



Beyond the Picture

Uncovering the Grey Area of Images and Messages!

March 14th 2010

Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre

27-31 Upper O'Connell Street

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Seminar Proceedings

The Africa Centre Seminar ‘Beyond the Picture: Uncovering the Grey Area of Images and Messages ‘ took place in the Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre on the 15th March 2010. Seminar participants were welcomed by **Mr. Eric Yao, Coordinator of the Africa Centre** and the panel discussion was facilitated by **Dr. Sahr Yambasu, Board member of the Africa Centre**. Following the panel discussion there was a workshop on strengthening the Dóchas Code of Conduct. This was facilitated by **Ms. Eilish Dillion Lecture in Kimmage DSC**.

A discussion panel comprised of **Mr. Colin White from the Irish Kidney Association**. Mr White completed his high school in Lesotho in the late 1980’s and later returned to teach in Botswana from 1994-1999 followed by a period in sports development in Zimbabwe from 2000-2001. He is currently working for the Irish Kidney Association developing a domestic and international sports programme for people on dialysis and organ transplant recipients as well as working on other projects promoting organ donor awareness. The second panellist was **Ms. Brigid Quilligan, Assistant Director of the Irish Travellers Movement**. Ms. Quilligan has been involved in Community Development and Human Rights for the past fifteen years. The final panellist was **Ms. Abiba Ndeley**. Ms Ndeley completed her MA in International Journalism; she is a freelance photographer and graphic designer. She works as a Client Advice Officer in Jobcare Ltd, is a proud mother of five and founder of www.afroland.ie .

Mr. Yao welcomed participants and explained that each image tells a story which in turn creates an impression. Over time some of these impressions can lead to discrimination or stereotyping. Mr Yao hoped that by the end of the day we would have developed stronger strategies to move the Dóchas Code of Conduct Forward.

The panel discussion started with Colin White explaining the origin of “the forget me not flower as an emblem” for the Irish Kidney Association. He stated that the flower was picked simply for its name – ‘*forget me not*’ - do not forget organ donors and do not forget those waiting for an organ transplant. Although forget me not flower is blue it was changed to purple to compliment the Irish Kidneys Association logo. The idea of the flower being a graft was also developed. The "Forget-Me-Not" flower is a symbol for life - dead wood of the Irish Kidney Association emblem represents the failed organ and the bandaged graft, with the new flower, symbolises the transplanted life giving organ. This emblem soon became a brand for the Irish Kidney association which now enables the charity to sell flower seeds, badges and broaches to raise funds for people with renal disease. Mr. White finished by suggesting that instead of using images to represent the people of the continent of Africa, its innovation should be illustrated to highlight the continents potential and how we can learn from Africa.

Brigid Quilligan explained that she is a Traveller and that Travellers are an indigenous minority who, historical sources confirm, have been part of Irish society for centuries. Travellers long shared history, cultural values, language, customs and traditions make them a

self-defined group, and one which is recognisable and distinct. Their culture and way of life, of which nomadism is an important factor, distinguishes them from the sedentary (settled) population. During the 1950 and 60s there was a national drive to wipe out nomadism in Ireland and this resulted in the substantial loss of the traveller language. Ms. Quilligan then went on to discuss the recent TV documentaries that have been produced about travellers; in UK 'My Big Fat Gypsy wedding' and in Ireland 'The Truth about Travellers'. The documentary in the UK aimed to give insight into the secret life of Travellers particularly around their weddings. The programme was viewed by 8 million people and received huge complaints from the traveller community in relation to the portrayal of women. Ms Quilligan stated that the TV documentary 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' has set the Traveller community back about 20 years and has reinforced negative stereotype among the 8 million viewers who watched the documentary who believed it all to be true. It is also ironic that Irish Travellers have more legal rights in the UK and Northern Ireland in comparison to Ireland where they struggle to be noticed as an ethnic minority. The Irish documentary 'The Truth about Travellers' was not as damaging however only concentrated on a minority of the community. There was a comment about non-married women having no status within the community and this again frustrated Travellers around Ireland. Numerous complaints were made to TV3 and there was a consensus reached that Travellers would have input in future documentaries.

