bond

Putting the people in the pictures first

Ethical guidelines for the collection and use of content (images and stories)

Contents

About Bond

Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development. We connect, strengthen and champion a dynamic network of diverse civil society organisations to help eradicate global poverty, inequality and injustice.

About the People in the Pictures group

This guide was produced by the Bond People in the Pictures Group, for Bond members, July 2019. The People in the Pictures working group was established in 2017 at the launch of The People in the Pictures: vital perspectives on Save the Children's image making[1] research report. In 2018 it became a Bond group which meets quarterly[2]. The group currently has over 100 members, representing a range of organisations working in international development. The group serves as a space for discussion and advice on ethical approaches to gathering and using content[3], and a platform to share best practice and knowledge across the sector. Ensuring the people in the pictures are recognised as and respected as key stakeholders in NGO image making is a key part of the group's ongoing aims.

With thanks to the following for their financial contribution to these guidelines

WaterAid   CONCERN worldwide   Save the Children

OXFAM   COMIC RELIEF   care

Sightsavers   PLAN INTERNATIONAL   BritishRedCross

Background to these guidelines

In 2007, Dóchas[4] produced a Code of Conduct on Images and Messages that was adopted by Concord[5] and became part of the Bond charter[6]. In 2014 Dóchas produced an illustrated guide to accompany this code[7]. In 2018, following a review of the code and illustrated guide, the People in the Pictures group, co-chaired at the time by Jess Crombie and Tamsin Maunder, approached Bond and suggested that they develop an updated set of ethical guidelines for the sector.

These guidelines, prepared by consultant Siobhan Warrington, were informed by several workshop sessions with, and feedback from, members of the Bond People in the Pictures group, plus a review of existing NGO ethical content guidelines.

There is a one-page Statement of Ethical Practice to accompany these guidelines. Members of the People in the Pictures working group will contribute to creating awareness of the statement and guidelines among their own key stakeholders (partners, donors, supporters, and staff). Greater awareness will support improved practice as well as fostering greater confidence in the sectors' approach to image making.

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[1] https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/people-pictures-vital-perspectives-save-childrens-image-making
[2] https://www.bond.org.uk/groups/people-in-the-pictures
[3] "Content" refers to images (still and moving) and personal stories

[4] The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations
[5] The European NGO Confederation for relief and development
[6] https://www.bond.org.uk/charter (see number six of the Common Principles)
[7] https://dochas.ie/sites/default/files/Illustrative_Guide_to_the_Dochas_Code_of_Conduct_on_Images_and_Messages.pdf

Introduction

As NGOs[8] we rely on the images and stories of the people we work with[9] to communicate the importance and impact of our work, and to support our awareness-raising, campaigning and fundraising efforts. These contributors[10] generously share their time as well as their images, experiences and perspectives with us and make our communications powerful and effective.

We must respect the contribution of these people by working to ensure that our image making is ethical and supports contributors' rights to participation and protection. As a sector we should be moving towards an approach which recognises contributors as our partners in the process of sharing their stories rather than as subjects for our stories.

We have a responsibility to improve public understanding of the realities and complexities of the inequalities, injustices and poverty we are working to overcome, alongside the capacities and resilience of the people we work with. As such we also have a responsibility to better understand the wider impact of our communications on public audiences. The images and stories we gather and choose to share can potentially impact the way audiences view the world (and themselves in relation to the rest of the world). We must actively try to ensure that our images and stories no longer rely on repetitive single stories that perpetuate stereotypes of the people and places where we work.

We must recognise the increasingly global nature of communications and assume that our outputs could be seen by anyone, anywhere.

For example, content intended for UK audiences can quickly end up on the social media page of someone in the country where it was produced. We must also recognise that our audiences within the UK are not homogeneous and that our communications can have specific, and at times negative impacts on diaspora audiences who share aspects of identity with the people and places portrayed.

What do these guidelines cover?

