

Why only few remember the Enough Food If campaign



In 2013, Enough Food If was the first campaign coalition since Make Poverty History in 2005. Yet while many recall the latter, few do the former, despite around 200 NGOs having been involved in the 2013 campaign. [Graham Harrison](#) explains some of the reasons behind this failure to make an impression on the public memory.

In 2013, the major international development NGOs led a campaign coalition that aimed to be as big as other landmark global poverty campaign moments such as Make Poverty History or Jubilee 2000. During its construction, those who led the campaign declared that it would be a major public event with ambitious goals. The campaign was called Enough Food If. The fact that many – most? – readers will not recall the campaign is intriguing and raises key questions regarding the role of development NGOs and the campaigns they advocate.

Enough Food If failed to make an impression on the public memory. Why? The key to answering this question is, intriguingly, its success. Success can be a tricky thing and in this particular case, it came at a significant cost.

First, a little context. Big development NGOs like Oxfam and Save the Children have been thinking about how to make an impression on a broad British public since the massive public profile they achieved through Make Poverty History. But, at the same time, there was a good deal of trepidation of trying to repeat Make Poverty History. A key reason for this was that, although successful in achieving massive public prominence, Make Poverty History left a difficult legacy for coalition building. Most coalition members went through a difficult set of reflections about Make Poverty History's effects on the sector more broadly.

As a result, NGOs wanted to project their message, understood that this meant creating some kind of coalition to amplify voice, but were not sure how to do it. Leading development NGOs very concerned to ensure that whatever they did, it would be perceived as a success and this set a tone of conservatism and moderation from the beginning.

Enough Food If was designed in a particular way in order to write success into its procedures. Most importantly, it wanted to align its goals as closely as possible to those held by the Conservative-led coalition government. Indeed, the campaign's origins derived from the 'hunger summit' hosted by David Cameron after the Olympics in 2012. And, leaders within the campaign consulted the government as it established itself and set its goals: a coalition of coalitions.

Subsequently, key themes developed through the campaign's 'asks' were substantially similar to the international development agenda being articulated by the Coalition Government and especially David Cameron. The Enough Food If campaign themes were tax, aid, land, and transparency. International taxation reform, defending aid, and promoting transparency were at the heart of every statement Cameron made on international development and his motif of a 'golden thread'. The only distinct campaign issue was land, and this articulated mainly through a concern with 'transparency' which was Cameron's main point of reference throughout his development communications. It was also most as if the second clause in the campaign's suggestive name was: Enough Food If... the Coalition government achieves its development vision and manages to get other G8 governments on board in the process.

The problem here is that the campaign had little sense of ambition, risk, or distinct identity from a government leadership that was moderately interested in a moderate vision for international development. As a result, success seemed likely and also rather unremarkable. The lack of adversarialism and distinct ambition was both a way to secure a success narrative and to make that narrative entirely unremarkable.

This securing of success was manifest in other ways: the campaign was short, rather loosely-managed, and very generalised. It allowed any organisation to get on board and required little from them and almost no difficult intellectual and political discussions about campaign identity and politics. There was a gathering in Hyde Park but little attention to the decisions made at the G8 meeting a week later. The campaign coalition's statements after the G8 were general and supportive. Within the coalition, statements were made about the success of the campaign, none of which raised questions about the low level of ambition or lack of distinctiveness of the campaign.

There is a balance to be struck in any campaign mobilisation. The more likely success seems, the less like that it is worth winning. Across a whole range of campaigns throughout British history, it is the long-fought, highly-ambitious, politically contested, and complex campaigns that are remembered, including popular suffrage, anti-apartheid, and Drop the Debt. Even campaigns that have ostensibly failed have left significant footprints on the political issues they engaged with: nuclear disarmament, anti-war, climate change protests, Global Social Fora, Occupy.

You need ambition, risk, and political contention to generate campaigns worth winning and remembering. In this sense, the Enough Food If campaign was not worth winning or remembering.

Note: the above draws on the author's [published work](#) in the British Journal of Politics and International Relations.

About the Author



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