Africa Centre Conference
‘The Use of Images and Messages - A Human Rights Issue’
14th and 15th July 2010

Conference Report
by Lizzie Downes

Funded by
EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Irish Aid
Department of Foreign Affairs
An Roinn Gnóthach Eachtracha
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
Table of Contents

Day 1

Introduction
Eric Yao, Coordinator of the Africa Centre .................................................................3
Elaine Mahon, Dóchas Development Education Working Group .................................3

Speeches
His Excellency Jeremiah Ndou, South African Ambassador to Ireland:
‘Nelson Mandela, his work on Human Rights and Social Justice’ .................................4

Her Excellency Kemafo Nonyerem Chikwe, Nigerian Ambassador to Ireland:
‘Images and Messages from an African Perspective’ ......................................................6

Performances
Short play: ‘Dublin Pride’ by Arambe Productions .......................................................7
Music: from Clover Watts and Gary McDowell ............................................................7

Day 2

Welcome
Eric Yao .........................................................................................................................7

Speech
Fionnuala Quinlan, Irish Aid Press Officer .................................................................7

Keynote speech
Samuel Mohochi, Chevening Scholar at the Transitional Justice Institute, School of Law,
University of Ulster .......................................................................................................8

Delegate questions and comments ..............................................................................9

Panel discussion and workshop feedback session .......................................................10
Chair: Her Excellency Catherine Muigai Mwangi, Kenyan Ambassador to Ireland

Workshop 1 – ‘Up-to-date Research on the Use of Images and Messages’
Facilitator: Eilish Dillon, Kimmage Development Studies Centre ................................10

Workshop 2 – ‘Critical Analysis of the Code from a Southern Perspective’
Facilitator: Charo Lanao-Madden, Coordinator, Making Connections Project, Centre for Global
Education, Belfast ......................................................................................................11

Workshop 3 – ‘The Irish Experience of Implementing the Code’
Facilitator: Philip Watt, CEO, Cystic Fibrosis Association of Ireland .........................12

Workshop 4 – ‘Human Rights and Images and Messages – Do Codes of Conduct Work?’
Facilitator: Walt Kilroy, Former Deputy Foreign Editor, RTE .....................................13

Plenary discussion ......................................................................................................14

Reflection and wrap-up session
Facilitators: Elaine Mahon, Selam Desta, Matthias Fiedler and Max Zimani .............16

Closing remarks .........................................................................................................19

Recommendations .....................................................................................................19
Day I

The 2010 Africa Centre conference ‘The use of Images and Messages – A Human Rights Issue’ was held in Dublin Castle on 14th and 15th July. Before opening the conference, Eric Yao, Coordinator of the Africa Centre, requested a minute’s silence as a gesture of respect to the victims of the Ugandan bomb attack on 12th July. Mr Yao then formally welcomed the delegates on behalf of the board and staff of the Africa Centre, mentioning in particular the members of the diplomatic corps.

Mr Yao introduced the theme of the conference, emphasising that images not only influence the way people think, but also how they react. He indicated that the aim of the conference was to generate discussion and debate on the use and influence of images and messages from the South, linking this issue with human rights legislation. The conference was also intended to celebrate Nelson Mandela and scheduled to coincide with Mandela Day.

Elaine Mahon, representing the Dóchas Development Education Working Group, then addressed delegates. Ms Mahon works with the National Youth Council of Ireland’s development education programme and is also the Dóchas representative on the development education EU forum of Concord. Ms Mahon began by stating her intention to set the context, raise some questions and provide some background information on the Code of Conduct and on how this conference came about.

She reminded delegates that the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages was adopted by Dóchas members in 2007, building on a previous Code which had been written in 1989 by Concord members. The Dóchas Development Education Group had set up a working group which re-drafted and reworked the Code. This group has also been instrumental in organising this conference.

She explained that purpose of the Code is to set out a framework that development organisations can refer to when they are drafting public information and awareness-raising campaigns and to assist organisations in using and choosing images ethically. The Code has approximately 60 signatories to date, mainly from the development sector.

Ms Mahon acknowledged that the Africa Centre is both the chair and an active and valued member of the Dóchas development education group. The Dóchas CoC is a fundamental part of the Africa Centre’s development education programme. Ms Mahon referred to other Africa Centre initiatives on the CoC, including last year’s joint Dóchas/Africa Centre seminar (Portraying the Developing World: the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth’, held in the Irish Aid Centre on Sept 10th), and also the ‘Africa Also Smiles’ poster campaign - both aspects of the Centre’s work which aim to challenge and change stereotypes about the Global South.
Ms Mahon asserted that the influence of images and messages on perceptions, beliefs and attitudes cannot be underestimated and it is crucial that we use images and messages which are as fair and accurate as possible, so that not only do the Irish public understand the complexities of development and the varied living experiences of people living in the Global South, but also that the many people from the Southern diaspora in Ireland are treated with dignity and respect and don’t experience negative stereotyping or discrimination based on “ill-informed messages”.
She pointed out that many Irish organisations are already moving from a charitable agenda to a partnership approach, involving the experience and perspectives of African and other migrant-led organisations both here and abroad, and they will help to challenge the images and messages used. The Africa Centre provides that voice and is active in promoting the CoC.

Ms Mahon stressed how more people are beginning to critically question the images of the developing world they receive, especially as they interact increasingly with people from the Global South. The fair and ethical use of images and messages is impacting on other sectors outside the development sector. She referred to the NYCI, who are currently producing an education pack on the theme of images and messages, an issue which has been cited as the priority by their members for One World Week. Ms Mahon outlined how an analogy involving the example of misuse of teenage Facebook profile photos served to underline the significance of individual rights, dignity, privacy and hence a Code of Conduct for youth groups.

Ms Mahon stressed that challenging images and messages has to be an ongoing process. If it is to be perceived as a human rights issue, then it should cut across all sectors, including youth, traveller, community groups etc.

Ms Mahon congratulated the Africa Centre and thanked them for organising this conference, which she perceived as an opportunity to open dialogue on the issue with a wider audience.

Eric Yao thanked funders and EU project partners (Slovenia Africa Centre and the Afro-Community Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI)) and introduced the next speaker, the South African ambassador to Ireland.

