



Collaborate | Innovate | Engage

OPENING REMARKS

Stuart Taylor, Chief Executive Officer, iDE Canada

One of the privileges of being the opening speaker is that I get to pose a bunch of questions for us to think about without any obligation to actually provide any answers. Over the past 20 years that I've been working in international development, I've noted a few trends that are changing what it means to do "development" and public engagement.

Je voudrais souligner quelques tendances qui ont des implications pour l'engagement du public. Chaque tendance soulève des questions, mais je ne suis pas obligé de trouver des réponses! C'est à vous d'y réfléchir et d'en discuter pendant la conférence. Il y a quatre réalités dont je voudrais discuter:

- **la convergence géographique:** les frontières sont maintenant économiques plutôt que géographiques. De plus en plus, ces frontières divisent nos communautés.
- **la convergence des affaires et des missions sociales:** de plus en plus, on trouve des entreprises avec une mission sociale, et des organismes sociaux avec des stratégies d'affaires.
- **la convergence des secteurs économique, social et environnemental**, et finalement,
- **la nécessité de démontrer l'impact des programmes sociaux.** Les bailleurs demandent plus de données probantes pour les résultats, mais que sont les implications pour l'engagement du public?

Let's start by looking at geographic convergence. Despite some efforts south of the border to turn back the hands of time, we live in an increasingly globalized world. More and more, we see the demise of the so-called "third world" as a geographic reality and the emergence of "third world" as a localized, economic condition. The late Hans Rosling illustrated this powerfully in several TED Talks with animated visualizations of differences in life expectancy and other key variables over time and across regions. How many times have you heard the term "third world conditions" applied to situations in Canada, the US or Europe?

We see a fast-emerging middle class in parts of Africa and large swaths of Asia. Increasingly, a young, educated and connected person in Lusaka or Lahore has more in common with a similarly educated and connected person in LA than an illiterate labourer down the road.

Along with this trend, the rise of social media is giving previously marginalized voices more of a platform to share their own experience, rather than having development organizations and workers acting as privileged intermediaries in the telling of stories, successes and struggles. We see this both internationally and domestically as we also increasingly hear indigenous voices more audibly telling their stories.

This all raises some interesting questions for the role and approach of “public engagement”. Who is engaging who? Which voices continue to be marginalised? What is the role of organizations like ours in amplifying those voices? Where are those borders and fault-lines that run through our own society? It is no longer a story of us over here and them over there. Rather, we see the challenges of solitudes within our own communities – haves and have-nots, urban/rural, men/women.

A second relevant trend is the convergence of business and social mission. When iDE started 35 years ago, the concept of promoting business opportunities as a way of addressing poverty was anathema to most organizations. Today, with the proliferation of social enterprise – including the creation of a whole class of B-corporations that adopt a triple bottom line of financial/economic/social – we see many individuals and groups with a social mission adopting business as a sustainable and scalable means of achieving social goals. Likewise, we see many companies adopting social mission with a range of motivations – from cynical PR plays to genuine commitment to “doing well by doing good”.

We see smart, young business school graduates turning down lucrative Bay Street or Wall Street opportunities for the opportunity to work on hard problems with tangible social value. Our global water and sanitation director is a Harvard grad who, while her friends were taking six-figure jobs with banks etc. right out of college, came to work for iDE in Cambodia, earning pennies for the challenge of creating viable businesses serving rural populations with affordable toilets.

From a public engagement perspective, this means that there is an expanded field for action. One does not need to be working for a non-profit to be a social entrepreneur, and purchase and investment decisions are a whole area of action. One of the more obvious, early manifestations of this is the fair trade movement.

I’ve toured the coffee supply chain in Nicaragua and met with coops who are selling into the fair trade market. However, I’ve also toured large processing facilities preparing green coffee for export to Starbucks among other coffee giants. What fascinated me was the level at which the system was tracking social and environmental indicators along the way. Organizations like Rainforest Alliance and others have worked with major buyers and processors to develop sophisticated chain of custody systems. While fair trade has had direct impact and growing – although still limited - market share, this had me wondering about the indirect effects – raising awareness of social and environmental issues through the supply chain, which then puts pressure on the Starbucks, Nestles and others to ensure that their own supply chains pass a certain standard of scrutiny.

How does public engagement adapt to these realities – helping people to navigate the complex set of choices around purchasing behaviour, and discerning the empty PR from genuine impact?

