



Evaluation of the Get Fair campaign
Summary Findings

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With funding and support from



Newton Hall
Newton
Cambridge CB22 7ZE
Tel: (01223) 871551
Fax: (01223) 871303
cpc@campolco.co.uk

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1. KEY POINTS

- 1.1. The Get Fair campaign is a co-ordinated umbrella mobilisation of third sector organisations, aimed at encouraging individuals to take action on UK poverty. The aim of this research was to assess the impacts of Get Fair to date and to draw lessons for future UK poverty coalitions.

Key points

- The campaign achieved some impressive outcomes: it signed up more than 60 member organisations going beyond traditional poverty groups, was mentioned during Prime Minister's question time and led to improved collaboration in the sector and to clear impacts on its activists;
- The latter includes reactions from some activists that they are now less likely to think that poor people partially have themselves to blame;
- Engaging with individuals who are already supportive of the UK poverty agenda, be they MPs or activists, is worthwhile: it can act as a powerful reminder or give a boost to individuals' enthusiasm to act.
- Actual involvement of many Get Fair member organisations was limited; real ownership of the campaign remained with a small group of mainly faith-based organisations;
- Involvement of member organisations was wider in policy advocacy at the national level and less pronounced in grassroots events;
- Mobilisation of activists proved difficult – partially because many Get Fair member organisations do not have supporters who engage in the kind of grassroots activism which Get Fair was modelled on;
- The main challenges for the campaign were resource constraints including the absence of a campaign manager; a slow start-up process and a lukewarm initial endorsement from the sector; a perception that Get Fair was a faith-based campaign; and lack of clear and strong leadership.
- Get Fair's real achievements despite serious challenges plead for a continuation of the campaign – but dealing with the lack of ownership among many Get Fair members is crucial.

2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Get Fair formation and activities

- 2.1. The wish to develop stronger collaboration between third sector organisations working on UK poverty goes back quite some time. Inspired by the success of the 2005 Make Poverty History campaign, poverty groups started thinking about launching a Make *UK* Poverty History campaign, in particular following the December 2006 National Poverty Hearing.
- 2.2. The Get Fair campaign, a co-ordinated umbrella mobilisation of third sector organisations, was launched in May 2008. The main objectives of the campaign were to encourage individuals to take action on UK poverty and encourage more coordinated lobbying by Get Fair coalition members. The campaign took as its starting point earlier research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) showing that “*the public are currently a long way from supporting an anti-UK poverty agenda*”.
- 2.3. The Get Fair campaign was not the only force working towards getting poverty higher on the (political) agenda in 2008 and 2009. Get Fair operated alongside the End Child Poverty campaign and in a wider context of cross-party political support for the UK Government’s commitment on child poverty. The recession similarly encouraged increased political (and public) attention for poverty issues.

The main Get Fair activities during 2008-2009 were:

May 2008	Parliamentary launch of Get Fair
September 2008	Launch of Get Fair website
October 2008	End Child Poverty rally (organised by End Child Poverty and supported by Get Fair)
November 2008	Get Fair open letter to party leaders
January 2009	Scottish launch of Get Fair
February 2009	Poverty & Homelessness Action Week (PHAW)
April 2009	Preparatory sessions for June 2009 lobby
June 2009	Lobby of MPs by constituency activists

Achievements

2.4. Get Fair can boast significant achievements in terms of its reach:

- The campaign secured a membership of more than 60 third sector organisations, reflecting the diversity of the sector and including key players such as Oxfam, Help the Aged, Shelter and Save the Children. The coalition went beyond traditional poverty groups and also included housing and human rights charities and charities supporting children and older people;
- Get Fair reached out to close to 300 British policy-makers, including at least 160 MPs and more than 120 MSPs – these results are similar to the reach of other fairly small advocacy initiatives undertaken by individual third sector organisations;
- The campaign website received visits from more than 5,500 unique visitors and more than 750 individuals registered their email address on the website; and,
- More than 4,000 individuals participated in various Get Fair activities, in particular the January 2009 PHAW initiative and to a lesser extent the June 2009 constituency lobby.