**Nelson Mandela, his work on Human Rights and Social Justice**  
**His Excellency Jeremiah Ndou, South African Ambassador to Ireland.**

The Ambassador thanked the Africa Centre and its coordinator Eric Yao for organizing this event, and acknowledged the particular importance of the conference theme to Africa.

The ambassador began by quoting from an opinion piece by Joe Humphreys in this day’s Irish Times: “The World Cup may have briefly dispelled our misperceptions but the global force of Afropessimism is likely to re-
assert itself quickly ... in the months and weeks leading up to South Africa’s hosting of the tournament, media outlets worldwide (with some honourable exceptions, naturally) predicted the mass murder of football fans, along with widespread organisational chaos and incompetence”. Mr Ndou agreed that the attitude that certain people in the West have towards the African continent is that it is dark, hopeless, lost; that there is nothing good about it. The successful African hosting of the World Cup nevertheless, has gone a long way toward disproving those Afro-pessimists; Africa is not only about hunger and poverty.

Mr Ndou reminded us that it is little over 60 years ago since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations (1948).

Nelson Mandela was a universally respected statesman who insisted on the ‘indivisibility of human rights’ and urged for the inclusion of economic rights (including food, shelter and healthcare), claiming: “we do not want freedom without bread, nor do we want bread without freedom”. Mandela perceived the absence of such basic needs as entrenching inequality and injustice and warned against the language of rights being used to mask the maintenance of one group’s power, privileges or status.

Mr Ndou outlined some of achievements of Nelson Mandela, his role in fighting apartheid, his imprisonment on Robben Island, and his role in transitional South Africa, for which he earned the international reputation of compassionate negotiator and model peacemaker. In 1993, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which (despite objections) he shared with former South African president FW de Klerk. Shortly afterwards, following democratic elections Mr Mandela was elected president.

Even since stepping down in 1999, Mr Mandela is still South Africa's highest-profile ambassador, campaigning against HIV/Aids and securing his country’s right to host the 2010 football World Cup.

In November 2009, The UN General Assembly declared July 18th ”Nelson Mandela International Day” in recognition of Mandela’s leading role in and support for Africa’s struggle for liberation, unity and democracy. On 10th June 2009 the Irish government passed a motion introducing this initiative to the Irish people. On Mandela Day people worldwide are encouraged to dedicate at least 67 minutes of their time to their communities in emulation of Mandela’s 67 years of uninterrupted service to humanity. Mandela Day celebrates the idea that each individual has the power to transform the world and work towards a common humanity.

Mr Ndou underlined the extent of rapid growth and historic change which both South Africa and the Continent has witnessed in this generation. South Africa has rapidly evolved from its apartheid years following years of economic and structural reform. Winning the bid to host the first FIFA World Cup, in which Nelson Mandela played a pivotal role, was a key achievement. Despite the negative pre-tournament publicity, South Africa hosted a successful world class event.

February 2010 marked 20 years since the apartheid regime unbanned the ANC and other liberation movements, releasing Nelson Mandela from prison and opening the doors to freedom, dignity and equality for all South Africans.

Mandela was instrumental in setting up the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), established by the Government of National Unity. This became a key instrument in democratic Africa’s interrogation of its Apartheid past. Mr Ndou emphasised that the achievements and failures of the TRC have offered many lessons, and he shared with delegates Mandela’s statement on receiving the report of the TRC in October 1998.

Mr Ndou repeated that Nelson Mandela has become an inspiring symbol of hope and democracy, not just for South Africa, but for Africa, and the world. The ambassador concluded with an extract from Mandela’s autobiography ‘Long Walk to Freedom’.
Images and Messages, An African Perspective
Her Excellency Ambassador Kemafo Chikwe, Nigerian Ambassador to Ireland

The Ambassador acknowledged the presence of the South African ambassador, the Africa Centre coor-
dinator and delegates. She thanked the Centre and the conference organisers for the opportunity to speak on the theme from an African perspective asserting that it afforded the African community the chance to tell their own story rather than a Western media one. Dr Chikwe reminded the audience of the litany of negative images of Africa which have been constantly presented over the last century in the media - as well as a cacophony of negative commentary from NGOs. It is not possible for a people to withstand such a barrage of negativity, and Africa receives the worst of it. Dr Chikwe questioned the need for the existence of such messages and the motives of both the media and NGOs. She highlighted the dangers of aid agency fund-raising and media advertising leading to self-sustenance – at the expense of Africa. Dr Chikwe alluded to a Sightsavers fundraising poster which claimed: ‘Being blind is hard, being blind in Nigeria is harder’. Dr Chikwe joked that blindness is not one of the issues one hears in relation to Nigeria – it’s usually ‘corruption’! Dr Chikwe asserted that this poster is an insult to Nigerians; that these messages and forms of fundraising should be discouraged; that these NGOs should not be absolved merely because they are engaged in altruistic activities. This negative bias is detrimental to positive reporting. Dr Chikwe reminded the audience that the origins of this behaviour can be traced back to scramble for Africa - the ‘white man’s burden’ - where the depiction of black Africans as ‘less than human’ allowed their mistreatment to continue.

The ambassador went on to ask why negative media reporting on Africa is so exces-
sively out of proportion – in relation to other continents. She assured delegates that in a continent of fifty four separate countries with a combined population of one billion peo-
ple, with some of the fastest-growing economies in the world, that there had to be more positive than negative stories. Dr Chikwe pointed out that where wars exist, it is Africans who play the main role in resolving them. She cited the example of Liberia where Sierra Leone intervened and the Nigerian contribution in the liberation of Mozambique – interventions that she claimed went unmentioned in the media. Dr Chikwe alluded to the 2008 Irish Independent opinion piece by Kevin Myers - ‘Africa is giving nothing to any-
one – apart from AIDS’, - and emphasised that the reprimand by the press council and the subsequent withdrawal of the piece was “too little, too late”. She iterated that such distorted and gratuitously offensive reporting is likely to cause grave offence to Africans everywhere, and has no place in print journalism. Dr Chikwe added that Africans – with their talents in academia, business and culture - need to take ownership of their own images and messages, for instance by establishing their own PR and marketing firms. The image of Africa, she claimed, could be improved by the success of the African dias-
pora. The ambassador concluded by urging more support from Western media so that Africans can succeed in portraying a truer and fairer representation of their continent.

