



The Media and the Financial Transaction Tax

Many long-term RESULTS activists are extremely skilled and practised in writing letters to the editor (LTEs) that get published in both local and national media. This month we are planning to make a big splash in local media outlets on the subject of Financial Transaction Taxes (FTT) for development, and we would like to encourage you to go beyond the LTE and to generate an opinion piece in your local newspaper.

Most newspapers print opinion editorials (op-eds) or guest columns. *An op-ed is an expression of opinion rather than a release of news.* Although style varies between different newspapers, an op-ed tends to be lively, provocative and sometimes controversial. They provide a very effective way to register concern about poverty and development issues to policy-makers and to inform communities about the situation and what they can do to improve it. There has been a huge amount of coverage of the FTT idea in national newspapers over the past few months, so it's a good idea to use this as a 'hook' for your piece.

Some papers publish a number of 'Opinion' articles on or near the letters page, and these always have an author. Sometimes, a paper also has an 'Editorial' published on the letters page, underneath the newspaper's own name and with no specific author. So there is a difference between an Opinion piece and an Editorial: when speaking to your local paper, find out which one is going to work best for them and then prepare the appropriate piece.

This background sheet will give you specific tips about successfully publishing an op-ed, as well as some general points on how to make the best use of your relationship with the media. In addition, the **focus call in January, which will be held at 6:15-7:15 on Tuesday 19th January** will focus on this issue and will give you lots more guidance on how to make your action successful.

RESULTS op-ed

If you do not have the confidence to write your own op-ed, we will be circulating an opinion piece from RESULTS Executive Director Aaron Oxley no later than the 11th of January which you can pitch to your local paper. To have the best chance of the piece being published you should adapt it to your local context, perhaps by using local examples or mentioning local people – we will make sure that there are places in the text for these kind of additions. If the editor would rather this issue be tackled as an Editorial, this opinion piece can be easily adapted to that purpose.

If you do decide to use Aaron's op-ed, please be aware that some papers have strict rules that prohibit submissions that have previously been published in other places. Other outlets may frown upon re-publishing a piece, but may allow it. Still others may have no problem with it. Before you pitch Aaron's op-ed, make sure you know the paper's policies and be upfront that the article is not exclusive.

Getting your op-ed published

Op-eds are usually 600 to 1,000 words long. It is best to call the newspaper first and request their guidelines for submitting an op-ed. If possible, speak to the person who is responsible for making decisions on op-eds to alert them that you intend to submit an op-ed and briefly explain the importance of the issue. You can find the contact details for your local paper either on their website or in the printed paper itself (often on the letters page).

A few days after you've submitted your finished op-ed, call to confirm that it was received and inquire about plans to publish it. If you learn the editor does not plan to run it, find out why and determine if a revision would improve its chances of being published. In some cases, the paper may give you the opportunity to shorten it and have it printed as a letter to the editor. Alternatively, you can call another paper and ask if they would be interested in your op-ed. When your op-ed is published, follow up with a thank you to the editor in charge of op-eds.

Tips for writing your op-ed:

1. Scan your paper's opinion pages to get a sense of what people are and are not writing about. Opinion editors often look for pieces that cover issues they are not yet covering. You will also get a sense of the style that the paper prefers.
2. Try composing your op-ed using the EPIC format: Engage, Problem, Inform, Call to Action (for more details click on the link). EPIC can be a powerful and effective formula for organizing and presenting your thoughts and ideas. Remember, anybody can write; the difference between a published and unpublished piece is in the number of rewrites you are willing to do and your openness to seek and receive help if you need it.
3. Get in touch with how you personally feel about the issue and feel free to use personal examples, relating your message to your own experiences.
4. It's often helpful to open with a story or anecdotes and then circle back around to it by referencing it at the end. An example:
 - i. As part of opening paragraph: "But even more perplexing than our own poverty problem is the question of how to address poverty in nations with a fraction of our wealth and opportunities. It can make us feel powerless."
 - ii. As part of a closing sentence: "It is time to take hold of solutions. The UK government now has the opportunity to push for a tax that could secure the resources needed. Will they step up to the plate and implement real solutions? Thinking of the huge impact that the financial crisis has had on poor countries, it would be perplexing if they didn't."
5. Because an op-ed is longer than a letter to the editor, resist the temptation to cover more issues or ideas and instead go deeper on the issue you want to cover. Tell an illustrative story, give a detailed example, include a bit more data, or highlight other people's points of view.
6. Make sure there is a call to action for your members of Parliament and/or your readers. An op-ed is a prominent piece that will be read by many people; use this opportunity to be bold in what you want.
7. Make your piece current and relevant. Have it relate to something that is going on now.
8. Once you have drafted your piece, send it to your partners, other RESULTS activists, or the RESULTS staff for feedback. This is a critical step. Feedback from others helps ensure that you have a piece of publishable quality.

General tips for media work

To be most effective in your media advocacy activities, you'll want to DROP NAMES! First, specifically mention the name of the policy maker or agency that should take action (in this case your local MP, Gordon Brown and the UK government). By doing so, you will greatly increase the likelihood that these people or institutions will see this media coverage directly. Anything in the news mentioning your parliamentary members or government Ministers will be read the very same day by their senior staff – and sometimes by the members themselves. Elected officials are sensitised to the views and opinions of their constituencies who hold the power to re-elect them. Therefore, those who understand the media and know how to work with editors and journalists potentially possess a great deal of political power.

If you get published, make sure to send a copy to your member of parliament, as well as to RESULTS (julia@results-uk.org) so we can track the impact that you are all having.

IMPORTANT: Coordination with other Robin Hood Tax organisations

This is the kick-off of a national-scale, very large, very exciting campaign that has the potential to be bigger than Make Poverty History. It is a very exciting time to be taking action on this. HOWEVER, because RESULTS is taking this action in concert with many other organisations, it is important that we stick to our role – particularly during this sensitive lead-up and launch.

So, we would like to remind you to NOT pitch or send your, or Aaron's Op-ed to any national papers, and to remind the editor that the launch date of the campaign is the 25th and nothing should be published in advance of that date. The National papers are being targeted by RESULTS centrally and by other organisations in the campaign who already have strong links to the editors of those papers.

This is great for you to be able to tell the editor, too: normally, the big NGOs don't make time for smaller, local papers. By going in and offering them a chance to be on the cutting edge of a new, massive movement you are giving them a scoop!