

# Mobilizing opinion

## Achieving Results

**Sam Harris**

**Among the more promising developments to emerge from the so-called 'lost eighties' are grassroots organizations committed to empowering the poor and the hungry in developing and industrialized countries alike. Results, an international citizens' lobby, has combined sophisticated telephone usage and concerted small-group activity to generate editorial opinion in the print media and to influence legislative and budgetary policy. The approach meshes two seemingly contradictory trends – localized public participation and global interdependence.**

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There's not a rich lobby in Washington that wouldn't trade its limos for the group's achievement: more than 300 editorials in three years and a 3-0 record. Nor is there a lobby that has nobler causes: feeding the hungry and self-sufficiency for the poor.<sup>1</sup>

Many groups, including Bread for the World in the US, the World Development Movement in the UK and Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN) in the Federal Republic of Germany, have discovered the power of getting the grassroots involved in taking political action on issues of hunger. One group in particular has created a modest social invention by empowering local grassroots groups to generate editorial opinion in the media and effective legislative lobbying. The group is Results, an international citizens' lobby that in a mere decade has swelled to include more than 150 groups in seven countries. From its headquarters in Washington, the organization has emerged from the so-called 'lost decade' of the 1980s as an extremely effective mobilizer of national and international political will and action to end hunger.

The mobilization effort entails convincing individual citizens that they can make a difference in creating the political will to end hunger. My particular stimulus for organizing Results in 1980 came in the aftermath of a speaking tour in 1978-79. Only 200 of 7000 secondary school students who had listened to lectures on world hunger were able to name their own representative to the US Congress. Clearly a gap separated the numerous calls for political will to end hunger and the know-how for producing it, and Results stepped in to bridge that chasm. The group began by learning and, in turn, teaching citizens how to persuade the US Congress to place hunger high on its agenda.

During its first few years, Results operated primarily as a voluntary US grassroots movement and did not acquire any full-time staff until the end of 1984 when there were 40 groups in 27 states and enough funds for the first paid staff member. Since then Results has grown to 11 groups in Australia, seven in Canada, five in the Federal Republic of Germany, five in Japan, 20 in the UK, 105 in the US and the newest group in Moscow, USSR. Now the full-time staff numbers seven in the US, one and a half in Australia and one and a half in the UK. The organization has an annual budget of \$700 000, \$500 000 of which is in the US.<sup>2</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> Colman McCarthy, 'Leading the charge against hunger', *Washington Post*, 8 May 1988.

<sup>2</sup> The figure for the US is particularly impressive insofar as contributions to lobbying groups are not tax-deductible.

1989 Results groups generated 1573 published print media pieces internationally, or 4.3 pieces a day (see Table 1).

### Group activities

All Results groups, whether on local, national or international fronts, pursue their common goals in characteristic fashion. Members lobby policy makers and legislators, speak to editorial writers, and train private citizens to do likewise, thereby affecting legislative and budgetary priorities. The approach combines the novel use of advanced telephone capabilities (so that dispersed groups can communicate) with practice in simple face-to-face delivery of information and opinion, traditional letters to the editor, and other grassroots activities that focus on the elimination of hunger.

Each Results group has a minimum of four key volunteers, called partners, who attend three meetings every month. These meetings are:

- A nationwide telephone conference call with a guest speaker. (The US call usually has 200–300 participants; the UK call 40–50; the West German call 15, etc.) Guests have included members of Congress and Parliaments in all countries, the heads of the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), authors Susan George, Francis Moore Lappe, John Clarke and many more.
- A delivery meeting with the primary purpose of improving the partners' ability to 'deliver' their message and to expand the range of issues they can articulate.
- An education and action meeting at which partners and their supporters and colleagues write letters on the spot to the editors of local newspapers, to their legislators, to national leaders and to international aid agencies.

Group leaders receive a weekly support call and a letter from their national office almost as often. Leaders or partners might deliver a packet of information on an issue to local editorial writers, meet with their congressional representative on his or her visit to the district, or hold a press conference around a major publication or activity.<sup>3</sup>

Over the years Results has sought support for four major approaches to ending hunger and poverty in the Third World: small-farmer agricultural development through IFAD; improving the survival of small children through immunization, oral rehydration therapy, breast-feeding and growth monitoring; promoting small loans to the poorest people; and adopting a set of concrete, measurable goals to reduce global poverty.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Over the past five years Results groups in the US have co-convened, with the US Committee for Unicef and numerous local groups, more than 100 news conferences to mark the release of Unicef's annual report, *The State of the World's Children*.

<sup>4</sup> Results groups in the US and Australia also focus on domestic hunger and poverty.

Table 1. Results: a profile.

