

Most take pride in Canadian NGO's development work abroad, express frustration over continued suffering

Canadians show most concern over children's safety and well-being, natural disaster relief

March 13, 2018 – Development aid has never been a bigger part of the fabric of the global community. Since the turn of the century, the amount of money wealthy nations have donated to developing ones has increased by [more than 80 per cent](#).

Canada and its NGO community play a substantial role in this donation ecosystem. This study from the Angus Reid Institute explores the nuanced issue of official development aid on a national, personal, and organizational level, finding Canadians holding often incongruent views.

The portrait that emerges is one of pride – seven-in-ten (72%) Canadians say they are proud of the work of Canadian development NGO's – and frustration – three-quarters (77%) also say that no matter how much we give, the situation in developing countries doesn't seem to improve.

It's an image of hope – nine-in-ten say aid work could have a meaningful impact in the focus community – and skepticism – Canadians are split down the middle over whether they place a great deal of trust in the NGO community overall.

One thing most Canadians agree upon: however small the role, three-quarters (75%) say that helping even one family or village is worth the effort.

Ranking most important overseas development aid issue for Canadians: Concerned minus not concerned shown



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Sept 26 – Oct 2 among a representative randomized sample of 1802 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

More Key Findings:

- Approaching half of Canadians (45%) say that they believe the top focus of most Canadian NGO's working in overseas development is helping those in need. One-quarter (27%) say that only 'some' organizations are focused on this.
- Religiosity appears to play a role in personal participation in overseas development work. One-in-three (33%) practicing religious Canadians are heavily involved in this area, while just five per cent of non-practicing Canadians say the same.
- Trust of Canadian NGO's working overseas is an issue. Fewer than three-in-ten Canadians (27%) say that all or most NGO's can be trusted to use donor dollars effectively and to spend those dollars where they say they will (29%)
- Seven-in-ten Canadians (69%) say they would prefer to donate to a charity working on local Canadian issues, though those most inclined to value international aid work – the True Believers – do not show a preference between local and international work
- More than eight-in-ten (85%) say that corruption in many poor countries is the single biggest obstacle to making positive strides in development

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Millennials: Financially strapped but want to do more

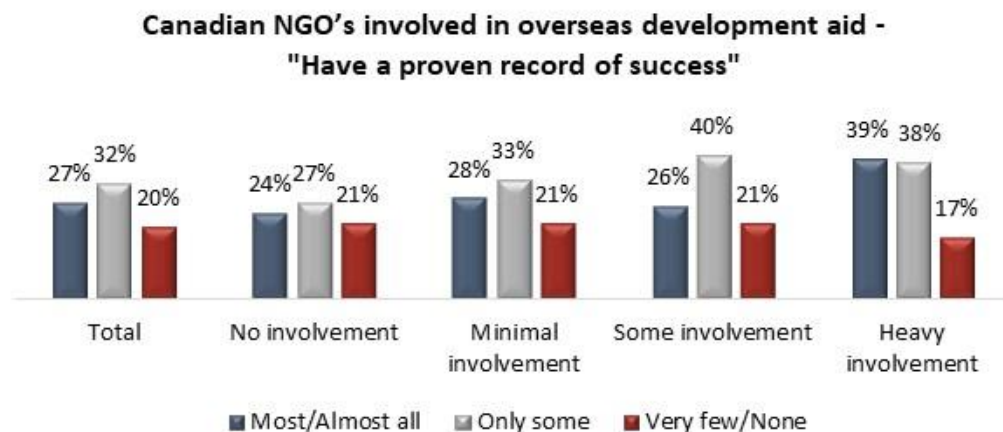
The NGO Community working abroad

In this second part of the Angus Reid Institute study on overseas development aid, our focus turns from [Canadian government giving and personal engagement](#), to views of the NGO community working in the field.

On almost all accounts, those who have a closer relationship with the NGO world have a more positive view of it. The Angus Reid Institute created an Involvement Index based on responses to questions in this survey, and grouped Canadians by their exposure to development issues and the work being done on the ground. For more on the index please see the methodology note at the end of the release.

Positive views

Asked about the job that Canadian development NGO's do overall in delivering aid, one-third of Canadians (32%) say that only some organizations have a proven record of success, while another 27 per cent say most or almost all of them do. Among those who have the most engagement with development work, four-in-ten (39%) say that most or all organizations have a solid track record.

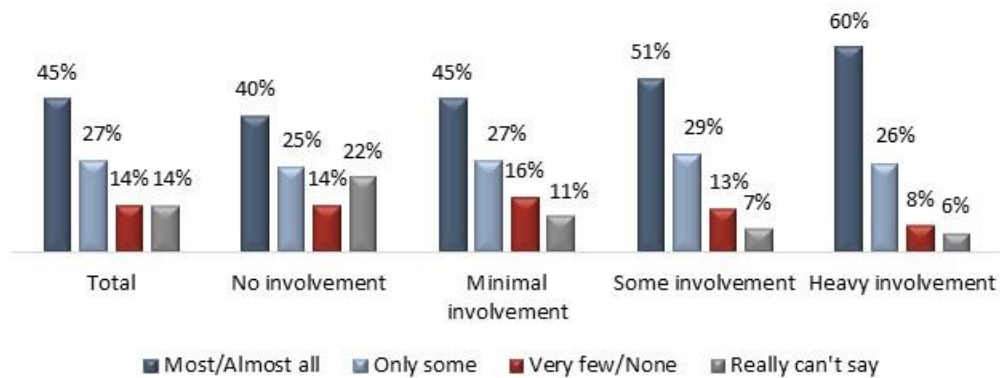


Further, Canadians are generally positive when asked about the priorities of these organizations. 45 per cent say that almost all or most are primarily focused on helping those in need, compared to 14 per cent who say that few are. Even among the less involved, skepticism about the motivation of NGO's is low:

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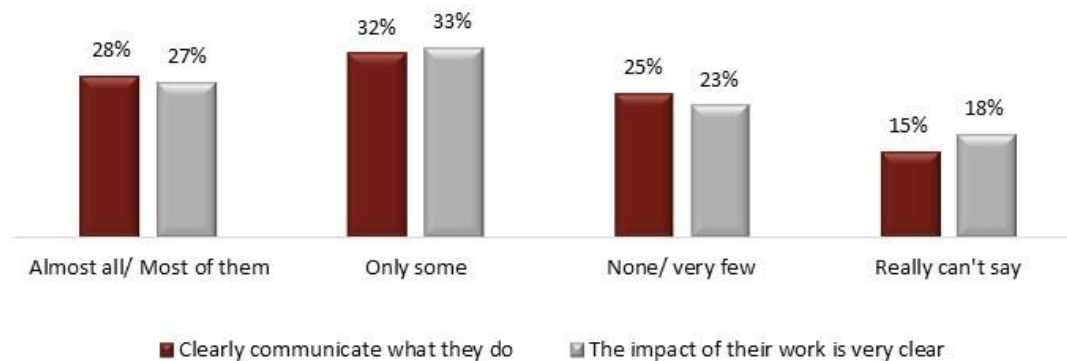
Canadian NGO's involved in overseas development aid - Their top focus is helping those in need