A third convergence is that of social, economic and environmental goals. Working in international development takes us closer to the front lines of climate change. For a smallholder farmer in Burkina Faso or the Mekong Delta, climate change is a current reality and the direct links between environmental issues, poverty and food

insecurity are readily apparent. We can tell the stories of individuals experiencing the interplay of environmental, social and economic pressures.

Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy reflects this intersectionality of issues. There is a strong climate theme and of course the name of the policy itself makes a bold statement about the centrality of advancing the empowerment of women and girls – an undertaking that cuts across areas of trade, foreign affairs, environment, etc.

However, the solutions are far from simple. Small-scale drip irrigation systems can significantly improve water efficiency – the amount of crop one can grow with a given amount of water. Is this a water-saving solution? Most farmers, presented with a technology that improves water efficiency will plant more area, in many cases actually increasing pressures on local water resources, while improving their food production and income.

Well-meaning activists at one point pushed for a boycott of fresh-cut flowers flown in to Europe from Nairobi. The Kenyan flower producers pushed back and pointed out – with data – that even after coming in on a plane, the Kenyan flowers still had as little as one fifth the carbon footprint compared with flowers coming out of Dutch greenhouses.

The reality of intersecting and sometimes competing social, environmental and economic concerns can be daunting for public engagement. Simple stories can be compelling and simple actions – [click here](#) – are attractive, but are they effective?

Effectiveness is the crux of my fourth trend. Organizations are under increasing pressure to measure and demonstrate impact. This is an area of personal passion for me (even though I can see the eyes glazing over) as I led our global evaluation team for several years. We have used a variety of methods - from qualitative deep dives to randomized control trials – to try and answer the question of whether we are making any difference. Organizations such as GuideStar and GiveWell have popped up to offer guidance to donors making decisions on international development efforts. Rigorous evaluation outfits such as 3ie, Innovations for Poverty Action, and the Jameel Latif Poverty Action Lab at MIT have expanded rapidly in recent years

I can see two key questions from a public engagement perspective:

1. How to communicate results in a way that is engaging and meaningful.

Dean Karlan at Innovations for Poverty Action published a paper that asked whether reporting evidence from rigorous evaluations improved response from donors. The study used a randomized design to report either an engaging story or story plus evidence from evaluations. Which campaign do you think worked best? I would have guessed the story plus evidence.

Turns out, the provision of evidence had no net effect on subsequent giving. However, diving further into the analysis, the study found that donors who had given larger amounts in the past increased their donations as a result of seeing the evidence, whereas donors who had given less actually *decreased* their donations as a result of the evidence! They argue that the larger donors were more committed to impact and concerned about achieving results. The smaller donors were after what they call the “warm glow” effect – feeling good by giving, which tends to involve small amounts to a number of organizations, versus larger amounts to fewer. For these donors, they argue that the evidence actually decreased the emotional impact of the story and possibly

introduced doubt about effectiveness, which they did not get from the story alone. While this is a study of fundraising specifically, the results could also apply to broader public engagement, where the goal is to motivate people to take a specific action. We need a good understanding of our audience and what kind of communication and engagement will actually spur action.

2. How to evaluate the impact of public engagement efforts.

Admittedly, it can be difficult to measure change in some of the variables we are trying to affect and, particularly in the area of policy, very difficult to attribute changes to any particular action. However, even the act of trying to specifically define our goals in measurable terms is a valuable process. At least in our own experience, I know we have been guilty of generating a lot of heat and light without necessarily advancing a strategic goal. Forcing ourselves to clearly define the change we seek is tough, but an important step if we are to be focused and effective in our action.

En conclusion, on a identifié quelques questions pour l'engagement du public :

- Comment amplifier la voix des communautés marginalisées dans un contexte de mondialisation où les frontières sont économiques plutôt que géographiques ?
- Comment engager le public pour profiter des opportunités et faire face aux défis liés au rôle de l'entreprise dans le développement ?
- Comment agir en posant des actions assez simples et compréhensibles malgré la complexité des enjeux sociaux, économiques et environnementaux ?
- Comment mesurer et communiquer les résultats de nos efforts de façon compréhensible et mobilisante ?

I wish you productive and useful discussions as you explore the opportunities and challenges for public engagement in a changing world. The potential and need for meaningful public engagement has never been greater, even as the challenges become increasingly complex and dynamic.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak this morning.

Migwetch.

Merci.