Ms Abiba Ndeley discussed how the typical African stereotype has been around for hundreds of years and this needs to change. She showed us tube clip of different cityscapes throughout African countries to highlight the Africa you don't often see. Charities do good work however their portrayal of people is very negative. Ms. Ndeley stated that she herself used to support Charities good work but then discovered that by doing so she was supporting the stereotype charities developed and stopped donating. She then went on to mention that there are many different ways of getting into the hearts and minds of people as illustrated by Mr. White and the use of branding and in documentaries however it is important that there is input from the group in question at initiation. Ms. Ndeley also mentioned that is important for people to take action and she has done this by setting up a website www.afroland.ie.

Seminar participants made the following points:

- How can you avoid using negative images and messages when you are trying to make people aware of the injustices in the world
- Are development staff themselves responsible for creating such inequalities?
- How can we deal with organisations that use negative images and messages to fundraise?
- Where do you find the balance between illustrating the positive but not disregarding the negative
- Some commented on the pictures in the Irish Aid centre and stated that they found them offensive. The plain white background is not a background you would see in Africa. All pictures show individuals who are farmers or tailors and fail to illustrate the university degree holders, the bankers or business people.

Feedback Report from the Workshop on Strengthening the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages at the Africa Centre Seminar – 'Beyond the Picture: Uncovering the Grey Area of Images and Messages' - 15th March 2011

Introduction to the Feedback Report

This workshop was the first in a series of workshops undertaken by the Dóchas task group on the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages (CoC). These workshops are part of a review of the CoC undertaken by the Dóchas task group with the aim of strengthening the CoC. It is hoped that these workshops, designed as a process of consultation with relevant development organisation personnel and other interested parties, will contribute to fulfilling the objectives of the review which are: to revise the CoC; to make the CoC more user friendly by developing an illustrative guide to compliment the code; to promote greater ownership of the code among signatories; to devise indicators to ensure implementation of the codes principles; and to recommend a monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with the principles of the code.

Facilitated by Eilish Dillon, the first workshop was held over one and a half hours with a group of approx. 20 people as part of the Africa Centre Seminar on Images and Messages, 15th March 2011. Designed in consultation with the rest of the task group by Eilish Dillon and Rebecca O'Halloran, the workshop comprised of three general sections: 1 – Review of Principles; 2 – Monitoring Criteria and 3 – Monitoring Mechanisms. Various exercises were designed to ensure that participants could contribute their views and analysis of the Code of Conduct in these areas as well as to allow for written feedback to be compiled by participants throughout the process.

Notes below are compiled from group work sheets as well as from individual work (post-its) and general discussion (from flip charts). Each section is structured as per the time it was undertaken during the workshop and it gives some indication of the process involved for future facilitators.

Section 1. Review of Principles 11.30 – 12.10pm

Process: Mbemba Jabbi and Eilish Dillon gave an introduction to the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages. Mbemba made the link between the early morning and late morning sessions and introducing the principles of the CoC. Eilish briefly explained the background to the Code of Conduct and, having passed around copies of it, introduced the wording of the principles and 'we strive to' statements. The large group was broken into 7 groups and each were asked to briefly discuss their reactions to the principles. These were gathered in the big group and written on flipchart sheets.

Overall Reactions to Principles – Brainstorm on the basis of group discussion of the principles as outlined in the Code of Conduct:

- A lot of thought has gone into them
- What is meant by 'respect for dignity'? – it is not very clear
- Principles are good but it's important to consider how to do things, e.g., 'ensure people can tell their own story'
- There are implicit assumptions in the principles with regard to who has power – in this case, the organisation has power. It should be mediated and the role of large NGOs should come out stronger
- Re: children and the ownership and control of a person's image – many are compromising of children, e.g., the Trócaire ad with problematic images of children
- Organisations should be presenting the context but it doesn't happen.
- Fundraising leads to an over-simplification of situations – the discourse implies donors and those who are 'poor' and need 'help'
- Control of how the code is implemented very important
- Principles are fair and good but guidelines needed for implementation, e.g., re: 'potentially stereotype, in practice and in reality, images and messages are often different to the principles

Group Work Feedback on 'We Strive to' statements: [Each group was given one of the 'we strive to statements' and asked to discuss it and to complete the forms below. General feedback was given on each of the statements.]