Challenges

Other findings suggest a disconnect between the NGO community and its pool of potential donors. On issues of communication and effectiveness, Canadians voice uncertainty. Just under three-in-ten (28%) say that Canadian organizations clearly communicate what it is they're doing overseas, while the same number (27%) say that the impact of their work is apparent:

Statements about Canadian NGO's involved in overseas development aid

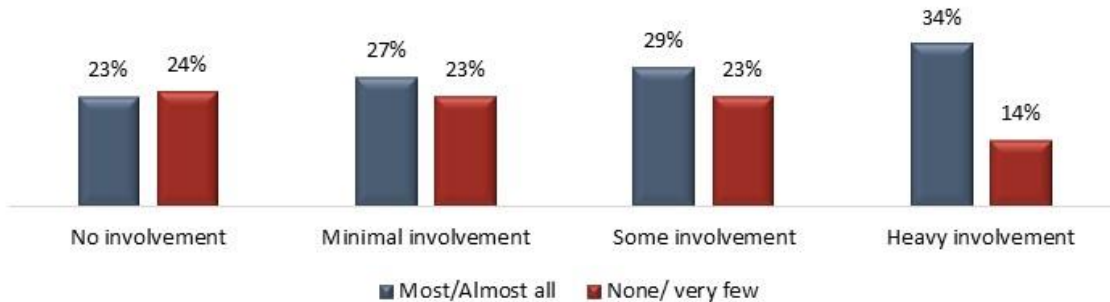


Even among the most involved, just one-in-three (34%) say that the impact of the work done by most NGO's is evident to them:

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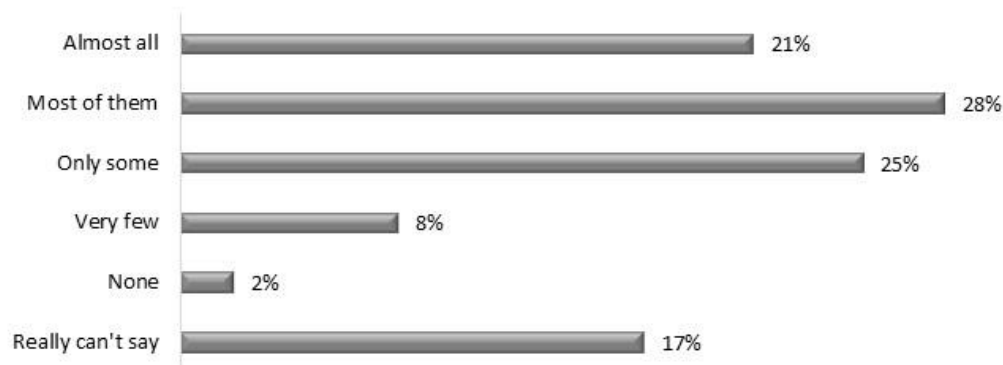
Statements about Canadian NGO's involved in overseas development aid
'The impact of their work is very clear' - by level of involvement in development community



Perhaps more concerning for non-profit boards across the country, Canadians are skeptical about the use of donor funds in the industry.

Half of Canadians (49%) say that all or most NGO's waste too much money on staff salaries and administration. Only one-in-ten do not hold this concern about at least some of the sector.

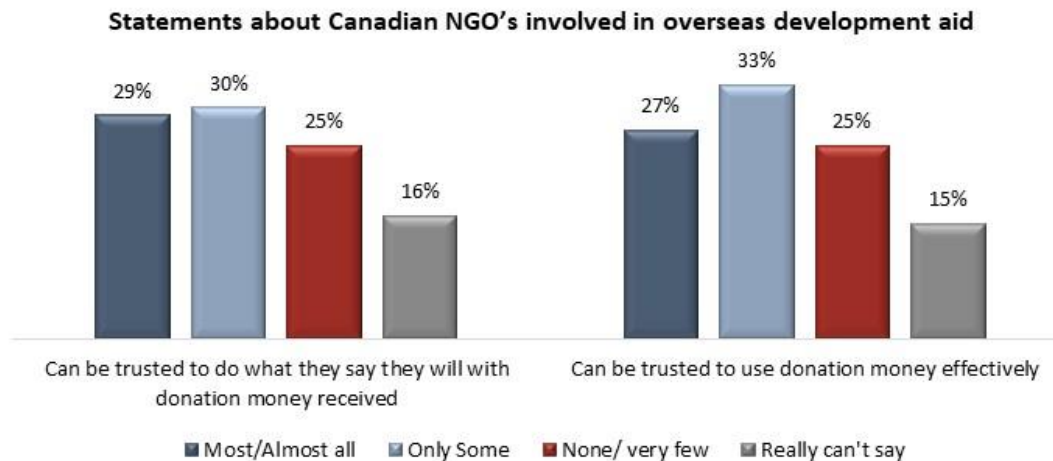
Statements about Canadian NGO's involved in overseas development aid
'Waste too much money on their own salaries and administration'



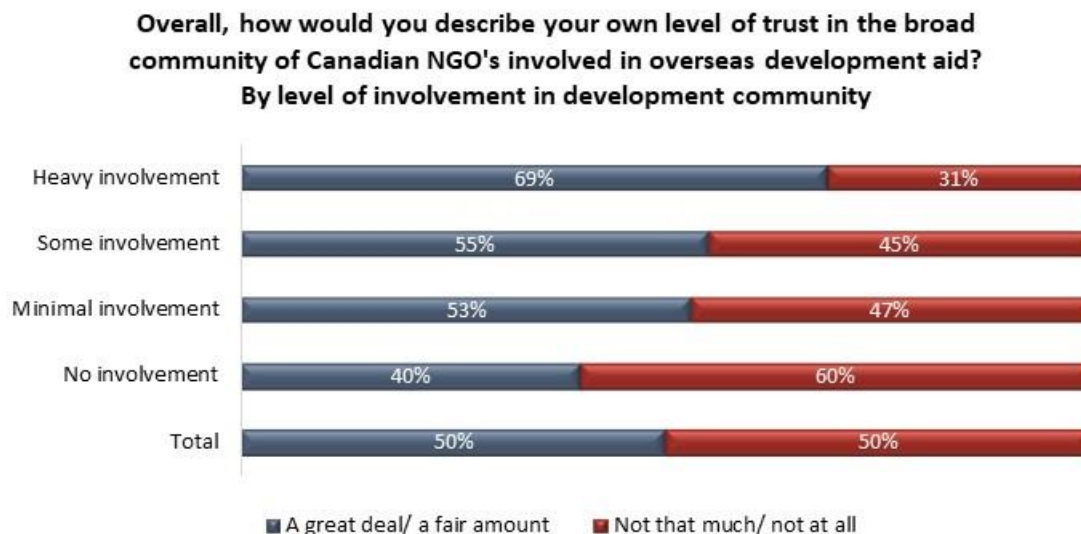
The same skepticism applies to the use of money that goes to program operations. Under three-in-ten Canadians (27%) say that all or most NGO's can be trusted to use donor dollars effectively and to spend those dollars where they say they will (29%). A large number of Canadians say that some NGO's are trustworthy in each case, while one-quarter say that none or very few are:

