

## **Seminar Activity: Policy Simulation (3 hours)**

I created this seminar as an exercise to help students learn about everyday politics in international development, loosely based on my own experiences of working for the British government in Pakistan. Please feel free to use it, tweak it or make it the basis for something entirely different. I'd love to hear what you and your students make of it. Email me on [cathy.elliott@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:cathy.elliott@ucl.ac.uk) or tweet @DrCathyElliott

### ***Notes for tutors:***

I usually spend around 10 minutes setting the scene and explaining that we are now in the fictional country of "DevelopmentLand", which is similar to Bangladesh in all respects except where the information on their cards is clearly different. I hand out the roles detailed below on pieces of paper to teams that I have put together. I also explain that we are all actually *in* DevelopmentLand, even though some of us are expatriate workers from the USA, the UK or other Global North countries.

I then introduce the Minister of Health and team to the group. I explain that the aim of the game is to win the chance to work with the Minister and that there will be an opportunity to make a pitch to persuade the Minister. Every team has to prepare their pitch but if they are able to form a consortium with other teams they can pool their time and have longer to persuade the Minister. They are also more likely to be successful, as the Minister will be able to benefit from the expertise of the whole consortium.

I also have a team of journalists who circulate and report on the whole thing. Their final report can be part of the assessment for the module if you are able to give different assessments to different students. Alternatively, you can find volunteers who might like to be journalists for fun, for the practice, for extra credit or because you might mention it in a future reference letter. The work the journalists do in bringing everything together can be a very valuable point of reflection for the rest of the class, so it's great if they are prepared to share their work. They can do a group project or each be freelance journalist with their own agenda.

I allow the teams to make of their roles what they will for usually around 90 minutes. I circulate around answering questions about DevelopmentLand, making suggestions where appropriate and playing the odd "wildcard".

It usually takes about half an hour for all the teams to make their pitches and then the Minister has around 10–15 minutes to make a decision with her advisory team and feed back with reasons to the group. Whilst the minister is deliberating, the rest of the group can speculate on what they think the decision will be and what reasons they predict will be given. The last half hour or so is spent in a debrief.

When reflecting on the experience of the simulation in the debrief, you might want to ask the class the following questions:

- Was the way the “game” was set up fair for everyone? How democratic was the game? How realistic was it?
- Did the experience make you think differently about policy-making?
- Do you think policy-making is more prescriptive or more of a process? Does the game change your thoughts about that question?
- Who had the most power? Was it the Minister or someone else? (The voters? The donors? The “discourse”?)
- Was there anyone who didn’t get represented at all? Did you think about that as you were playing?
- Could any of the mapping tools we thought about in the lecture have helped the Minister? (This refers to participatory mapping tools, such as stakeholder mapping and mapping policy landscapes.)
- How do you feel now about the people who really have to do the sorts of jobs we role played today?

Here is the full list of “roles” and the information each group is given.

### **Minister of Health and Advisory Team**

Your country is interested in improving the overall health of the population in keeping with its obligations under the Sustainable Development Goals. You believe that there may be money available from the international development community to develop a sector-wide programme for healthcare in your country. You need to decide who you will work with and each organisation will make a pitch to you to persuade you to work with them. To help you do this, please develop a list of criteria of how you will judge each pitch.

At the end of the session, you will have to rank the different possible partners and beneficiaries in order of preference and give your reasons.

Things to consider:

- You are very keen to meet your obligations under the Sustainable Development Goals. Your understanding is that some donors might want to club together to give the government money (budget support) to promote maternal health: this is your priority.
- Your government budget is quite dependent on grants and loans from donors.
- You also need to be voted back into power when the election happens in 2 years.
- Poor people don’t always support your party as it depends on other factors (like who their landlord is, what the local religious leaders say, and where they live in the country).
- Religion is often a big factor in elections in your country and you need to appear to be in tune with local cultural conventions.

- If there are consortia or groups of people who want to work together, you can save time by meeting them together. (However, you need to know that they can work together.) It's up to you to decide how you want to manage your meetings and whom to invite.
- According to the Paris Harmonisation Agenda, it is the Government (you!) who should decide development priorities and co-ordinate the donors and other players to support your priorities.
- You once did a class at University called DPD (happy days when you were young in London!): You are therefore know all about managing social change in the context of conflict about values. You are particularly interested in consortia or groups who are making an effort to reconcile differences in values.
- Of course, you know a lot of people in the international development industry and you have dinner together all the time. You can use these informal contacts in whatever way you like. You can invite anyone to dinner. You are particularly well networked with the World Bank, UK Department for International Development and Archana (a local NGO). Some of you did your Masters together in London.
- If you want, you can hire consultants to help you make your decision. The donors can help you with that.
- You are modern and cosmopolitan and you live in the city. Your preferred language is English.
- It's usually a good idea to talk to journalists to get your message across to the public, but of course do think about the impact of your words on your electability for the future.

The different groups who want to meet you will at some point in the session each make a pitch. Listen carefully.

You then need to decide who you will work with as preferred partners and then feed back your decision to the whole group.

