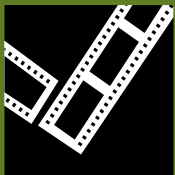


# THE ILLUSTRATIVE GUIDE TO THE DÓCHAS CODE OF CONDUCT ON IMAGES AND MESSAGES



Dóchas is the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations. It provides a forum for consultation and co-operation between its members and helps them speak with a single voice on development issues.

This resource was developed by the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages Task Group, and special thanks are due to the members of the Group, and all within the sector, who contributed their time to the Guide. The Group would also like to thank Elaine Mahon who developed the first draft of this Guide, and U.S. artist A.Stiffler of [portfolio.findchaos.com](http://portfolio.findchaos.com), who provided the illustrations.



## **CODE OF CONDUCT ON IMAGES & MESSAGES**



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# 01. INTRODUCTION

## THE DÓCHAS CODE OF CONDUCT ON IMAGES AND MESSAGES

Adopted by Dóchas member organisations in 2007, the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages (the Code) offers a set of guiding principles for NGOs to use while designing and implementing their public communications strategy.

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### The Code is founded on a framework of three core values:

- ▶ Respect for the dignity of the people concerned;
- ▶ Belief in the equality of all people;
- ▶ Acceptance of the need to promote fairness, solidarity and justice.

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### The Seven Guiding Principles of the Code are:

1. Choose images and related messages based on values of respect, equality, solidarity and justice;
2. Truthfully represent any image or depicted situation both in its immediate and wider context so as to improve public understanding of the realities and complexities of development;
3. Avoid images and messages that potentially stereotype, sensationalise, or discriminate against people, situations or places;
4. Use images, messages, and case studies with the full understanding, participation and permission of the subjects (or the subjects' parents/guardians);
5. Ensure those whose situation is being represented have the opportunity to communicate their stories themselves;
6. Establish and record whether the subjects wish to be named or identified and always act accordingly;
7. Conform to the highest standards in relation to human rights and the protection of vulnerable people.

Since 2007, significant numbers of Development NGOs in Ireland have become signatories to the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages. NGO staff understand that the images and messages used to portray people, places, and situations in the developing world can have an enormous impact on our perceptions and attitudes.

**The commitment by NGOs to implement the Code signals a willingness to engage in best practice in this area.**

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## **Background**

The Code asks NGOs to critically reflect on the messages they are portraying, ask questions about the language they use, and explore the implications of using different terms.

When it comes to images, the question of what is appropriate or not is equally important. It is not just about using either all positive or all negative images. Replacing one set of stereotypes with another has the effect of changing the stereotype, but it does not serve to challenge them or construct more complex alternatives. The Code calls on organisations to present a realistic portrayal of the lives people lead and the role of NGOs.

Additionally, the Code aims to encourage NGOs to diversify voices, perspectives, and representations in their public communications, including critical reflection from partners and communities in the Global South and an examination of an organisation's values.

**It is important to ask if the communications used promote long-term public engagement by a variety of actors or instead promote a short-term response from donors.**

# THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The Illustrative Guide is a support to organisations seeking to implement the Code and should be used as a compliment to the text of the Code. The Guide provides practical examples of good practice<sup>1</sup> when using images and messages as well as good practice when working in emergencies or using social media. It contains dedicated sections on consent, child protection, and accountability and feedback. Examples and questions posed in this Guide could also be extended for use with media and in organisational strategies, case studies and reports.

The Illustrative Guide takes into account the Review<sup>2</sup> of the Code commissioned by the Dóchas Development Education Group between 2010-2012, which consulted a number of organisations and individuals as to how to strengthen the Code and provide further guidance to signatories on its implementation. It is based on research, explanations, discussions, and anecdotal evidence from Code signatories, gathered through workshops and the review process.

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## Who Should Use the Illustrative Guide?

The Guide is for those within Development NGOs, and other NGOs who work on development related issues, who have an interest in and commitment to implementing the Code in their communications. This includes, but is not limited to:

- ▶ NGO personnel who work in fundraising, development education, communications, advocacy, and policy advisory roles;
- ▶ Senior management and governance personnel in NGOs who approve the organisation's overall policies;
- ▶ Agencies contracted by NGOs to supply professional services such as copywriters, creative designers, journalists, and photographers.

It can also be used by media decision makers who are responsible for communicating images and messages about the developing world, such as editors, journalists, photographers, picture editors, and contract staff.

### Challenges around the Implementation of the Code

Despite good intentions, many signatory organisations face a variety of challenges to implementing the Code. For small organisations, it can be an issue of resources and capacity in identifying and obtaining Code-compliant images and messages to use. For larger organisations, there can be differences in priorities between departments, branches, offices in other countries, and stakeholders such as volunteers. Monitoring social media can also be a challenge. There is no quick solution to these challenges and acknowledging them can create a dialogue within organisations.