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What all of this adds up to is a situation where roughly half of Canadians say they have at least a fair amount of trust in Canada's NGO community, all things considered, while the other half say they do not. Bridging this gap in public opinion is likely key to garnering more support for projects in the future. Whether it's shoring up the support of those most involved Canadians (31% still have trust issues) or engaging the large group who are not involved at all (60% say they have little to no trust), finances and communication appear to hold an important place in this discussion.



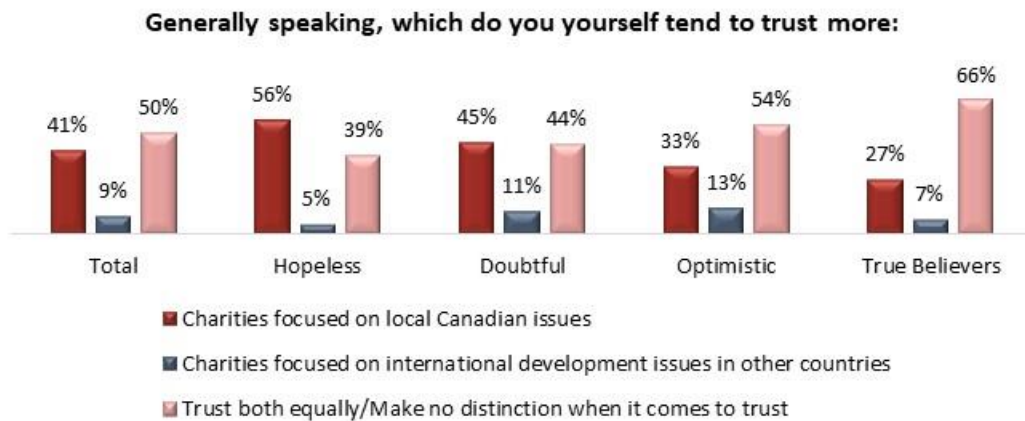
Canadians lean local on trust, giving

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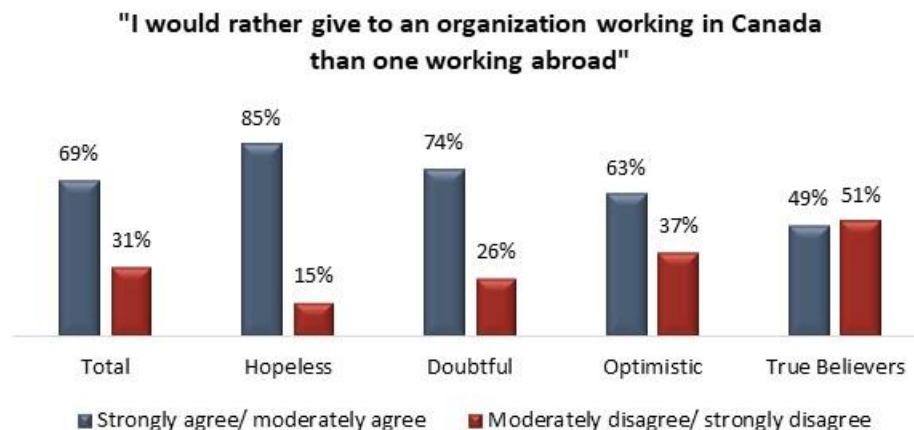
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Another aspect of the charity landscape is the competition between organizations acting domestically or abroad. While half of Canadians (50%) say they are equally trusting of charities in either realm, there is a distinct preference for charities involved in local giving among the other less trusting half. In analyzing this data, we are using the previously introduced mindsets when it comes to the international development sector. To review these groups, the Hopeless, the Doubtful, the Optimistic, and the True Believers, please view Section One of the [first report](#).

The increased trust for organizations working domestically is thus, particularly strong among the Hopeless, where more than half (56%) say they trust charities focused on local Canadian problems over those working in international development. Across each subsequent group, that proportion drops:



When asked outright whether they would rather give to an organization in Canada over one working abroad, seven-in-ten Canadians (69%) say yes. Notably, True Believers in international aid do not lean one way or another, prioritizing international and domestic aid equally:



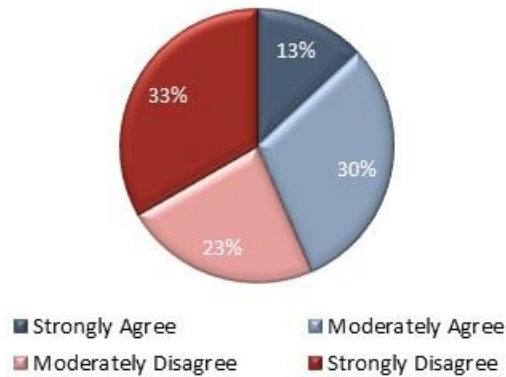
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Religion plays a role for many

The activities of the church have played a foundational role in Canadian society, especially [at the community level](#), as the Angus Reid Institute explored last year. In the NGO community, religious affiliation has been common as well. World Vision Canada (1957), Compassion Canada (1963), Development and Peace (1967) are a few organizations that have been working in this country for more than half a century and have a faith-based foundation. For Canadians, more than four-in-ten (43%) say that their own personal faith has a strong influence on their views of charitable activities:

"My own personal faith has a strong influence on my views of charitable activities"