Eric Yao thanked the Nigerian Ambassador and acknowledged the presence of the Ethiop-
ian ambassador, the Dean of the African embassies and representatives of the Embas-
sies of Lesotho and Morocco.
Mr Yao closed the opening session of the conference and introduced ‘Dublin Pride’, a short drama sketch, written and directed by Bisi Adegun, of Arambe Productions. Set in a casting agency, the play explored the manifestation of racism in perceptions and stereotypes and took a perceptive and humorous look at what it means to be ‘a true Dub’.

The production was followed by a recital of popular classical and contemporary music performed by Clover Watts and Gary McDowell from Belfast supported by drummer Gabriel Akujobi. The repetoire included a song entitled “I see Africa/Africa Smiles Too’ specially composed for the conference.

A wine reception followed.

Conference Proceedings – Day II

Welcome
The second day of the conference was again opened by Eric Yao, who acknowledged the presence of representatives from the Ethiopian embassy, board members of the African Centre, the Irish Aid press officer and the Africa Centre’s EU project partners – the African Centre Slovenia and ACSONI Northern Ireland. Mr Yao stated that the formulation of action points would be a key action for day two of the conference.

Fionaula Quinlan, Irish Aid Press Officer
Ms Quinlan congratulated the Africa Centre for hosting the conference and drawing attention to the CoC, and to Dóchas for its work in reviewing the Code. Ms Quinlan underlined Irish Aid’s strong support for the CoC, and for the work of the Africa Centre in bringing an African perspective to development education, promoting good practice, fostering skilled educators and engaging a wider African perspective in DE. She acknowledged the proliferation of negative images and the challenge of counteracting them. Ms Quinlan pointed out that work is being done to promote a positive view of Africa and cautioned that focusing on disasters, for instance, is only a fragment of the story and ignores the long-term causes of such events. She stressed the importance of looking at stories of hope and of Africans building their own futures sustainably. She alluded to VSO research which indicates that audiences want positive hopeful news and what people have in common. News reports emphasise either the exotic or the misery, with little contextual information. Ms Quinlan quoted Mark Goldring in the research: “We have taken part in an intricate dance that sacrifices the long-term building of a balanced view for the short-term gain of raising funds for or awareness of our work”. This tension, however, is not new, and regardless of their different functions, all images and messages should communicate dignity and respect.

The aforementioned research also indicated that “80% of the British public strongly associate the developing world with doom-laden images of famine, disaster and Western aid”, all of which makes for very difficult viewing. Ms Quinlan stressed that while we cannot ignore such events, we must seek out the more hopeful stories – of strength, innovation etc and build a more balanced picture of the reality. One of Irish Aid’s strategies in this regard is to focus on the results and record progress in the projects they are involved in.

Africa Day is a central part of Irish Aid’s awareness-raising strategy and they have organised major events in both Dublin and Limerick - attracting 17,000 people this year. These celebrations highlighted the close cultural and community ties which Ireland and Africa maintain.
Ms Quinlan brought attention to the Simon Cumbers media fund, which Irish Aid finance, emphasising that applications which challenge negative and promote positive perspectives would be favoured. She went on to acknowledge that Irish Aid itself has used material which did not comply with the Code, and must also be accountable. In the absence of Code police we are all responsible for upholding the principles of the Code in our practice. Ms Quinlan underlined the important role which the development sector has to play in raising awareness of the Code, but accentuated that they can also influence the media in this regard e.g. through clarity in their guidance to them, through insisting on consent for image use, by listening to stories and context, by acting responsibly, and by referral to existing ethical codes and initiatives (e.g. Ethical Journalism Initiative). She cited the example of the Danish cartoon controversy, which highlighted the need for dialogue and awareness-raising over Codes and legislation.

Ms Quinlan finished by iterating the need for greater debate and reflection around development coverage in the media, stressing that information-sharing occasions such as this conference are important steps on that route.

Eric Yao thanked Fionuala Quinlan for her contribution and acceded that she had raised a number of key issues, which would be revisited during the day. Mr Yao acknowledged the conference sponsors: Irish Aid, the European Commission and the Joseph Rowntree Trust. He emphasised that the Africa Centre plan to run the Images and Messages project in three regions: Ireland - North and South - and Slovenia. He also thanked the working group which helped to organise the conference, before introducing the Keynote speaker.

---

**Keynote Speech**

**Samwel Mohochi, Chevening Scholar at the Transitional Justice Institute, School of Law, University of Ulster.**

Mr Mohochi thanked the Africa Centre for organizing the conference and for the invitation to speak. He began his address stressing that the issue of images and messages impacts on African nationals and Southern development practitioners most directly. As a development and human rights practitioner Mr Mohochi is conscious of how competition for funding and donor fatigue can lead fundraisers to employ drastic strategies.

Mr Mohochi questioned the validity of monitoring in relation to the CoC, and whether ethical issues can be enforced. He explained that where copyright or intellectual property rights are infringed – as in the use of images without consent – the law could feasibly be enforced. He alluded to research by Jessica Wishart, which showed that while fundraisers are careful not to infringe the law, they continue to employ ‘poverty pornography’ as a fundraising strategy. So, there is a disconnect where charities present themselves on the one hand using a rights-based approach, while on the other adopting a needs-based ‘saviour and savages’ approach while fund-raising.

The speaker went on to define development/poverty/famine pornography, emphasizing that the stereotype is the African malnourished child, blank expression, awaiting salvation. Such disempowering images, allow the viewer to ‘commoditize’ apparent suffering, creating a commoditization of poverty. In Mohochi’s opinion, the degree of actual suffer-
ing does not justify their use. The media, he asserts, has always depicted Africa as a ‘wretched earth’.

