



IN BRIEF 4

COMMUNICATING IN A PANDEMIC:

MESSAGES THAT RESONATE WITH THE BRITISH PUBLIC



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COVID-19/coronavirus has changed the way we work and live overnight. The pandemic presents a significant challenge to development organisations' work and communications – a challenge this DEL InBrief addresses.

FINDING A VOICE

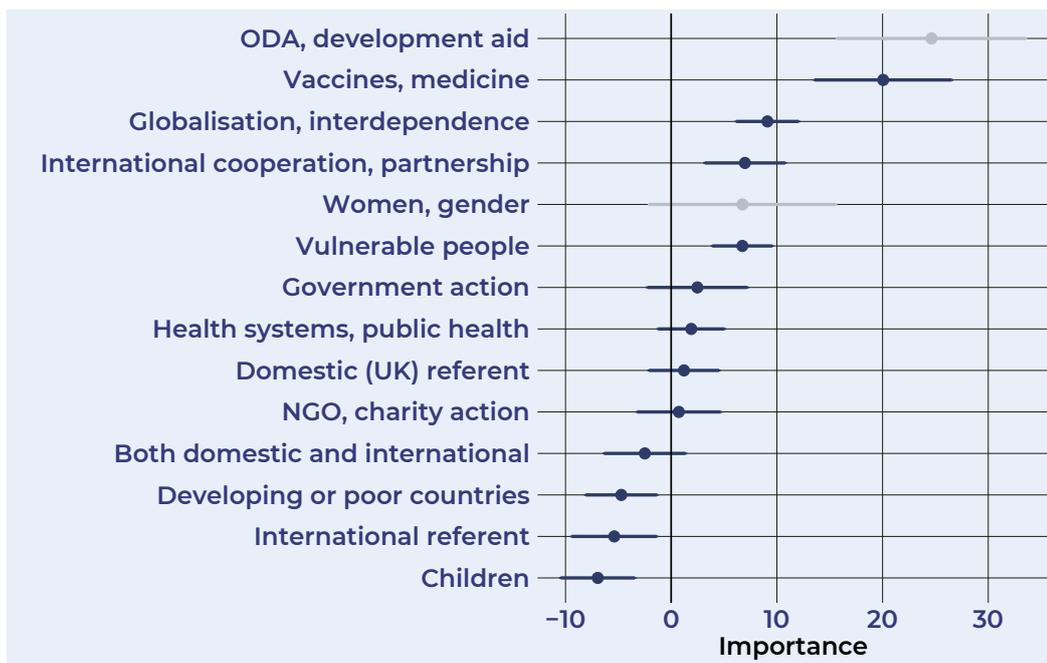
As of June 2020, the worst hit countries have been wealthier ones. While there are worries around certain large, middle income countries, namely Brazil, Indonesia, and India, the relative success of efforts in many developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific means concerns about low-income countries response are not foremost in the British public's mind.

And yet, the pandemic is far from over. If history is any lesson there is every chance that the second wave could be worse than the first. Plus, countries worst hit by the pandemic are not necessarily the ones to suffer the worst economic damage. Global recession, capital outflows, and falling exports will mean destructive levels of unemployment and destitution, unsustainable levels of government debt, and severe governance challenges for many developing countries. We know too well how these issues can give rise to other challenges – conflict, mass migration and the neglect of infrastructure and social safety nets, to name a few. So, given these tensions, how should development organisations make the case for international cooperation when the public's focus is still squarely placed on the impacts of the pandemic at home?

KEY INSIGHTS

- So far, countries worst-hit by the pandemic are wealthier ones, which presents challenges for organisations hoping to communicate immediate and longer-term needs in developing countries
- Messages that call for a collective response and emphasise the interconnectedness of the challenge perform best
- Respondents scored poorly messages that advocated turning our backs on vulnerable people
- Highlighting specific vulnerable groups (like children, women, refugees) seems to 'short circuit' empathy when public's own struggle isn't acknowledged
- Positive, humane language resonates well, while negative, threatening or alarming language performs poorly

FIGURE 1: HOW FRAMES AFFECT SUCCESS OF STATEMENTS



respondents.