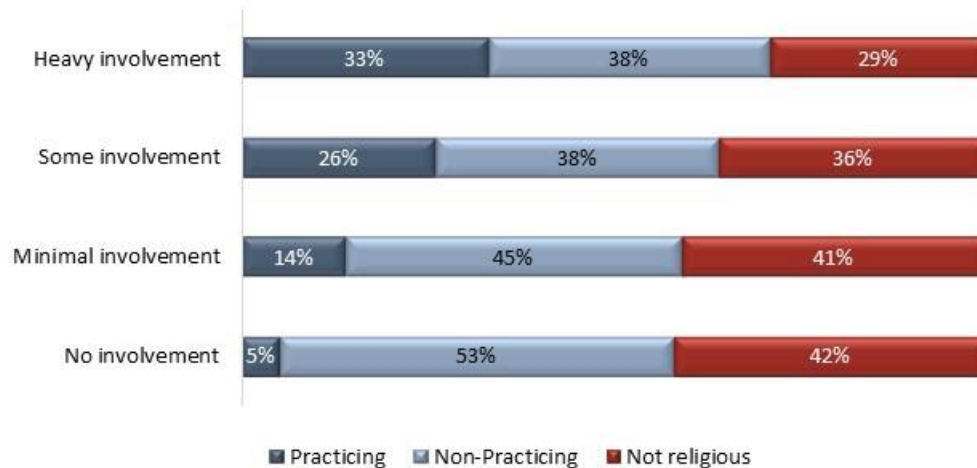


Religious affiliation is a factor when it comes to Canadians involvement in development issues overall. Among those who are heavily involved, one-in-three (33%) are practicing religious, meaning they attend church regularly, while four-in-ten (38%) are non-practicing religious. Religiosity declines alongside involvement, as seen in the following graph:

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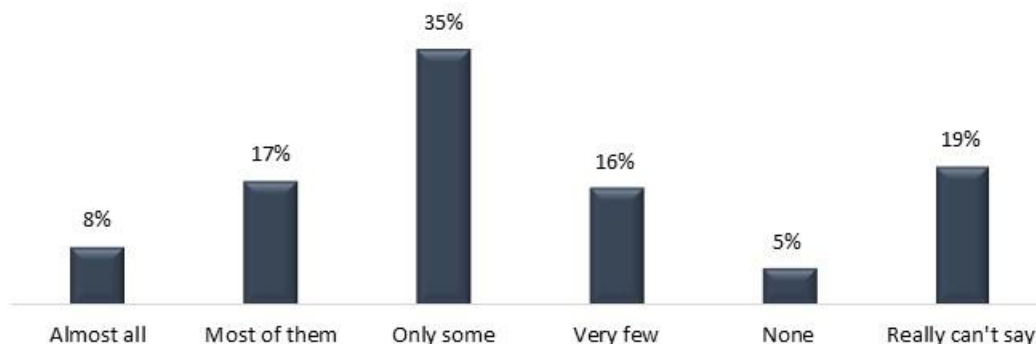
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Involvement in development issues by religious activity



That's not to say that some Canadians aren't uncomfortable with the place of religion in development work. **Some claim** that religious organizations represent a holdover from colonialism and imperialism, and that secular NGO's have a better claim to independent purveyor of aid.

Canadian NGO's involved in international development: "Too often have overly religious motivations"



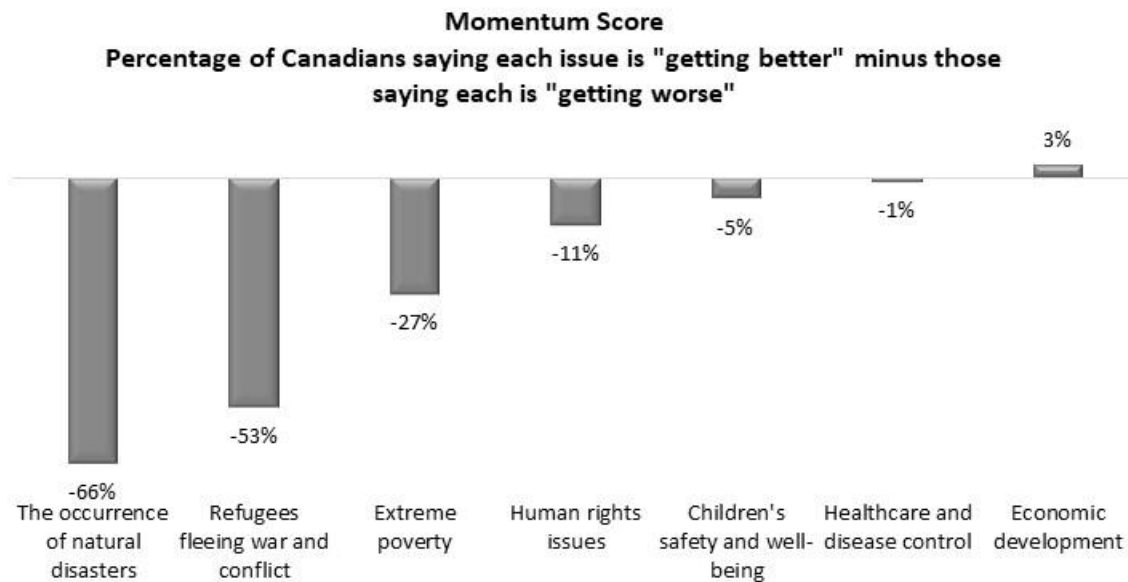
Perceptions of development trends

Which areas of development aid are getting better or worse?

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Two issues that Canadians appear most pessimistic about are the two receiving the most media coverage over the past few years. The occurrence of natural disasters is perceived as the aid issue which is worsening the most. This, after hurricanes Harvey and Irma devastated Texas, Puerto Rico, and other areas of the United States, and while flooding in South Asia has killed [more than 1200 people](#). The vast majority of Canadians, seven-in-ten (70%), say that this issue is worsening, while just four per cent say it is improving. The refugee crisis is seen as worsening by six-in-ten (59%) and improving by just six per cent:



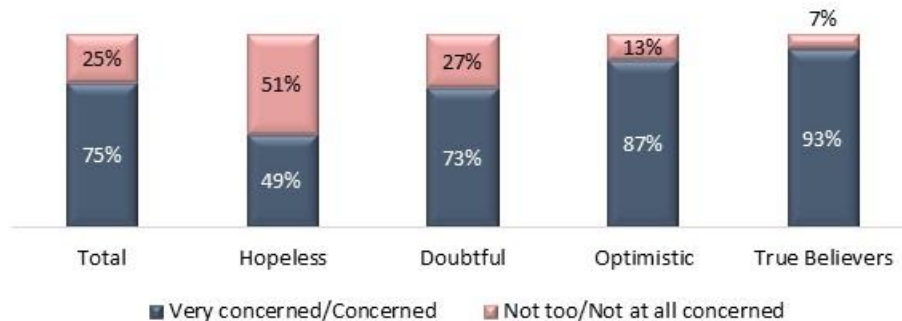
Which issues concern Canadians most?

