

Focus On Ethics:

Addressing Tensions in Choosing Fundraising Images

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Background and Context

THE ISSUE OF THE IMAGES USED IN FUNDRAISING AND COMMUNICATIONS HAS BEEN OF CONCERN TO THE Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) and its members for many years. The power of fundraising and communication images to shape public perceptions of developing countries has long been recognized.

The CCIC *Code of Ethics*, adopted in 1995, contains several clauses that refer to fundraising and communications:

3.5.1 “Fundraising solicitations shall be truthful... There shall be no misleading information (including material omissions or exaggerations of fact), no use of misleading photographs, nor any other communication which would tend to create a false impression or misunderstanding.”

3.5.3 “Any and all communications to the public by the Organization shall respect the dignity, values, history, religion and culture of the people supported by its programs. In particular, the Organization shall avoid the following:

- *messages which generalize and mask the diversity of situations;*
- *messages which fuel prejudice;*
- *messages which foster a sense of Northern superiority;*
- *messages which show people as hopeless objects for our pity, rather than as equal partners in action and development.”*

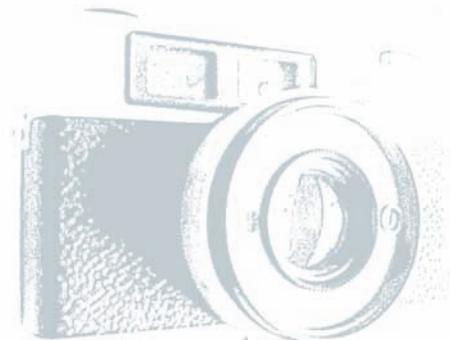
3.5.6 “The Organization will ensure that the content of the messages sent out in disaster appeals does not undermine the work of development education which calls for long-term response.”

In 2001, the members of the newly formed Africa-Canada Forum (ACF) decided to look more systematically at the images they used in their fundraising and promotional materials. Concerns about fundraising images had been raised at one of the first meetings of the ACF. Images of Africa in the media and in the fundraising materials of some civil society organizations (CSOs) were seen as contributing to a negative view of the continent among the public, and to pessimism about Africa’s prospects.

At an ACF symposium in 2001, a workshop was held to examine, assess and discuss a display of about 100 images provided by Forum members. Participants recommended that the ACF keep looking at the question of images, and work in collaboration with CCIC to explore ways to deepen the dialogue in the CSO community around ethical issues related to images of Africa. During the same time period, CCIC’s Ethics Review Committee was examining the issue from the perspective of the “Communications to the Public” section of the CCIC *Code of Ethics*. The ACF and CCIC’s

Organizational Development team joined forces and began a process of reflection and discussion among fundraising and communication staff from both ACF and CCIC member organizations.

The process of reflection subsequently broadened beyond images of Africa to consider fundraising and communications images used by CCIC members working throughout the developing world. This publication documents what has been learned so far through this process.



The Power of Images

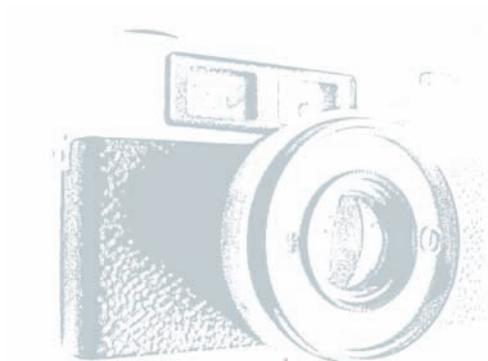
“The pornography of poverty” • “Poornography”
“Starving baby appeals” • “Doom and gloom images”

THESE ARE SOME OF THE TERMS THAT HAVE BEEN USED TO DESCRIBE A CERTAIN TYPE OF FUNDRAISING image. We have all seen these images – emaciated children with distended bellies or flies in their eyes, women dressed in rags, queuing for food aid or picking through garbage. You can “save” these people, the fundraising ads say, by sending money to pay for emergency relief, to sponsor a child through monthly payments, or to help launch an education program.

These images and messages are powerful. They touch hearts and raise money that is used to fund programs in the South. They also, however, tend to portray people as helpless, passive victims, which can undermine their dignity and work against the aims of longer-term development work. Ethical questions about fundraising images have been raised in the civil society sector for a number of years. There continues to be controversy – not because organizations do not know about the concerns raised or because they have decided to deliberately be “unethical” in their practices, but because the issues involved are complex and laden with value conflicts.

Varying perspectives, conflicting values

Much has been written over the years highlighting concerns about “doom and gloom” images,¹ but less has been written about why organizations choose to use these controversial images. Explanations for such choices have been well articulated in discussions between CCIC members. In an effort to help others better understand the complex issues involved, some of the most common perspectives raised in the discussions – for and against using such images – are presented here.



FOR

Calling attention to real needs

THE IMAGES USED ARE FACTUAL ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE HORRIFIC SITUATIONS IN WHICH PEOPLE *are* living. People *are* starving, children *are* dying of preventable diseases, people *are* clambering over trash piles looking for food. Natural disasters *are* leaving people homeless and destitute.

It is the situation that is undignified, not the image. When civil society organizations (CSOs) show images of extreme poverty, Canadians become aware of the indignities that people are experiencing.

If organizations were to choose to use rosy pictures in order to make absolute poverty look more “positive”, this would not be truthful. As noted in the *Code of Ethics* standard 3.5.1, “fundraising solicitations shall be truthful...”.

AGAINST

Undermining human dignity and fueling racism

PICTURES OF HUMAN SUFFERING – IMAGES THAT SHOW PEOPLE HALF-NAKED, CRYING, SICK, desperate – undermine human dignity. It is not respectful to show people this way, particularly if the images were taken without permission. CCIC members have agreed, in the Council’s *Code of Ethics* (3.5.3), that “communications to the public by the Organization shall respect the dignity...of the people supported by its programs”.

Racism may be fueled by images of people in the South as being “other” – separate from “us”, objects of pity. When the majority of Northern donors shown in ads and TV appeals are white, and Southerners being “helped” are people of colour, negative messages are being conveyed. The CCIC *Code of Ethics* states in section 3.5.3 that organizations shall avoid “messages which fuel prejudice... foster a sense of Northern superiority... [and] show people as hopeless objects for our pity...”. It has been noted that the persistence of negative images of Africa may fuel racist attitudes not only towards Africans, but towards Canadians of African origin.²

FOR

Building awareness and mobilizing for action

PEOPLE LIVING IN THE NORTH HAVE AN ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY TO CARE ACTIVELY ABOUT suffering elsewhere in the world. Showing this suffering taps into Canadians' values of compassion, fairness and respect and will lead the public to say these conditions must change. A similar situation occurred when the photos of the prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq were released in 2004: the indignities that the prisoners were suffering came to light. This allowed the global community to cry "shame" and to say that these acts must stop.