These guidelines cover the process of filming, photography and interviewing, as well as the selection and use of images and stories, and aim to support sector-wide best practice. They urge NGOs to put contributors at the centre of NGO image making; to recognise contributors' rights, and to consider our responsibilities towards them while gathering and using their images and words for our communications purposes. Working ethically is about deliberately considering (and responding to) the risks and impacts of our work, on both individuals and their communities (by geography or identity), as well as the impact of our communications on audiences. Working ethically requires those involved to employ empathy and sensitivity and to think critically about their work and the impact it may have on others.

These guidelines cannot cater for all the ethical issues and dilemmas that different NGOs will face and they do not replace the existing individual content or image guidelines that many Bond member organisations may already have in place.

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[8] "NGOs" is used as a catch-all term throughout the document. It is acknowledged that the members of Bond represent a range of organisations working on international development, including: those that are secretariats with a large diverse member base; those that work with partner organisations; and those that work with the country programmes or teams of their own organisation.

[9] Throughout this document we use the phrase "the people we work with" to describe those who some may refer to as either beneficiaries or participants.

[10] The term "contributors" refers to the people who feature in films, photographs and accompanying interviews. It is a deliberate alternative to "subject" to better acknowledge their active role in, and contribution to image making.

Who are they for?

These guidelines are for anyone working in a Bond member organisation who is involved in the gathering and use of content. They are for all staff, including volunteers, wherever they are based and whatever role they have – whether that is a country programme team taking images of projects for reports or a fundraising team taking images for an appeal. They are also for freelance image makers and producers, as well as those who may be involved in the creation of content but who are not under contract such as visiting donors and media representatives. The guidelines are also for those who manage and use content, whether that be for fundraising, awareness-raising, advocacy or supporter engagement.

While many NGO images continue to be produced by northern-based professional filmmakers and photographers, some NGOs are increasingly commissioning image makers based in the regions of the world where their work takes place. There will be times when local/national NGO staff are responsible for gathering content, or when the people we work with are engaged in content creation themselves[11]. While some aspects of these guidelines (translation, knowledge of context etc) will apply differently depending on who is gathering the content, the core principles and approaches are designed to support contributors in the image making process; they therefore apply to whoever is behind the camera.

Ethical not legal guidance

While these guidelines have been developed to be in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) that relate to processing personal data (which includes imagery), they are primarily ethical, and not legal, guidelines[12]. It is the responsibility of your organisations to ensure your communications are legally compliant in relation to GDPR, data protection and intellectual property rights. NGOs are also responsible for considering any national laws that may affect their content gathering, and use (ie the country that content is gathered in as well as the country where the content is stored and published), and to comply with any local or cultural restrictions in relation to taking images of people, places or objects.

Working ethically benefits everyone

Ethical content gathering and use is a win-win-win – for contributors, for NGOs and for audiences. Taking the time to get to know your contributors, treating them with the care and respect they deserve, will also enhance your relationship with the people you work with and is likely to result in a better and more effective set of images and stories.

Do less to do better
Invest the time in thinking carefully about your communications and what you really need in terms of stories and images. Developing a more focused brief allows you more time to gather the images and stories that you know will be used. Having more time to spend with individuals should result in better stories. Think about doing less but doing it better.

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[11] For example, by taking part in participatory photography/video; digital storytelling and/or citizen media initiatives.

[12] **General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)** came into force across Europe in May 2018. GDPR require all organisations to have a lawful basis to process personal data, which includes images and personal information.

Power, inequality and race

It is important for all those involved in NGO image making to acknowledge the considerable power imbalances at play in both the production and consumption of NGO images.

UK-based NGO staff and professional filmmakers/ photographers are paid to produce communications materials that are often intended to elicit donations from supporters to help those featured in the images. The people being asked to feature in NGO communications are likely to feel obliged to participate, due to their relative lack of power and their existing relationship with the NGO. Image making is often mediated by staff from country programme teams or partner organisations. They are likely to experience more power and privilege than those who are being photographed/filmed, but significantly less than any visiting staff/freelancers from the UK. These layers of inequality, inherent in the production and consumption of NGO images, are also racialised: those with the most power and privilege are generally white, and those with the least are generally people of colour.