2.5. Similarly, Get Fair can boast significant success in terms of impacts:

- Get Fair led to closer collaboration between individual third sector organisations. In some cases, Get Fair member organisations also reported an increase in their membership or access to senior politicians who would have been beyond their reach without Get Fair;
- Reactions from politicians to the June 2009 constituency based lobby varied. Some lobbies were seen as preaching to the converted but MPs commented that the lobby reminded them about the importance of UK poverty and showed that there was a constituency base for action on UK poverty. One MP raised Get Fair in Prime Minister's question time following the lobby visit. Examples of practical impacts of the lobby are rare, but in a couple of instances an MP agreed to follow up on issues raised, for example by getting in touch with a local councillor; and,
- By and large, Get Fair activists had already been committed to fighting UK poverty and felt confirmed in their views, but hardly anyone said that there had been no impacts at all. Large proportions were now more likely to pay attention to what politicians were saying or were more likely to email or write to a politician. Encouragingly, a small proportion indicated that they were now less likely to think that poor people partially had themselves to blame. Despite years of campaigning experience, activists still felt re-energised by the lobby:

“I am used to lobbying but I am always very stimulated by the contact with policy-makers. It encourages you to do things”

Challenges

- 2.6. For most Get Fair member organisations, involvement was limited to sharing information about the Get Fair campaign with their own supporters, members or partners. The main Get Fair activities with a public engagement component, the January 2009 PHAW event and the June 2009 constituency based lobby, were coordinated and managed mainly by a few faith-based organisations.
- 2.7. Get Fair suffered from a persistent lack of real ownership of the campaign beyond a core group of mainly faith-based organisations. There were a number of reasons for this:
- The internal debate early on whether or not Get Fair should run simultaneously with End Child Poverty and the slow Get Fair start-up process affected the enthusiasm of partners;
 - Resource constraints meant that not enough time and efforts could be put in the partnership management process. There was no campaign manager;
 - A vicious circle was created: active involvement in the grassroot activities mainly came from a limited number of faith-based organisations, which led people to see Get Fair mainly as faith-based and further discouraged active involvement by other groups – this was however not true for all Get Fair member organisations and some non-faith groups were actively involved;
 - Resource constraints created a second vicious circle: member organisations did not feel a sufficiently strong sense of ownership and enthusiasm for the campaign to commit resources to it and without additional resources it was difficult to invest sufficient time in nurturing the membership; and,
 - The very active involvement of Church Action on Poverty (CAP), de facto acting as campaign manager – often as a direct result of work being placed with CAP by the Get Fair coalition – allowed the rest of the steering group “to become complacent”. The steering group also suffered from lack of continuity and frequent changes in membership. This effectively left Get Fair without strong leadership. Get Fair (recently) established a tighter Executive Group of 5 people and started moving away from being a single focus campaign towards offering a campaigning ‘space’ for coalition members. Members of the Executive Group feel that this has given a clearer focus for decision-making and leadership.
- 2.8. Mobilisation of activists proved difficult. Although most Get Fair member organisations have supporters, these supporters are not usually asked to

engage in the kind of local activities Get Fair modelled itself on: grassroots activity, which is loosely inspired on one central campaign message but lets individual activists choose the type of activity and specific messages they wish to focus on. The supporters of other organisations are sometimes asked to participate in advocacy efforts, but the campaign asks tend to be more specific and controlled. In other instances, supporters are not asked to support any advocacy efforts: they rather engage in local community projects or support the organisation financially.

Lessons learnt

- 2.9. The main reasons for organisations to sign up to the campaign were:
- Support for the principles of what the Get Fair campaign stands for;
 - A clear link between UK poverty and the organisation's own remit;
 - Belief that joining forces must be more effective; and,
 - A desire to change people's perceptions of their organisation.
- 2.10. The widest involvement of the Get Fair membership was reached when Get Fair decided to write an open letter to the three party leaders, which was signed by almost 30 third sector Chief Executives. More generally, involvement of member organisations was wider in policy advocacy at the *national* level and less pronounced in *grassroot* events (PHAW and the constituency based lobby).
- 2.11. In its attempt to link national policy asks to local priorities and grassroots activity, Get Fair at times risked falling between the national and the local level and achieving neither: local activists do not like being pushed into focusing on national issues they feel are irrelevant or too complicated; member organisations feel that Get Fair failed to reach the (national) debate that really matters to politicians. Linked to this is the challenge devolution poses to campaigns and the need to engage with policy-makers at local, regional and national level – including both the devolved administrations and the UK level.
- 2.12. Activists, even committed ones, need support and guidance. There is always a risk that they will not bother in the end with the lobby, just opt for an email instead of the face-to-face contact or just lobby on their own instead of trying