Once they are aware of the indignities suffered by people living in poverty, responding to fundraising appeals gives people a way to act. Providing Canadians with opportunities to act on their values is what CSOs do best. Exposing the wrong of these conditions and mobilizing public action on behalf of the people in the South is an essential part of democratic action for social justice. CCIC's Development Principle 2.2 (m) tells us that "development is a global process which should link common interests and issues and build an international movement for change". By financially supporting the work of CSOs, Canadians are able to act concretely to make change happen.

This financial response is a first step toward a longer process leading to deeper understanding and action. Once people become supporters, they are provided with additional information, and are given opportunities to hear from staff and partners in order to better understand the complexity of the situation. This can't all be done in a single short fundraising ad, which is the equivalent of a media "sound-bite". The ad gets people in the door, and follow-up activities give organizations more time and space to educate the donor.

Psychological experiments have shown that people are much more willing to aid identified individuals than larger numbers of unidentified people.

In one study, people were given three options to donate to famine relief work in Africa.

By far the greatest amounts were donated in response to an appeal that featured a photo and appeal on behalf of a single child, a girl named Rokia.

The lowest amounts were donated in response to an appeal that provided statistics about famine-affected people in the region (e.g. "Food shortages in Malawi are affecting more than 3 million children"). An appeal that combined a photo and information about Rokia with statistical information about the numbers of famine-affected people in the region did little better than the general statistical appeal.

"When it comes to eliciting compassion, the identified individual victim, with a face and a name, has no peer." ³

AGAINST

Perpetuating destructive myths about development

IMAGES OF PEOPLE AS HELPLESS VICTIMS PERPETUATE THE MYTH THAT DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS can only be solved by Northern charity. They can undermine the efforts of CSOs and their partners to create a broader understanding of the underlying structures causing poverty and injustice. CCIC members long ago made a commitment together that “development should address the root causes of global inequality and not merely its symptoms” (*Code of Ethics*, section 2.2e). Fundraising images and messages that emphasize victims and suffering can work at cross-purposes to the fundamental development work that CSOs and their partners are doing.

Personal stories and images are used to create an emotional connection with donors, but when issues are personalized – when political and economic issues, root causes and Northern complicity in creating poverty are left out of the picture – what conclusion is the viewer or reader most likely to draw? Research suggests that “when poverty is described in terms of individual victims and particular instances of hardship and when the context is ignored, the poor themselves are most often held responsible for their own plight. Yet when news items include background information about general trends and when poverty is expressed as a collective outcome, people tend to assign responsibility to societal factors.”⁴ Focusing on individual victims perpetuates misunderstandings about development issues.

For every person who donates and is then provided with more nuanced information, there are many more who are exposed to the “sound-bite” images but do not engage further. These people are left with misleading, simplistic impressions of life in the South.

In November 2001, the British nongovernmental organization VSO commissioned two independent pieces of research on how British people view the developing world: a survey of a representative sample of the UK adult population, and qualitative interviews. When asked the question, “When I say to you ‘developing world’, what words come to mind?,” 80 percent of survey respondents stated strong negative associations: war, famine, debt, starving people, natural disaster, poverty, corruption. Nine percent had no association at all. Seventy-four (74) percent of respondents agreed that “developing countries depend on the money and knowledge of the West to progress”. As the researchers noted, “the stereotypes of extreme deprivation and poverty, together with powerful images of Western aid, add up to a strong sense of Africa . . . as the helpless victim, deserving and requiring Western aid in order to survive.”⁵ When given a more complete picture of life in the South, respondents had various reactions, but one of the most common was a feeling of anger. Many blamed the media, and some blamed CSOs, for providing narrow and inaccurate perspectives of the developing world.

FOR Effectiveness

ORGANIZATIONS HAVE AN ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY TO BE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT, AND NOT waste resources. There are many causes trying to get the attention of the public, and organizations have very limited time and space to get their fundraising messages across.

Experience has shown that donors respond well to messages and images that appeal to their compassion and desire to help. There is also evidence that donors give more in response to appeals on behalf of individuals rather than groups or communities. An appeal that tries to explain the complexity of the situation and show the broader development issues, and which does not show an urgent personal need, will not appeal to donors. The result will be a less effective fundraising campaign, leaving the organization with fewer resources to support its work: it will be able to do less in the fight against poverty. This will undermine its ability to fulfill its mission and to comply with the CCIC *Code of Ethics* standard 3.4.1 to “conduct its finances in such a way as to assure appropriate use of funds and accountability to donors”.

The more money that is raised, the broader the development response can be, ensuring support to more communities, feeding and educating more people, saving more lives. An effective fundraising campaign will raise more funds relative to the time and resources invested, meaning that fundraising and administration costs can be “kept to the minimum necessary to meet [our] needs”, as per standard 3.4.6 of the *Code*.

AGAINST Contributing to a sense of hopelessness

IF PEOPLE KEEP SEEING THE SAME IMAGES OF SUFFERING, THEY ARE LEFT WITH THE IMPRESSION that things don’t improve. This will lead people to think the development work we do is not effective in the long term. Fundraising materials may sometimes show improvement in a village or school as a result of a CSO’s involvement, but donors are seldom provided with evidence of broad systemic changes that do take place, such as greatly increased literacy rates or improved economic circumstances in a country. This can contribute to a sense that CSOs are not able to effectively contribute to real change, and repeated images of suffering lead to a feeling of hopelessness that works against building support for long-term development.

Continuously showing images of suffering contravenes the intent of *Code* standard 3.5.6 that says organizations “will ensure that the content of the messages sent out in disaster appeals does not undermine the work of development education which calls for long-term response”. It also negatively affects the public’s perception of the international cooperation community, an issue addressed by standard 3.3.5 (“The Organization shall recognize that all of its activities impact on the public perception of the international co-operation community...”).

By contrast, showing Southerners as strong and active agents in their own development processes may increase Canadians’ confidence that their donations are being effective, and thus encourage people to donate more, increasing the overall effectiveness of fundraising efforts.

Are smiling children the solution?

Seeking to be responsive to the ethical concerns raised and more respectful of the dignity of people in the South, some CSOs have tried to use more “positive” images in their fundraising. Smiling children and women who have already been “helped” by the Northern organization are shown.

But many of these “positive” images raise similar concerns about stereotyping, lack of portrayal of the broader context, and perpetuation of attitudes of Northern superiority. The people may be smiling, but they are still rather passive – still needing to be “helped” by foreigners. There is still little acknowledgment of the role played by local communities, and little indication of the larger context of people’s lives. The overall message – that only you, the foreign donor, can make a difference – remains the same.

In workshops in 2001, ACF and CCIC members analyzed “positive” images of Africa used by Forum and Council members, and raised concerns relating to issues of gender and context. Most of the people in the photos were women and children; few men were shown. Most photos showed rural, agricultural scenes, even though CSOs also do considerable work in cities.