Group 1:

We strive to:

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

What you like about the statement	4 words - strong
What you might change in relation to it, if anything	The terms are v. Broad – what do they mean and who do they refer to? Different people and organisations attach different meanings to them. There's a hierarchy of terms – as a list, would alphabetically be preferable?
Is there anything missing from it that you would like to include?	'Recognition' but needs to be linked to context – how to include it in an image? A comma (after respect)

Additional Comments in relation to the statement	The statement reads like a first opening statement (mission) which the others elaborate upon.
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Group 2:

We strive to:

“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 you like about the statement	It's trying to make a difference It's trying to change dominant representations Recognises the need for change
What you might change in relation to it, if anything	Promote the use of positive images so that people can aspire to a goal Substitute the last word or say instead “complexities of the communities towards whom development is being targeted”
Is there anything missing from it that you would like to include?	The statement is too broad and impossible to implement Not just to represent but promote understanding of the culture and complexities of the culture it is trying to represent It needs to depict complex political problems, not just economic or educational
Additional Comments in relation to the statement	Recognise the diversity of religion, culture and language Allow people to tell their own story in their mother tongue Teach the people who do development of the importance of diversity – promote understanding of structural and political problems as opposed to just problems within the community

Group 3:

We strive to:

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

What you like about the statement	Broad and makes sense
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What you might change in relation to it, if anything	Needs to be broken down Also needs to be separated depending on what the images are being used for Examples of what is right or wrong – maybe website/training days
Is there anything missing from it that you would like to include?	Definition of the terms used More examples
Additional Comments in relation to the statement	If using images taken by the people in question they may necessarily be biased or stereotypical – one sided – particularly in conflict situations

Group 5:

We strive to:

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

What you like about the statement	Attempts to consider the true party
What you might change in relation to it, if anything	Too broad and aspirational. Could this be done for every image an NGO uses, realistically?
Is there anything missing from it that you would like to include?	Where practicable, reasonable
Additional Comments in relation to the statement	Blatant abuse, misrepresentation may be words to include

Group 5:

We strive to:

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

What you like about the statement	Real, participation, choice, opportunity
What you might change in relation to it, if anything	Without editing, or manipulating, or adding own opinion
Is there anything missing from it that you would like to include?	freely
Additional Comments in relation to the statement	Good code, but open to interpretation Research issues

Group 6:

We strive to:

“Establish and record whether the subjects wish to be named or identifiable and always act accordingly”

What you like about the statement	It's good to try and achieve consent
What you might change in relation to it, if anything	Need to follow up and further investigate stories of the people in the images – can't just use an image in isolation Statement should say what will happen now and in the future with the image
Is there anything missing from it that you would like to include?	More information should be required on the purpose and current and future use and storage of the image
Additional Comments in relation to the statement	What is consent? Do you need to very clearly establish the purpose for which the image will be used before taking it? Who can truly give this consent – child, parent, community leader?

Group 7:

We strive to:

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

<p>What you like about the statement</p>	<p>Nice sentiment</p>
<p>What you might change in relation to it, if anything</p>	<p>It is subjective Whose standards are we conforming to? Define vulnerable Too vague</p>
<p>Is there anything missing from it that you would like to include?</p>	<p>Clarify which set of standards we are using (UN?)</p>
<p>Additional Comments in relation to the statement</p>	<p>It is simplified? But who is the target? The could should be explained to funders, volunteers, all involved</p>

Section 2. Monitoring Criteria – 12.10pm – 12.35pm

Process: Each participant was asked to reflect on words and images that should or should not be used with reference to 'an organisation and its work'; 'where the organisation works and the work context' and 'partners' or 'beneficiaries' using the following statement: “if an organisation was reflecting these statements ('we strive to...') in their use of images and messages or not, what would their pictures, captions, labels, terms, case studies, ads, cartoons, words and videos look like?”. Each participant was given green and orange post-its [green for 'should use' and orange for 'should not use'] and asked to write on the post-its what they think an organisation should or should not do. These were then placed on three big sheets – one for each topic. General comments were sought and exchanged in the large group.