Understanding these layers of power and inequality should urge us to take care with image gathering and use, and work to deliberately disrupt or challenge these inequalities.

María-Lucía, a Community Advocate for Women's Justice Initiative, prepares for an interview about child marriage and girls' rights with the Girls Not Brides team at her home in Chimaltenango, Guatemala.

Photo: © Girls Not Brides / James Rodriguez

Putting the people in the pictures first

The women, children and men who NGOs work with, and who contribute their image and story for our communications, are likely to face complex challenges in their daily lives and may be experiencing specific vulnerabilities. We must appreciate and respect the value they bring to our work by ensuring they are supported and empowered to safely participate in content gathering. We must recognise and respect their rights to participation and protection during image making. Content gathering should be governed by the same high standards in relation to human rights, safeguarding and accountability as any other NGO activity. Contributors' wellbeing will take precedent over our communications requirements.

Putting contributors first means:

• We will take the time to find out about contributors and their circumstances in advance of the content gathering; whether that be during the planning stage, during a meeting with partners, or with the contributors themselves in advance of content gathering.

• We will be clear with contributors about the role that our NGO will have or not have in their community[13]. We will never state that work will happen that is not planned, or promise something that we cannot deliver. We will be honest and accurate with them and our audiences about our role in their lives.

• We will endeavour to inform contributors in advance of our intentions to gather content, except for in rapid onset emergency contexts.

• We will give contributors a clear explanation in a language they understand (avoiding NGO or legal jargon) of the purpose of gathering their image/story and how it will be communicated to others. This will take place ahead of any legal informed consent forms being completed, and will involve sharing examples of finished communication materials.

• We will provide contributors with the opportunity to ask questions about the content gathering, and we will encourage them to express their preferences and any concerns about being filmed, photographed or interviewed.

• We will respect an individuals' rights to refuse to be photographed, filmed or interviewed.

[13] Community used here in the broadest sense to refer to those living in the same geographic area, but also those who may be connected to others through their identity or their interests.

- We will ensure contributors are aware of their rights to:
  - Change anything regarding the set-up of the content gathering.
  - Decide not to answer a question.
  - Stop participating at any point.

- It is our responsibility to manage contributors' expectations: we will make it clear that image making will not lead to direct assistance for them or their families. We must recognise that, for a contributor, the content-gathering experience will be experienced as a group of people demonstrating significant and genuine interest in their/their family's life. Understandably a contributor may expect some form of follow-up to this initial interaction. NGOs must take care to explain what will happen next and be honest and truthful in their explanations.

- We will listen carefully to contributors' accounts and record what they tell us accurately.

- We will recognise contributors for their knowledge and experience on the issues affecting their lives, with considered and critical opinions. Contributors are more than their own individual case studies; they can be insightful and powerful spokespeople on the issues we are focused on.

- Wherever possible we will collect and use in-depth interviews that tell rounded stories of contributors; stories that find out more about them as individuals with experiences and ideas beyond the issue our organisation is focused on.

- Wherever possible, we will endeavour to use contributors' own words and voice in the messaging and captioning that accompanies our images and films, as well as in any on or offline materials.

- We will be honest and transparent with contributors about what aspects of their lives we are interested in documenting and communicating to our audiences. However, we will be open to our plans shifting in relation to the contributors we meet and the stories they share.

- Where possible and appropriate, with our partners/staff in context, we will return copies of finished content and/or images taken to contributors[14]. It is recognised that this will only be possible in the context of ongoing programmes. As well as being respectful, returning finished content can help to manage expectations.