In general, the top performing statements speak to one of three themes: supporting scientists' efforts to find a vaccine, interconnectedness, and international cooperation. The best performing message – 'I want our government to work with other governments to ensure scientists have the funding they need to find the treatments and vaccines that can help end this crisis' – was

To explore this question, DEL tested messages gathered from project partners as well as key public statements from media and public figures in order to understand the British public's response to the pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this InBrief was generated using YouGov's online panel of adults (18+) in Great Britain. Fieldwork was conducted from 24-27 April 2020 with a sample size of n=1,761. The data are weighted to be nationally representative.

To generate the messages for the analysis we asked partner development organisations to

submit messages for testing. Some messages were modified for length, clarity, or to remove organisation's name or other identifiers.

131 messages were presented to respondents at the top of a large survey on public attitudes. Respondents were shown 10 pairs of messages, chosen at random. Messages were selected 'without replacement,' meaning that no respondent saw the same message twice.

A POSITIVE APPETITE

Table 1 shows the 'league table' of winning messages – i.e. messages respondents agreed with more – in descending order. A complete table of messages with cuts by age, gender, 2019 General Election vote, 2016 EU Referendum vote, and support for aid spending [can be found here](#). The table number shows the percentage of times that message was chosen over another message; the higher the percentage, the more agreeable the message to

chosen 78.5% of the time against other randomly selected messages. A similar message, calling for support for scientists' work towards a vaccine, ranked second highest at 76.3%.

The third best performing message, 'The crisis shows that investments in public health and development aid should not be viewed as a drain on resources – there is a strong need to build a social safety net for all, even within high-income countries' – was selected 72% of the time. Two parts of this statement are worth reflecting on. First, respondents are warm to the idea of public health and development aid as an investment, protecting us against future events. Previous research by the Aid Attitudes Tracker found that framing overseas aid as an investment didn't land well with the public. However, the coronavirus pandemic may offer an opportunity to show how development aid can build resilience and capacity. Second, as the public in Britain and other high-income countries battle with historic job losses and economic insecurity, the notion of a social safety net for all

This reinforces the idea that messages that resonate tend to be 'we,' not 'they.'

clearly resonates with respondents.

Across the statements, notions of connectedness and interdependence feature positively, opening up space for communicating the sustainable development goals.

Looking lower down the table – ‘The British character still exists, and it will get us through this crisis’ – was chosen 35.4% of the time, and the weakest performing message, ‘The primacy of national responses to the crisis shows how cross-border super-states like the EU go against nature’s grain’ was chosen just 19.7% of the time against other randomly selected messages – both are messages that communicate division and unilateral action.

An important caveat is that not all weaker performing messages are bad news. A handful of messages, for example, ‘We should stop all aid

to other countries while we deal with coronavirus’ and ‘I don’t care about women’s rights when the UK has coronavirus’ were selected just 23.5% and 21.7% of the time, respectively. In other words, respondents declined to turn their backs on aid and women’s rights: new challenges haven’t pushed out core values and commitments.

FRAMING & ISSUES

In order to reveal patterns in the data we manually coded all messages to see whether they were framed in a particular way or touched on particular issues. For example, was the statement about the UK or other countries, or both? Did the statement refer to vulnerable populations in some way?

The global connectedness frame was the most common (25 of the 131 messages, 19% of the time). Somewhat surprisingly, statements that referred to women or gender and those that used an ODA or development aid frame were the least common (both only 2% of the time). As such we caution against inferring anything about these selections given the small sample size.

As shown in in Figure 1, the frame most strongly correlated with successful messages was the vaccines or medicine, e.g. ‘When a COVID-19 vaccine is available, we must ensure everyone across the globe has equal access to it.’ Other frames positively associated with successful messages

Respondents didn’t turn their backs on children & women’s rights: Covid hasn’t pushed out core values.

include international cooperation, collaboration, or partnership in some form; those that highlighted the connected nature of the world and/or globalisation; and those that referenced vulnerability, or particularly vulnerable populations (generally) or exclusion.