Feedback from Individual Work on post-its, which were posted onto big sheets.

Images [Labels, Captions, Pictures, Ads etc] and Text	Re: the Organisation and its Work	Re: Where the Organisation Works and the Work Context	Re: 'Partners' and 'Beneficiaries'
That can be used	<p>Empathy</p> <p>Emphasise intercultural collaboration as opposed to the many ways the organisation can help</p> <p>Show an alternative way of understanding the issues – be clever and creative</p> <p>Rationale - addressing of audience rather than on an emotional level</p> <p>Use images that portray the organisation as a facilitator rather than an instructor</p> <p>Achievements, Track records, real case studies and history of organisation</p>	<p>Community agency – recognise that communities have their own coping strategies</p> <p>Show people working together</p> <p>Promote the positive work women in the community do to survive in difficult times</p> <p>Introduce the political problems to shame inept governments as opposed to shaming the vulnerable</p> <p>Contextualise specific country or circumstances/contexts</p> <p>Understand the culture and political dynamics of the communities involved</p> <p>Awareness through symbolism</p>	<p>Pictures should be used but at a time period and they should expire</p> <p>consult the person, people about how they wish to be portrayed</p> <p>local people working on local projects alongside partner that promotes sustainability</p> <p>Role models from previous 'beneficiaries'</p> <p>Work of orgs should highlight their progress and how that impacts on the life of 'beneficiaries' which we</p>

	<p>Work in equal partnership with an org in South and Southern personnel have presence in West Focus on 'what you can do' aspect and promote active engagement and participation with the issues instead of promoting the idea of throwing money at the problem Learning and developing Admit mistakes balanced with learning and adaptation Organisations work with people in humanitarian situations 'GOAL and its partners do such and such'</p>	<p>Do show genuine depiction of as many facets of the situation as possible – allow narrative to emerge rather than force it Images, captions and messages used should have exact places, organisations and work. Africa is a continent not a country. Name the country Show the complexity of the country/situation Give context – politics, history, culture Show images of modern factories, research facilities and institutes, universities, libraries, playgrounds, parks or local equivalent Yes, need for specification on the country rather than the continent as a whole Name good and bad things happening in an area and the contributors to them</p>	<p>do not often see Abstract representations – not real people but representatives, cartoons etc Agents of their own future – help to help themselves Take the '9 grounds' into consideration Images that we would be comfortable using of ourselves Cannot say because what is acceptable or appealing to me may be unacceptable or offensive to someone else Actual subject telling their story and no narration or too much editing Don't mind so long as they are positive – but again it's open to personal interpretation Use images from or taken by partners or subjects of campaign – try to promote empathy not sympathy Positive messages Get permission</p>
<p>That should not be used</p>	<p>Staff wearing the T-shirt (with org logo) given priority in images 'GOAL does such and such' Old pictures and statistics That its work will save all problems and the village won't survive without their presence No captions of fly infested children and no need for so-called 'black box from Trócaire' Orgs should not generalise their work, they should mention effect details</p>	<p>Yes images can be used. However, not in a way of portraying an entire continent in a negative way. Ideally countries should be named and not continents Don't depoliticise conflict or situations for the sake of broader appeal or government funding for your org Don't use 'Third World' – many people/orgs still do – 'Third' suggests a constant state Situation should be highlighted</p>	<p>Don't use photos if you can help it – use videos because they give more context Use photos of people taking about their own situations Don't use words like 'underdeveloped', 'poor' Outdated unsolicited images Situations of pity Vulnerable images Avoid using images</p>