Words as well as photos contribute to images of development. Participants in ACF/CCIC workshops have reflected on the discrepancy between the messages their organizations use to explain the same issue to different audiences: e.g. “food aid” in fundraising materials, “food security” for advocacy materials.

Some organizations have made considerable efforts to show a broader, more complex social and political context in their fundraising. Others have begun to show Southern people working in their communities to overcome very serious barriers to social justice.

Some organizations, however, remain hesitant to alter their fundraising approaches, fearing that change – however much merited – may reduce the bottom-line success of their fundraising appeals. A few have even followed the lead of other CSOs and begun using more pictures of smiling children even though work with children is not one of their program areas.

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Then what is the solution?

The varied perspectives highlight the complexity of the issue of fundraising images, and illustrate why a single, simple solution has not been found. A large part of the challenge is the strong values-based rationale given for whether or not to use particular images.

It is never easy to address value conflicts with prescriptive solutions and simple rules. Except for extreme cases, one cannot say categorically that a given type of image is “good” and another is “bad”. Many factors need to be considered. A shocking, “negative” image may be appropriate to draw attention to a particular situation, or it may be “pornography”. *Context* and *balance* are important factors. It is also important to consider the *collective and long-term impact* that many images of a certain type may have on the public’s view of the South. What impact will this sustained use have on development processes?

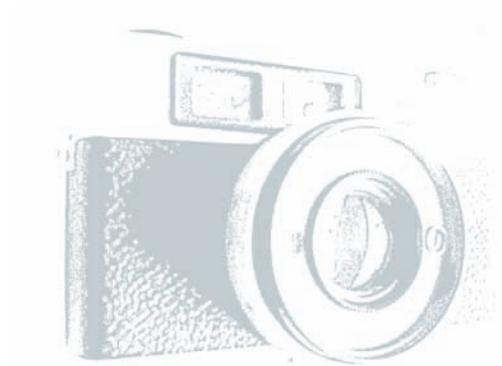
What does this complexity mean for organizations and for the international cooperation CSO sector more broadly? Do organizations have to accept that the arguments about ethical images will continue and that no agreement is possible? Does it mean that “anything goes” as long as someone has a values-based argument?

There is a way forward through the maze of value conflicts, both within organizations, and across the sector. Ultimately, a process of ethical reflection is needed to determine if fundraising images are congruent with organizational values and broader ethical principles. The ethical reflection needs to be ongoing: it is not something that can be done once and crossed off a list.

A process of ethical reflection need not be as intimidating as it sounds. It should not be avoided out of fear that it will be difficult or time-consuming. It may well be both, at first, but as individuals and organizations get in the habit of reflecting on the ethical dimensions of fundraising, it will become easier. By working to ensure that fundraising practices embody the values that underlie their work, organizations will be strengthened. More importantly, their partners' long-term work for social justice will be front and centre, where it belongs.

The next section highlights an ethical framework that can assist organizations to deal with value conflicts such as the ones described above. The framework is designed to help people make ethical decisions in a way that is not divisive for the organization or the sector, remains based on ethical principles and leads to innovation and action. Fundraising images can be both respectful and financially effective. These concepts need not be mutually exclusive.

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An Ethical Framework for Addressing Value Conflicts

THE PREVIOUS SECTION SUMMARIZED SOME OF THE MANY UNRESOLVED VALUE CONFLICTS RELATED TO THE issue of fundraising images, and highlighted the complexity of this issue for organizations. Civil society organizations (CSOs) in the international cooperation sector are familiar with complexity. Working in an ever-demanding environment, buffeted by currents of global change, CSOs rely on their ethical compasses to help them stay on course. But, as the tensions around images illustrate, organizations tend to follow different routes, and sometimes those routes raise fundamental questions about mission coherence, peer accountability and long-term sustainable development.

How does an organization address ethical dilemmas arising from value conflicts? How can choices be made that contribute to progress, not only for the organization, but for its broader goals of social change? An ethical framework can help organizations work through and try to resolve such dilemmas.

What is ethics?

Ethical dilemmas are a part of life, and definitely a part of organizational realities. International cooperation CSOs are strongly values-based, with missions that aim for a better world. But when organizations *do* good, does it automatically mean that they *are* good?

Often we associate ethics with rules and accountability frameworks that tell us what is right and wrong and what we must do. We hear about ethics when a scandal hits, when people do wrong and get blamed for their “bad” behaviour. We rarely associate ethics with progress and innovation.

Ethical decisions are not always about clear-cut rights and wrongs. With strong organizational values come conflicts in values. Organizations may be asked to be transparent and respect confidentiality, to be truthful and have concern and care for others. Ethical decision-making is about discovering for ourselves what is the best choice to make, because there is generally no rule to tell us what to do in a given situation.

Attention to ethics is part of day-to-day actions, not something to be considered only when a problem or crisis arises. Cultivating ethical decision-making as an integral and explicit part of the life of organizations creates an atmosphere in which colleagues can work through issues together to make the “best” decision. Through reflection, the question broadens from “are we doing things right”, to include “are we doing the right things”? By collaborating as a sector, organizations are better placed to strive for higher levels of ethical practice, and to negotiate the challenging paths of value conflicts along the way.

VALUES AND ETHICS

Values can be described as enduring beliefs about what is important, which motivate us to act.

Values may be positive or negative, explicit and implicit.

Ethics involves an ongoing process of reflection on our values.

What is the right way to live and work together?

Are our values appropriate?

If so, how can we, as individuals and organizations, live up to them and act on them?

Working through value conflicts

When confronted with value conflicts, we often think that we must find a solution by balancing the values. There are, however, different *kinds* of values. Understanding the differences can help us to work through value conflicts by allowing us to prioritize some values – not as a way of negating other values, but as a way of *improving the ways in which we act on them*.

Drawing on the work of Canadian ethicist Kenneth Melchin⁶, CCIC has been looking at the use of ethical frameworks to help resolve such value conflicts. The following framework offers a possible tool for

organizations seeking to clarify and resolve value conflicts around images. It is explained through examples from the ongoing debate about fundraising images and through reference to the principles and standards in the *CCIC Code of Ethics*.

Values concerned with individual needs

One of the very first items in the *Code of Ethics* states that “development should ensure the satisfaction of basic human needs” (2.2 d). Ensuring the meeting of basic human needs (e.g. for food, education, housing, health care, etc.) is a fundamental issue for everyone and an outcome ultimately sought by all development practitioners.

A person arguing for the use of certain fundraising images because the outcome allows organizations to address “real needs” is responding to values at this level. This primary level of “doing good ethically” by responding to individual needs and desires surfaces such values as survival and security. But what is the difference between a person needing water, an income, etc. and actually being able to get it? The question quickly moves from what is needed, to how to achieve it. Something has to happen to ensure that basic needs at this primary level are met, and continue to be met over time.