Less well-performing messages included those about other countries and not the UK, or explicitly spoke of developing countries (in general). The same is true about those messages that referred to children, such as ‘At this unprecedented time, it is important to protect the most vulnerable children, whether that’s here in the UK, or in more fragile communities around the world.’

This reinforces the idea that the messages that resonate tend to be ‘we not they.’ Messages that emphasise the global character of the virus and/or underline the importance or possibility of international cooperation perform better. But highlighting particular groups – no matter how important – can backfire and seems to trigger an ‘us versus them’ response. If people are asked to care for others without having their own suffering or sacrifice acknowledged, it risks short circuiting empathy.

While it might be surprising that messages referencing children do worse, on average, it may reflect evidence that children seem to be less badly affected by the virus, which presents a challenge for many

WORST-PERFORMING MESSAGES

- ‘I don’t care about women’s rights when the UK has coronavirus’ (22%)
- ‘The primacy of national responses to the crisis shows how cross-border super-states like the EU go against nature’s grain’ (20%)
- ‘The “Blitz spirit” isn’t back - it’s bunk. It was and has always been a myth’ (21%)
- Coronavirus is impacting women and girls the most as they are the most likely to shoulder the caring burden and work in unstable jobs (23%)

TABLE 1: HOW MESSAGES LAND

95% confidence lower
Percentage times chosen
95% confidence upper

		95% confidence lower	Percentage times chosen	95% confidence upper
1	I want our government to work with other governments to ensure scientists have the funding they need to find the treatments and vaccines that can help end this crisis	78.5	73.2	83.8
2	The only way to stop the corona virus crisis is to test, treat and prevent future infections with a vaccine - we need to support the world's scientists to do that.	76.3	70.7	81.9
3	The crisis shows that investments in public health and development aid should not be viewed as a drain on resources - there is a strong need to build a social safety net for all, even within high-income countries.	72.0	66.2	77.7
4	It is in everyone's interest to stop the virus from spreading unchecked, destroying lives and economies, and continuing to circle around the world.	71.2	65.5	76.9
5	We need a global response to a global problem. We're all in this together.	71.5	65.0	78.0
6	We should take urgent action in the fight against COVID-19 and helping communities to build resilience against diseases in the future.	70.8	64.3	77.3
7	The coronavirus crisis has affected us all like we could never have imagined. Whilst we are all in this together, we know it is the most vulnerable in our communities who will be hit hardest by this crisis. For people reliant on services that keep them safe from harm, connected and warm and fed, the physical and social isolation that is necessary to stop the spread of coronavirus is an even greater threat. We need to support local charities and projects in the UK, so they can provide essential support to people who really need it through the crisis.	71.0	64.3	77.7
8	Coronavirus knows no borders. It is a global threat and our shared humanity demands a global response.	69.7	63.8	75.7
9	Left undeterred, the virus will continue to spread across countries resulting in second and third waves of infections in the UK.	69.4	63.5	75.3
10	When a COVID-19 vaccine is available, we must ensure everyone across the globe has equal access to it.	70.2	63.4	77.1