## **World Bank**

Please prepare a 5 minute pitch to persuade the Minister to work with you or your consortium. (If you do a joint pitch with other organisations, you can pool your time.)

You want to put money into the government's budget (a loan on very good terms) to support the health sector, but you need the Government's agreement for your priorities. Your priorities are of course the Sustainable Development Goals, which guide all international action. In accordance with the Paris Harmonisation Agenda, you are keen to work together with other donors so that the government does not have to divide up its resources trying to work on lots of different small projects. Ideally the Minister should co-ordinate all that – with a bit of guidance from you.

You are also guided by sound economic principles and you think that economic growth is very important for development outcomes. You believe

that policy-making should be evidence-based and it's good sense to have the right data before making decisions.

You are well acquainted with the Minister and some of your team were at school/university with her. You also make it your business to have good relationships with other people working in international development, especially big agencies and international staff. It's part of your job to meet socially to oil the wheels. You also have some local staff who know the more prominent local NGOs, such as Archana.

You sometimes chat to journalists to get your message across.

### **DFID (UK Department for International Development)**

Please prepare a 5 minute pitch to persuade the Minister to work with you or your consortium. (If you do a joint pitch with other organisations, you can pool your time.)

You are the British Government's Department for International Development. You are responsible for spending the UK's aid money. You want to put money into the government's budget (a grant) to support the health sector, but you need the Government's agreement for your priorities. Your priorities are of course the Sustainable Development Goals, which guides all international action. You believe that policy-making should be evidence-based and it's good sense to have the right data before making decisions. In accordance with the Paris Harmonisation Agenda, you are keen to work together with other donors so that the government does not have to divide up its resources trying to work on lots of different small projects. Ideally the Minister should co-ordinate all that – with a bit of guidance from you. You can recommend some very good consultants from Crown Agents who might be able to help the Minister co-ordinate the policy process and you could even pay their £500-a-day fee if that would help move things along.

The party in power in the UK is very interested in promoting public-private partnerships: you might want to consider your reasons for this and explain to the Minister why this can really work well.

You are well acquainted with the Minister and some of your team were at school/university with her. You also make it your business to have good relationships with other people working in international development, especially big agencies and international staff. Some of you did your Masters in International Development and a few of your old friends from the course work for big international NGOs. You also have local members of staff who know the Archana, Swim First and Lymphatic Filariasis people quite well. It's part of your job to meet socially with other players to oil the wheels.

You sometimes chat to journalists to get your message across.

### **White Ribbon International**

Please prepare a 5 minute pitch to persuade the Minister to work with you or your consortium. (If you do a joint pitch with other organisations, you can pool your time.)

You represent a consortium of international NGOs who want to promote maternal health. You can offer support to train midwives and other health professionals and to establish health facilities. It is better to work with the government, rather than setting up rival, or parallel, systems. You also have lots of expertise in getting public health messages out to people, including expectant mothers and their families.

It obviously makes sense to work with local partners who know the country best and you are busy doing a scoping mission to find out who's who and who you can work with. It's important to be culturally sensitive. You are not particularly well networked with big development organisations and you are suspicious of the World Bank and other neoliberal organisations. However, you do accept government funding. You know a few people from DFID from your Masters. You are particularly interested in working with women and women's groups.

You sometimes speak to journalists in order to communicate important public health messages.

## **Archana**

Please prepare a 5 minute pitch to persuade the Minister to work with you or your consortium. (If you do a joint pitch with other organisations, you can pool your time.)

You are a women's group organised by local women. Some of your leadership are well educated and speak good English. You would say you are feminists. You are not a huge fan of the current government and will criticise them when necessary, but you do think it is the role of government to fund the sort of work you do. You do lots of work with local women to improve their maternal health outcomes, particularly around awareness-raising about how important it is to seek proper healthcare in pregnancy and childbirth. You would like to lobby the government to give more priority to this work. You feel that some of these rural areas are really backwards and need a lot of help to come up to date with the latest technology and know-how. It is difficult to work with them if they won't even adopt basic hygiene practices like encouraging mums to bathe their babies.

You don't really know any of these international players, though of course you know a lot of people in government and have dinner together all the time. You were educated in the West, so speak good English as well as the local language. You know the local DFID and NGO staff, but not the internationals.

You sometimes speak to journalists to get important public health messages across.

### **Local Religious Leaders**

Please prepare a 5 minute pitch to persuade the Minister to work with you or your consortium. (If you do a joint pitch with other organisations, you can pool your time.)

You represent many religious leaders from across the country. Your members have huge influence on the daily lives of ordinary people in a country where the vast majority of people are devout. In keeping with your religious faith, you want all people to be healthy, educated and able to live decent lives. You want to be able to influence the government to support all these good things. Of course, you think this should happen within the tenets of your faith and many of your members are quite socially conservative, particularly when it comes to keeping private things private and ensuring that men do not disrespect women, for example by seeing too much of their bodies.

You don't really have dinner with all these international people because there tends to be a lot of drinking, which is forbidden in your faith, and they speak English all the time. However, it might be nice to invite them to your place of worship or one of your meetings.

You sometimes speak to journalists to communicate important religious ideas to a wider public.

