



Breaking the silence on aid workers salaries

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A new international Task Force has been set up to promote ‘a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay’ for workers and to develop organisational capacity in lower income countries. The research which found discrepancies between the salaries earned by local and those earned by expatriate aid workers was instrumental in setting up the task force. According to the findings from a jointly funded project by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Department for International Development (DFID) an expatriate aid worker will be paid on average four times more (and sometimes much more) than a local employee doing a similar job, with local salaries pushing workers below the poverty line.

Led by Professor Stuart Carr of Massey University, New Zealand, and Professor Malcolm MacLachlan of Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, the study tested the impact of ‘dual salaries’ on local workers’ motivation in the health, education and business sectors in Malawi, Uganda, India, China, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea in instances when they have been working with expatriate aid workers.

Professor Carr explains: “Such disparity can have repercussions beyond just employee dissatisfaction. Our findings show a keen sense of injustice on the part of locally-salaried workers, coupled with demotivation and low levels of job satisfaction raises the desire to work

abroad. 'This, in turn, contributes to local 'brain drain' – the mass departure of technically skilled people from one country to another.'

The researchers also found that wage gaps can prevent 'capacity development', the overall objective of the aid organisations, from occurring. These development activities often include supporting local training, provision of equipment and staff expertise.

Professor MacLachlan says: "Organisations can play a key role in workers' sense of identity and worth by making pay and benefits fairer and thus improving human services, productivity and poverty reduction itself. Above all, we must avoid international aid working against itself that is becoming 'capacity stripping'. Options for addressing this wage inequality include creating career plans, performance appraisals and job evaluations - for example through workplace goal-setting, structured feedback and job-sizing. This would help put to work the remaining Paris Declaration principles of ownership, results and mutual accountability."

By demonstrating that salary discrepancies result from expatriates who originate from higher income economies rather than different levels of experience or skills the researchers were instrumental in setting up the Task Force – which recently made its first full submission to the United Nations. The Global Task Force for Humanitarian Work Psychology aims to pursue a new mission which calls for greater attention to organisations and their dealings with their people – as part of the Millennium Development Goals from the UN's *'Keeping the Promise'*. And they plan to work through bodies such as the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation, as well as policy think-tanks such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Professor Carr continues: "We have argued that the role and impact of organisations and organisational cultures should be given much more attention, as the project findings showed that

organisations *can* be key to enabling a fair day's work for a fair day's pay and to promoting the perception of greater work justice and equity.”

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. This release is based on the findings from '[Aid Salary Discrepancies and Development Workers' Performance](#)', funded ESRC-DFID (Department for International Development) joint scheme for research on international development (poverty alleviation). The study was led by Professor Stuart C. Carr of Massey University's Poverty Research Group and School of Psychology, New Zealand, and Professor Malcolm MacLachlan of Trinity College Dublin's Centre for Global Health and School of Psychology, Ireland, in collaboration with an interdisciplinary consortium of colleagues from eight other countries.
2. 'The study' involved an on-paper survey of 1,290 local and internationally-remunerated professional workers from 202 aid, government educational and business organisations. Samples were taken from land-locked (Malawi, Uganda), Oceanic (Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea) and emerging economies (India, China).
3. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is the UK's largest organisation for funding research on economic and social issues. It supports independent, high quality research which has an impact on business, the public sector and the third sector. The ESRC's total budget for 2010/11 is £218 million. At any one time the ESRC supports over 4,000 researchers and postgraduate students in academic institutions and independent research institutes. More at www.esrc.ac.uk
4. In 2005 the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) formed a strategic partnership to provide a joint funding scheme with a total budget of £13 million. The aim of the scheme is to enhance the quality and impact of social science research addressing the key international development goal of reducing poverty amongst the poorest countries and peoples of the world. More information at [the ESRC-DFID joint scheme](#)
5. Findings from the project have also inspired a new book – *The Aid Triangle: Recognizing the Human Dynamics of Dominance, Justice and Identity* (MacLachlan, Carr & McAuliffe; Zed Books, London).
6. The ESRC confirms the quality of its funded research by evaluating research projects through a process of peer review. This research has been graded as outstanding.