11	The Covid-19/coronavirus pandemic will not end simply by conquering the disease in one country alone, but by ensuring recovery from this health crisis in all countries.	69.3	63.0	75.7
12	Charities and community organisations are part of our frontline response and will be needed now more than ever to provide essential support to those most at risk in our communities. Locally rooted organisations are a crucial lifeline for people in crisis. They are often the only witness to the many hidden dangers that go unnoticed behind closed doors, such as domestic abuse, child abuse, extreme poverty and destitution and people experiencing escalating mental health concerns. We need to pull together to support our incredible NHS and other key workers so they can fully focus on their work to tackle the spread of coronavirus.	68.5	62.2	74.9
13	COVID-19 highlights the need for strong, resilient health systems everywhere to deal effectively with global health security crises. We are only as strong as our weakest health system.	69.0	62.1	75.8
14	COVID-19 is a critical reminder that health should be treated as a universal human right. Everyone deserves access to essential quality health services.	68.7	62.0	75.4
15	A global pandemic demands a global response because no country or community will be safe until all of us are safe.	68.7	61.8	75.6
16	We have seen amazing examples here in the UK and across the world of people coming together to help their neighbours, reach out to the community, support their country and turn the tide on this disease.	68.4	61.6	75.2
17	Now is the time to come together to prevent the spread of the disease across the world and protect vulnerable children from the worst effects. Only a huge collective effort will work, and we can all play our part.	66.6	60.6	72.7
18	Coronavirus is a global crisis and we all have a role to play.	67.8	59.9	75.7
19	We are being reminding us of our connection to each other - and to nature. When we emerge from this crisis let's rebuild a future where everyone can thrive.	65.8	59.8	71.8
20	We're seeing and showing that we can act together to limit harm - even though it's hard. We face tough choices as we move through and out of the pandemic. But we do get to choose. We can choose to rebuild a future that meets everyone's needs.	65.7	59.1	72.3
21	Coronavirus shows the need for investment in health systems around the world.	64.8	58.3	71.4
22	Recovery from the coronavirus crisis must lead to a better world. We must ensure a truly global response, then build resilience for the future.	65.5	58.1	72.8
23	The right government action has been the main factor in how well different countries have responded to the pandemic. When leaders act it saves lives and protects our wellbeing.	62.7	56.2	69.2
24	Helping support the coronavirus response in other countries is the right thing to do. But it's also the smart thing to do. A response that leaves out the poorest people, refugees, and the vulnerable wherever they are will mean this virus is still a threat to everyone.	63.1	56.1	70.2
25	In this period of uncertainty and upheaval in our daily lives, it is more important than ever that we are kind and compassionate.	62.2	55.9	68.6
26	Our natural world is healing as we see pollution levels plummeting. For the sake of our planet and our future, we can never return to polluting business-as-usual. Let's build real sustainable societies within our planetary boundaries.	63.0	55.9	70.0
27	We're seeing how deeply we all depend on each other. When we come through this crisis we must rebuild societies where everyone can thrive.	62.2	54.9	69.5