### **Traditional Birth Attendants and Dais**

Please prepare a 5 minute pitch to persuade the Minister to work with you or your consortium. (If you do a joint pitch with other organisations, you can pool your time.)

You represent the many hundreds of thousands of traditional birth attendants in your country who have always supported and helped women in pregnancy and childbirth. Although many of your members are illiterate and don't know the latest medical thinking, you think they offer great care and a real emotional connection for the women they serve, many of whom they might have delivered themselves years before! You think there is no substitute for knowing the women who are giving birth really well. You also value knowledge handed down through the generations, such as the importance of keeping babies warm and not immersing them in water, but your members don't mind learning more about the up-to-date methods. You would like to be involved in health policy, especially as your members might be the only healthcare workers some women ever meet.

You don't go to the city and you don't speak English. You will need to make this clear somehow if someone tries to speak to you in English. Luckily, some local and international organisations have local staff, so you can talk to them.

Your presentation to the Minister can be in the local language, which she understands.

You wouldn't normally speak to journalists as they are not interested in people like you.

### **Crown Agents**

Please prepare a 5 minute pitch to persuade the Minister to work with you or your consortium. (If you do a joint pitch with other organisations, you can pool your time.)

You are a big British private company with many years' experience of development. Recently in Zambia, you have helped the government improve their system for storing and delivering medicines and health commodities, which was plagued by stock-outs, slow delivery times and low employee morale. A private sector approach to management revitalised the system. Staff mediation, appraisals and benefits improved performance issues, and major improvements to infrastructure, equipment, and IT systems helped keep drugs usable longer, made distribution more efficient and streamlined the ordering process. Distribution costs dropped 32%, stock availability doubled and 95% of orders are delivered on time. You want to propose a similar project to the Minister, but they would have to fund it (including a small management fee to yourselves, of course).

You have previously worked a lot with DFID on projects and you know all their staff well. You also know the World Bank people socially. You often provide consultants on an *ad hoc* level to help Ministers co-ordinate and plan policy and DFID often pay for this as part of their project planning process. You are always happy to help, though your fee for consultancy is £500-a-day.

You don't ordinarily speak to journalists, but you are always up for a PR opportunity if one arises.

### **Lymphatic Filariasis Association**

Please prepare a 5 minute pitch to persuade the Minister to work with you or your consortium. (If you do a joint pitch with other organisations, you can pool your time.)

Your organisation advocates on behalf of sufferers of this neglected tropical disease. The disease is present all around the country and is endemic in poor areas. It causes much suffering and is potentially fatal. However, with the right treatment it could be eradicated. You don't get much funding or publicity, but you'd like to put that right. The Minister's support could be invaluable.

You don't really know any of these international players, though of course you know a lot of people in government and have dinner together all the time. You were educated in the West, so you speak English. You know the local DFID and NGO staff, but not the internationals.

You are delighted to speak to journalists to raise awareness and get your message across, though they are not usually very interested in your cause.

### **Swim First**

Please prepare a 5 minute pitch to persuade the Minister to work with you or your consortium. (If you do a joint pitch with other organisations, you can pool your time.)

Drowning is the leading cause of death among children in your country. Around 500 children die every month! Girls are more likely to drown than boys. The reason is usually that the children can't swim and they are alone or without another child who knows how to rescue them. You believe that this situation could easily be turned around if there was more awareness and lessons for all children in water safety, swimming and life saving skills. You don't need a great deal of money as you can develop a network of peer educators to make sure there are enough children who can swim and/or do basic first aid, but at the moment you don't have the resources to save as many lives as you could.

You don't really know any of these international players, though of course you know some local people working at international NGOs and donors.

You are delighted to speak to journalists to raise awareness and get your message across, though they are not usually very interested in your cause.

### **Journalists**

Your job as a journalist is to find out as much as possible about what is going on in DevelopmentLand to report it to the general public in the country. Make sure you keep detailed notes. You can observe what is happening in public or if you are invited to a meeting. You can also ask for interviews and these can be on or off the record. Your boss is usually most interested in getting stories about important people like the Minister and the World Bank as well as foreign governments. However, you can take a different angle for a specialist piece if you like and you think you can sell it to your editor. Some of the people from local NGOs or ordinary citizens will be less experienced with journalists and might be wary of you, but you can use your charm! Your final write-up can be as a news article, opinion piece or radio show/podcast/broadcast news/YouTube video. You went to University in the West and speak both English and the local language fluently.

### **Wildcards**

Along with the roles shown above, I also give each individual member of each team a card indicating whether they speak English only, local language only or both. People who speak English only are assumed to be expatriate workers who are probably paid more (despite having fewer skills, linguistically anyway!)

If I am feeling mischievous, I might whisper the apocryphal story that someone in a previous year handed a crumpled tenner (or a drawing of one) to the Minister or otherwise engaged in corrupt practices.

Finally, I give the big players a card that says the following:

If you receive this card and you are a local member of staff who can speak the local language, then you have to go and work for the organisation of the person who just gave you the card. They have made you a financial offer that you can't refuse. Of course, you will still stay friends with your former colleagues and will stay in contact with them.