Mr Mohochi raised the question of how such negative images define Northern perceptions of ourselves and others. He alluded to an Oxfam study which determined that images used in NGO fundraising campaigns and by the media reinforced stereotypes of the Global South. Similarly, VSO research found that 80% of the British public strongly associate the developing world with “doom-laden images”, with 74% of them believing that these countries are dependent on the North to progress. Images are enforcers of superiority/inferiority and giver/receiver relationships. The perception that our relationship with the developing world is one-way limits our ability to learn from the South.

Mr Mohochi referred to the recently aired BBC documentary ‘Welcome to Lagos’, quoting Professor Wole Soyinka – who described it as “the most tendentious and lopsided programme he had ever seen… jaundiced and extremely patronising,” - one which gave no sense of the modern city that Lagos is or the people who inhabit it. Mr Mohochi added that much work needs to be done on media coverage if the issue of images and messages is to be dealt with sustainably.

The speaker described the development of the CoC as a milestone but emphasised that strengthening of the Code is critical in ensuring that it is a live instrument. He suggested the creation of a monitoring committee with the power to effect sanctions as one approach.

He outlined the difficulty of upholding civil law sanctions against the illegal use of images and messages, and discouraged legal enforcement, adding that it is antagonistic and can thwart charities from their core mandate. Apart from cases of ‘drastic infringements’ he favoured ethical enforcement, which he believes to be more effective.

Mr Mohochi summed up by affirming his hope that the conference would come up with a framework for the ethical enforcement of Code - for the betterment of society.

**Eric Yao** thanked Samwel Mohochi for his address and invited questions from the floor:

---

**Delegate questions and comments**

A journalist delegate objected to the assertion that it is the media creating perceptions. He claimed that the media “are only reporting what happens in society”. He emphasised that the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has done a lot to promote the CoC and raise awareness amongst their members about appropriate reporting in relation to marginalized groups. He stressed that not all journalists are members of the NUJ, so it is unfair to blame all journalists.

Eric Yao acknowledged that Africans have a role to play in how they are depicted. It is necessary to build a stronger relationship with the media and work needs to be done on establishing the best approach and type of engagement.

An NGO representative pointed out that there are structural discriminations which prevent Africans from playing an active part in society. There is a need to include more
Southern voices in shaping development plans around the CoC and frameworks which monitor that process also.

Eric Yao acknowledged this point and reassured the speaker that this issue would be examined along with relevant research in the workshops. He thanked the workshop facilitators, contributors and the project group for coordination. Following the coffee break delegates broke into four groups for the concurrent workshops.

---

**Panel discussion and workshop feedback session**

**Chaired by** Her Excellency Catherine Muigai Mwangi, Kenyan Ambassador to Ireland

The afternoon session began with a panel discussion opened by the Kenyan Ambassador to Ireland. Ms Mwangi congratulated the Africa Centre for organising the conference, and referred to the issue of images and messages as an emotive one. She alluded to the ‘Africa Also Smiles’ poster campaign and acknowledged the need to show the positive side of Africa, asserting that this something which ambassadors deal with daily. Ms Mwangi was keen to point out that it’s not just about aid – it’s about developing economic and other partnerships - and stressed the need to focus on these opportunities.

The purpose of this particular session was to share outcomes from the four parallel workshop sessions. Each panellist was invited to give an overview of the workshop presentations and summarise the key issues discussed in the session they had facilitated. Comments from the floor followed.

WORKSHOP 1

Up to date Research on the Use of Images and Messages

**Eilish Dillon** from **Kimmage Development Studies Centre** facilitated Workshop 1.

The first speaker, **Denis Kennedy**, from the **University of Minnesota**, presented a paper entitled ‘Contextualising the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages’, where he spoke about regulatory practice in relation to codes in general. The question was asked whether rights or social justice is the better framework, and it was acknowledged that legalistic framing can limit critical reflections. It was emphasised that power – the ‘elephant in the room’ - is central. It was agreed that listening is essential, particularly if we are to change our perceptions and practices – and in order to unlearn and relearn alternatives. Kennedy’s research on the Dóchas CoC and other codes highlighted the lessons which can be drawn from this form of regulation. His paper highlighted the weaknesses of codes - their ‘toothlessness’ as long as they are voluntary. A code does provide
space for dialogue and reflection, particularly at the development stage, but it is important to have buy-in from other sectors. A code should not be seen as the ultimate answer, but rather one in a series of steps, and it should incorporate clear guidelines for implementation. A code should not be perceived as the end, but the beginning of a process.

Abiba Ndeley, representing Afroland/DIT, spoke about 'Fair and Accurate Journalism in Ireland'. Her presentation looked at the representation of black people in Ireland, and in particular the media reporting on the case of Pamela Izevbekhai on which she undertook detailed research. Ms Ndeley’s presentation revealed that it is not possible to talk about images and messages without talking about race and power. She focused on the stereotypes, which she perceives as grounded in ‘otherness’. Ms Ndeley believes that it is difficult for most well-intentioned white people to escape the negative beliefs they have about blacks. This discussion underlined the importance of putting all events in perspective, and the need for a greater representation of journalists from minority ethnic groups.

Dr Aine O’Brien spoke about the work of Fomacs (The Forum on Migration and Communications), based in Dublin Institute of Technology. She stressed that the media is not a single homogenous entity and our engagement with media varies greatly. She showed extracts from the ‘digital storytelling’ work which Fomacs has facilitated. Dr O’Brien warned that a code can close us down and must not become another alibi for NGOs. She asked whether codes of conduct allow enough space for critical reflection, discussion and debate and reminded participants of their role as ‘gatekeepers’ in opening or limiting such creative spaces. Codes should not be perceived as narrow definitions of good practice. The depoliticisation of NGOs in the last 30 years reinforces the need to ask how political or transformative a code actually is.

Workshop 2
Critical analysis of the Code from a Southern Perspective

Workshop 2 was facilitated by Charo Lanao-Madden, Coordinator of the ‘Making Connections Project’, Centre for Global Education, Belfast. Ms Lanao-Madden outlined some of the key issues raised in the workshop and particular elements of the discussion.