Neither of the two issues perceived as worsening the most are actually chosen as the top area of concern for Canadians when they think about development work. All four groups, led by the True Believers, choose children's issues as their top priority. Overall, three-in-four Canadians (75%) hold this opinion. There is a notable difference in the level of concern shown by the Hopeless compared to other cohorts on each of the issues presented:

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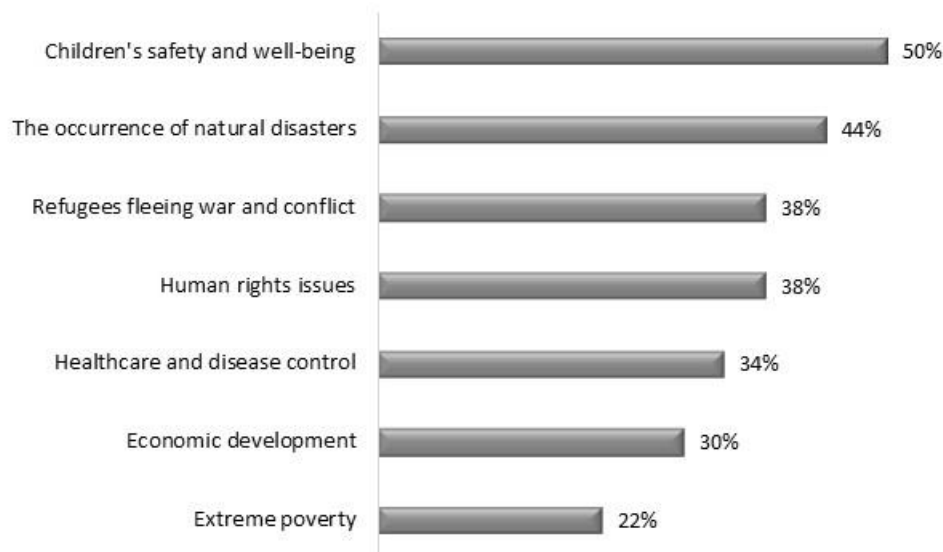
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**How personally concerned are you about this issue?
Children's safety and well-being, including education
challenges and child labour in many countries.**



Assigning a concern score to issue allows for a comparison of the relative concern related to each. All seven areas have more Canadians saying they are concerned than unconcerned, but the degree to which they say this varies significantly:

**How personally concerned are you about this issue? Concern
score: Concerned minus not concerned**



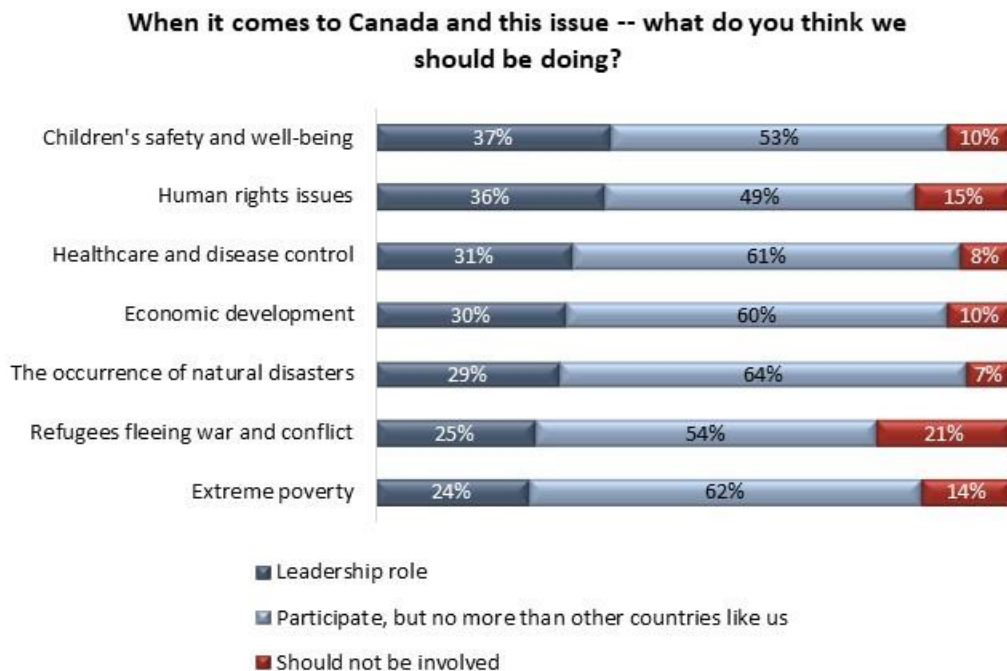
Where should Canada take a leadership role?

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Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Level of concern does not necessarily determine where Canadians say Canada's aid community should be most engaged. For example, while many voice significant concern over the occurrence of natural disasters and the damage visited upon affected countries, and while many are most likely to say that this issue is worsening more than any other area of concern, just three-in-ten (29%) say that Canada should take a leadership role in relief efforts. Canadians are more than twice as likely (64%) to say that Canada should participate in these programs, but no more than other countries of similar wealth.

The areas where Canadians are most likely to say their country should take a leadership role are in dealing with children's safety (37%) and well-being, or human rights issues such as the treatment of women or religious minorities (36%). Across each of the seven issues discussed, the largest group say that Canada should not lead the charge, and should play a smaller part, similar to other wealthy nations:

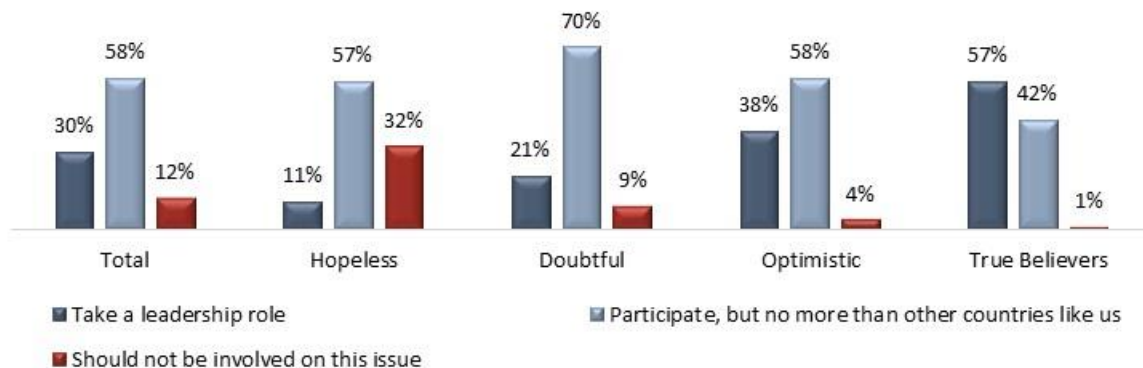


Using the average of all seven issues, it is evident that three-in-ten Canadians say their country should take a leadership role in international development, while six-in-ten (58%) say that we have a role to play, but no more than our peers. Across the four groups, a predictable trend emerges. The Hopeless are more than three times as likely as any other group to say Canada should not be involved at all in aid (32%), while six-in-ten True Believers (57%) say that this country should be a leader:

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Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

**How involved should Canada be in international development?
Average response for seven aid related sectors**



Where can progress be made?