28	It may give a semblance of accomplishment for countries to control the virus at a national level with travel bans and border closures, but this is just a stopgap. Only global victory can bring this pandemic to an end.	61.8	54.9	68.8
29	The crisis shows us how important good health is for fulfilling other human rights. Poor health has collateral impact on human development, education and economic opportunities.	60.9	54.1	67.7
30	We know that the most marginalised and vulnerable groups will face the greatest challenges in accessing health services, so we must commit to 'leaving no-one behind' in the global response.	60.2	53.2	67.2
31	We're all in this together, that means people who live across the street, or across the ocean.	60.0	53.0	67.0
32	We're seeing that our health is connected to the health of those around us - and the health of our planet. As we heal, we need to repair and revive so that our societies are in better shape for the future.	60.2	52.3	68.0
33	We are lucky to be able to practice social distancing and good hygiene in this country. Many people in other countries aren't able to do so.	58.9	52.1	65.7
34	Celebrate all those who are out there, on the front line, making an unbelievable difference to our lives in these challenging times.	59.7	52.1	67.4
35	No wall can be high enough to keep out a pandemic, or climate change, or any of the other big threats that face humanity in the future: we face these global threats as a global community.	59.2	52.0	66.3
36	Even with replacements for free school meals, many families - including those not previously receiving benefits - will struggle to feed their families well on a budget due to job insecurity, lack of awareness about healthy diets or lack of appropriate cooking facilities. Meanwhile, food banks are inundated with increased demand and running lower than ever on supplies as donations decrease.	58.5	51.9	65.0
37	I'm worried about people's health and the economy in the UK.	58.5	51.7	65.4
38	The world came together before and defeated polio. Together, we can defeat coronavirus.	58.8	51.4	66.1
39	Changing people's hygiene behaviour is as important as giving them soap and water.	59.0	51.2	66.8
40	Coronavirus shows how all our health - at home and abroad - is linked.	58.1	51.0	65.3
41	We all have a role to play in ensuring children aren't denied their most basic right of being fed as a result of their pandemic. It is good that development charities are partnering with community organisations across the UK already working to deliver food supplies to society's most vulnerable, to ensure that families are still well fed during coronavirus pandemic.	57.4	50.4	64.4
42	The critical role of community-based organisations and charities has been underlined by the response to COVID-19 - filling gaps in health responses and reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised.	56.6	49.8	63.4
43	We are one big community fighting the same thing and we need to pull together to help the most vulnerable.	57.8	49.5	66.1
44	COVID-19 teaches us that we are all global citizens connected by a single virus that recognises none of our natural or man-made diversity. For the virus, it is precisely our common humanity that matters.	56.1	49.4	62.7
45	This crisis highlights how many people were already struggling to stay afloat because of things like low wages and high costs. We must put this right when we emerge from the crisis.	56.4	49.3	63.4
46	While the virus itself is horrible, it also sheds light on some of the uglier sides of human nature, with an outbreak of selfishness and discrimination accompanying its spread.	56.2	49.3	63.0
47	Practice an attitude of gratitude - don't think "we're so unlucky to be stuck at home" - think "we're so lucky to be safe at home".	57.2	49.2	65.3
48	We need to help the oldest and most vulnerable in our local communities.	56.2	49.0	63.4
49	Nature is sending us a message with the pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis. There are too many pressures on our food and farming systems. If we don't take care of nature, we can't take care of ourselves.	56.3	49.0	63.7
50	I am proud of how the UK is coming together to support the most vulnerable in the country.	56.0	49.0	63.1
51	Many people in the world aren't able to practice social distancing or good hygiene because of the conditions they live in.	55.9	48.9	63.0
52	I'm worried about people's health and the economy for everyone around the world.	56.0	48.8	63.2
53	COVID-19 is going to have a catastrophic impact on the world's poorest countries.	55.9	48.8	63.1
54	COVID-19 is a global crisis, but the UK's priority should be helping its own people.	55.6	48.5	62.7
55	We should help those less fortunate than ourselves in the fight against COVID-19 if we can.	55.0	48.2	61.8
56	We should take urgent action to help in the fight against COVID-19 now.	55.6	48.0	63.2
57	It is worrying that millions of people living in poorer countries around the world who are already vulnerable due to food shortages, weak health systems and climate crisis are facing an outbreak of this devastating disease.	54.7	47.3	62.1
58	Donating to development charities to help provide food, essential supplies, health information and hygiene kits in places where millions of vulnerable families have no way of earning a living during lockdown is a good thing to do.	53.9	47.0	60.8
59	The global spread of COVID-19 highlights the need to turn our gaze outward. High-income countries working alone cannot suppress this disease. It will spread rapidly in low and middle income countries with fragile health systems and weaken the chain of defence.	53.6	46.7	60.5
60	Global cooperation has never been more important.	53.3	46.7	59.9
61	It is good to support those who deliver masks, oxygen and ventilators to the hardest to reach places on earth to save lives.	53.3	46.6	59.9