Alfred Abolarin from the Afro-Community Support Organisation of Northern Ireland (ACSONI) talked about the way images create a message and the impact this has on people on the ground. Max Shonhiwa Zimani’s presentation ‘Images and messages of Africa: the Slovene context’ focused on representations of Africa in fund-raising, media, children’s literature and school textbooks. His analysis looked at the way in which images impact on our unconscious. Mbemba Abdulie Jabbi and Rebecca O’Halloran from the Africa Centre in Dublin presented ‘A Critical Analysis of the Code from a Southern Perspective’. They raised questions of whether this Code is the one we require, what might be missing from it and whether it needs a clearer Southern perspective. It was suggested that underlying the Code is the notion of ‘us’ and ‘them’ - the idea of inferiority. The discussion touched on the issues of image interpretation and subjectivity, the importance of what is not shown in the image and the need to incorporate information about the causes of the situation depicted.
Workshop 3

The Irish Experience of Implementing the Code

Philip Watt, CEO of the Cystic Fibrosis Association of Ireland presented a summary of Workshop 3. The discussion focused on four key points: implementation, who is covered, strategies for effecting change and practical tensions arising.

Holy Ramanankasina presented the findings of external research commissioned by Dóchas: ‘Levels of Adherance to the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages’. The work done to date on Code implementation was commended e.g. the number of signatories. However it was acknowledged that some gaps and inconsistencies persist e.g only 46% of signatory organisations refer to the Code on their websites and only 26% have a feedback mechanism. Dóchas has been trying to establish a two-way communication system on the Code. Most organisations have not tried to find out what the public actually think and more needs to be done by those who claim they support the Code. There is a need for greater accessibility of the Code as many see it as somewhat long-winded. The consensus in this workshop was that the Code should remain voluntary as it is about educating people. It should also be perceived as an evolving process e.g. as images appropriate now may not be in five or ten years time.

Mr Watt asserted the need to establish who the CoC is for and whether the focus should be primarily on Africa. In this regard Frances Haworth, Project coordinator of Comber gave a presentation entitled ‘A case study of useful training’ which looked at a training model applying the Dóchas CoC in Eastern Europe. It was also noted that the representation of Irish travellers could be addressed more emphatically through the Code.

Justin Keane, representing Kerry Action for Development Education (KADE), talked about KADE’s experience of implementing the CoC through the production of its photopacks, the ‘Visions of Africa’ photography exhibition and its film collaboration ‘Changing Focus’, with Fás. Mr Keane’s presentation looked at the challenges and successes of the various projects in the context of the CoC.

The conference discussion touched on the need to tackle the issue of perceptions from different angles, e.g. training in both voluntary and formal sectors. The need to contextualise the Code within racism and colonialism discourse was also highlighted.
Workshop 4
Human Rights and Images and Messages - Do Codes of Conduct Work?

Walt Kilroy, Former Deputy Foreign Editor at RTE facilitated Workshop 4.

Chinedu Onyejelem from Metro Eireann talked about ‘Media representation and misrepresentation of Africans in Ireland’. He referred to the actual versus the perceived role of a journalist in the context of the reality of operating in media, underlining the pressures which journalists are under. He pointed out that journalists are not campaigners but are often challenged with the responsibility to represent as well as report on campaigning issues e.g. immigration. The negligible representation of ethnic minorities in the staff of main broadsheets and in media senior management is a key limiting factor to accurate and balanced coverage of the Global South. He urged people to share information with journalists while remaining cognisant that journalists do not make the final decisions.

Siobhan Cummiskey, a solicitor working with the Irish Traveller Movement, focused in her presentation on human rights responses to unacceptable or racist reporting on Travellers in the media. While freedom of expression is enshrined in the UN declaration, it is not an absolute right, but one that is subject to or counterbalanced by other rights. She went on to talk about some of the legal challenges e.g. Group Libelling and how difficult it is to enforce in law; and the Incitement to Hatred Act which has seen only 17 convictions since 1989 when it was enacted. Respect for dignity is inherent in the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland code and this agency has the power to withdraw advertisements which contravene the ASAI code.

Significant discussion on the Dóchas CoC took place and it was agreed that enforcement is different in this case. In terms of strengthening the CoC, it was felt that greater awareness of international law, better promotion of the Code, continued training, use of complaints/feedback mechanisms are all elements which would improve adherence generally.

Anne Molloy, representing Amnesty International presented a ‘Report on Levels of Adherance to the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages’. Ms Molloy’s report looked at how the Code works in providing a framework; how training, dialogue and internal reflection are some of its most important elements. Making the Code known, the feedback mechanism and assessment of public communication on the Code were all key soundbites. The review process for signatories was discussed and it was agreed that this is mutually supportive. It was felt that the Code itself could be more of a living document however. The challenges identified by organisations are limited by both time and resources: in regard to the implementation of the Code it was perceived that emergency situations put NGOs in a difficult position as they don’t have enough time to check details. Commitment to the Code varies from organisation to organisation, and disagreement within NGOs and between different departments is common. It was pointed out that portraying reality sometimes needs to be negative but can still honour the Code. The Code can also force people to be creative and to think outside the box. Finally it was suggested that the role of social media e.g. blogs, facebook etc. is becoming increasingly important for NGOs, yet this is a grey area in terms of the Code focus.
Plenary discussion

Following the feedback from panelists, the Ambassador invited delegate participation in the discussion:

A participant working in the area of intercultural communication underlined the many ways that different African countries do business, and consequently the impossibility of talking about the continent as one place.

The Chair explained that what she meant was that Africa is not just a place to ‘do aid’ but also trade and investment. She referred to the exclusion of African communities from key decision-making processes and asserted that we need to be asking what frameworks we are working in and employ a rights-based approach. She alluded to the lack of awareness also within Africa and in African states of human rights, and the fact that many people don’t have a space where they can reclaim those rights.

An African DE activist living in Ireland asked what the embassies are doing at a diplomatic level to portray Africa in a positive way. He emphasised that Africans should be doing more of their own cultural promotion. He acknowledged funding and aid agencies but lamented the fact that they are very Dublin-focused. He also asserted that while Ireland is actively giving aid to Africa she is also taking Africa’s natural resources. One of the panelists agreed that the money coming out of Africa to the West is rarely mentioned - only the aid going in.

Ms Mwangi acknowledged that it was evident that African ambassadors are not accessible to people. She assured him that they are engaged in many initiatives that promote Africa not just in Ireland, but worldwide.