to get others involved. People with wider pre-existing networks of organisational contacts tend to be both more active and more effective in getting others involved in the lobby. The briefing sessions organised in advance of the lobby went some distance towards providing this support.

- 2.13. Get Fair messaging was seen as “*worthy but dull*” and many were unclear as to exactly what was being asked – of politicians, of individual activists and of member organisations. Somewhat paradoxically, Get Fair policy asks came across to some as both too vague and too technical. A challenge in this context has been the tension between the Get Fair coalition as a brand and member organisations’ own brands.

Conclusions

- 2.14. Despite challenges in terms of securing more active involvement of the wider Get Fair membership, Get Fair has built up momentum over the past 18 months and a clear majority of activists and Get Fair member organisations were likely to engage in Get Fair in the future – which pleads for a continuation of the campaign.
- 2.15. Earlier JRF research has highlighted the lack of funding for public awareness building activities and funders would do well to note that the Get Fair campaign (i) is unique in its ambition to unite a divided sector and focus on challenging public opinion; (ii) has delivered modest but real impacts despite significant challenges; and, crucially, (iii) has shown a proven willingness to critically assess and reinvent itself since the May 2008 launch, including through the research findings of this evaluation.
- 2.16. Future coalitions and campaigns should draw lessons in particular in terms of the importance of nurturing the coalition membership.
- 2.17. The core challenge for the Get Fair coalition itself is to break through the vicious circle of lack of ownership among its coalition membership. This requires:
- Developing a clearer strategic vision as to what is expected of the Get Fair membership and, equally importantly, how the overall Get Fair campaign

can relate and add value to what individual member organisations are doing. Investing heavily in nurturing the membership remains crucial;

- Addressing the tension between on the one hand the explicit ambition of Get Fair to challenge public opinion and encourage local activism and on the other hand Get Fair member organisations' wish to engage in national policy advocacy. There is no easy answer to this tension. If a coalition is to be successful, it absolutely needs to start from coalition members' own priorities, which in the case of many Get Fair partners is national policy advocacy. However, the uniqueness of Get Fair lies precisely its focus on challenging public opinion. At the very least, there needs to be a discussion with the wider partnership as to (i) whether or not Get Fair continues to aim for an impact on public opinion and, if so, (ii) whether the grassroots activism approach is the way forward; and,
- A full time campaign manager is a necessity – the campaign manager role should focus on coordinating and facilitating implementation of the decisions made by the Get Fair coalition. A facilitative leadership style – suggesting initiatives and creating opportunities but leaving agenda-setting and prioritisation up to the wider membership – would be ideal.

3. FURTHER INFORMATION

About the project

3.1. The research was undertaken by Joke Delvaux and Sini Rinne from Cambridge Policy Consultants. The methodology included:

- Telephone interviews with Get Fair members (15), Get Fair activists (10) and MPs (4);
- An online survey of recipients of Get Fair e-alerts (39 responses); analysis of Get Fair media coverage; and,
- Analysis of feedback from Poverty and Homelessness Action Week organisers (78) and participants (80) and constituency lobby organisers and participants (14).

For further information

3.2. The full report, Evaluation of the Get Fair Campaign – Final Report, by Joke Delvaux and Sini Rinne, is available as a free download from:

www.getfair.org.uk.

3.3. Further information can be obtained from Joke Delvaux at Cambridge Policy Consultants (joke@campolco.co.uk, tel: 01223 871551) or the JRF project manager Teresa Hanley (teresa_hanley@dsl.pipex.com). This project was supported by the Joseph Rowntree programme on public interest in poverty. Other related reports can be found at:

www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/attitudes-poverty.