62	COVID-19 is exacerbating global inequalities, including access to quality health services, shortages of trained health workers and those highlighted by the socio-economic impacts of quarantine measures imposed by government.	54.6	46.4	62.8
63	COVID-19 has made it clear that charity may well begin at home, but doesn't end there.	53.6	46.4	60.9
64	We need to support vulnerable children no matter who they are or where they live.	53.1	45.7	60.6
65	At this unprecedented time for our country, it is important to protect the UK's most vulnerable children and families.	52.7	45.5	59.8
66	Across the world, COVID-19 has triggered community action on a vast scale. It's a powerful alternative to both government and private money.	51.5	44.9	58.1
67	This crisis shows that that every country is best protected by protecting people everywhere.	51.3	44.6	58.1
68	Viruses don't pay attention to borders, neither should solidarity.	50.5	44.1	56.9
69	In Syria, children are already vulnerable and healthcare systems are struggling to cope. The impact of a coronavirus outbreak would be catastrophic.	51.8	44.1	59.6
70	The coronavirus crisis dominates the news at the moment. However, we must not forget other serious crises for children around the world.	51.0	43.9	58.0
71	Great Britain has always come together and got through tough times.	51.2	43.8	58.5
72	It's important that rich countries take action to help the poorest countries respond to COVID-19, such as pausing debt repayments to allow their governments to invest in their healthcare systems.	51.1	43.2	59.1
73	This isn't just about compassion and empathy it's about hard self interest. Nobody is going to be safe, until everyone is safe.	49.8	41.8	57.9
74	We need to help the oldest and most vulnerable in our global community.	47.9	40.6	55.2
75	Adversity brings out the best of British - we've got through tough times before and we will again.	47.6	40.2	55.0
76	COVID-19 is a global crisis, so the UK should be helping people in other countries where we can, as well as helping our own people.	47.6	39.8	55.4
77	We are one big global community fighting the same thing and we need to pull together to help the most vulnerable, no matter where they live in the world.	47.0	39.1	55.0
78	The outbreak of coronavirus has had an unprecedented impact on children and families across the UK.	45.7	38.4	52.9
79	The crisis can strengthen global solidarity: the shared trauma can cultivate a sense of common destiny and more collaborative politics.	44.7	38.0	51.4
80	As COVID-19 spreads to the poorest countries in the world, it is more urgent than ever to support the most vulnerable communities.	46.2	37.9	54.5
81	We should seek to help the world's poorest people by providing water and handwashing facilities in the fight against COVID-19.	44.2	37.8	50.5
82	The climate crisis has not gone away during this time and we can't be distracted from the need to act.	45.0	37.6	52.3
83	I am proud of how the UK is supporting vulnerable people at this time.	44.5	37.3	51.6
84	At this unprecedented time, it is important to protect the most vulnerable children, whether that's here in the UK, or in more fragile communities around the world.	44.2	37.0	51.5
85	Experiencing food shortages in the UK was pretty scary and COVID-19 could have devastating effects on food security, nutrition and livelihoods in low-income countries. We can help.	43.3	36.9	49.8
86	Poor nations with weak health systems are drowning in debt, while rich nations are showing they can unlock trillions to build new hospitals and keep their economies alive.	43.8	36.7	50.9
87	We must prevent the spread of coronavirus to protect the world's most vulnerable children from a future they don't deserve. A future where they may be orphaned, forced onto the streets, out of education and into child labour or child marriage.	43.5	36.5	50.6
88	COVID-19 could have devastating effects on food security, nutrition and livelihoods in low-income countries. We can help.	43.9	36.0	51.7
89	At a time when healthcare in the UK has never been under more pressure, it is sobering to think about the catastrophic devastation that coronavirus could cause in a country like Yemen, whose health system has been decimated by war for five years.	42.8	35.9	49.8
90	We are at a critical juncture as borders are closing around the world to slow the rate of transmission. Let us not take the wrong cue from this. It does not mean that we are on our own, every country for themselves.	43.0	35.7	50.3
91	It is worrying to think that intense violence has forced over half a million Syrian children to flee their homes in Idlib. Now coronavirus threatens the lives of children and families living in crowded refugee camps.	43.1	35.4	50.9
92	While closing Yemen's borders and limiting people's movement is important to stem the spread of coronavirus, it can also have a terrible secondary impact on the availability of vital supplies, such as life-saving food.	43.0	34.9	51.0
93	Awareness campaigns are important to promote good hygiene.	41.3	34.5	48.1
94	It is right that footballers and celebrities donate their salaries to support front-line heroes in the UK and all over the world to help protect children and their families from Coronavirus.	41.0	33.9	48.1
95	Coronavirus has not just bumped Brexit down the political agenda, it makes the whole project look overblown and self-indulgent.	40.0	33.5	46.4

