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# **Connecting with Canadians: Quantitative Research on International Development**

## **Executive Summary**

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Prepared by Global Affairs Canada  
Supplier name: Narrative Research (fieldwork only)  
March 2020

This report summarizes results from a survey of 1,200 Canadians.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : *Tisser des liens avec les Canadiens : recherche quantitative sur le développement international*

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## Executive Summary

Canadians have low awareness of international development. Although survey respondents perform better when asked to name countries where Canada is actively pursuing development activities, the low level of understanding could be attributable to the lack of confidence Canadians have in Government of Canada information on development—confidence stands at around one third.

Survey respondents, asked to rate themselves on their knowledge of international development, exaggerate somewhat, but the responses are mostly accurate. The test to validate self-rated awareness was to ask survey respondents to name three countries where Canada is actively involved with development activities. Given the large number of countries in which Canada has development projects, it would be easy to name one country, slightly harder to name two, but three or more was deemed sufficient to establish a reasonable awareness of Canada's development activities. Close to one-in-five can name three or more countries accurately, which suggests that Government of Canada communications efforts have started to move the needle in the right direction in raising awareness. In 2018, only 1.7% had awareness of development and this increased to two per cent in 2019<sup>1</sup>.

The process of naming the countries triggers an awakening among some Canadians, because the question requires a deliberative answer. As such, awareness, using the country-naming measurement tool, now stands at 16%. Additionally, those who rated their self-awareness of development highly were also more likely to name three or more countries.

A majority of Canadians support Canada's international development activities, close to one quarter are neutral and less than one-in-five oppose them. Support is significantly lower among Prairie residents and somewhat lower among older Canadians.

Canadians were asked if they are "proud" of Canada's development activities<sup>2</sup>, and over eight-in-10 say that they are "proud." However, when cross-referenced with the previous question on support, we found that some survey respondents who say they are opposed to development on the previous question, also say they are "proud." Such cognitive dissonance can only be explained by social desirability bias. Also, Canadians who think that the Government of Canada's communications efforts are effective are significantly more apt to express pride than those who think communication efforts are poor.

When asked to consider the importance of various aspects of Canada's international development efforts, all aspects are considered important by Canadians. Speaking out in support of human rights is ranked as the most important, followed by education for children and girls, vaccinations in developing countries to protect people from disease and responding to natural disasters, each of which comes in over the 80th percentile. Even the least important aspect, helping developing countries deal with climate change, garners two-thirds saying it is important.

However, the attitudinal complexion soon changes when survey respondents are asked to rate Canada's performance across the same set of indices. Performance indicators drop by statistically significant margins, except in the case of "providing assistance to migrants who have fled their homes because of war violence and famine." Over two thirds of Canadians believe that Canada performs well on this file. Canada's "response to natural disasters" and "vaccinating people in developing countries to protect them from disease" receive a positive response from at least one half of survey respondents.

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<sup>1</sup> Current Issues Survey: PCO (2018-19)

<sup>2</sup> This question is leading and social desirability bias has inflated the number of positive responses.

Remarkably, the lower positive scores on performance does not result in significantly higher negative scores. Instead, Canadians are more inclined to provide a neutral score or say they don't know about Canada's performance on most of these indicators. This suggests that Canadians are reticent to render judgment about a subject they know little-to-nothing about.

There is also a notable East-West divide down the Ontario-Manitoba border, which reveals much higher positive scores in Eastern Canada than in the West of the country.

When it comes to evaluating the Government's communications on development, less than one quarter of Canadians provide a positive score, close to three-in-10 are neutral on the matter and a strong minority (over one-in-four) state that communications are poor.

The dichotomy here is that, while raising awareness has improved and this is a demonstrable communications success, a greater proportion of Canadians are of the mind that Canada communicates poorly on development to its people.

One of the challenges for the department moving forward is the lack of confidence Canadians have in Government of Canada information on development. Confidence in travel information ranks highest and that represents just over one half of Canadians stating they have confidence in it. Fewer than four-in-10 have confidence in Government information on charitable organizations, on education, gender equality and maternal and newborn health. Also, fewer than three-in-10 have confidence in assisting entrepreneurs in developing countries.

When asked about preferred media channels for news on international development, the results back up what the department found from the focus groups conducted on development in the summer of 2019, inasmuch as the preference for the Internet is statistically tied with traditional media in the form of television.

The Internet is preferred by Canadians who are younger and have higher levels of education, whereas older Canadians with lower levels of education prefer television.

Canadians who have travelled outside of Europe and the United States tend to go to tourist spots in countries like Mexico and the Dominican Republic for leisure purposes. India and China are also destinations for a small number of Canadians. As such, hardly any Canadians travel to countries where Canada has a strong developmental connection.

## **Methodology**

The survey was conducted among 1,203 members of the adult Canadian general public aged 18 or older, using CSS software, which is the equivalent of Random-Digit-Dialing technology between February 20 and March 13, 2020. The sample was weighted against the latest census data and has a margin of error of  $\pm 2.2\%$  with a 95% confidence level. Please note that Covid-19 may have had an impact on results, especially towards the end of the fieldwork.

The response rate was quite low, at two per cent. As such, non-response bias could have had an impact on the representativeness of the study. However, the firm contracted to conduct the fieldwork mitigated

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the risk of this: the questionnaire was thoroughly pre-tested; many of the numbers called were not-in-service, and; the survey was in the field for three weeks.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Please see Appendix A for a detailed description of call dispositions