- At the time of planning a content gathering trip, NGOs should consider together with country teams/partner organisations, if and how returning content will be possible, and include in the budget the costs associated with this (staff time, travel and printing). Country programme teams should have contact details of contributors, and if appropriate and possible, finished content/images could be shared digitally with contributors.

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[14] This may be more important for communications on sensitive issues or with vulnerable contributors; when contributors and partner organisations may require reassurance that the final outputs do not put them at any risk.

Our communications must do no harm

The humanitarian principle of Do No Harm must apply to all content gathering and use. NGOs have a responsibility to protect contributors (and their families and communities) from any harm caused by them participating in its image making.

All NGOs should require their staff and others who are working with or for them to adhere to their Code of Conduct, and/or a Child Protection or Safeguarding Policy. This requirement must extend to all those involved in NGO image making, including visitors (such as supporters) and media representatives who are not otherwise under contract. If during the process of image making you become aware or concerned that a contributor is at risk of harm (unrelated to your image making) you should follow your organisation's safeguarding policy and alert the appropriate staff member.

During content gathering with anyone, but particularly with those who are identified as vulnerable, contributors' wellbeing and safety should always take priority over the need for an image or a story. This means that there will be times, even when a person has given informed consent to contribute, that an NGO will decide to either not proceed with the planned content gathering, not to use a gathered story, or to anonymise a contributor. Always question whether you need a particular story and consider if another approach could work that does not involve vulnerable contributors.

Ensure all staff (irrespective of their location or seniority) who have most familiarity with contributors (or the issues they face) are actively encouraged and empowered to inform the image making. They must feel able to say no to image making requests, if they feel that the image making either a) poses a risk for contributors, or b) risks damaging their relationship or reputation with the people they work with. They must feel able to intervene:

- If they feel contributors are requested to pose/act inappropriately.
- If they feel contributors are no longer feeling comfortable.
- If they recognise a risk to the contributor that they did not anticipate in advance.
- If they feel anyone on the content-gathering team is behaving inappropriately.

Responsible content gathering requires time. Building in sufficient time allows for good communication with contributors and allows contributors to properly consider your request for their image and/or story. Short visits can be unsettling and potentially harmful to contributors who are particularly vulnerable, such as children.

All cameras should have their geographic information system (GIS) setting turned off so that images do not contain retrievable information on the exact location of contributors. If using the GIS setting for programmatic mapping purposes, make sure you have systems in place to ensure that information is protected and not available to all potential users of the image.

Assessing risks for contributors

NGOs have a responsibility to assess the risk to individual contributors of their participation in image making and of their image and/or story being shared. A risk assessment should take place during the planning phase of content gathering. Consider the implications of image use not just on the individual, but also on the wider communities that they represent (either in terms of identity or geography). Some risks may not be immediately obvious: for example, women being photographed in a women's group without veils – who would typically be seen veiled in public.

In the majority of cases, the NGO commissioning or organising the content gathering will be aware of the sensitivities of the context and this should inform the terms of reference (TOR)/brief[15]. It is good practice to keep a record of how you have taken the safety and welfare of vulnerable contributors into account.

Responding to the risks identified may at times be predetermined by organisational policy. Many NGOs choose to never publish children's real names and to always conceal the identity of survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), even if the individual concerned is willing for their identity to be shared.

Decisions about whether to reveal or conceal the identity of a contributor should be made in consultation with those who are familiar with the context. Decision-making will be different for individuals who have an existing public profile in relation to the sensitive issue and for whom the NGO content is unlikely to pose any additional risk. If someone expresses any concern about being seen by others, their visible identity should not be revealed, and you should check if they also want you to disguise the sound of their voice.