96	We urgently need to support the organisations helping to save lives as coronavirus hits the world's poorest countries.	40.2	32.9	47.5
97	It's the UK's responsibility as a world leader to help those less fortunate than ourselves in the fight against COVID-19.	39.4	32.8	45.9
98	Solidarity begins at home, but it doesn't end there.	39.7	32.8	46.5
99	Development charities are working hard to save the lives of people living in poverty in other countries to help end the COVID-19 pandemic.	40.1	32.6	47.6
100	This crisis will make us more united and stronger together.	39.1	31.6	46.6
101	Wash your hands for 20 seconds? Stay 2m apart? Only go out if necessary? For many people living in refugee camps, this just isn't possible. We all need to help support vulnerable people around the world.	37.9	31.1	44.8
102	Governments whose mission was to shrink the state, to cut taxes and borrowing and dismantle public services, are discovering that the free market cannot defend us from this crisis - we are watching neoliberalism collapse in real time.	37.2	30.9	43.4
103	The coronavirus is merely the latest problem to expose the problems of a globally interconnected world, highlighting the risks of open borders.	37.8	30.9	44.8
104	It really is about time we all said it. China caused this nightmare. Period.	38.8	30.8	46.9
105	To truly improve health security for people across the world, becoming universal health coverage heroes could be the best strategic decision political leaders ever make.	38.5	30.8	46.2
106	Development charities are working hard to help people in other countries to help make sure COVID-19 does not reappear globally.	38.3	29.7	46.9
107	Together we can show our love for all of humanity across the world and ensure the most vulnerable children are kept safe.	36.4	29.5	43.3
108	A metaphor here is Dunkirk, to be honest. We are a lot of little boats and the little boats can be effective.	36.3	29.2	43.3
109	The British character still exists, and it will get us through this crisis.	35.4	28.6	42.1
110	While painful, this crisis gives us an opportunity to tackle the other major threats we face: the climate ecological emergencies.	35.5	28.6	42.5
111	The horror films got it wrong. This virus has turned us into caring neighbours.	34.7	28.1	41.3
112	As Britain rightly focuses on halting the spread of the coronavirus here in the UK, we must not forget that we can still transform the lives of children in places like Yemen.	34.2	27.4	40.9
113	Together we can protect the world's most vulnerable children from Coronavirus.	34.5	27.2	41.7
114	Humanitarian organisations should be there for every child during this crisis and will continue to work to build a better future for them	34.1	27.1	41.1
115	We are in this together. The UK should do its part to help people in the world's poorest countries to survive.	33.5	26.9	40.1
116	It's counterproductive to say we should 'fight' or 'roll back' globalization. Instead, it's essential we seek to reign in its risks.	32.8	26.5	39.1
117	There are 12 million people in South Sudan, and only 3 ventilators. We must help them if they are to stand a chance.	32.7	26.4	39.0
118	Each country should look after their own.	31.4	23.9	38.9
119	Development charities should work to support new mums and babies to ensure that they have the nutrition they need to thrive.	29.6	23.6	35.6
120	We should be on the frontline of the coronavirus crisis helping to save lives as the pandemic hits the poorest countries in the world.	30.4	23.4	37.5
121	Euroceptics could be proved right if COVID-19 exposes European tensions and plunges the EU into existential crisis.	28.2	22.0	34.5
122	Together we can protect children from Coronavirus in the world's toughest and most dangerous places.	29.8	21.6	38.0
123	Charity begins at home. We shouldn't be helping people around the world to deal with coronavirus.	27.7	21.4	34.0
124	We should seek to help the world's poorest people by running hygiene promotion campaigns in the fight against COVID-19.	25.9	19.7	32.2
125	We can donate the money we are saving on our daily commute to help deliver oxygen and ventilators to families in some of the hardest to reach places on earth.	25.0	19.2	30.8
126	COVID is impacting women and girls the most as they are the most likely to shoulder the caring burden and work in unstable jobs.	23.1	17.5	28.7
127	We should stop all aid to other countries while we deal with coronavirus.	23.5	17.2	29.8
128	I don't care about women's rights when the UK has coronavirus.	21.7	16.0	27.4
129	The 'Blitz spirit' isn't back - it's bunk. It was and has always been a myth.	20.9	15.5	26.2
130	We can help celebrate and support front-line heroes in the UK and all over the world to protect children and their families from Cornoavirus by taking part in a special PE Challenge with Joe Wicks.	20.6	14.7	26.5
131	The primacy of national responses to the crisis shows how cross-border superstates like the EU go against nature's grain.	19.7	14.5	24.9