Organizing values

When we ask *how* to achieve the things valued at the first level, we move into a second – *organizing* – level of ethical practice. This level involves *patterns of cooperation* – ways of working together to ensure that the needs identified at the first level are met. It is seldom possible to meet basic needs without the cooperation of others. Whether it is someone making a water

container or a community digging a well, a company building pipes or a plumber bringing them into a house, some pattern of cooperation has to take place to ensure that individual basic needs are met for all.

With cooperation comes obligations: an agreement that goods or services will be provided within a time-frame, regulations to ensure food and water are safe, trust that people will do their part, etc. Often people respect an obligation because it is an essential part of the pattern of cooperation that has always existed, founded on cultural understanding and ethical principles such as trust and honesty (i.e., we know it’s the right thing to do). Sometimes the obligations need some help, or enforcement. Rules and laws are written, accountability frameworks are established, all to ensure that obligations are respected and that patterns of cooperation are efficiently maintained.

Values at this second level include productivity, efficiency and teamwork. These organizing values provide frameworks for actually implementing the first-level outcomes.

The very existence of civil society organizations is evidence of people answering the question “how can we achieve the outcomes valued at the first level?” Section 2.2c of the *CCIC Code of Ethics* states that “Development should enable people, especially the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized, to organize and to improve their political, social and economic situation”. Here is a reference to the importance of organizing – the identification of a second-level value to tell us how best to achieve the outcomes valued at the first level.

Organizations’ communications and fundraising activities happen at this second level. The people who argue for efficient use of resources, or for using particular images as a means to mobilize the public, are seeking



to act on values at this level. They are asking the question: “how do we need to organize ourselves”? To guide ethical practice at this level, the CCIC membership established standards for good practice such as: “The Organization shall control all fundraising activities conducted on its behalf. All fundraising contracts and agreements shall be put into writing”. (3.5.4) This standard assigns clear roles and obligations for how we organize with others around fundraising activities.

Values concerned with sustained public good

We see in the concerns raised about particular fundraising images that CSOs’ interests go beyond efficiently organizing themselves to achieve their outcomes. At some point, people begin to ask a new set of questions – questions that reflect on the way we organize. When we stand back and evaluate where we are going with second-level organizational systems and patterns of cooperation, we begin asking longer-term questions that are wider in scope: Is this way of working sustainable? Are we promoting hopelessness or fueling racism? Are we strengthening long-term partnerships? Is this method respectful of everyone involved? What is the overall impact of the images and messages being used by all the organizations in our sector?

This kind of questioning introduces a third, higher level of good that is about long-term, sustained public good, and care and respect for persons and the world. Civil society organizations are very familiar with this third level: it is about the core values found in their missions.

Ethical reflection at this level asks questions such as:

- How do the organization’s patterns of cooperation affect the dignity of persons?
- How do short-term patterns of cooperation affect long-term patterns? What are the longer-term impacts of processes that are, in the short term, efficient and effective?

Examining wider social considerations, this level includes values and principles such as social and environmental sustainability and progress, dignity, trust and human rights.

Promotion of these third-level values is seen in the *Code of Ethics* in the principle that “development should be environmentally and economically sustainable and not jeopardize the wellbeing of future generations” (2.2 f).

Relationship between the values

The three levels represent distinct kinds of values, but they are interdependent. The higher-level values provide guidance for innovation and implementation of the lower-level values. Outcomes valued at the first level cannot be achieved on their own: organizing patterns at the second level must be set up to accomplish them. These patterns do not operate in isolation: it is essential to be attentive to their quality, and this involves third-level reflection.

In the event of value conflicts, the framework and the *Code of Ethics* provide guidance and direction. Third-level values provide higher obligations and priorities, and these values provide guidance for innovation and



TOWARD ETHICAL PROGRESS



implementation of the lower-level values. In the event of value conflicts, third level values must prevail.

But organizations cannot just constantly evaluate and critique and not actually *do* anything. Third level values do not exist for their own sake, nor do they “trump” or override lower levels. They provide direction for the other levels. The inquiry and deliberation arising from the third-level reflection involves more than criticism of second-level structures, it involves a commitment to renewing those structures.

The three levels must work together so that organizations do not just gain knowledge about how the world is, but develop *ethical* knowledge to determine how it ought to be. The transformative process of deliberation and discovery in this three-level framework opens the door to *innovation*. The evaluation of second-level structures leads to transformation of social structures so that needs are met with respect for dignity of the person and in a manner that is environmentally sustainable.

This interaction, when played out in terms of communications to the public, is articulated in the *Code of Ethics*. Standard 3.5.3 tells us:

“Any and all communications to the public by the organization shall respect the dignity, values, history, religion and culture of the people supported by its programs.”

Here members of CCIC provide third-level principles of respect and dignity as ethical guideposts to evaluate communication practice. Critiquing and evaluating existing communications to the public is not, however, the end result. The standard goes further and gives vision and guidance for implementation of *improved practice*:

“In particular, the Organizations shall avoid the following:

- messages which generalize and mask the diversity of situations;
- messages which fuel prejudice;
- messages which foster a sense of Northern superiority;
- messages which show people as hopeless objects for our pity, rather than as equal partners in action and development.”

These points all guide organizations toward progress. They provide guidance that supports and sustains organizing values so that individual needs can be achieved with human dignity, respect and equity. The standard gives limited direction – it is more an example of the kinds of roadblocks to avoid that could divert organizations from a path of progress.

The standard provides the ethical obligations that CCIC members have established for, and between,

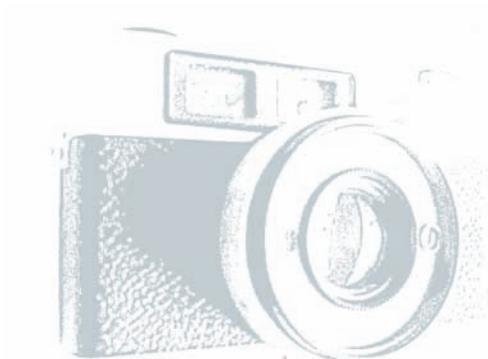
themselves. It is not a specific recipe for communication messages, but leaves organizations room to innovate – to transform the patterns of cooperation themselves. The resulting innovation, informed by long-term developmental principles, will move the sector along a path of progressive social change.

Fitting everything together in practice

The CCIC *Code of Ethics* provides principles and standards to assist organizations through the three levels of reflection, and includes guidance and vision for implementation. It does not provide prescriptive answers to exactly what each organization must do in every case (e.g. what an “ethical” image should look like). Organizations need to use its minimum standards and higher-level principles as roadmaps and ethical markers to inform new forms of implementation at the level of organizational processes, so that outcomes can be achieved with dignity and care. This document offers some suggestions, and individual organizations will undoubtedly come up with more. The intent is to encourage, rather than stifle, innovation and a diversity of approaches.