Most likely areas for meaningful impact

Looking more broadly at international development programs in sum, Canadians are most optimistic about strides that can be made in healthcare and disease control. More than half (56%) say that a meaningful impact can be made here, and only seven per cent say that aid will not help.

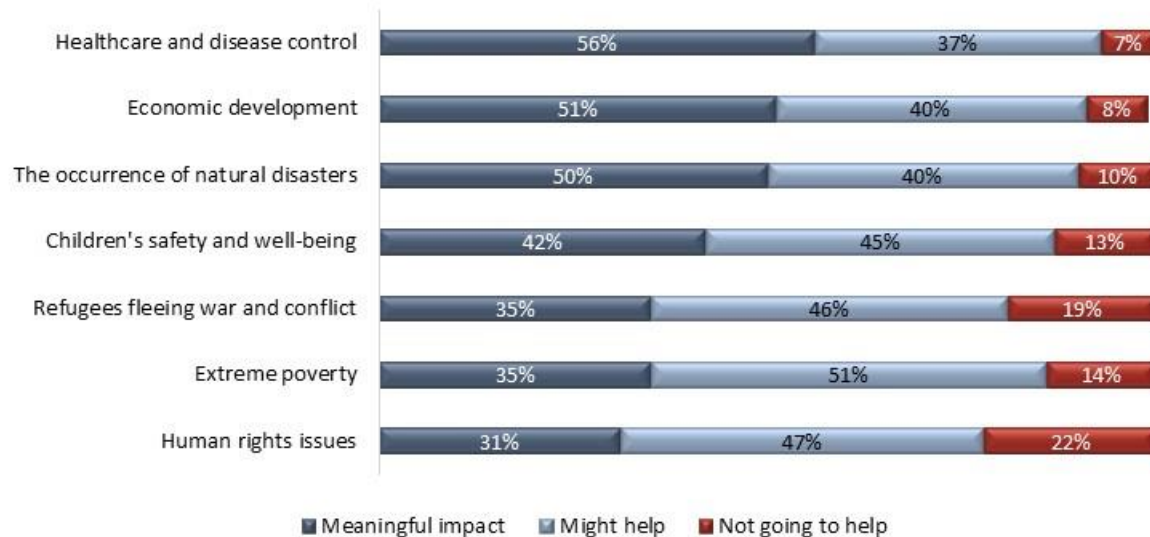
Significant evidence exists to support this sentiment - one of the most obvious successes being the control of malaria globally in recent years. Between 2010 and 2015, malaria incidence among populations at risk fell by 21 per cent globally. High profile efforts by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and Doctors Without Borders undoubtedly contribute to this positive assessment.

Half of Canadians also perceive a meaningful impact from work in economic development and disaster relief, while they are most negative about human right issues, refugees and extreme poverty.

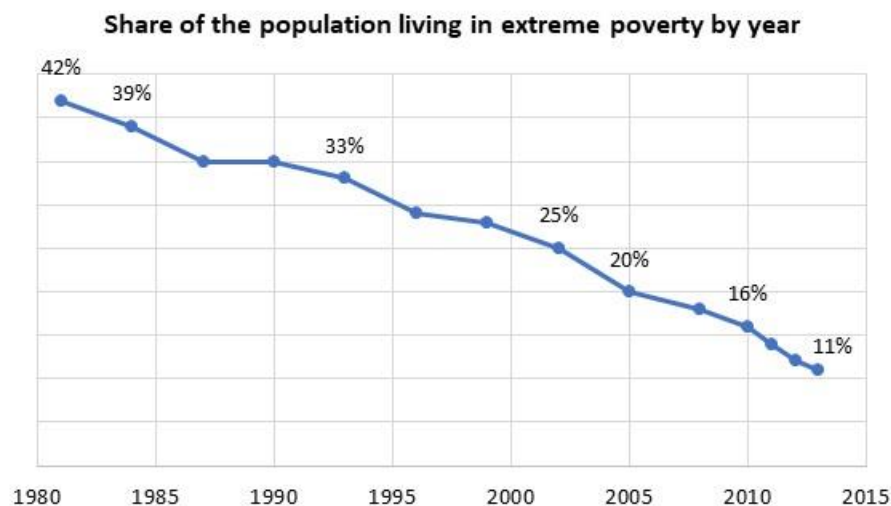
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Do you believe that assistance from other countries and international aid organizations can have a meaningful impact in addressing this issue?



Some of these issues are difficult to disentangle. Economic development for example, may have a direct impact on the rate of extreme poverty in a country. And while Canadians are more bullish about the impact of programs on economic development than extreme poverty, data suggests that progress in addressing extreme poverty has been robust. The share of the population globally living in extreme poverty has dropped drastically since 1981:



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The two issues that appear most intractable for Canadians are refugees and human rights. For some insight into why Canadians may feel pessimistic about these two, it is worth considering questions about governance in the developing world. More than eight-in-ten (85%) say that internal corruption is the single biggest obstacle to development in most of these poor countries. Another two-thirds say that political corruption creates a situation where sending aid to many of these countries is seemingly pointless. Clearly governance is an issue for Canadians when they consider where they would like funds to go.

Asked to consider some of the most important reasons why international aid may have not be able to have a meaningful impact, corruption is chosen by 70 per cent of respondents, significantly more than any other reason:

**What do you think are some of the most important reasons why international aid might not have a meaningful impact sometimes?
(Choose one or two)**



One aspect of the refugee crisis that cannot be overlooked, and is likely to drive much of the public pessimism in Canada, is the sheer scale of migration. [In 2016](#) there were an estimated 13.5 million Syrians requiring humanitarian assistance – 6.6 million of whom are displaced, and 4.8 million of whom are refugees outside of Syria now.