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1. In some Principles only recommended or in some cases, not recommended, image examples have been provided.  
2. Review of the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages (2010 – 2012) - Report for Dóchas Board.

# 02. THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

## PRINCIPLE ONE

Choose images and related messages based on values of respect, equality, solidarity and justice

### What does this mean in practice?

**Respect** means appreciating the people and situations NGOs are working with and showing consideration for people's privacy and dignity. It means regarding people as active, valuable, and capable agents of change in their lives.

**Equality**, when capturing and using images, and communicating messages, is about respecting the rights of all people with the same standards, promoting an appreciation of diversity, and committing to non-discrimination.

**Solidarity** is about using images and messages which promote working together with rather than for communities.

**Justice** is about promoting issues in a way which calls for actions to address the causes of poverty, for example, and is not just about taking a charitable approach.

### 👍 RECOMMENDED



### SAMPLE CAPTION

Members of the “Global Justice” movement in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, protest for the recognition of water as a human right before the Rio+20 conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 2012. (Photographer: XY)

### EXPLANATION

The image shows a group of local people actively engaged in transforming their own lives and advocating for international policies that will directly improve their daily lives.

 NOT RECOMMENDED

**Your gift  
of €10  
to our  
organisation  
will save  
his life...**



**EXPLANATION**

Even though this image/advert depicts the child in a respectful manner, it simplifies the bigger issue and suggests global poverty and inequality can be addressed by giving more money. Note that adding personal details about the child in this case would not change the underlying message.

**Steps you can take**

**Try to avoid using language and images which are paternalistic, based on the idea of ‘us’ giving to ‘them’.**

- ▶ Messages: Promote the ability of people and communities to transform their own lives. For instance, try to use a caption like “local communities are rebuilding their homes and lives” as opposed to “you can make a difference to their lives”.
- ▶ Images: Try to show the development NGO as a facilitator/supporter rather than an instructor/implementer.

**Try to foster a sense of our interconnected common humanity rather than focusing on the differences between “us” and “them”.** Communicate issues of poverty and inequality which reflect on the causes rather than the effects.

- ▶ Messages: Communicate the role of institutions and global systems rather than focusing solely on the individuals affected.
- ▶ Images: Try to use abstract images or symbolism, rather than photographs of people, to represent the harsh reality of poverty, inequality and disadvantage.



**Avoid images and messages that victimise or dehumanise people.**

- ▶ Images: Try to choose images which show local communities working together for change as opposed to photographs or videos of people who are suffering.

**Try to avoid the “charity model” which reduces global poverty and inequality to purely a question of money.**

**Try to create a dialogue that shows the complexity of the situation and the many different ways that may be available to address the issues.**

- ▶ Messages: Try to avoid phrases like “€1 a day can change a child’s life”.
- ▶ Images: Try to reduce the emphasis on agency branding.

## **PRINCIPLE TWO**

Truthfully represent any image or depicted situation both in its immediate and in its wider context, so as to improve public understanding of the realities and complexities of development

### **What does this mean in practice?**

Some forms of communication, such as a photograph or a slogan, only represent a fragment or snapshot of the situation. This presents a significant challenge for NGO personnel if they wish to avoid oversimplification and distortion of understanding. However, even in short style communication cases, efforts could be made to promote a broader understanding of any development or humanitarian situation for the public.

**👍 RECOMMENDED**



**SAMPLE CAPTION**

Angela and Thomas Okeke in an Abeche, Chad, regional hospital, where their son Malik received treatment for acute undernourishment in February 2012.

Parents who have to stay in hospital with their child receive food rations for themselves and their other children. The current food crisis was caused by extreme droughts and international food speculation. (Photographer: XY)

**👎 NOT RECOMMENDED**



**EXPLANATION**

In this image, “Malik” is cropped out of context to exaggerate his vulnerability and destitution. The way he is being portrayed as alone, without clothes, and starving is supposed to exaggerate the urgency of the appeal and the accompanying message underlines this again. This image would need a detailed caption to give more information about the context and causes of his situation. Even better, he could be depicted in an image that shows more context (see recommended example).

## Steps you can take

### **Try to avoid generalisations and be as specific as possible.**

- ▶ Messages: Try to use phrases like "Work with us in the rural communities of [Country X] to support children affected by HIV and AIDS" rather than "Help African AIDS orphans".

**Try to include exact information about places,** the background to a situation, and the organisations and institutions involved (especially local or national institutions)

Portray Africa, Asia, and Latin America for example, as the varied and diverse continents they are. Try to name the country, place, and time which features in your communications. Be specific.