Sensitive contexts and vulnerable people

Most NGOs recognise some contexts as "sensitive" and certain groups of individuals as vulnerable.   Such contributors may have experienced, or be at risk of experiencing further trauma or stigma and it is important that any image gathering is sensitive to this. Concealing the identity of contributors may be essential to address the risks of negative consequences, such as reprisals, violence or stigmatisation in their communities. These contexts include, but are not limited to:

• People living in or fleeing from conflict zones.
• People seeking asylum.
• People affected by natural or manmade disasters.
• People living with HIV.
• People with a disability.
• LGBTQI+ people.
• Survivors of sexual assault.
• Survivors of gender-based violence.
• People speaking out against government, authority or large corporations.
• People facing religious or caste-based discrimination.
• Children.
• Older people.

[15] Some NGOs have developed specific guidance on image making in particular sensitive contexts. Save the Children have published guidance on media and communications with children in humanitarian contexts (see Resources); Blue Venture's image guidelines contain specific guidance for image making in healthcare settings; and BBC Media Action have a set of editorial guidelines relating to vulnerable adults: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/vulnerable-adults-media-action.pdf

It is not possible to list here all possible sensitive contexts. It is therefore essential to consider any sensitivities in relation to the specific time and context in which the content gathering is taking place. For example, in the UK there is stigma attached to poverty which means many parents would be reluctant for their children to be identifiable in any NGO communications that would imply they were living in poverty.

It is also not possible to identify all sensitive situations in advance, hence the importance of unhurried, good communications with contributors in advance of content gathering, so any unknown or unexpected sensitivities can surface and be handled responsibly.

Image making with children

For some NGOs, children are their most frequent contributors. It is essential that NGOs conform to the highest standards in relation to children's rights according to the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**. Some children can face multiple vulnerabilities, such as children living in institutions or in care systems. Additional care must be taken when gathering content from these children or their care givers. For example, if interviewing a care giver and the child is present, it would be important that you avoid exposing children to information about their own history or their family's history which they do not already know, or is inappropriate for them to hear.

During all content gathering that is likely to involve children, there should be a designated child protection focal point within the group of staff involved. At no time should any individual in the content gathering team be left alone with a child; there should always be more than one adult present. Some NGOs will have additional requirements such as reference checks (DBS for UK-based individuals) and/or requirements to complete child protection training prior to content gathering involving children.

Some NGOs have chosen to not use children's real names alongside their images in NGO communications. Others may decide to use the child's first name only. It is also usual to never publish the child's (or vulnerable adult's) exact location (ie the name of their neighbourhood or village). Images and messages should also never include any identifying features (landscape or signage) that could reveal their exact location. The rationale behind these decisions is that children's identity should be protected so that they are never traceable by anyone who intends to cause them harm.

Additional care for contributors who may have experienced trauma

Content-gathering must at all costs avoid re-traumatising someone. Expert advice should be sought in advance from those who have worked closely with the contributor (or those in a similar situation). And again, consider whether your communications are truly dependent on such individuals.

Individuals who have experienced trauma may respond to an interview in unpredictable ways; the presence of people who have an existing relationship with contributors is critical as they are probably best placed to determine how to respond. This may be a trusted friend, family member or staff member the contributor knows well.

Anyone gathering content from someone who has experienced trauma should ideally be trained in how to approach this situation with best practice, and must be prepared to use their judgement to respond appropriately if someone becomes upset. Becoming upset may not necessarily mean that you should end an interview, and to do so could be detrimental, by sending out a message that it is wrong to become emotional. Individuals may be grateful for having the opportunity to talk about their experiences even if it does make them feel upset; they may

not have had a chance to discuss these experiences with others. But in other situations, you may decide that it would be appropriate to pause or end an interview.

Be aware of the impact of asking people to share their experiences. In some more sensitive contexts, it may be safer for the individual to talk about their current situation or their ideas for the future than to recount a previous traumatic experience.

Strategies should be in place should a difficult situation arise. Content gatherers entering a context of interviewing people with trauma should have distress and, if possible, referral protocols prepared in advance. This means being prepared to respond appropriately if someone becomes upset when recounting their story, and being able to refer people to services they need (if that is possible and appropriate). It is also advisable to support your country programme or partner organisation to conduct a follow-up visit to check on the contributor shortly after the content gathering has taken place.

