framed to influence attitudes and mobilise public action.

However, the difference between the arena of ‘learning’ associated with DE, and the domain of ‘knowing’ or ‘informing’ linked to campaigning, is the autonomy that approaches to problem-based knowledge accords self-directed social actors in meaning making. Such possibilities are further enhanced in the digital information era where the production and diffusion of actionable knowledge is enabled by the communication power autonomous actors have to ‘mass communicate from one to many’ audiences (Castells, 2005: 3; 1997). This era has also enabled the emergence of diverse forms and arenas of knowing that allows the knower to encounter the political dimensions of the campaign issue as well as the generation of common frames through counter-discourse (Fraser, 1992).

Up until the *Finding frames* report was published in 2011, studies about campaigning in the UK were predominantly focused on surveying impact (see for example, COI, 2009; Darnton, 2009; PPP, 2005), with little focus on the changing environment of campaigning, and the nature of campaign audiences. The *Finding Frames* report highlighted the implication of salient but critical factors such as the representations of global poverty in NGO campaigning. For example, it described the charity aid narrative NGOs use in their campaigning as *surface frames* which Darnton & Kirk (2011: 65) traced to the legacy of the 1985 Band Aid campaign that paid more attention to fundraising than sustainable forms of public engagement. The *Finding Frames* report also outlined the weaknesses in the ‘justice, not charity’ Make Poverty History (MPH) campaign to sustain deep frames to ‘the dominance of consumerist values’ in communicating their message (ibid: 32). The focus of the MPH campaign on communicating with the G8 (Group of eight leading industrialised countries) leaders rather than the public, and the

prominence of fundraising strategies worked against efforts to reframe public engagement with global poverty (ibid).

The valid criticisms about how approaches to NGO campaigning result in a shallow understanding of the root causes of global poverty can also be said of the uncertain impact of the methodologies adopted by DE have had on influencing public perceptions of development. What is argued in this article is that the introduction or use of social justice frames in campaigning will not necessarily translate to increased levels of public understanding. Such frames will need to be multiplied and used as a common frame of reference for public deliberation, and engagement with global poverty and inequality. The paradigm shift in the way NGOs describe their campaigning as founded on knowledge, understanding and values provide a persuasive indication of the complementarity between DE and campaigning. The programmes that are organised by both the international NGOs and the more radical student-led campaign organisations have implications for the perspectives and frame of reference young people bring as social actors and potential NGO 'issue publics' (Gyoh, 2015). For example, educational campaign programmes with post-primary schools are important for mentoring young people in developing an active interest in global issues and citizen action.

For big NGOs, campaigning programmes in schools are also designed to promote particular attitudes and ways of perceiving global development issues. For both categories of NGOs, the overall aim of the campaign or active education programmes with post-primary schools, is to promote knowledge, understanding, values, attitude and skills (KUVAS), as reflected in Oxfam's approach to educational campaigns (ibid). The representation of global poverty is therefore influenced by the values and attitudes these organisations promote in their DE programmes designed around the principles of liberal education that imply an apolitical frame of reference. While the dichotomy between campaigning and DE were acknowledged in the schools programmes undertaken by these NGOs, the

increased emphasis on values, understanding and knowledge in NGO campaigning attempts to close the gap in their approaches.

Adopting a hybrid approach that integrates education and advocacy can introduce young people to activism at local community level in ways that make a link with global dimensions. This form of active education designed around practical challenges such as energy conservation and waste recycling connect easily with the everyday experience of young people, thereby influencing the frame of reference they bring as autonomous actors. What is highlighted in this article is the paradigm shift in approaches to NGO campaigning that has received little attention in the debates about public understanding, and how this gap in knowledge sustains the dichotomy between DE and NGO campaigning. The narrow view of campaigners as action takers that are mobilised to support advocacy initiatives undertaken by knowledgeable professionals within the organisation further portrays campaigning as an activity detached from knowledge on the issue. This conception of campaigners is self-limiting and, arguably, can constrain the emergence of the critical mass of potential catalysts that can generate knowledge and multiply frames for public understanding.

A notable point that emerged from my thesis was that campaigners occupied a dual position of *the target* audience of NGO campaign messages, as well as *social agents* that not only act on, but also extend NGO narratives about global poverty. Evidence from the more radical student-led organisations showed that they considered the role of the organisation as directing them to diverse sources of knowledge, and mentoring the next generation of activists. Observation of the websites of the sampled organisations showed that although NGOs such as CAFOD and Oxfam maintain a campaign web link for young people, the content largely focused on mentoring them to start their own campaigns. Social media provided an important medium for information sharing and served as a platform for extending their narratives (Gyoh, 2015). The activities on their websites also showed that most of the campaigns on local issues had a global resonance,

thereby, creating a sense of connection between local campaigners and global issues.