- ▶ Messages: Aim to use captions like "People experiencing poverty in [Country X] want change" rather than "People in the developing world need your help".

**Depict the culture of the place and people's situations, and limit comparisons to what life is like in Ireland or Europe.** Involve local staff if possible when designing communications.

- ▶ Messages: Avoid simplistic juxtapositions such as "They're helpless. We're not", or "Being poor is hard, being poor in [Country X] is harder".

**Highlight issues,** and remember that while no one doubts the harsh reality of children begging or of hunger in a country, this is only "a" truth about that country. Try to avoid communicating it as "the" truth.

**Remember that an individual can often be taken to represent an entire country,** continent, or group by those receiving NGO communications.

- ▶ Images: Try to portray a range of people in images rather than repeatedly using photographs of children, or women and children. Show women and men in a variety of roles.

### **Try to show complexity:**

- ▶ Messages: Identify both the good and bad things happening in a country. If possible, focus on the wider issues - the causes and effects of a situation - rather than instilling the idea that "aid is the solution".
- ▶ Images: Consider using a "photo story" (a series of images that show stages of a project to provide more information than a single snapshot, for example).

**As in principle one, try to avoid focusing solely on donations,** as it can give the impression donations alone will end poverty or will address the political and economic causes of poverty and inequality.

### **Limit cropping images as much as possible**

Cropping may exaggerate vulnerability and destitution, especially of children. Cropping can also place people out of context. For example, a child may look alone rather than being cared for by family members.

### **Use accurate captioning for images**

Without context, a photograph or slogan can be seen to depict a whole continent or people.

Captions should include information about the situation, where (the location) and when the photograph was taken, and the names (first and family name) of those photographed where appropriate (both foreign and local personnel).

## **PRINCIPLE THREE**

**Avoid images and messages that potentially stereotype, sensationalise, or discriminate against people, situations or places**

### **What does this mean in practice?**

The majority of photographs used by NGOs have a similar theme. They are usually of children, or women and children, and depict rural areas and poverty. As a result, whole areas and regions of the world can become reduced to poor women and children living in unnamed rural places. Some show negative stereotypes which serve to sensationalise, whereas others represent stereotypes of happy, smiling people benefiting from NGO assistance.

**These stereotypes often omit the active roles that people play in their own lives.**

Because they are repeated, they can perpetuate the myth that poverty is a natural phenomenon rather than a result of broader social, economic, or political factors.

**👍 RECOMMENDED**



**SAMPLE CAPTION**

Gladys Mhike, regional financial manager with local NGO [XY], running a workshop on microfunding with colleagues in Matobo, Zimbabwe, October 2013. (Photographer: XY)

**EXPLANATION**

The image shows a Zimbabwean woman working in a senior position for a local NGO and sharing her knowledge with colleagues, rather than depicting, for example, an international aid worker teaching local people.

**👎 NOT RECOMMENDED**



**SAMPLE CAPTION**

[International film star XY] visiting children in Uganda to fight hunger in Africa.

**SAMPLE CAPTION**

The international film star, as well as the international aid worker, is depicted with a group of beneficiaries which can promote power imbalances and inequality. The sample caption does not provide any details about the concrete situation or the role that the film star, aid worker, or local people play to solve the situation.

---

## Steps you can take

### **Images and messages should contribute to cultural understanding rather than misunderstandings or simplifications.**

- ▶ Messages: Try to avoid using slogans which make false generalisations like “Save a child’s life” or “Asian food crisis”, reinforcing stereotypes which seek to evoke pity or charity, or reducing communications about development to images and messages which exaggerate the desperation or show passive acceptance of local people in a situation. Provide information about the context. For example, one country can become a by-word for a situation like Ethiopia = famine or Rwanda = genocide.
- ▶ Images: Try to avoid creating, accepting, or using images of, for example, malnourished children with flies around their face. Promote the partner aspect of development by limiting images of the international aid worker with a local beneficiary, as such images promote power imbalances and inequality between the development agency and the local population.

**Show the diversity of people in development and avoid having just one international face among a sea of local people**, as this inaccurately portrays an international development worker as the helper/educator and can construct a false notion of aid workers as saviours.

Many development workers are based in their own country, **so try to represent the reality of local people working locally to fight poverty and inequality.**

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## The smiling child: the new stereotype?

It is a welcome development that many organisations recognise they have a responsibility to try and move away from prevailing negative images and messages. However, the tendency to directly replace the image of the “poor unhappy person” with the “smiling happy child” does an equal disservice to the context of many situations. It is entirely possible and feasible to convey negative stories and situations accurately while still adhering to the values and principles of the Code of Conduct. As the Code notes: “It is a reality of our world today that many of the images of extreme poverty and humanitarian distress are negative and cannot be ignored. To ignore them would run counter to the spirit of this Code which is to portray the reality of the lives of people with sensitivity and respect for their dignity.”

