

## Overseas poverty and justice: attender attitudes

### Poverty and its complexities

Overcoming the absolute poverty faced by many of the globe's poorest people is regarded as an issue of moral importance by increasing numbers of Australians. The roots of poverty, and our relationship to its causes and solutions, are often complex. In the 1991 National Church Life Survey 90% of attenders thought there was a responsibility to share in meeting the needs of people in developing countries. In recent decades Christian NGOs, and churches themselves, have played an increasing role in both delivering aid and in advocating with governments to increase the size and effectiveness of national responses to poverty and injustice.

In late 2011, the National Church Life Survey asked a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders about their views on the Australian Government's involvement in a range of issues that are regarded as relevant to the question of ending global poverty:

#### ***In your opinion, does the Federal Government do too much, too little, or about the right amount in each of the following areas?***

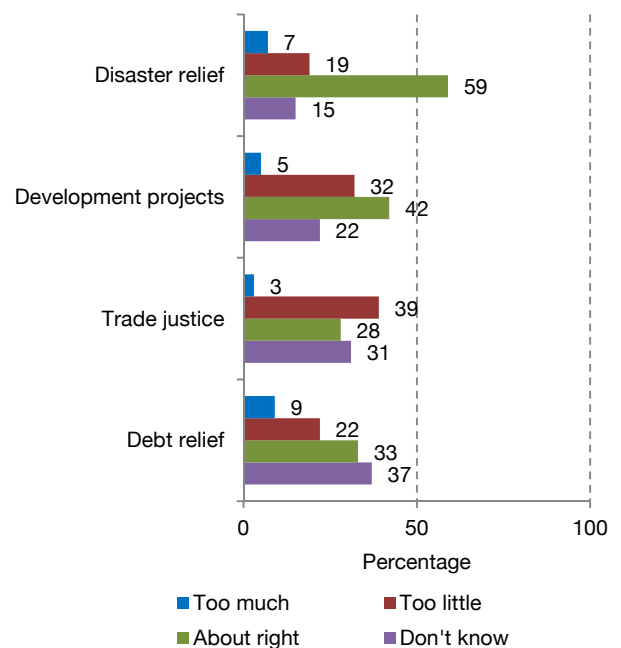
- Provision of overseas emergency aid/disaster relief
- Funding of projects for development in poor countries
- Establishment of/advocacy for just trade arrangements with poor countries so producers get a fair return for their product
- Provision of debt relief to heavily indebted countries

### Overall responses

Only a small minority of church attenders believe the Federal Government's response to international poverty has been too much (less than 10%). The government's provision of overseas emergency aid/disaster relief was deemed about right by 59% of attenders, with 19% claiming it was too little. The government's funding of development projects was deemed to be about right by 42% of attenders, but a sizeable minority (32%) believed the government was doing too little. The issue of just trade arrangements with poor countries had the largest group of attenders (39%) who believed that too little is currently being done (only 28% felt it was about

right). Some 33% of attenders believed the provision of debt relief to heavily indebted countries was about right and 22% felt it was too little.

**Figure 1: Attender attitudes to Federal Government action on overseas poverty and justice**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,427).

Support for action declines as the issues become more complex or are less well known in the community. For example, 37% attenders responded 'don't know' when posed with the issue of debt relief for heavily indebted countries. Church leadership was strong in this area in the late 1990s (with Jubilee Australia), but it now appears to require new work to educate Australian attenders. In contrast, Micah Challenge has been very active in the churches in the new millennium, with a stronger focus on aid than on trade justice or debt relief.

### Demographics

Attenders aged under 30 years were the most likely compared to other age groups to indicate that there was too little emergency aid/disaster relief and too little government funding of development projects. This

represents a high level of awareness and concern of Generation Y with the subject of international aid and development, and may be reflective of Micah Challenge's strong engagement with young people. Older attenders were the most likely to think that government delivery of disaster relief and development funding was about right. The differences between age groups regarding debt relief and trade justice were not as marked.

Men were more concerned than women that too little was being done to fund development and emergency relief. A higher level of formal education was associated with a greater likelihood of thinking that the government was doing too little in each of the four areas (emergency relief, development projects, debt relief and trade justice), and a lower likelihood that the government was doing too much.

**Table 1: Overseas poverty and justice by age, gender, education**

	Age				Gender		Education		
	15-29	30-49	50-69	70+	Fe- male	Male	Scho- ol	Trade cert	De- gree
<b>Disaster relief</b>	Percentage								
Too much	1	6	8	10	7	7	11	7	3
Too little	31	22	16	13	15	24	14	20	24
About right	48	55	63	64	62	55	59	59	60
Don't know	19	16	13	13	16	14	16	14	13
<b>Development projects</b>									
Too much	2	4	5	7	4	5	8	5	1
Too little	43	36	29	26	30	36	27	34	37
About right	26	37	45	51	42	41	47	41	37
Don't know	28	23	21	16	24	18	19	20	25
<b>Trade justice</b>									
Too much	2	3	2	2	1	4	4	3	1
Too little	37	42	40	36	39	41	30	40	49
About right	24	25	26	36	26	30	32	29	23
Don't know	37	30	32	25	34	25	34	28	27
<b>Debt relief</b>									
Too much	3	7	11	11	7	11	11	10	4
Too little	22	25	20	19	21	23	15	22	28
About right	29	32	33	34	29	37	35	34	30
About right	46	36	36	36	43	29	39	33	38

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,275).

## Church life

Pentecostals and Baptist/Churches of Christ and "Other Protestant" attenders were the most likely to think that too little is being spent on emergency aid and overseas development projects. Again, this may be reflective of Micah Challenge's strong engagement with evangelical churches. In contrast, Anglicans attenders were the most likely to think that the government was doing too

little with regard to trade justice. Differences between denominations were not significant for debt relief.

**Table 2: Overseas poverty and justice by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
<b>Disaster relief</b>	Percentage						
Too much	7	6	10	7	0	7	6
Too little	18	24	16	14	24	16	26
About right	65	50	61	68	56	64	51
Don't know	10	20	13	11	21	13	16
<b>Development projects</b>							
Too much	3	3	7	2	3	2	4
Too little	30	38	29	27	40	31	35
About right	40	33	46	52	34	47	36
Don't know	27	25	18	19	23	20	25
<b>Trade justice</b>							
Too much	2	1	2	1	3	4	4
Too little	50	43	34	44	47	39	30
About right	24	21	32	23	20	25	32
Don't know	24	34	31	31	30	31	34
<b>Debt relief</b>							
Too much	7	5	11	5	8	11	5
Too little	21	25	20	22	25	20	24
About right	29	25	36	35	26	37	35
Don't know	43	45	34	38	42	32	36

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=1,301).

Higher levels of devotional practice and church attendance were generally associated with a greater likelihood of thinking that the government was doing too little about overseas poverty and justice.

## References

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**About NCLS:** The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations every census year since 1991.