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Regional preference for aid

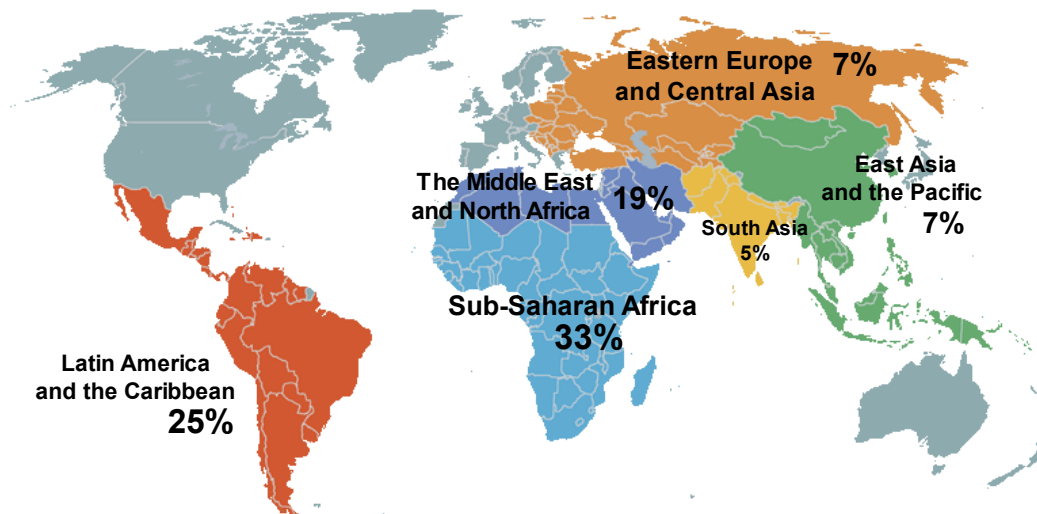
Overall Canadians are most likely (33%) to say that funds should be flowing to Sub-Saharan Africa. This is, in fact, the primary target for Canadian foreign aid. In 2012-13, 38 per cent of funding went to this region. In dollar value for 2016, this represented more than \$2.1B.

One-quarter (25%) of Canadians say that Latin America and the Caribbean should be the focus of aid efforts. 2016 totals here amounted to roughly \$700M - \$110M of which went to humanitarian and ongoing reconstruction efforts in Haiti.

The Middle East and North Africa is chosen by 19 per cent of Canadians, while one-in-three (33%) say they aren't sure where funds should go.

*Note the regions are defined by the World Bank.

Which places do you think should get the most focus in terms of international aid efforts ?
(Select one or two)

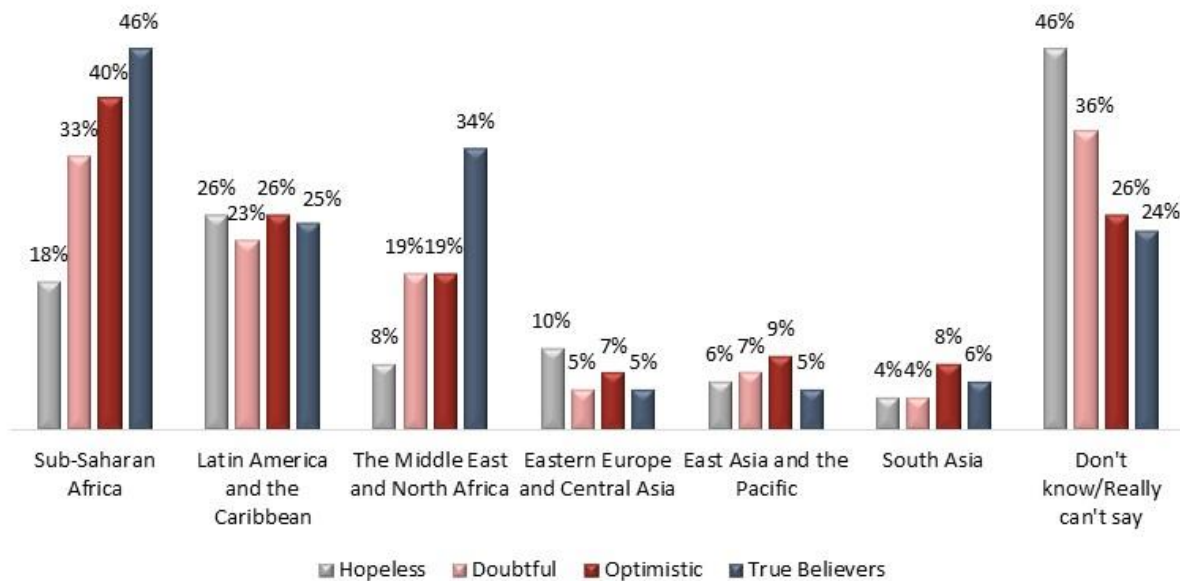


Support for aid in each area differs substantially based on which group of Canadians is asked. Sub-Saharan Africa is a focus for 46 per cent of True Believers, but this drops across each less enthusiastic group, to just 18 per cent among the Hopeless. All groups support Latin America close to equally, but the Middle East is preferred by significantly more True Believers than other groups:

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Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Which places do you think should get the most focus in terms of international aid efforts? (Select one or two)



Millennials: Financially strapped but want to do more

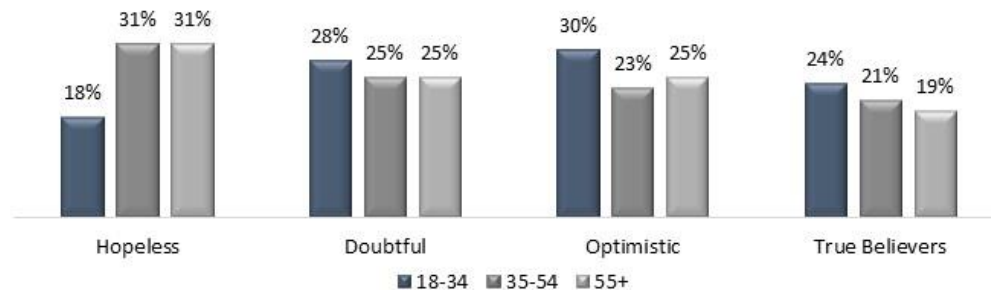
Younger Canadians, those in the so-called 'Millennial' cohort, have some distinct variations in their opinions about the current state and the future of development. Canadians age 18 – 34 are more likely to be among both the Optimistic and the Believers.