A member of the African NGO community asked what, in a global context, are the human rights issues in relation to images and messages?

Philip Watt replied that images and messages are bound up in human rights and the way in which national governments spin can have a major impact on what’s done in a particular country. There is a need to look beyond Africa – or more expansively within Ireland: there is greater In reply to a delegate question about the origins of Africa Day Mr Yao added that Africa Day was instigated by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The Africa Centre have been celebrating it since 2003. Mr Yao offered his appreciation to Irish Aid for their involvement in Africa Day.

Philip Watt pointed out some welcome developments in the media e.g. Near FM’s intercultural policy. He emphasised the need for more ethnic minority journalists rather than the few who get typecast into talking about diversity issues. Potential within the code for example in terms of how refugees are portrayed, how minority religions (Jewish and Muslim communities for instance) are depicted. Messages and images can contribute to creating the climate where mistreatment/racism takes place.

Charo Lanao-Madden added that in Northern Ireland, the people most discriminated against are Irish Travellers. When asked, non-Travellers can give numerous examples of
negative images but not a single positive image of their Traveller neighbours. Such images can shape the way we see reality.

Eilish Dillon agreed and added that if images are negative, out of context, limited, etc., then our policies and practices are equally negative.

Walt Kilroy referred to the Incitement to Hatred Act and one’s (or a group’s) right to a good name, but urged caution in regard to a rule-based approach.

A lawyer working for a Traveller support organisation reiterated that codes are just pieces of paper unless they are used. She commended the action taken by Dóchas in making a formal complaint in response to Kevin Myers’ article. She emphasised that taking this kind of action is the way in which we make codes work.

A development sector representative stated that the media is the biggest animal in the room, and within the media there are entire societies. She too asked when Africans themselves are doing to challenge these images and why is Irish Aid, rather than the African community, charged with celebrating Africa Day? This lack of perceived involvement by Africans again portrays them as passive and incompetent.

The Ambassador acknowledged that there is much that African embassies can do to promote the Code. In reference to Africa Day she pointed out that Irish Aid’s role in organising Africa Day is related to the Government’s integration policy commitments.

Fionnuala Quinlan from Irish Aid also responded (later on) to a previous comment asserting that the reason why Irish Aid celebrates Africa Day is because it is about integration and the celebration of Irish business, trade, travel, cultural and community links to Africa, and not simply aid links. Irish Aid tries to ensure that the African embassies are very involved: many have stands at the event and some are on the steering group. Africans are well represented in the administration of the event and Irish Aid strives to ensure that the messages communicated about Africa are positive.

A comment was made that Africa Day is very Irish Aid-branded. Ms Quinlan responded that Irish Aid or other agencies do not campaign or fundraise at the event. She felt that as Irish Aid invest about a third of their public information budget into Africa Day, they need to be accountable to taxpayers also. She also emphasised the need to acknowledge Irish Aid’s role in organizing Africa day. Embassies have modest budgets but do contribute to initiatives such as Africa Day.

Walt Kilroy addressed the comment which referred to the media perpetuation of negative images. He explained that news operates in an environment where it is the public who decide what they look at. The media are under pressure to balance accessibility and content and do not have the remote control in their hands. He added that news is negative and good news is not news. However he mentioned particular programmes which he believed made an effort to contextualise and explain the issues respectfully. Unfortunately the viewership for these programmes is much less than for programmes about cars, cooking or interior decoration. The CoC challenges us to be imaginative, ethical and accessible and he referred to reality tv and sports programming as holding potential in this regard.
An NGO staffer issued an invitation to delegates to join Comhlámh’s online forum ‘Talk about Development’ - as a place to continue some of the discussions initiated at this conference. She emphasised that there is already a thread on the subject of images and messages.

---

**Reflection and wrap-up session**

For the final session, delegates were divided into four groups, in order to discuss the four key questions in the box below. The groups were circulated until each group had addressed all four topics. The discussions were facilitated by Mbemba Jabbi, Elaine Mahon, Selam Desta and Matthias Fiedler.

1. Reflecting on your views on the use of images and messages... would you say that this conference has changed your perceptions in any way?

2. What specifically can we do to make the code work?

3. CoC – a rights based instrument – if so how is the right to complain actualized?

4. Can fundraising campaigns be successful without portraying negative and shocking images of southerners?

The collated feedback and key points arising from the 16 discussions was summarised by the four facilitators as follows:

**1. Reflecting on your views on the use of images and messages... would you say that this conference has changed your perceptions in any way?**

**Elaine Mahon** reported:

For most people the conference raised a lot more questions and doubts, and it was a very important space for us to think and reflect on what we are doing.

- The Code is seen as an ongoing process, the CoC as a living document and the use of images and messages as a journey. Participants see the CoC as the first step in this journey and iterated the need for more events like this, including opportunities for online discussion e.g. in blogs etc.

- The point was raised by Africans and other minority communities in Ireland that the conference was an important acknowledgement of their frustration, i.e. when they see negative images and messages relating to their communities or countries of origin, and this conference was a good outlet for them to air their views.

- There was significant debate and difference around the issue of whether the Code should be reinforced and made stricter or whether it should be more open and flexible. A lot of people felt that if it was more open, more people would be likely to engage with it and make change happen. The question remained however as to how violations and complaints are dealt with. This was highlighted as a key issue, which needs to be worked on.

- Most people were pleased that this is becoming a human rights issue and is not just about development. It was pointed out that the title of the conference is very broad
and focused only on development. It was suggested that there should be other perspectives and involvement from the private sector, e.g. advertising and PR campaigns.

- The point was also made that we tend to focus on images and photos a lot: what about the messages: the language, the terminology we use to talk about development. Should we be saying ‘in Africa’, ‘Africans’, ‘poor people’ etc?
- A deeper issue is that even if we are regulating our use of images and messages, that is not going far enough in addressing the underlying reasons for inequality.
- The role of the media came up frequently and the question asked whether they are really serving the development sector’s best interests. The role of community media was highlighted, as a voice which allows local issues and views to come through.
- The conflict within the development sector and within NGOs was discussed: who has the final say in regard to what images and messages are used; is it the DE programme or the fundraisers?
- The importance of developing critical thinking in the education system was advocated. Individuals must be empowered to ask questions and not just blame the media for giving the wrong message.