## PRINCIPLE FOUR

Use images, messages, and case studies with the full understanding, participation and permission of the subjects (or the subjects' parents/guardians)

### What does this mean in practice?

Before taking an image or researching a story, it is important to ensure that you have the full informed consent of the subject. The subject must be aware of where and how the information will be used. This means obtaining consent for the use of their personal information including stories about people's lives, as well as images and photographs of them, their families, and their communities.

The Code acknowledges that this may not be possible to obtain in all situations (large crowds, for example), but, in all cases, the core values should be considered and applied. An interesting litmus test would be to step into the shoes of the subject and ask "Would I want this image of or message about me and/or my family to be used as a marketing, fundraising, or communications tool for an organisation in another country?"

Keep in mind that some people may not want their personal details made public. It is important that NGOs make sure people involved understand the implications of participating in development communications. It is also important to be culturally sensitive when gathering information and data about a local project. In some cases, it may be necessary to engage a local interpreter or translator. More information about consent can be found in the Consent Section (Section 5) in this document.



### RECOMMENDED



### EXPLANATION

This illustration shows a scene where a local photographer has established a relationship with the subjects she photographed. They have a chance to give their consent and their required details are noted for future referencing or captions. A local photographer can help establish relationships and communicate with the people whose photos are being taken.

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## Steps you can take

**Try to establish a relationship with the people you photograph.** When using photographs of individuals, it is recommended to seek written permission or, at the very least, verbal consent. Photographs of large groups or crowds, where individuals are not recognisable, generally do not need consent. Use a consent form where possible. Bear in mind it may need to be translated in writing or via an interpreter for local communities. If written consent is not possible, a clear verbal explanation of what consent involves should be provided.

**Communicate how the photographs taken or information provided will be used:** Where? For what purpose? When and for how long?

**Show some examples of the kinds of materials that are produced** so that those involved understand how their personal details and story might be used.

**If a translator is being used, try to ensure that the translator has read or, at the very least, understands the spirit of the Code,** and is clear on the potential outputs of their work (may not be feasible in some cases).

**Once consent has been granted, be as accurate as possible** in recording names (where appropriate), details of the situation, and location.

**Information should not be used indefinitely.** Images and information should have an expiry date (for example, 2-3 years).

**Gathering information about children is particularly sensitive. It is crucial to establish who can give consent for obtaining photographs or details about a child.** Rely on local staff or contacts to identify the appropriate individuals within a community. Never take a photograph of a child without the full understanding and permission of the parent(s)/guardian(s). For more information, see the dedicated section on Child Protection (Section 6) in this document.

Please see the Consent section (Section 5) for further guidelines on taking photos and researching stories.

**A note on consent:** Gaining consent and/or identifying people in an image does not automatically equate to compliance with the Code. The Code should be considered and applied before an image is captured or message conveyed, not retrospectively, and its guiding principles, along with international instruments and standards should act as the main reference point for all decisions.



## PRINCIPLE FIVE

Ensure those whose situation is being represented have the opportunity to communicate their stories themselves

### What does this mean in practice?

The person who is telling the story and regarded as the “expert” in a situation (the “voice”) has a great impact in terms of how it is understood. Try to facilitate the person/people to tell their own story or give their own analysis. It is recommended to include a diversity of voices so as to represent the breadth and complexity of a given situation, and to avoid the possibility of stereotyping.

#### RECOMMENDED



#### EXPLANATION

The split TV screens show a different way an emergency can be covered. For example, using a local spokesperson shows that local people are actively involved in development or humanitarian work and gives them a chance to communicate their own views and opinions.

#### RECOMMENDED



#### SAMPLE CAPTION

Abeer Feisal, presenter of “Daily News” at Radio Hargeisa, talking about the upcoming presidential elections in Somaliland in November 2012.

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## Steps you can take

**Facilitate the person/people to speak for themselves by using local spokespersons (to show that local people are actively involved in development or humanitarian work) and by using the first person (“I” or “we”),** which shifts the balance to the person behind the story and their experience, creating space for “we have” and “we are”. Try not to generalise diverse groups of people under the terms “they” or “these people”.

**When editing, be careful that the meaning of a story is not altered or distorted.**

- ▶ Messages: If a text is edited or added to, state this clearly in the final version.

**Be aware that women and children are frequently used to represent communities living in poverty in images used by NGOs.**

- ▶ Images: Create diversity by including men, older people, people with disabilities, and other groups.
- ▶ Messages: Remember that in development communications, women are often “seen, but not heard”. Make every effort to give voice to women’s experiences and points of view as well as representing them in images.