Country	Date started	Number of groups	Print media pieces generated in 1989
Australia	1985	11	172
Canada	June 1986	7	90
FR Germany	March 1988	5	63
Japan	April 1989	5	15
USSR	January 1990	1	—
UK	July 1986	20	206
USA	May 1980	105	1027

## Agricultural development

When most citizens think of Third World hunger, they think of famines and providing food. Results has sought long-term solutions to hunger and poverty. The work of IFAD – to improve food production and incomes among the rural poor and to promote people’s participation in those projects – was on target.

Results’ support for IFAD began in 1985, when the US and the oil-producing and exporting countries (OPEC) were locked in a squabble that put the existence of IFAD in jeopardy. Industrialized countries had contributed 58% of IFAD’s budget and OPEC 42%. OPEC asked that the ratio be changed two percentage points to 60/40 for the second replenishment of IFAD’s funds. All countries, except the US, agreed. Results volunteers in the US initiated editorials in 46 newspapers supporting a successful second replenishment. After a six-month campaign, a State Department official called to say that Results could ‘stop the editorials now because 60/40 is OK’. The replenishment negotiations were successfully completed.

Results Australia played a key role in 1988–89 by altering their government’s plan to terminate contributions to IFAD beginning with its second replenishment. The second replenishment pledge was paid. In 1989 Australian volunteers played the central role in their government’s decision to contribute A\$10 million to the IFAD third replenishment and half a million dollars for the Special Programme for Sub-Saharan Africa.

## Child survival

In the early 1980s Unicef began to enunciate a programme of primary health care for the children of the Third World with special emphasis on four programmes represented by the acronym GOBI:

- Growth monitoring called for parents and community health workers to weigh and monitor the growth of infants because early stages of malnutrition are difficult to identify with the eye.
- Oral rehydration therapy (ORT), a simple mixture of sugar, salt and water for children suffering from diarrhoeal dehydration, was hailed in a 1978 editorial in the *Lancet* as ‘potentially the medical advance of the century’<sup>5</sup> because it could save most of the 5 million lives lost each year due to dehydration.
- Breastfeeding was promoted over bottle feeding because mother’s milk is more healthful and available in the early months of life.
- Immunization against six vaccine-preventable diseases (measles, polio, tuberculosis, diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus) could save the 5 million children lost each year in the early 1980s.<sup>6</sup>

In 1986 legislation before the US Congress would have doubled the Child Survival Fund from \$36 million to \$75 million, especially for the promotion of the World Health Organization (WHO)/Unicef campaign to immunize the world’s children by 1990. Bread for the World and Results worked together to persuade more than half the House and half the Senate to co-sponsor legislation calling for the increase. Results volunteers initiated 60 newspaper editorials and hundreds of letters to the editor supporting the increased funding. When the House Appropriations Committee balked and voted for \$50 million, Results volunteers generated 30 more editorials in 30 days (for a total of 90 editorials) and

<sup>5</sup> ‘Water with sugar and salt’, Editorial, *The Lancet*, Vol 2, No 8084, 5 August 1978, p 300. The editorial echoes an earlier one: see ‘Oral glucose/electrolyte therapy for acute diarrhoea’, *The Lancet*, Vol 1, No 7898, 11 January 1975, pp 79–80.

<sup>6</sup> Unicef now estimates that immunization and ORT save 3 million lives each year. See *State of the World’s Children 1990*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, USA, 1990, p 14.

the House agreed to the Senate appropriation of \$75 million. The next year funding was \$80 million, the next year \$100 million, and in fiscal year 1990 funding for child-survival activities across several accounts is slated at \$200 million.

Results UK played a key role in achieving a major increase in the UK contribution to Unicef, bringing the support back up to pre-Thatcher levels. Results in FR Germany generated 12 articles in national newspapers and received written support from more than 40 Bundestag members for increased government funding for Unicef. The government increased its funding by half a million marks more than was originally in its 1990 budget, plus an additional 1 million marks each year up to 1992. Results Australia also participated in a successful primary health initiative.

### Microenterprise poverty lending

Extreme poverty often looks to be a condition that offers no path of escape. Professor Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, has argued that credit itself should become a fundamental human right. He has said, 'Credit will equip a dispossessed person to give a fight against the economic odds around him. Without the support of credit he only gets beaten mercilessly. [Access to credit] is basic for the economic emancipation of the poor in general, and poor women in particular.'<sup>7</sup> Grameen has provided loans averaging \$67 to over 500 000 landless women in Bangladesh and reports a repayment rate of over 98%.

In 1987 Results pressed the US Congress to make funds available for credit to the poorest people in the Third World. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) opposed this 'minimalist' approach, which was geared more to self-employment, in favour of its own programme of larger loans to people who could hire the poor and create wage employment.

More than 100 editorials, hundreds of letters and more than 150 congressional co-sponsors were generated in 1987. As a result Congress earmarked \$50 million for microenterprise lending for the poor in fiscal year 1988. In report language, Congress urged that up to 80% of the loans should be targeted to individuals in the poorest 50% of the population with special emphasis on businesses owned by women and the poorest 20% of the population. It was also recommended that loans should not exceed \$300 unless it was necessary to fulfil the objectives of the programme.