<p>Superiority – power For campaigning groups – try not to only focus on the negatives and 'wrongs' of the situation – try to be broad based and inclusive in approach. Avoid 'left' or 'right' wing language The 'white aid worker' shown in the active role alongside the black passive, helpless recipient of aid Charity is a terrible word Presenting staff/organisation as heroes – bringing salvation and solutions Do not assume that aid and development are necessarily good; encourage people to critically analyse</p>	<p>but not without a full explanation – people should not be photographed Org should not generalise but mention country and region they work in and the communities they are dealing with Framing situation only as a result of natural disasters (as opposed to pol, econ, ecological etc) Don't use women and babies images in famine – why not show the men who spend all their energy foraging for food? Do not assume that race and geography (i.e., Black Africa) necessarily constitutes vulnerability to suffering Don't show one white face among 20 black faces to indicate some kind of educational role No assumptions but facts Images that only show one depiction Don't compare a country to your own – show the complexity, inequality within the country you are looking at Don't imply that an entire continent, region or country is the same No country is made up only of refugee camps</p>	<p>that dehumanise, victimise or demonise Do not use images out of context and challenge situations where this occurs Do not assume that white equals benevolent partner, criticise the global political structure that produces inequalities Criticise the charitable model and promote individual agency – do not assume charity is always good or neutral Beneficiaries evokes charity model Caution with partnership that it is not imposed Donor v recipient relationship – inequitable relationship Vulnerable children Negativity – although this is open to interpretation Flyers which include images which credit and name prominent figures and celebrities while blatantly not acknowledging presence of recipients of aid/assistance Blunt, offensive statements – carry out full, adequate research No images of dying people – respect their dignity</p>
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Section 3 - Monitoring Mechanisms – 12.35pm – 12.55pm

Process: Group Work [There were three large groups who were asked to indicate on a large sheet whether they agreed or disagreed with each of the statements. They were not asked to arrive at consensus but to reflect upon all views in the group, so the information from all groups is compiled together below. Not all groups identified the numbers of those who agreed or disagreed with the statements – so the numbers below are only an indication of the numbers of people who agreed or disagreed with a particular statement, they do not reflect it accurately. Perhaps we need to look at how this is done in the future, e.g., ask individuals to complete the forms first before discussing their views in a bigger group.]

Introduction – existing monitoring requirements in relation to the Code of Conduct include: completion of an annual survey and participation in an annual implementation seminar. For quite a while Dóchas has been considering the need to put in place stronger monitoring mechanisms to ensure that organisations who have signed up to the Code comply with its principles. To this end, criteria for assessing whether or not an organisations' images and messages adhere to the principles are being reflected upon. Below are a number of statements – can you indicate whether you agree or not with these statements, giving reasons for your answer, where possible? Remember that you need to think about what would actually work to strengthen the Code.

Statement	Agree – why?	Disagree – why?
There should be no penalties for non-compliance with the Code's principles – organisations should be encouraged to engage in best practice, not punished for not.	4 – who and how can you punish? Perhaps sanctions instead There needs to be a regulatory and governance process – punishment and penalties too strong	8 – there needs to be proof of compliance – if not you should not be able to promote it. Perhaps promote the Code as a quality brand.
It is difficult for organisations to comply with the Code's principles when other organisations are using shocking and stereotypical images to raise money.	9 – do-able but difficult It is difficult, but it is no reason not to buy into the code. It should never be an excuse.	1
Irish Aid should not fund organisations that are not signatories to the Code of Conduct in their	6 – it should be something that is	4

use of Images and Messages	considered – an organisation might be signed up to the code but not complying	
Signatories to the Code should have to prove that they are in compliance with the Code's principles before they are allowed to call themselves signatories	6 – when the document is finalised and agreed, then possibly	1
Dóchas needs to appoint a review committee to oversee the ways in which organisations use images and messages, especially in advertising, and this committee should have the final say when it comes to whether or not an organisation can be accepted as a Code signatory.	6 – the committee should be balanced. Of the 6, three indicated that they think it should be an independent committee.	2
Dóchas should allow organisations to become signatories but it should 'name and shame' those who do not comply with the Code's principles.	2	7 – it should name but not shame – by omission, it is shaming
Greater involvement of Southern voices is crucial. The Code document itself needs to be critically evaluated by Southern activists to establish if it does incorporate their perspectives and is actually the document they want and need. Southerners should be better facilitated in getting involved in the various processes surrounding the Code, and in particular, in actively challenging inappropriate images and messages themselves.	10 – the idea is sound but the language is problematic Multiple groups – not only Southern, even minorities within Ireland. Everyone should get a voice.	

The Seminar was then closed by Mr. Mbemba Jabbi of the Africa Centre

Ends