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## PRINCIPLE SIX

Establish and record whether the subjects wish to be named or identified and always act accordingly

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### What does this mean in practice?

It may often be the case that the people in the photos or story do not wish to be named or identified for security reasons. This should be respected at all times. Individuals or groups of people may have serious fears about certain information being made public, or that the information they provide could be traced back to them. It is also important to consider whether or not it is appropriate to identify or give personal details about children, especially if they are conveying a sensitive story (gender-based violence, for example).

**While respecting the dignity of those relaying their stories, the protection of vulnerable people should also be considered.**

 **RECOMMENDED**



**SAMPLE CAPTION**

Jasmeen, who has experienced long-term domestic abuse, is involved in the local women's group's campaign against gender-based violence. The group has been supported by local NGO [XY] in Aden, 2014. (Photographer: XY)

**EXPLANATION**

The images shows a woman as actively involved in advocacy work without directly naming or identifying her.

 **NOT RECOMMENDED**



**EXPLANATION**

This illustration depicts a situation where a subject of a photograph, or a person representing his interest, has not given consent to the use of a picture, or is no longer happy for the image to be used in a certain context (for example, because the relevance or context has expired).

---

## Steps you can take

**Always ask if a person wishes to be identified.**

**When gathering information and images of children, the appropriate person (parent/guardian) should give consent to the agency representative involved.**

Even if a person or community does not express concern about the use of their personal data, **explicitly ask whether they wish to be identified, showing examples of what might be done with the information.**

In Ireland, consent for using photographs of children is obligatory. Consent must be sought from a parent/guardian for any child under 18. Similarly, **many organisations choose not to name children who appear in their publicity materials in order to protect the identity of the child.** For more information, see the dedicated section on Child Protection (Section 6) in this document.

**All images and information should be labelled and logged within an organisation's office information system.**

**Establish organisational guidelines around how long a case study/story and accompanying images can be kept and for how long it can be used,** as well as who has access to it and the purpose for which it can be used.

**Be aware of cultural sensitivity.**

- ▶ Images: Show extreme care or sensitivity when photographing taboo practices or stigmatised populations. Some issues, (for example abortion and prostitution), are sensitive in most societies. Make an effort to obtain at least verbal consent before taking a photo.

For more on verbal and written consent, see the Consent section (Section 5).

## PRINCIPLE SEVEN

Conform to the highest standards in relation to human rights and the protection of vulnerable people

### What does this mean in practice?

It would be important to take steps beyond informed consent to protect the privacy of human photo subjects when they are portrayed in vulnerable situations. The international standards of human rights as well as the core values of an organisation should be a guide in this regard and could also be taken into account when designing a public communications strategy.

### Consider referring to international instruments in your communications when working with individuals and communities such as:

- ▶ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
- ▶ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which guarantees women's rights to participate fully in their community, express their opinion, and make choices.
- ▶ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which states that children who are capable of forming their own views have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them.
- ▶ The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

These instruments provide a framework for developing communications in the context of human rights. They highlight the importance of the people being consulted, the right to express one's own opinion, and the need to protect people who are in vulnerable situations.

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## Steps you can take

**Use a model (rather than an actual patient or victim),** and obtain a written release from the model.

**Use an abstract image** to represent an issue.

**Use pseudonyms (false names)** or do not include names.

**When necessary, alter photo content to protect subjects.**

**When the identity of a person is altered for a communication, or not provided, it is important to explain why** (for example, by referring to the international conventions/declarations mentioned above).

**Use images of men and other demographic groups** as well as images of children and women.

**Use real time or normal speed in video footage,** as using footage which has been slowed down can give the impression that the people portrayed are weak or powerless.

**Be careful when framing a photograph.** Consider the angle of the photograph. Try not to take images from above, which look down on a person or group. Try to avoid taking a close-up photograph, especially someone who is injured, ill, or dying.

**All images of people in vulnerable situations should focus more on the reasons for and the context of a situation,** rather than on an individual's suffering.

**Try to show women in the powerful position they often occupy within families and communities.**

**NOT RECOMMENDED**



**EXPLANATION**

The photograph and the angle it is taken from emphasises the vulnerability of the child. If this picture was used without a caption to explain context and ensure the consent of the child, it may violate the human rights of the child.