### **Bridging approaches for increasing public awareness and understanding**

Considering the paradigm shift in how NGOs conceive of their campaigning, it is important that they provide opportunities for campaigners to engage as stakeholders in constructing and framing knowledge, rather than limiting their engagement to taking action. In that way, NGOs would take on a mediating role in sustaining their network and internet platforms where campaigners can engage in negotiating meanings, as well as actively participate in constructing knowledge on development and global poverty. Chapman & Fisher (2000: 15) have described campaigning as an activity undertaken by groups and individuals that use particular frames to 'communicate a conflict issue, build public support for their actions, and draw attention to new narratives'. 'Conflict issue' is used in the broadest sense to imply contestations about existing social and economic conditions perceived or defined as unjust. Considering the role of NGO campaigners as actors that receive, share, propagate and act on information that is framed by the organisation as knowledge about global poverty, campaigners can be considered as potential catalysts for multiplying public understanding. This occurs when NGO campaigners use similar frames, such as testimonies and images of desperation and disaster designed to trigger compassion and fundraising, or images of protest and interrogation linked to social justice.

However, it is useful to note the important distinction the 'IF' campaign (1) evaluation report made on the difference between *raising public awareness* about the campaign, and *increasing public understanding* about the campaign issue (Tibbett and Stalker, 2013). This indicates an acknowledgement by practitioners of the challenge in designing campaigns that go beyond raising public awareness for action, to increasing public knowledge about the issue. The question is how NGOs can design and undertake their campaigning to enable the desired objective of increasing public understanding. In order to move from the point of the stated

recognition of the difference between *raising public awareness* and *public understanding*, NGO campaigning will need to develop concepts that contribute to the theorisation of its practices. Ní Chasaide (2009) has noted the challenges in ensuring the application of common understanding and interpretation of social justice concepts, methodology and frames in the action for global poverty. The purpose of theorisation of experience is to enable the replication, adaptation and improvement of successful practices. Theory can also provide boundaries to guide practice for accomplishing set objectives (Gomm et al., 2000).

An illustration of the importance of theorisation in interpreting the approaches and methodologies adopted in NGO campaigning is found in the conceptualisation of *campaign knowledge* in Gyoh's (2015) doctoral thesis as the framed information communicated in campaign messages. 'Campaign knowledge' was proposed in the thesis as:

“the informational content of campaign messages derived from published and unpublished sources, including testimonies and visual representations of events, and existing conditions in specific countries or regions, as well as the causal factors communicated as factual accounts by which organisations advocate and mobilise the public to take action.”

The term differs from 'campaign message', which refers to representations of the conflict issue in NGO media, encompassing published and unpublished information including video testimonies (Dogra, 2012). Developing on such concepts will enable NGOs to develop and adopt strategies that focus on increasing public understanding of the campaign issue, and making the distinction with strategies that raise awareness to take compassionate actions.

### **A digital network of social actors**

The advent of online NGO campaigning has seen their interpretation of 'successful campaigns' to include achieving a target number of online petitions and actions that bears no relevance to accomplishing the underlining campaign objective. The negative implication of this interpretation of a

successful campaign by NGOs can be linked to the culture of ‘clicktivism’, which is argued to result in ambivalent campaigners who are disengaged from the campaign issue (Ballie Smith, 2008; White, 2010). There is however, a promising side to online campaigning that can be linked to the emergence of virtual arenas of interaction that offer new possibilities for campaigners to encounter diverse sources and forms of knowledge. While NGOs acknowledged the potential of the Internet in promoting their agendas, Thompson (1995) described such virtual spaces as mediated ‘counterpublics’ that provide alternative public arenas where groups excluded from mainstream discourse interact and negotiate meanings on issues of common interest. Evidence from the research highlights the potential offered by digital information technology, and how radical groups such as student-led campaign organisations used their network to generate frames and multiply their narratives (Gyoh, 2015). This possibility aligns with the constructivist approach to knowledge in which social actors actively participate in the construction of knowledge (Kincheloe, 2005). It also conforms with organisational knowledge theory, in which social actors with a shared interest collaborate as stakeholders in the production and dissemination problem-based knowledge in addressing practical problems (Collins, 2010; Lin & Wu, 2005).

Bennett (2004) has suggested that the web has emerged as the most important networking medium for mobilising voices for campaigning because it enables rapid and horizontal dissemination of information, and the potential for interactive opinion formation. This new public space is inclusive, diffused, and global in the way its network transcends and connects actors across social, economic and cultural boundaries. Kech & Sikkink (1998: 2) uses the term ‘transnational network’ to describe actors bound together by shared values and a common discourse. The ‘network’ relates to Castells’ concept of the network society that referred to ‘a complex form of organisation held together by communication and driven by information flows’ (Stalder, 2006: 167). On the other hand, ‘networking’, describes the operation paradigm and the pattern of interaction among social actors with a common interest coordinated by information flows (Castells, 2005). The

phenomenon of an information, text or image ‘going viral’ can therefore result in public awareness of the campaign issue, or deliberation that can increase public understanding depending on how the communication is framed.