development organisations' focus on children as both a vulnerable category and a subject more likely to elicit sympathy.

From a communications perspective, it is far better, based on this evidence, to refer to vulnerability in general and inclusively than to highlight a particular vulnerable group, claiming they have a special right to assistance. Given we know that the virus affects demographic groups differently, this insight stands in contrast to evidence that shows that the virus's impact varies based on race and social class, presenting a difficult line to walk.

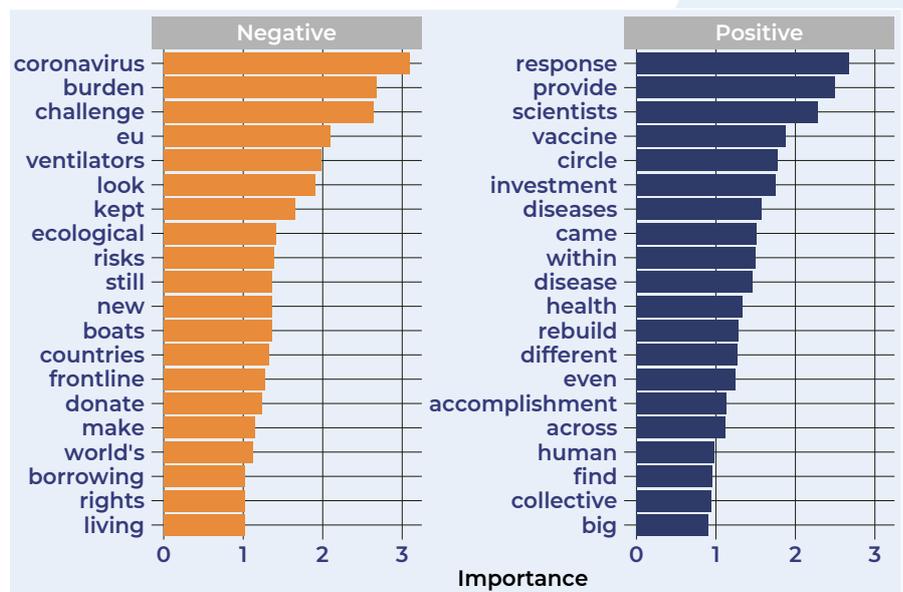
WORDS MATTER

In our final approach we took to identifying patterns, we reduced each statement to constituent words and ran a lasso regression model to understand whether certain words were systematically more common in relatively successful statements.

Figure 2 shows the top 20 words associated with successful messages. In the second column are words associated with bottom performers, ordered by relative likelihood of the word to predict success or failure.

All told, this does not mean that constructing a message by numbers is necessarily possible, but it provides some clues about how language resonates or doesn't resonate with

FIGURE 2: WORD-CHOICE AND COVID-19



the public. The valence of the words in the two columns suggests that people would prefer to see messages that use positive language and humane terms. The language of the 'not chosen' column suggests that people shy away from threat and alarming language.

MORE DEL RESEARCH ON COVID COMMS

This message testing was part of a larger survey on attitudes towards development issues in a time of COVID-19. Elsewhere we have discussed the findings around threat perceptions and support for global cooperation as well as what people believe donors should do to support developing country governments. Finally, for those readers who would

like to download the full table of the 131 messages – it is available on the DEL website, [developmentCompass.org](https://developmentcompass.org). The downloadable spreadsheet does not only have the aggregate score for each message, but also allows you to reorder the more or less successful statements for different groups in the population – for example by younger or older respondents, or Remain and Leave voter. The spreadsheet contains cuts by age, gender, 2019 General Election vote, 2016 EU Referendum vote, and support for aid spending and [can be downloaded here](#). There are number of significant differences among the different groups.

DATA:

The data for this In Brief was generated using YouGov's online panel of adults (18+) in Great Britain. Fieldwork was conducted on April 24 – 27 2020 with a sample size of n= 1,761. The data are weighted to be nationally representative.

You can find out more information about DEL research at developmentcompass.org

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