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Searching for Innovative Approaches

THE ETHICAL FRAMEWORK DESCRIBED IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION PROVIDES GUIDANCE TO HELP ORGANIZATIONS reflect on, and begin to resolve, value conflicts around fundraising images. The key is innovation – finding ways to realize second-level values of effectiveness in fundraising in ways that are respectful of third-level values of dignity, truthfulness and sustainability. This means developing new processes, experimenting with different messages and seeking new ways to portray images.

Some organizations are aware of the ethical dilemmas raised by certain types of fundraising materials, but are reluctant to try new approaches because of a fear that they will not raise as much money. Their experience and conventional wisdom suggest that donors respond to images that evoke emotional reactions such as pity, and to the pitch that their individual donations are vital to make a difference in someone's life. Given that, organizations remain hesitant to try fundraising approaches that refer to the structural causes of poverty rather than individualizing misfortune, that portray a diversity of situations and that show aid recipients as strong, active partners in their own development. If people in the South are shown as strong, competent and making progress, the conventional wisdom says, Canadians will not be moved to donate.

There is, however, some evidence that there does not necessarily have to be a tension between respecting high-level values and achieving effectiveness in fundraising. Doing what's right and doing what works are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Toward a new context

Although emotional responses to individual distress may motivate generosity, there are indications that relying on such responses is unlikely to sustain public concern in the long term, or to mobilize public action on problems of significant scale.⁷ Some research suggests that approaches to development fundraising which rely on emergency-oriented, emotional appeals may not, in fact, be as effective as conventional wisdom would hold. Different approaches which respect higher-level values of dignity and sustainability may well be more effective in raising funds.⁸

Rather than just routinely following old practices, CSOs should ask themselves: What do we want from people? Is it sufficient that they give money at the current levels? Do we want enhanced giving? Do we want a broader and deeper engagement with Canadians? Do we want Canadians to have a deeper understanding of development?

These questions apply as much to humanitarian organizations as they do to CSOs that focus primarily on longer-term development challenges. Organizations whose mission is to respond to humanitarian emergencies will naturally use emergency-oriented appeals. In

doing so, they can contribute to deepening Canadians' understanding of the developing world, for example by including information on the political and economic contexts of disasters, highlighting the front-line response and agency of local people and acknowledging the need for longer-term preventative measures to reduce the likelihood of future disasters.

In CCIC-ACF workshops, researcher and social marketing expert Janice Nathanson has proposed that the concept of *global citizenship*, which is the basis of many public engagement efforts, be considered as the foundation of fundraising appeals. Fundraising representations could then be evaluated in terms of how well they deliver on the principles of global citizenship. Do fundraising appeals help Canadians understand the world, and promote linkages between Canadians and people of the South? Do appeals promote a sense of efficacy among Canadians? Do they provide options for collective and diverse responses?

This is not a new suggestion: the 1996 CCIC Task Force on Building Public Support for Sustainable Human Development recommended that building global citizenship be the goal of CSOs' engagements with the

public, including engagement through fundraising messages.⁹ CCIC members have adopted the concept of global citizenship as a framework for public engagement efforts,¹⁰ but there has been less take-up of the concept in fundraising messages. Ms. Nathanson has hypothesized that, if fundraising materials address the elements of global citizenship, *more people* might want to give – and *give more*. This hypothesis builds on the work of a number of scholars in the area of framing theory.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

A framework based on active global citizenship would enable Canadians to:

- recognize connections between the global and the local;
- see themselves as involved and able;
- access and reflect critically on a diverse range of views and information;
- participate in public dialogue and decision-making; and, if they wish,
- take action to address the key challenges of our day.¹¹

Insights from framing theory

Framing theory describes the way in which ideas are cast, or “framed”, to attract adherents and mobilize action. Some frames resonate more than others, and some frames are more effective in mobilizing people to act.¹²

One tenet of framing theory holds that the more central the *beliefs, values and ideas* associated with a frame are to their own lives, the more likely it is that people

will be mobilized by the message. The big question is: does development fundraising speak to the beliefs and values of its audience?

Findings from past public opinion research have suggested that many Canadians care about compassion leading to collective responsibility, people-first investment, democracy, freedom, equality, and a moral community.¹³ These values are consistent with the principles of global citizenship. But the framing of some fundraising appeals is not as consistent with some of these values. These fundraising materials do appeal to compassion, but they focus on individual rather than collective responsibility. There is little sense of visible and equal partnership in solving problems.

Another concept in framing theory holds that the more a frame is congruent or resonant with the *personal, everyday experiences* of the audience, the more likely it is to mobilize that audience. Frames that are too abstract, and which distance the audience from the issue, tend to have less impact. In many fundraising appeals, apart from testimonials from donors and sponsors, there is little that bridges the gap between “us” and “them”. There is little sense of interconnectedness or common destiny. Canadians may feel pity, but they can’t connect with the experiences of these “other” people – famine, war and extreme poverty. These experiences have little to do with the everyday world of most Canadians.

The concept of *efficacy* is also critical. “Self efficacy” refers to how well individuals believe they are capable of averting a threat (or by extension resolving a problem) by following recommended behaviours. “Response efficacy” relates to people’s belief that the behaviours recommended will indeed avert the threat (or resolve the problem).¹⁴

Framing theory suggests that the more urgent and severe the frame, the less efficacy people feel. Researchers have found that when there is already high awareness and concern about an issue, an appeal that presents the problem as threatening or severe can make the problem seem insurmountable, and reduce the audience’s sense of efficacy.¹⁵ Such appeals may be most effective when concern is low, as they work to increase concern about a problem. When concern about an issue is already high, an appeal that indicates that

people can do something to solve the problem is likely to work better than one that suggests the problem is threatening and severe.

Surveys show quite consistently that most Canadians recognize an obligation to provide international aid to those in need. A survey of Canadians' attitudes towards development assistance several years ago¹⁶ revealed that 78 percent of Canadians supported Canada's aid program. This suggests that concern about international poverty is already quite high, and that now Canadians need to know more specifically what they can do about it and how their actions can make a difference.

In summary, research suggests that the following factors contribute to encouraging people to give:¹⁷

- *Personal relevance* (sense of linkages, interdependencies, common destinies)
- *Social and political context* (understanding that a social problem is related to a wider political context)
- *Self-efficacy* ("I can make a difference")
- *Response efficacy* ("Development programming makes a difference")
- *Opportunities for engagement* ("What can I do?")
- *A solutions-oriented approach.*

An alternative approach to fundraising

Building on the research described above, it has been suggested that positive fundraising campaigns built around the concept of global citizenship have the potential to be as successful as (or possibly even more successful than) approaches that reinforce negative stereotypes. A possible orientation could be:

- *Progress is possible.* Create a vision that galvanizes.
- *Progress is happening.* Demonstrate that change is happening – not just in individual cases, but on macro levels as well. Allow people to see progress in action (as the United Way does with its "thermometer" image).
- *Progress has happened.* Demonstrate that donors' money has made a difference – that lives and social conditions have been transformed. Many fundraising campaigns attempt to show how donations have made a difference but the key is to show how change has taken place not just in individual cases but at a larger level.