**Fact:** When researching 50 development organisations in the USA, 82% of the photographs they used from the Global South were of women and children. Why do you think this happens? What effect do you think this has on our understanding of the role of women in the Global South? Even if unintentional, could the repeated use of images of children foster the idea that southern countries are in need of being looked after and being cared for “because they can’t look after themselves”? (Source: Rachel Tallon, Right Place Resources, New Zealand)

# 03. WHAT TO DO IN EMERGENCIES?

People and communities are most vulnerable when they are experiencing a crisis, such as war, famine, or drought, or living through the aftermath of a disaster such as an earthquake. For many organisations, the principles of the Code can be left to one side during emergencies. Images and messages from disasters rarely portray local people helping each other. People in such situations often go through immense efforts to provide for their families before aid arrives, or in places where aid doesn't reach.

In the example of drought in one country or in regions such as the Horn of Africa, coverage often depicts people waiting helplessly for aid agencies because of “famine in Africa”. Famine is often equated with Africa, and Africa with famine. This kind of coverage reduces a continent of 55 countries with thousands of cultures, languages, and histories to a single, impoverished place in the minds of the viewer.

Images and messages which portray emergency situations are very powerful in shaping public understanding and attitudes. Organisations have a responsibility to make every effort to follow best practice in the use of images and messages, even when this might not be considered a priority.

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## Steps you can take

▶ **Messages:**

Try to focus on the aspirations, capacities, and strength of local communities and organisations who often demonstrate resilience during emergencies. Disaster recovery is about building on the capacity of the local population rather than “helping” to address their perceived weaknesses.

▶ **Images:**

Highlight people and communities being active in addressing the effects of the emergency. Show local people helping and supporting each other. Avoid the stereotypical images which degrade, dehumanise, and distort the complexity of an emergency.



# 04. OTHER TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Telling a story, explaining a crisis, and calling for people to take action can be difficult to convey in some forms of online communication. The emergence of social media has demanded that NGOs adapt their communications to attract and engage with their supporters and general members of the public. Social media also presents the risk of "dumbing down" an issue or situation in order to create viral content that spreads to millions of people online. It would be important to ask in such a context if those receiving or sharing a message fully understand the wider issues, in terms of what is at stake or what is really happening in the situation being portrayed.

**The Code is versatile and can be applied to social media as well as traditional communications. Similar training, processes, policies, and good practices should be in place for social media as they are for other communications.**

Social media profiles and networks can be used to invite feedback on the images and messages NGOs use by providing an example and asking "How are we doing?"

Volunteers recruited by organisations should have the chance to learn about and implement the Code in their own social media via blogs, Twitter, Facebook etc. Volunteers and staff working in different countries should be able to participate in training on the Code as part of pre-departure preparation, support while abroad, and upon their return.

 **NOT RECOMMENDED**



Like · Comment · Share · 8 hours ago · 

 16 people like this.



So proud of all the great work!



Living the life!

**EXPLANATION**

Volunteers often take pictures with the best intentions in mind or they might be completely oblivious to the fact that they are breaking the Code of Conduct's principles. It is important that they are sensitised to related issues, that they are given a chance to discuss ongoing situations, and that they are trained on good practice.

**Remember to apply good practice related to the Code in all communications including:**

- ▶ Annual reports
- ▶ Charity gifts campaigns
- ▶ Fundraising events
- ▶ Humanitarian appeals
- ▶ Newspaper reports
- ▶ Social media, such as Twitter and Facebook
- ▶ Sponsorship
- ▶ TV advertisements
- ▶ Volunteer recruitment and training

# 05. CONSENT

## When to Obtain Consent

### All individuals in all settings when possible

Obtain consent from:

- ▶ Parents, guardians, or teachers of children
- ▶ Directors/managers of clinics or other service programmes

## When Consent is Not Needed

### Non-recognisable individuals in public (faces and all other identifying features are obscured)

Public figures in public (celebrity campaign launches, for example)

Crowds in public (for example, audiences at outdoor concerts, demonstrations, etc.) or war/conflict situations where it could mean more harm for the photographer and/or the photographed person to ask.

## When written consent is encouraged

### Recognisable/non-recognisable providers and clients in clinical settings

Recognisable or non-recognisable individuals in any setting where personal, private information is exposed in the photo or documented in the corresponding caption such as:

- ▶ Health status (for example, HIV-positive persons, persons living with AIDS/STIs, abortion history, TB, diarrhoea, disease, etc.)
- ▶ Health behaviour (for example, sex workers, sexual orientation, alcohol and drug use, contraceptive use)
- ▶ Victims (for example, survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), rape, exploitation, or abuse)
- ▶ Criminal behaviour (for example, perpetrator of GBV or other forms of violence)

## TIPS FOR OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT

**Cultural Sensitivity:** How you approach individuals and communities creates a relationship that can have a lasting impact on field staff and future travellers to a region. Before experiencing another culture, talk to your colleagues, consult guidebooks, and research online to learn about the views of that culture towards photography and the issues you are interested in documenting.