Working with models

At times, an NGO may decide to use a model or actor in their communications. If you do, you must ensure that this is made clear to the audience. The rights and wellbeing of child actors/models should also be governed by an NGO's child protection and safeguarding policies.

Capturing images of everyday life for Rajit and his foster family, India.

Photo: © Hope and Homes for Children

Informed consent

Informed consent is the cornerstone of ethical content gathering and use. It is much more than form-filling alone. It requires meaningful dialogue, and is about listening and asking questions.

This guidance will help to ensure that your process of informed consent meets the interests and needs of both the contributor as well as the organisation gathering and using the resulting content. It should help NGOs to plan and facilitate an informed consent process that is both ethical and meets the legal requirements of GDPR. GDPR has made informed consent a legal requirement in relation to the gathering (and storage and use) of any personal data (including images) that will be used by organisations for promotion or fundraising purposes. For organisations, ensuring their content is legally compliant is critical. Without evidence of informed consent, images should not be used for any promotion or fundraising purposes[16].

The "informed" in informed consent relates to ensuring the potential contributor(s) understands:

• **Why** the NGO wants to film/photograph/interview them (for fundraising/ communications/ campaigning purposes etc).

• **What** the resulting communications will be (advert/publication etc).

• **How** and **where** it will be communicated (through what channels/ mediums and to whom).

In addition, GDPR also requires organisations to let contributors know:

• **How long** their image and other personal information will be kept by the NGO.

• That they **have a right to withdraw consent** for further use, at any time.

• **How** they can withdraw consent.

The evidence you gather (either a signed form, recording verbal consent, or completing a consent app) must demonstrate that the information above has been shared with the contributor, so that there is evidence that their consent is informed.

It is important that NGOs do all they can to ensure that informed consent is **freely given** (and this is also a GDPR requirement). Many contributors are likely to feel obliged to agree to NGO requests to film/photograph themselves or their child. It is important that your informed consent process is one that engenders dialogue with the contributors. They should feel comfortable and encouraged to ask questions and share any concerns. You must reassure them that there will be no negative consequences for them or others if they choose not to be filmed/

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[16] Many NGOs are likely to possess images gathered prior to May 2018 for which there may be no evidence of informed consent. Some NGOs have chosen to delete all such imagery from their records; others have chosen to review using such imagery on a case-by-case basis with due consideration of any risks involved for the contributor (and the NGO) in publishing those images.

photographed/interviewed. You should provide multiple opportunities for contributors to say no or express their concerns, by asking, for example:

"Is there anyone who you don't want to see this photograph?"

"Would you feel more comfortable if we didn't take your/ your child's photograph?"

"Are you still comfortable with being filmed?"

The information shared during the informed consent process must be **clear and in a language contributors can understand**. If an image maker/interviewer does not speak the language of the contributor(s), an interpreter must be arranged. Your interpreter must speak in a clear and accessible way – using the equivalent of plain English rather than NGO or legal jargon.

Best practice would also be to translate the consent form into the language (or the national language) of the contributor. Ask your country teams to check this and ensure that the forms you are using to gather evidence of informed consent are clearly understandable.

Remember that it is also important to facilitate an informed consent process with everyone that you are interviewing/photographing or filming including staff and partners.

Informed consent and children

Many NGOs work to a principle of obtaining informed consent from parents/carers when gathering content from anyone aged under 18 years; and it would be important to check national laws if choosing to do otherwise. The GDPR legal requirement in the UK is that children aged 13 or over can sign an informed consent form by themselves; and for children aged under 13, a parent/carer/legal guardian would need to sign the form. Some NGOs seek to obtain dual consent from both child and guardian as the child approaches adulthood. When gathering content from children, remember it is also respectful to gain informed consent from the child themselves, using an age-appropriate approach.