"Organizations tell donors about a complex problem but then what opportunity do we give them to engage? We say, 'give us money'. This very reductive approach isn't how the world works today; people expect and want more. There are two reasons why people give: hope and opportunity for engagement."

Mark Sarner, President of Manifest Communications, speaking at a CCIC-ACF workshop for fundraisers in Montreal, February 2006.

In developing a new approach, it is important to start with strategic communications research and analysis in order to know what donors, and potential donors, care about. The basis of a fundraising appeal is a communications appeal, and many of the principles that apply to social marketing can be applied to fundraising for social change movements.

Social issue advertising and social marketing can be counter-intuitive: campaigns that use shocking images and attract a lot of attention do not necessarily result in behaviour change. There may be potential to generate more funds through positive images that stress progress in international development, but individual organizations need to do their own research to better understand their donors' needs and to develop appropriate approaches.

Due to the competitive nature of fundraising, there is little publicly available data on what works and what doesn't. However, there is some anecdotal evidence that fundraising approaches that present a more complete and true image of the South may be more successful in the long term. At a CCIC-ACF learning session in April 2005, a participant noted that her organization had carried out focus group research with its donors. It found that donors who had a good understanding of development issues were more loyal (more likely to continue giving) than people who responded to more simplistic appeals. Another participant noted that his organization did an acquisition mailing that used what he considered negative images and simplistic messages: the mailing was very successful in terms of response rate, but the donors it attracted did not respond well to further appeals related to the ongoing work of the organization.

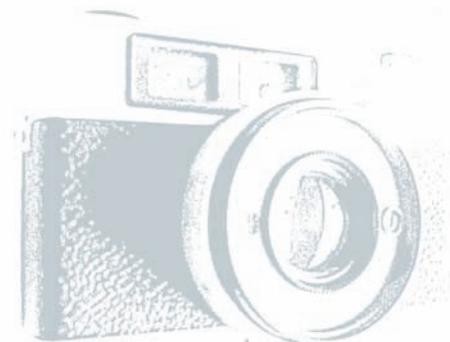
Ultimately, the key is for organizations to research their donors' attitudes, try new approaches in pilot projects and continue to seek ways to develop fundraising materials that are both ethical and effective. There is no one answer, but there is a lot of promise.

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do not necessarily result in behaviour change.

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What Do Ethical Fundraising Images Look Like?

Asking the Tough Questions

THERE IS NO ONE “RIGHT ANSWER” TO THE QUESTION “WHAT DO ETHICAL FUNDRAISING IMAGES LOOK like?” However, there are a number of questions that you can ask yourself as you develop fundraising images and messages, which can help you determine if you are on the right track from an ethical point of view.

There are no hard and fast rules about what is “right” and “wrong” in an image. However, it can be said that *context is important*. By and large, the more generalized the image, the more it may risk being problematic, because it may be taken out of context and be misleading.

For example, in a crisis situation about which there is little public awareness, use of a shocking image might be appropriate. Early photos of the impact of the Asian tsunami of December 2004, for example, raised awareness about the extent and seriousness of the natural disaster and spurred greater response. However, such photos should be used judiciously and for a limited period of time. Continuing to use shocking images to attract attention and raise funds, when awareness of a disaster is already high, could be considered unethical. Such images need to be balanced with others that show, for example, the full extent of local people’s response to the crisis and the positive steps that have been taken since the disaster to rebuild what was damaged.

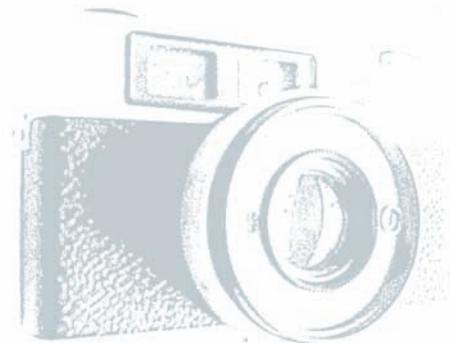
Just as it is vital to consider context, it is important to think about the overall impact of a fundraising/communications package – the images, the texts, the total impression left with the viewer or reader. It is also essential to consider the cumulative impact of *all* the fundraising/communications materials that your organization is providing to donors and to the general public. Each item should not be considered in isolation: the impact of the whole needs to be considered.

This impact goes beyond the impression created by your own organization’s images. Members of the public are exposed to a variety of images and messages about international cooperation in appeals from numerous organizations. Taken together, these images and messages create certain overall impressions. It is important, therefore, to consider how your organization’s materials may contribute to the cumulative effect of the sector’s fundraising images and messages on public attitudes.

There are no hard and fast rules about what is “right” and “wrong” in an image. However, it can be said that context is important. By and large, the more generalized the image, the more it may risk being problematic, because it may be taken out of context and be misleading.

Some ethical issues to consider

A number of ethical issues should be considered when selecting images of the South. As described in “An Ethical Framework for Addressing Value Conflicts”, ethical reflection should consider whether fundraising images and messages embody third-level values such as respect, truthfulness, integrity, equity and partnership, and sustainability.



RESPECT: Are images respecting the dignity of the people portrayed and encouraging respect for their way of life?

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- Does this image respect the privacy of the individual(s) portrayed?
- Do you have consent from the individuals in the image to use this image?
- How would you feel if you were the subject of this image and you knew this image was being viewed by thousands of people?
- Is it necessary to use an image at all? Can you make your point more respectfully with words?

TRUTHFULNESS: Are the images and messages accurate, balanced and representative of reality, and therefore truthful?

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- What is your intention in using this image? Are you seeking to manipulate the viewer or to portray the situation accurately?
- Does the image tell the whole story? Is it focusing on a narrow reality in a way that will cause the viewer/reader to generalize inappropriately about the situation?
- Does this image contribute to the public's understanding of the whole picture?
- Does this image portray or help to portray a balanced view of the situation/region in question?

INTEGRITY: Is "what we show" the same as "what we know" about life in the South, so that we are acting with integrity?

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- What is your overall impression of Southern countries after viewing this image/this message? Based on what you know from your organization's work, would this impression be accurate?
- What is the impression given of the relationship between Northern agencies (staff, cooperants) and

Southern organizations (staff, workers, villagers)? Is this an accurate impression?

- What aspects of Southern life are missing from this picture? Does their absence contribute to an unrealistic or untruthful impression of life in the South?
- Are the text and image coherent? Or is the text saying one thing but the image leaving a different impression?

EQUALITY AND PARTNERSHIP: Are we supporting or undermining our work in partnership? Are we promoting or discouraging equality between women and men?