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### Verbal Consent:

**When possible, establish a relationship before you start taking photos.** When you approach photo subjects in the field, briefly introduce yourself, be courteous, and explain the purpose of your visit or the reason you want to take photos. In clinical contexts, speak with the clinical director before you begin photographing health workers or clients.

**For example:** “I am taking photos for [Organisation XY], an NGO working to improve health in your country/[Country XY]. Do I have your permission to take your photo for use in educational media and in our publications?”

- ▶ If you don't speak the same language, communicate with your body language. At the very least, smile, nod, and point to your camera before shooting. If you sense any reluctance, confusion, or disdain, refrain from taking the photo. Respect a person's right to refuse to be photographed.
- ▶ If you are travelling with someone who speaks the local language, ask him or her to translate your request for verbal consent.
- ▶ Identify an adult who can give you verbal consent on behalf of children.

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### Written Consent:

**Obtaining written consent may not be practical in all circumstances.**

Furthermore, written documents may have little or no meaning to people who speak a different language, people of low literacy, and people who live in cultures where photography or publications are not common. However, if it is your organisation's policy to obtain written consent, consider these tips:

- ▶ Prepare your consent forms ahead of time in the local language of the area you will be visiting.
- ▶ If you are unable to prepare written consent forms in the local language, orally translate the consent form to your photo subjects. Use an interpreter if necessary.
- ▶ For low literate subjects, ask the subject to make a mark on the consent form. If the person does not want to or cannot use a writing tool, obtain verbal permission. Have the consent witnessed by a literate witness who can sign or countersign the document and confirm that the form was read to the subject.

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## Further guidelines for taking photos and researching stories

- ▶ Explain that these photos or information may be used for TV, radio, postal communications, newspaper advertisement, the internet/social media, etc. If the person has no frame of reference for these media, be able to produce examples of your organisation's communications/fundraising output which feature programme participants.
- ▶ Ask for the correct names of the subject(s) and locality. Ask the subject (via translator if necessary) to spell their name and the village/locality/camp to ensure proper spelling.
- ▶ Capture an accurate and representative story.
- ▶ If there is no translation available, ensure at least names, locality, and permission is established.

# 06. CHILD PROTECTION

While communications should contain as much information as possible about the situation, location, timing, and names of those featured, it may not always be in the person's best interests to be identified. Gathering information about children is particularly sensitive.

When working with children, NGOs must adhere to the highest standards of Child Protection and act in accordance with their child protection policies. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) should be referred to at all times in situations relating to children. NGOs may also need to review and update their child protection policies in light of the Code.

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## Steps you can take

- ▶ Images of children should only be made, kept, and used where there is a valid reason associated with the activity involved and where informed consent has been given by the appropriate person.
- ▶ It is best if images focus on an activity and, where possible, feature groups of children rather than individuals.
- ▶ Be careful when revealing too many details about individual children as it may endanger them, although it is desirable to provide some information on the context of a photograph. Focusing on a group or family rather than individual children can provide more protection.
- ▶ Informed consent: Ask for the child's/children's permission and get parental/guardian consent for images, including for the retention and use of the image. This means ensuring that everyone is fully aware where, when, and how the images will be used.
- ▶ Where images are kept for future use, relevant names, dates, and other contextual information should be stored with them, as well as the signed consent for their usage.
- ▶ For spontaneous or unplanned images, the relevant people should be informed of the purpose of the photograph as soon as it is taken and asked for consent. If consent is refused, the image should not be published.
- ▶ Stories and images of children should always be taken or written with the best interest of the child in mind.

- ▶ Ensure that contracted photographers or journalists are not allowed to spend time with or have access to children without supervision.
- ▶ Ensure that any local Child Protection Officer receives training on the Code.
- ▶ Ensure that all staff, including communications staff, receive child protection training.
- ▶ Any complaints or concerns about inappropriate or intrusive images should be reported and recorded in accordance with any other child protection concern.

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## Convention on the Rights of the Child

**Article 17 of the CRC notes:** “State parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual, and moral well-being, and physical and mental health.”

### **When applying the Code in relation to children, the following should be considered:**

- ▶ Foster participation by children and young people by enabling them to express their views freely and imparting information/ideas of all kinds.
- ▶ Engage with children and young people in order to learn from them.
- ▶ Where possible, inform people about the positive actions taken by children and young people at local, national, and global levels.
- ▶ Avoid creating vulnerability where it does not exist (for example, images looking down on children).

These guidelines can also be applied to other vulnerable groups such as women (in certain situations), those affected by HIV and AIDS, and those living with a disability.