Concern for implementation prompted the Results Educational Fund study, *Where Credit is Due*, which focused on ten countries comprising 50% of the global microenterprise earmark for fiscal year 1988.<sup>8</sup> Of the \$31.8 million reported by USAID, Results Educational Fund could only verify that \$5.2 million was spent in ways that would fulfil congressional intent. Of the remaining \$26.6 million, \$18.5 million was not counted because USAID could not provide data on loan size and gender. Another \$8.1 million was not counted because the programmes clearly did not comply with the intent of the earmark.<sup>9</sup>

The report concluded that USAID had not complied with the earmark.<sup>10</sup> It appears that the Agency remains committed to the strategy of assisting people 'a few rungs up' in the hopes of creating wage employment rather than self-employment. The data made avail-

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Yunus, *Credit for Self-Employment: A Fundamental Human Right*, Grameen Bank, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1987, p 5.

<sup>8</sup> Danielle Yariv, *Where Credit Is Due: Report on AID's Compliance with 1988 Microenterprise Earmark*, Results Educational Fund, Washington, DC, USA, 1989.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p 1.

able have shown contradictory and inappropriate figures for fiscal year 1988, including a \$2.6 million project in Jordan '[expecting] that the average loan will be in the neighborhood of \$15 000–\$20 000'.<sup>11</sup> The findings of the report sparked a congressional call for an investigation by the General Accounting Office.

### **Poverty reduction**

A citizen lobby on development issues constantly faces the quality and quantity issues surrounding foreign aid. Evidence that foreign aid can and often does harm the poor is clear. The bulk of US foreign assistance is military and security related. Since USAID is a component of the US State Department, questions of intent and focus abound. To ask blindly for more foreign aid is never an option.

In 1988 Results' major US legislative focus was the Global Poverty Reduction Act. The legislation directed the President to establish a plan for US foreign development assistance to contribute measurably to eliminating the worst aspects of absolute poverty by the year 2000, which plan would be monitored by progress made towards the following goals:

- reduction of under-5 mortality rates by at least 50% of the 1980 mortality rates, or to not more than 70 per 1000 live births, whichever achieves the greater reduction;
- achievement of universal primary education and 80% female literacy for those age groups defined by each country;<sup>12</sup>
- reduction of the proportion of the population living in absolute poverty by at least 50% of that proportion in 1980.

The bill gained the support of over 260 members of the House and Senate, 100 newspaper editorials and more than 70 private groups, such as Results, Oxfam America and the Christian Children's Fund. But USAID, concerned as always about setting goals that are too ambitious, opposed the measure from the beginning. For example, in 1986 the author received several letters from senior USAID officials complimenting Results' work on the global immunization campaign but expressing concern with our preoccupation with its achievement by 1990.

In November 1989 President Bush signed into law a measure requiring the USAID Administrator to set country-by-country goals for poverty reduction and report each year on progress being made. By February 1990 more than 125 members of Congress had signed a letter to the USAID Administrator urging selection of the three goals above.

### **World Bank reform**

On two occasions Results has joined forces with the World Development Movement (WDM) in the UK to gather signatures from parliamentarians on letters to World Bank President Barber Conable urging greater Bank focus on the poor. The second letter was signed by more than 800 MPs and legislators from Australia, Canada, the UK, the US and FR Germany.

### **Critiques**

As a very active and aggressive popular lobby, Results has received its share of criticism.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> This goal was subsequently altered to match that adopted at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All: universal primary education and halving of 1990 illiteracy rates by the year 2000.

- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and congressional staff who work for change more quietly on the inside express concern about Results' louder push from the outside.
- Groups that provide loans in the \$600–\$2000 range are concerned with our success in pushing for much smaller loans and feel their important work is under-recognized.
- NGOs that receive large portions of their funding from USAID are uncomfortable with the pressure Results brings to bear on the Agency.
- Groups and individuals who feel a sense of hopelessness about what can be achieved express concern about the ambitious nature of goals pushed in the Global Poverty Reduction Act.

In the UK lobbies are referred to as pressure groups. The designation is quite apt. It might be said that if a lobby is not irritating in some ways, it might not be much of a pressure group.

### **Conclusion**

In a decade characterized as the lost eighties, one of the more promising developments has been the emergence, in both the developing and industrialized worlds, of popular groups committed to empowering the poor and the hungry. Results, with its combination of small-group activity tied together by sophisticated telephone usage, concentrating on print media and their influence, and designed to influence parliamentary and agency actions and budgets, meshes well with two, somewhat contradictory, significant trends of our times – local popular participation and global interdependence. But at its heart Results represents an acknowledgement of the dignity and courage in ordinary individuals to organize for extraordinary action.