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- Is the vital role of your organization's partners shown or mentioned in this image/text?
- What does this image say about your partner organizations and their work?
- Do you think this image would encourage empathy, as opposed to pity, in the viewer?
- What message does the image convey about gender equality? Are women and men being shown as capable, active and involved in development of their families and communities?

SUSTAINABILITY: Are we building support for long-term sustainable development?

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK:

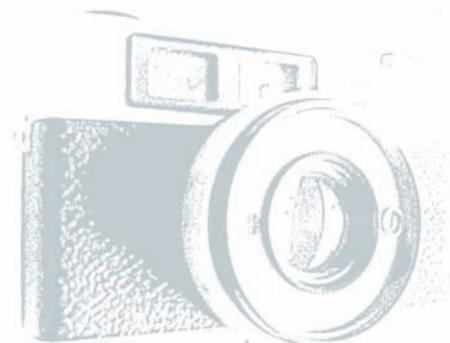
- What is this image saying about the aims of the development process?
- Does the image encourage a sense of interconnectedness and interdependence between the viewer and the people in the image?
- Does the image convey a sense of hope?
- Does the image convey a sense of efficacy (the belief that people can make a difference)?
- Are local people being shown as active agents of their own development or as passive recipients, dependent on others?

Show the image to a variety of people from within and outside the organization, including people from the regions being portrayed, and ask them some of these questions. Make a particular effort to involve women and men from partner organizations in this reflection whenever possible. The importance of doing this is reinforced in several parts of the *Code of Ethics*. (3.1.2 (b) "Partners shall strive to deepen their understanding of each other through transparent sharing of information." 3.1.2 (d) "Partners shall engage in regular and open communications ... to ensure that all partners are properly represented and that no organization unilaterally speaks on another's behalf." 3.5.5 "The Organization will encourage the participation of its partners in the formulation of communications to the public.")

Clearly, such a process of consultation will take time, and production plans and schedules should take this into account. Consider building a "bank" of images that have been provided by and/or reviewed by partners and, if appropriate, can be used without further consultation. For example, encourage partners to provide photos and permission to use them. Remind staff who are meeting with partners or visiting programs in the field to take appropriate photos and obtain permissions to use them in fundraising materials.

And, of course, ethical reflection is not just reflection for its own sake. The images that you choose for fundraising purposes should be those that your reflection leads you to conclude are ethically acceptable.

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women and men from
partner organizations in this reflection
whenever possible.



Ethics in Action: Providing Guidance to Staff, Service Providers and Suppliers

A NUMBER OF PEOPLE MAY BE INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING FUNDRAISING MATERIALS, INCLUDING FUNDRAISING specialists, writers, translators, graphic artists, and photographers. Often, aspects of the production of the materials are contracted out. It is important that all who are involved in the process of producing your fundraising materials understand your organization's mission and its ethical perspective on images and messages.

It may be useful to produce a brief document summarizing your organization's approach to ethical fundraising. The process of producing this document can provide an opportunity to encourage discussion of the issues within your organization. The final document can provide useful guidance to external suppliers as well.

Shown on the page 23 is a possible template for such a document.

Bringing suppliers up to speed

The more your suppliers understand about the work of your organization, the better they can meet your needs. Some organizations that work regularly with the same suppliers invite these suppliers to meet Southern partners when they visit, or to attend public events of the organization. Such activities can help suppliers better understand the vital role of partners, and the nuances of your organization's work.

It may be helpful to prepare "tip sheets" for writers, translators, artists and photographers. These could contain examples of preferred language, problematic language, positive and problematic images. As noted earlier, it is not always easy to define problematic images and messages: context is important. However, even very basic guidance can be useful for staff and suppliers.

For example, tips for writers and translators could include points such as the following.¹⁸

Gender Equality: Writing should acknowledge the strengths and capabilities of, and the important roles played by, women as well as men. For example, women are responsible for much of the domestic agricultural production in many countries. Rather than saying "A farmer in Tanzania has many challenges. He has to....", it is better to say something like: "A farmer in Tanzania has many challenges. She or he has to....". At the very least, use gender-neutral language that does not assume

that development actors are men (e.g. "Farmers in Tanzania have many challenges. They have to...".)

Partnership: Images and texts should include and acknowledge the vital work of partner organizations. It is best to avoid sentences such as the following: "Thanks to your gift, [your organization] was able to provide counseling to women in Indonesia who have experienced domestic violence." Instead, try to use wording that acknowledges and honours the role of partners, such as: "Thanks to your gift, [name of partner organization], a partner of [your organization] in Indonesia, was able to provide counseling to women who have experienced domestic violence."

Dignity: Images and messages should respect the dignity of those with whom we work. Messages should not imply that people in the South are helpless to improve their situations, or foster a sense of Northern superiority. ("Without your help, these women have no hope. With your gift, they can live to see another day.") Messages can convey the importance of the donor's gift while acknowledging the capabilities of people in the South. ("These women have many skills which will allow them to contribute to their communities. They just need a little help to get started.")

A tip sheet for regular suppliers could also include a summary of the questions posed in "What Do Ethical Fundraising Images Look Like? Asking the tough questions".

The creativity challenge

It can be challenging to develop fundraising campaigns that are both effective and ethical. It may mean stepping outside conventional ways of doing things.

For those who do the “creative content” – concept developers, writers, artists, photographers – this can be an opportunity to really be creative.

Challenge your creative professionals to find new ways to get your organization’s fundraising messages across. It can be done. For example, one organization that works with children in conflict situations challenged its advertising team to come up with a campaign that drew attention to the issues of children in conflict situations without showing photos of children in such situations. The winning campaign used images of childhood – teddy bears, alphabet blocks, etc. – with text that emphasized that conflict is no place for a child.

Try looking beyond the development sector for ideas and inspiration. Some very creative campaigns have been developed to raise funds for medical research or disease prevention. These campaigns use images and messages that do not dwell on the negative aspects of disease or portray those with certain medical conditions as “victims”, but rather celebrate the strength, resilience and hope of people living with difficult conditions.

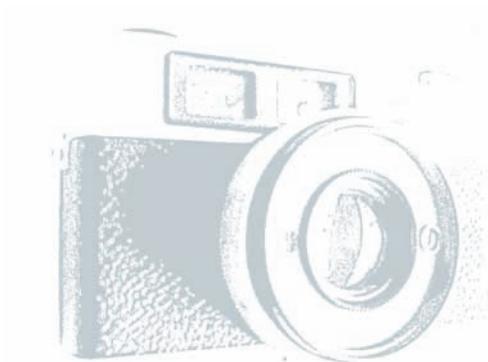
If changes are needed in your organization’s fundraising materials, look for ways to make incremental improvements. Experiment with new approaches in pilot projects so that risk is controlled. Change is not always easy, but it is possible.

Challenge your creative professionals to find new ways to get your organization’s fundraising messages across.

It can be done.

For example, one organization that works with children in conflict situations challenged its advertising team to come up with a campaign that drew attention to the issues of children in conflict situations without showing photos of children in such situations.