2. What specifically can we do to make the Code work?

Max Zimani related the concrete steps and suggestions proposed:

- There is a need to focus on training for organisations to ensure better understanding of the Code and how to use it.
- There is a need for clear practical guidelines on how to use the Code: One group suggested it would be good to target all Code stakeholders, i.e. fundraisers, DE practitioners, Southerners, the ministry of integration etc. with the same guidelines. Another group advocated very specific guidelines for specific target groups i.e. different guidelines for fundraisers and development educators.
- Another issue was awareness-raising/education e.g. fairtrade. It is common for large organisations to claim that they are practising fairtrade. Analogously CoC affiliation/adherence could become a sought-after badge for organisations who have an ethical policy around the use of images and messages.
- Peer reviews were emphasised as an important tool: each organisation could have a person who would be the CoC contact; they could exchange information on best practice with other signatory organisations. Dóchas might facilitate this.
- Naming and shaming was mentioned numerous times as a tool to make the Code more effective. One participant suggested that Irish culture might not permit this.
- The issue of penalties generated the most debate. There was a feeling what while it appeared to be the solution, it may ultimately cause more harm than good.

3. The Code of Conduct – a rights based instrument – if so how is the right to complain actualized?

Matthias Fiedler summed up the discussions as follows:

- The Code has helped to promote work on diversity and encouraged voices of the South living in Ireland to be heard.
- Tension exists between openness and enforcement and regulation and the Code as a living document. It was acknowledged that the tension is possibly an inherent part of the ‘journey’, and while the Code will continue to be a tick-box exercise, it must also be geared towards learning and further development.
- The need for training and diversified guidelines for different parts of the sector was reiterated, e.g. guidelines for development educators, campaigners, fundraisers. The link with awareness-raising and DE was underlined.
The Code should be framed within Human Rights principles and approaches. If it is perceived as a HR-based instrument then it could link into bigger frameworks.

It was asserted that more could be done in regard to peer reviewing. There was a lot of debate as to whether this would work or was advisable or not, and it was suggested that maybe outside monitoring or evaluation could work.

There is consensus that in many ways the Code is working: it is a tool and if we see it as a tool that we can develop it has more potential. This group reiterated the need to view the Code as a living document and one which invites debate.

Implement the Code if you are an organisation and start making complaints. The question is one of supply and demand: it was emphasised that by starting to make complaints we are making the document work. People were encouraged to act within the structures available, e.g. by approaching the media outlet or organisation that has violated the Code, and copying the complaint to the most appropriate organisation. This kind of action can be perceived as ongoing work on the Code, highlighting where further development/amendment is required.

4. Can fundraising campaigns be successful without portraying negative and shocking images of Southerners?

Selam Desta summarised:

- Opinions varied but the majority (98%) were adamant that it is possible to raise funds and be successful without portraying negative images.
- There was a big question surrounding the definition of success, and how it is measured. Is it the volume of money raised or the actual implementation and impact of projects on the ground that define success?
- It was suggested that a good needs analysis prior to project implementation can ensure success.
- The use of creative images was advocated e.g. using symbolic or iconic rather than human images e.g. Amnesty advertisement.
- In using ethical guidelines we are measuring our successes in the context of human rights and development education.
- Sharing success stories of project activities can promote and enable the completion of these project activities. It was suggested that showing unfinished activities or projects-in-progress is preferable to showing human faces as ‘victims of the project’. Creating awareness about an issue rather than just showing reasons or results can make for successful fundraising e.g. Cancer Society daffodil image.
- All groups underlined the need to contextualise poverty with our local problems here also.
- Avoid using human images altogether.
- One person only felt the need to use shocking image tactics because he considered it as the only way to get people’s attention. However he was not advocating their use. The view that positive images don’t sell was put forward and strongly challenged. It was acknowledged that in the absence of hard data and research – and the passing of time – it was impossible to know for sure.
- The key is in the way we communicate messages – is this done simplistically e.g. by just giving end results, or are we actually showing the bigger picture and inviting the public to question critical issues?
- It was asserted that it is possible to be successful by building adverts into DE as a kind of education tool and ethically testing them against the Code.
- The importance of truthfulness, balance and responsibility in the way we communicate was emphasized by all groups.
- Our global village culture was cited as an opportunity to share accurate and balanced information between North and South.
- If we highlight the reciprocal benefits of aid for both North and South we will be successful.

**Closing remarks**

Closing remarks were made by Eric Yao. He recognised the presence of the diplomatic staff and acknowledged funders (Irish Aid, The European Commission and The Joseph Rowntree Trust) for their support. He thanked everyone for their attendance and participation, in particular the speakers (Elaine Mahon, His Excellency Jeremiah Ndou, Her Excellency Kemafo Nonyerem Chikwe, Fionnuala Quinlan, Samuel Mohochi and Her Excellency Catherine Muigai Mwangi); facilitators (Eilish Dillon, Charo Lanao-Madden, Philip Watt and Walt Kilroy); workshop contributors (Denis Kennedy, Abiba Ndeley, Aine O’Brien, Max Zimani, Alfred Abolarin, Mbemba Jabbi, Holy Ramanankasina, Frances Haworth, Justin Keane, Chinedu Onyeyelem, Siobhan Cummiskey and Anne Molloy); rapporteurs (Eimear McNally and Lizzie Downes) and all participants. He complemented the staff of Dublin castle for their service and efficiency; the Africa Centre staff and volunteers (Mbemba Jabbi, Rebecca O’Halloran, Ciaran Stewart, Sebit Iwa, Seun Babarinde, John Murinye, Serge Dadie, Grace Kennedy and Raviro Makororo) and the working group (Elaine Mahon, Rebecca O’Halloran, Mbemba Jabbi, Eilish Dillon and Holy Ramanankasina) for making the conference possible. My Yao stated his belief that we have engaged in a serious discussion which will blossom beyond this conference. He emphasised that the issue of images and messages is a collective one and it is all our responsibilities to promote the positive and challenge the negative. We need to bring about a better relationship with the media and bring them on board as partners. Mr Yao invited delegates to join the Africa Centre at the 2011 conference on this theme in Belfast.