More than half (54%) are in these top two categories in terms of their opinions of the development sector. Each of the other two age groups, those 35 – 54 and over the age of 55, are most likely (31%) to be found among the Hopeless. The opposite is true of younger Canadians, this is where they're least likely to be found (18%):

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Development dispositions by age



This optimism about the efficacy of development programs translates to their assessment of the overall state of affairs across the development spectrum. Younger Canadians are more optimistic about the positive momentum in each area. Across all seven, Millennials are more likely to say they see each as improving and less likely to say they're getting worse compared to older age groups.

| In your view, would you say this issue is improving or getting worse? (Percentage who say 'Improving' shown) | | | | |
|---|-----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| (weighted sample sizes) | Total (1802) | Age | | |
| | | 18-34 (522) | 35-54 (629) | 55+ (652) |
| Economic development | 25% | 31% | 26% | 20% |
| Human rights issues | 21% | 31% | 20% | 15% |
| Healthcare and disease control | 21% | 28% | 21% | 26% |
| Children's safety and well-being | 18% | 25% | 17% | 14% |
| Extreme poverty | 9% | 15% | 8% | 4% |
| Refugees fleeing war and conflict | 6% | 10% | 7% | 2% |
| The occurrence of natural disasters | 4% | 8% | 2% | 2% |

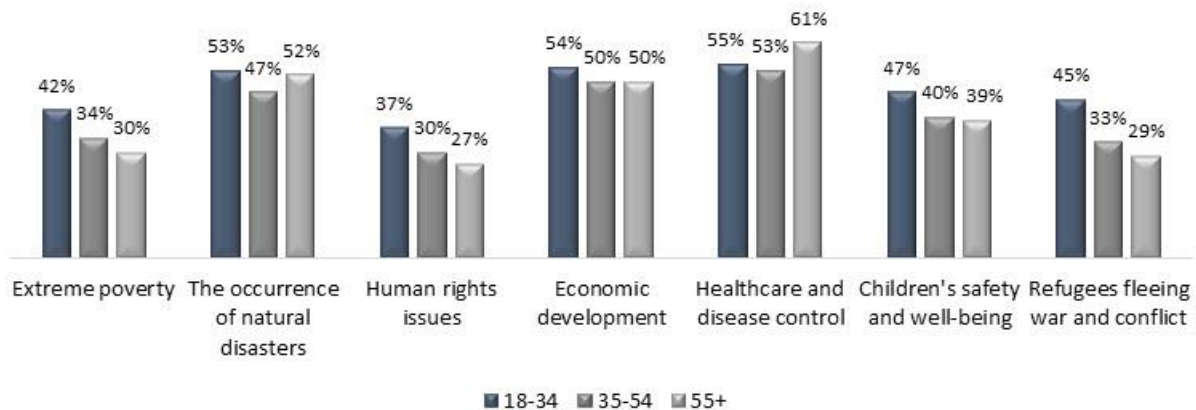
This age group is also more positive about the impact that assistance from the international community can have on each of those issues. Across each, this group is significantly more likely than those over 55 to say that aid is worth the effort, with the notable exception of issues involving healthcare, where older Canadians are most hopeful about the potential impact being made:

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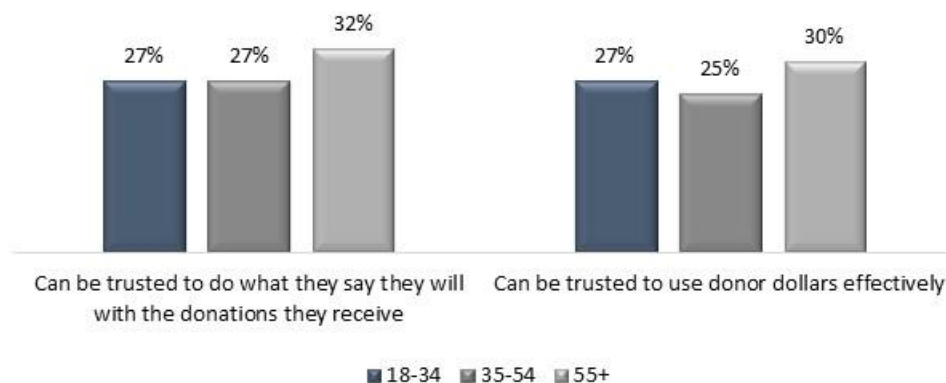
Do you believe that assistance from other countries and international aid organizations can have a meaningful impact in addressing this issue?

Percentage who say Yes shown



They're similarly more likely to say that Canada should do more and take a leadership role on a number of these issues. Notably however, they are no more likely than other generations to say NGO's in their own country can be trusted to deliver effective aid:

Canadian NGO's involved in overseas development aid
Percentage who say Most or All:



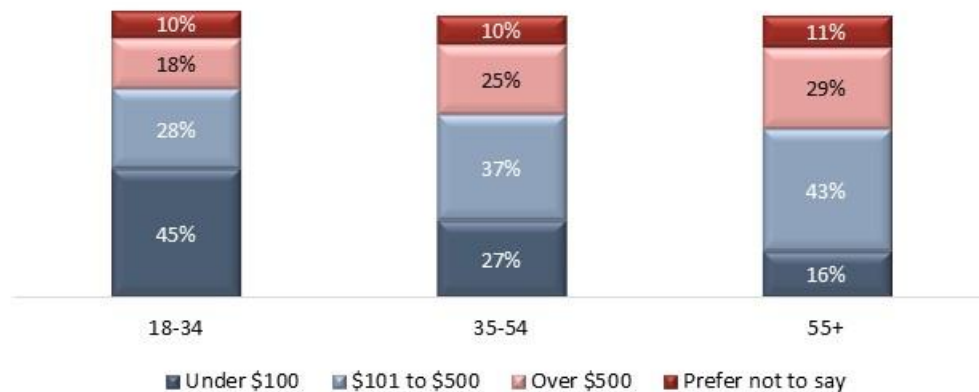
In terms of their donation practices, relative wealth appears to play a large factor in generational differences. While a close to equal number say they have donated in the past couple of years to overseas

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development – roughly one-in-five among each cohort – Millennial donation amounts are much more likely to be under \$100 total:

Approximately how much money have you donated to overseas development charities or projects over the past couple of years?



Involvement Index Methodology:

Based on a person's involvement with overseas charity projects in the past couple of years. The four groups are scored on a scale from 0 to 7.5, based on their responses to direct questions about their engagement with charitable organizations in this field.

The questions of interest are QE1 and QE2.

At QE1, assign 1 point for each Yes at items 1, 2 and 4 in this item bank
Assign 1.5 points for Yes at the 3rd item "donate money to international aid"
Assign 1.5 for a Yes response at QE2b and/or c

Minimum score = 0
Maximum score = 7.5

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For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics and involvement index, [click here](#).

For results by efficacy index, [click here](#).

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

Dave Korzinski, Research Associate: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org