Guidance for the informed consent process

The guidance below is designed to support an approach to informed consent that is based on sensitive and effective dialogue with contributors before, during and after the image making. Every situation will be distinct and present its own challenges and limitations. You should always consider someone's capacity to be able to provide informed consent; different approaches may be required with children and some vulnerable adults. For example, the discussion might take longer, or it might need to be shorter and for some contributors a follow-up visit is essential.

Before content gathering

• **Assign responsibility for consent**: At the planning stage determine who is responsible for facilitating the informed consent process with contributors (this might be someone from your country programme/a partner organisation/or your assigned interpreter).

• **Identify and talk to contributors in advance of content gathering:** Plan and budget for country programme/partner staff to visit potential contributors in advance, to carry out initial informed consent dialogues, and to identify potential contributors who are willing to participate. In situations where this is not possible, there should be time and space created for informed consent, in advance, and distinct from, the content gathering itself. Potential contributors should be provided with the information and time to make a considered decision, to ensure that consent is both informed and freely given. It is recognised that this will be more difficult to achieve in emergency contexts or with people on the move.

• Be aware that in certain contexts, cultural/social norms may require you to first obtain consent from a local leader in advance and in addition to individual contributors.

Essential elements of informed consent

The dialogue around informed consent should be relaxed and carried out in the contributor's own language, ideally by someone they have an existing relationship with, and without a large crowd present.

You may need to explain that the reason you are taking the time to explain everything is out of respect for the contributor and as an alternative to just taking their photograph without permission. The process, and any forms used, are designed to respect and protect their wishes.

Your organisation should have its own form for gathering evidence of informed consent, or a required checklist to guide an audio/video recording of informed consent. The table below can be used to cross-check against your own forms and procedures or to produce one if you don't have one in place already.

Essential elements of informed consent

Introduce organisation and individuals.	Names of individuals and their roles. Name of NGO and clear short introduction to its aims.
Explain **why** you would like to photograph/ film/ interview them.	Provide a short and clear explanation, for example: to raise funds for X; to raise awareness of X etc.
Manage contributors' **expectations.**	Be clear that the filming/photography/interviewing is not going to result in any direct benefits for that contributor/their community etc (unless it is).
Clearly communicate contributors' **right to refuse** to participate and explain there will be **no negative consequences** in doing so.	Very clearly state that there will be no negative consequences - for individuals, their families and any project work - if they decide not to participate in content gathering.
Explain **how** their image/story will be used. What will the resulting communication look like.	Help contributors to visualise the results of the content gathering by sharing digital and/or printed copies of sample content.
Talk about **who** is likely to see it.	While you may have specific audiences in mind, make sure contributors are aware that their images and stories could be seen by anyone, anywhere, including their neighbours/family/ employers. Make sure all contributors are urged to consider carefully whether they are happy for their image and story to be public and potentially seen by anyone, including those close to them. Ask contributors if there is anyone that they would not want to see their image/read their story. It can also be useful to talk about audience numbers. For example: "We will share your photograph on our Facebook page which has 100,000 followers."
Explain **contributors' right** to conceal identity.	If they would like to share their story but do not want anyone to know it is them, there are different ways their identity can be concealed: no images of face, no recording of their voice, changing their name.
How long will agency keep image/story for.	For example: "We will store your image and story carefully and only use it for purposes described above. After a specified number of years (normally three to five)[17] your image and story will no longer be used. If we do want to use your images and story again, we will need to come back to you at this point to re-consent."
Contributors' right to withdraw consent.	For example: "After we have gone, if you change your mind or have any questions you can get in contact with [insert name and contact details]. We cannot remove any existing communications, but we will not use your image in any future communications. Leave card/paper with contact details."

Once all of the above has been covered, you can get on with the process of checking that your contributor is happy or not to proceed with the photography/ interview/filming, and to **gather evidence of their consent**, either collecting their signature on your informed consent form, or video/audio recording their consent, ensuring that the elements above are included (or referred to) in that recording.