**Recommendations**

I. The CoC document needs to be an active transformative tool rather than an ideological and prescriptive rulebook. It should be reviewed and amended on an ongoing basis and opportunities for critical reflection and debate need to built into its development process.

II. Clarity in terms of who the Code is intended to benefit/represent is required. Should the focus be primarily on Africa? Should it focus more emphatically on the representation of travellers, refugees, minority religions? Should it be a one-size-fits-all Code or fit to measure? Targeted guidelines for different groups could make the Code a more accessible tool.
III. The language and terminology used in NGO materials should be given equal consideration to the image/photo used, as well as the interplay between the two, when evaluating compliance with the CoC. Some of the nuances could also be teased out in the Code companion booklet ‘A Guide to Understanding and Implementing the Code on Conduct on Images and Messages’.

IV. 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.

V. Signing up to the Code should be perceived as the first in a series of stages, others being promotion, research, public dialogue, training, implementation, review, evaluation etc. Signing up is much more than a tick-box exercise and must never be an ‘alibi for inaction’.

VI. All Code signatory organisation staff should be obliged to attend CoC training, be that in-house or external, general or streamlined, departmental or inter-departmental.

VII. In organisational promotional material there is room for greater creativity e.g. a move towards use of abstract/symbolic messages and away from literal/human references. Briefing professional graphic designers to work alongside fundraisers and development educators could help create new trends in messaging and improve Code adherence significantly.

VIII. There is an immediate need for rigorous and up-to-date research on public attitudes to current NGO images and messages, as well as in-depth study on the impact and effectiveness of different styles of messaging. This would help to challenge the assumption that shocking and stereotypical images and messages are necessary fundraising tools. The views of the Southern diaspora should be particularly targeted in this research.

IX. Signatory organisations need to actively promote the CoC and ask the public what they think about their image and message use and Code adherence. Complaints/feedback mechanisms need to be properly activated and moderated. Furthermore, organisations themselves need to begin commenting on/challenging the images and messages used by their peers, and in these ways the Code will be actively tested.

X. Wider promotion of the Code is necessary to encourage buy-in from other sectors e.g. media, PR, advertising, graphic design. Given that the media takes many of its cues from the development sector, it needs to be particularly involved - and challenged.
XI. Ethical rather than legal enforcement of the CoC is recommended. However strengthening strategies such as better promotion, rigorous training, activation of complaint mechanisms and regular evaluation are essential to check and improve adherence. The establishment of a monitoring committee with the power to effect sanctions could be an effective strengthening tactic. The pros and cons of a Code monitoring body could be tested with a pilot operation phase.

Appendix I

Conference programme

Day 1: 14th July (Conference Opening and Reception)
18.00 – 18.30pm: Registration Tea/coffee
18.30 – 18.40pm: Introduction
· Eric Yao: Coordinator - Africa Centre
· Elaine Mahon - Dóchas Development Education Working Group
18.40 – 18.50pm: Nelson Mandela, his work on Human Rights and social justice
Speaker: H. E. Jeremiah Ndou, South African Ambassador to Ireland
18.50 – 19.10pm: Images and messages from an African Perspective
Speaker: H. E. Kemafo Nonyerem Chikwe, Nigerian Ambassador to Ireland
19.10 – 19.30pm: Arambe Production – Creative Action
19.30 – 20.00pm: Clover Watts & Gary McDowell, Classical Contemporary Music
20.00 – 21.00pm: Wine reception

Day 2: 15th July
09.30 – 10.00am: Registration
10.00 – 10.05am: Welcome: Eric Yao – Coordinator Africa Centre
10.05 – 10.15am: Fionuala Quinlan - Irish Aid Press Officer
10.15 – 11.00am: Keynote speaker: Mr. Samwel Mohochi - Chevening Scholar, Transitional Justice Institute, School of law, University of Ulster
11.00 – 11.15am: Coffee and Tea break
11.15 – 12.45pm: Workshops
Workshop 1 – Up-to-date Research on the Use of Images and Messages
Facilitator: Eilish Dillon – Kimmage Development Studies Centre
Contributors:
· Dennis Kennedy (Researcher)
· Abiba Ndeley (Afroland/ DIT)
· Aine O’ Brien - Fomacs
Workshop 2 – Critical Analysis of the Code from a Southern Perspective  
Facilitator: Charo Lanao-Madden- Coordinator “Making Connections Project”, Centre for Global Education, Belfast  
Contributors  
· Max Shonhiwa Zimani - African Centre, Slovenia  
· Alfred Abolarin - Afro-Community Support Organisation of Northern Ireland, Belfast  
· Mbemba Abdulie Jabbi & Rebecca O’Halloran - Africa Centre, Dublin

Workshop 3 – The Irish Experience of Implementing the Code – What are organisations doing?  
Facilitator: Philip Watt - CEO of the Cystic Fibrosis Association of Ireland  
Contributors  
· Holy Ramanankasina - Dóchas  
· Frances Haworth - Comber  
· Justin Keane – Kerry Action for Development Education (KADE)

Workshop 4 – Human Rights and Images and Messages – Do Codes of Conduct Work?  
Facilitator: Walt Kilroy- Former Deputy Foreign Editor at RTE  
Contributors:  
· Chinedu Onyejelem – Metro Eireann  
· Siobhan Cummiskey – Irish Traveller Movement  
· Anne Molloy – Amnesty International Ireland

12.45 – 14.00pm: Lunch Break  
14.00 – 15.00pm: Panel discussion  
Chair: H.E. Catherine Muigai Mwangi, Kenyan Ambassador to Ireland.  
15.00 – 15.15pm: Tea and Coffee Break  
15.15 – 16.30pm: Reflection Session  
Facilitators:  
· Dr. Matthias Fielder  
· Selam Desta  
· Max Shonhiwa Zimani  
· Elaine Mahon  
Wrap up – Dr. Matthias Fielder  
16.30 – 16.40pm: Closing Remarks - Eric Yao, Coordinator Africa Centre