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Fundraising and Communications of [name of your organization] : Our Ethics in Action

Our Vision:

[complete for your organization]

Our Mission:

[complete for your organization]

Our Ethics in Action:

We aspire toward our organizational vision and fulfill our mission within a culture of ethical practice. In creating fundraising materials, we maintain our organizational integrity by being:

- respectful of our donors, partners, and the communities with which we collaborate to eradicate poverty;
- truthful about:
 - how we will use donations;
 - our capacity to use donations effectively;
 - the diversity of situations within communities where we work;
- accountable for fundraising activities conducted by others on our behalf.

Fundraising and communication materials, whether created and developed by internal staff and volunteers, or external suppliers and service providers, shall be ethically-based and therefore:

- aspire to our higher values as outlined in our vision;
- promote long-term social good as described in our mission;
- show people as active, full participants in their development process;
- honestly portray the complexity involved in situations; and
- effectively raise appropriate financial and/or political support.

As a member of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, [name of your organization] seeks in its fundraising and communications practices to comply with the provisions of the CCIC *Code of Ethics*. These include the section of the Code that deals with *Communications to the Public*:

3.5.3 Any and all communications to the public by the Organization shall respect the dignity, values, history, religion, and culture of the people supported by its programs. In particular, the Organization shall avoid the following:

- messages which generalize and mask the diversity of situations;
- messages which fuel prejudice;
- messages which foster a sense of Northern superiority;
- messages which show people as hopeless objects for our pity, rather than as equal partners in action and development.

Fundraising Images: An Interactive Exercise

THE FOLLOWING SERIES OF ACTIVITIES IS DESIGNED TO HELP DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS DO THEIR OWN reflection on, and analysis of, the images their organizations use for fundraising purposes. The learning objective is for participants to value the use of ethical fundraising images.

The exercise can be carried out with staff, volunteers, Board members and/or donors. The activities are designed for up to 15 people. The small-group sizes should be adjusted as necessary to accommodate the number of participants.

SUGGESTED ROOM SET-UP: 3 round tables that can seat at least 5 people each.

TOTAL TIME: 2 hours

Activity 1: What do we see? (maximum 10 minutes)

MATERIALS NEEDED: A display of images used by your organization for fundraising purposes (e.g. posted on walls around the room).

INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS:

- ▮ On your own, take 10 minutes to wander around and review the display of images. As you review the display, consider the following questions:
 - If these pictures were forming your view of developing countries, what would they tell you about those countries?
 - Who are the subjects of these images?
- ▮ Be prepared to discuss your observations in small groups.

Activity 2: What does this tell us? (maximum 25 minutes)

Divide participants into groups of 3-5 people, one group per table.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Flipchart paper and markers available on each table. Masking tape available.

INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS:

STEP 1: Small group work (10 minutes)

- ▮ In your small groups, take 10 minutes to discuss and answer the questions listed below. Ensure that all members of the group have time to share their insights.
- ▮ Record your answers on the flipchart provided.
- ▮ Appoint a spokesperson to share the group's insights in the plenary.

QUESTIONS:

- What did you observe about the images?
- How do these pictures make you feel? What do these pictures make you think?
- Were there any surprises?

STEP 2: Plenary (maximum 15 minutes)

- ▮ Group spokespersons report back to the plenary, summarizing their groups' key insights. Do not repeat findings that were already mentioned by a previous group. Post the flipcharts for all to see.
- ▮ Briefly discuss, in plenary, the findings of the groups, and reflect on their observations. Examples of further questions to consider if needed:
 - Is there a dominant type of image used? If so, why do you think there are so many pictures like that?
 - Are the texts and images coherent?
 - What aspects of life in the South are missing from these pictures?

Activity 3: What are we saying to others? (maximum 30 minutes)

MATERIALS NEEDED: Flipchart paper and markers available on each table.
Masking tape available. Copies of CCIC *Code of Ethics* available.

Divide participants into small groups of 3-5 people per table (mix participants so people are in different groups than they were for activity 2). At each table, a different topic will be covered (see *topic choices below*).

INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS:

STEP 1: (maximum 20 minutes)

- ▶ Take 20 minutes to discuss and answer the following questions: What are the images saying about [the topic at the table]? What are the implications of the use of these images for [the topic at the table]?
- **Table 1:** Topic: *The region of focus* (e.g. Africa, Asia, Latin America).
Include discussion of whether these images tell the whole story, whether they are related to reality, what these images say, impressions they convey about gender roles, etc.
- **Table 2:** Topic: *The aims of development processes*.
Include discussion of what these pictures say about relations between Southern countries and Northern countries; about equality between women and men in development processes; and about relations between Northern agencies (staff/cooperants) and Southern organizations and communities (staff/workers/villagers).
- **Table 3:** Topic: *Our organization*.
Include discussion on consistency and coherence between the mission of the organization, the messages and images used in fundraising, and the CCIC *Code of Ethics*.
- ▶ Record your answers on the flipchart provided.
- ▶ Appoint a group spokesperson to share the group's insights in the plenary.

STEP 2: (maximum 20 minutes)

- ▶ Group spokespeople report back to plenary their group's key insights.
Do not repeat points that were already mentioned by a previous group.
Post the flipcharts for all to see.

Activity 4: What can we do better? (maximum 35 minutes)

Participants stay in the same small groups they were in for Activity 3.

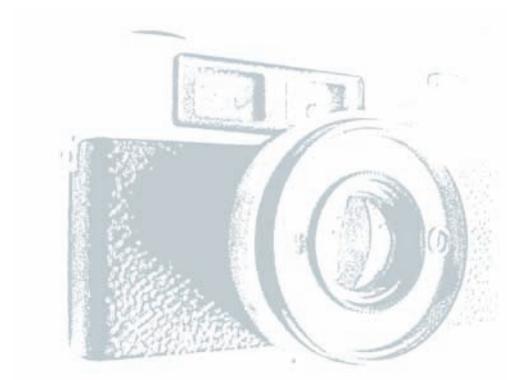
MATERIALS NEEDED: Encourage groups to use whatever is available in the room, and their personal possessions, as props as they wish.

INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS:

- ▶ In your small groups, take no more than 20 minutes to develop a very brief (maximum 3 minutes) creative method (e.g. a very short “jingle”, a poem, etc.) that you can deliver to the other tables, giving them advice on how to avoid two possible problems when creating images for fundraising.
- ▶ In plenary, each group presents its 3-minute creation.

Activity 5: Wrap-up (10 minutes)

In plenary, discuss possible next steps that your organization could take with respect to fundraising images.



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17. Research by various scholars, summarized in Janice Nathanson. "Images and Insights in Fundraising Advertising". Presentation to CCIC-ACF Images of Africa Learning session, April 12, 2005.
18. These suggestions were drawn from a "tip sheet" for suppliers developed by a CCIC member organization.