**The full text of the Convention can be found at**  
<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

### **For further information:**

- ▶ [www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk](http://www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk)
- ▶ Save the Children Principles for Ethical Reporting on Children:  
[http://ecaf.savethechildren.se/East\\_Central\\_Africa/Media/Ethical-reporting-on-children/](http://ecaf.savethechildren.se/East_Central_Africa/Media/Ethical-reporting-on-children/)
- ▶ Guidelines for Taking and Using Images of Children and Young People in the Arts Sector (March 2009)
- ▶ [www.dataprotection.ie](http://www.dataprotection.ie): The Data Protection Commissioner offers more information about data protection under the “Self Assessment Data Protection Checklist”.

# 07. ACCOUNTABILITY AND FEEDBACK

The Code is voluntary and self-regulatory, so its core idea is that organisations are responsible for their own performance and members of the public can hold organisations to account. However, signatories must fulfil criteria towards a minimum compliance with the Code and commit to providing a feedback mechanism, whereby anyone can comment or ask questions on their adherence to the Code.

If you think a signatory has breached the Code of Conduct, let the organisation know about it, preferably in writing, via their feedback mechanism, or by directly contacting the Code Champion, Head of Communications, or Director/CEO. The organisation's feedback mechanism is the first point of contact if you would like to make a complaint regarding an organisation's adherence to the Code. However, in the case where an organisation fails to respond or you are not satisfied with their response, you can also contact Dóchas by emailing [media@dochas.ie](mailto:media@dochas.ie). For more information on this please see the Complaints Mechanism on the Dochas website at [dochas.ie/code/resources](https://dochas.ie/code/resources).



# 08. IMPLEMENTATION, TRAINING AND OTHER RESOURCES

**By signing the Code of Conduct, organisations have agreed to adhere to the following minimum criteria:**

1. Make reference to the Code on their main website by displaying the Code logo either on their “Homepage” or in their “About us” section;
2. Make reference to the Code in their annual report;
3. Fill in and return Dóchas questionnaire on their implementation of the Code’s commitments on an annual basis;
4. Take part in peer-accountability reporting in the form of the Dóchas annual meeting for signatories;
5. Appoint a Code Champion;
6. Put in place a training plan for staff, management and volunteers;
7. Provide explicit information on feedback mechanisms on website;
8. The signatory’s Board discusses Code compliance at least once in the past 12 months;
9. Develop a Code implementation plan.

## TRAINING

It is the responsibility of each individual organisation to ensure that staff are adequately trained and cognisant on the Code and its underlying guiding principles. As a signatory organisation to the Code, it is important to ensure that the Code is internalised by the whole organisation. While buy-in at senior management level is important, the Code will only be successful if everyone is involved in its implementation. Therefore, it is critical that all staff members are aware of the Code, understand its underlying values and principles and most importantly, are aware of how the Code impacts on their day-to-day work. It is also important to note that the Code’s principles should be implemented throughout all activities of the organisation and this should be reflected in the content of the training.

For further resources and templates on training, Code implementation, feedback mechanisms, and internal promotion, please see the dedicated section on the Dóchas website: [dóchas.ie/code](http://dóchas.ie/code).

# 09. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

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## Questions to Consider:

- ▶ Does the use of the planned image and/or message fit with the core values of respect for the dignity of others?
- ▶ If used, would those directly affected by this image and/or message feel that it is a fair and true representation?
- ▶ Have all the subjects of the image and/or message agreed to this application of their image/story?
- ▶ Would the use of this image and/or message cause offence or hurt?
- ▶ Might the use of this image and/or message contribute to cultural or racial stereotyping of people, places, and situations? Does it involve gender stereotypes?
- ▶ Would you feel comfortable using the chosen image/message about yourself or your family?
- ▶ Does this image promote the active role of people in their own development and offer a fair reflection of working relationships between people in the Global North and the Global South?
- ▶ What function does the communication perform? Is it being used to evoke pity in the viewer. Does it portray the situation accurately?
- ▶ Does it contribute to stereotypes about the contributions of volunteers to development?
- ▶ What aspects of life in communities where NGOs work are missing from the communication, if any? Why are they omitted?
- ▶ Does the communication convey a sense of interdependence or interconnectedness and encourage long-term engagement in development issues beyond charitable donations?

These questions are not mutually exclusive and are listed here to prompt further reflection about practical choices and alternatives.

The Code expresses a set of values and guiding principles and this Guide is intended to provide advice on best practice. Opinions will differ between individuals so it is important to remember to always adhere to the spirit of the Code.

Every effort has been made to ensure this document complies with the NCBI Clear Print Guidelines. Should you encounter a difficulty in accessing this publication, please inform Dóchas at [media@dochas.ie](mailto:media@dochas.ie) so that we can continue to improve the accessibility of our publications.

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