The network emerged as important for understanding the structure of NGO campaigners as well as their activities as social actors that create and disseminate knowledge. Recent surveys conducted by Intermedia in the UK and Suas in Ireland indicate that young adults constitute an important element of the network of NGO campaign audience that have an interest in knowing more about development and global poverty (Crompton, 2010; Darnton & Kirk, 2011; InterMedia, 2012; Suas, 2013). However, an interesting point that emerged from the thesis and also found in earlier studies such as *Global Generation* (Cross et al., 2009) and *The World online* (Fenyoe, 2010) suggested that young people do not use the internet as a learning hub. However, these surveys also acknowledged that young people use the internet to find out more on existing interests rather than seek new knowledge, and that new perspectives are derived from the meanings they negotiate through interaction. Recent phenomenon on the use of social media by extremist groups to recruit and radicalise young people also provide the basis for reflection on assumptions about the role of the Internet in public opinion formation.

The network of NGO campaigners therefore refers to social actors whose activities are sustained and enabled by the emergence of mediated virtual public arenas earlier described as counterpublics (Thompson, 1995). Such venues enable the generation of counterdiscourse where new narratives and frames filter into mainstream discourse in the way proposed in transformative and social learning theories applied in DE and adult education (Brown, 2013; Mezirow, 2000). The conditions necessary for campaigns to act as catalysts that multiply knowledge for public understanding can be argued to be similar to what is required in DE to influence public perception and attitudes to global poverty and inequality. Both endeavours require that their audiences acquire or bring particular frames of reference as autonomous

knowers and learners, and the nature of their involvement in generating similar frames for extending social justice narratives.

In the above consideration, the approaches NGOs adopt in undertaking educational campaign programmes with young people at post-primary school level is important for the frame of reference they bring as autonomous actors. However, the ability to generate similar frames will depend on the opportunities campaigners have to identify and frame the campaign issue. These two broadly stated conditions are intimately linked to the way DE and NGO campaigning are deployed as endeavours that aim to change attitudes and increase knowledge and public understanding about global poverty and inequality.

## **Conclusion**

In analysing the shift in the way NGOs define their campaigning as based on values and knowledge highlight new possibilities that narrow the gap between the foundation and approaches to DE and campaigning. The educational programmes with schools emerged as important for influencing the frames of reference autonomous knowers and learners bring as actors in an expanded and more diffused public sphere, and therefore, provide a platform to integrate discourses in the virtual publics and real world. Another area of complementarity is the encounter and interrogation of political structures and normative values that is in contradiction of the liberal education foundation DE. While this internal conflict has remained a source of critique by some academics, promoting certain attitudes and social justice frames is a core element and objective of DE. The political nature of the values and actions promoted in DE to deepen public engagement makes NGO campaigning the logical agency by which to activate and apply the competence to take informed action. The article argued how the autonomy of NGO campaigners as 'knowers' and stakeholders in framing and disseminating knowledge on global poverty mitigate issues of indoctrination associated with DE and other fields of GE.

The emergence of new public spaces where young people and campaign audiences share information, generate and multiply common frames can also contribute to public deliberation necessary for increasing public engagement and understanding (Cox, 2011). The article also argued that young adults constituted the same public audience that DE and NGO campaigning target in their activities. Furthermore, NGO campaigning sustains a network of autonomous actors that act as issue publics that can generate and multiple frames. This constituency of social agents not found in DE are potential catalysts that can multiply knowledge for increased public understanding, as well as strengthen the action against global poverty and inequality.

### **Notes**

(1) IF campaign is the most recent collaborative campaign undertaken in 2013 and planned to coincide with the G8 summit in the UK. It involved over 200 NGOs whose campaigners were linked by an integrated social media platform.

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**Son Gyoh** holds an MSc in development management and has recently completed his research for award of a PhD in development education at the Institute of Education (IOE), University of London. He has been involved as a practitioner and course facilitator in development education (DE) in Ireland at the level of research and consultancy on ways the perspective and voices of the global South can be included in 'Northern' representation of poverty and inequality. His interest in *actionable knowledge* as a way to complement *learning* in DE was a major motivation to explore new potentials and possibilities in non-governmental organisation (NGO) campaigning in an era of pluralism and diffused knowledge. His doctoral research proposed NGO campaigners as stakeholders that receive, disseminate and apply framed knowledge, and therefore potential catalysts who can multiply public understanding about global poverty and inequality.