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[17] The length of time an organisation chooses to store and use someone's personal data (ie the lifespan of the image/story) is up to the individual organisation. GDPR protocol states that if you wish to retain someone's personal details for longer than five years they must agree to this. Many NGOs have decided that they will not use images for more than five years, but if you think you might want to, you must include a request for this on your form (ie tick a box saying that they agree to this), so your form should contain this box.

At the end of the interview/filming/photography

• Where possible, **review and share any images taken with the contributor** as a way of checking they are happy with those.

• At the end of any interview, when the contributor has told their story and had their image taken, it is important to **revisit the consent agreement** by checking: "Is there any part of what you have told us that you would prefer us to leave out?" and confirming whether they still do (or do not) want to be identifiable in the resulting communications.

• Leave contributors with the **contact details of partner/communications officers in-country** with a clear statement (in their language) that they can contact them in the event they have any concerns about the photographs or they decide they no longer want the NGO to use it. (It is a GDPR requirement to ensure that contributors are made aware of how they would go about withdrawing consent if they wished to.)

• You need to also clearly explain that images and stories that have already been published cannot be removed, but an NGO can guarantee that existing communications featuring a contributor will not be re-used, and that **no future communications will be produced once consent is withdrawn**. This information, together with the contact details, could be on a small laminated card, a thank you letter, or a copy of the consent form – something that is left behind with contributors.

During participatory video training with Blue Ventures, participants get hands-on experience with a new camera.

Photo: © Blue Ventures | Matthew Judge

Informed consent with groups

The way in which informed consent should be managed when photographing or filming groups of people, as opposed to individuals, is determined by several factors, including the age of the people involved and whether the context of the group is considered sensitive.

NGOs should determine, in advance, how the informed consent process with groups and crowds will be conducted, and how they will gather evidence of informed consent. They should also consider the chance that one individual in a group will withdraw consent, and what this means for the use of the material. As a guide:

A group of adults in a context which is deemed to be non-sensitive, for example: participants at a training course, members of a savings group, partner organisation's staff meeting.

In these contexts, it would be considered appropriate to go through an informed consent process with the whole group and ask individuals to declare their consent either by a show of hands, or a signature on a group consent form. If you decide not to collect individual signatures, then an appropriate group consent form must be signed by someone who is recognised as the group leader/representative and is happy to guarantee the consent of those individuals present at the time of content gathering, and that the individuals are also happy for this individual to do this on their behalf.

If you go on to do one-to-one filming/photography/interviewing with any individuals from that group, you will also need evidence of that individual providing consent.

A group of children in any context

Parental consent in advance is required, and the NGO must have some form of evidence of this consent. How that is managed will vary from place to place, some schools may have existing consent arrangements in place with all parents, others may choose to inform parents in advance of image making taking place and ask them to inform the school if they do not give consent for their child to participate. A responsible staff member should sign an appropriate consent form, guaranteeing that parental consent has been obtained. Informed consent should also be conducted with children, in a way that is meaningful and appropriate.

A group of adults in a sensitive context: for example, a protest group, an HIV support group, or patients at an Ebola treatment centre.

It is advised that you gather informed consent on an individual basis when gathering content with such groups. As with individuals who are considered vulnerable or in sensitive contexts, consider carefully with contributors (and those who are familiar with them and their context) whether or not their identity should be concealed to protect them from any risk associated with being identified in that context.

Informed consent with crowds in public space

For content gathering that will involve imagery of large groups or crowds in public spaces, the consent arrangements should ideally be thought through in advance of the image making.

If an individual is recognisable in a crowd shot, the decision as to whether informed consent is required or not depends on whether the context of that crowd reveals information about that individual which is considered personal (health, sexuality, asylum/refugee status, political beliefs, religion).

You do not require consent from identifiable individuals in the background of an urban or rural public scene which does not reveal any personal information about the individual. But, the situation for identifiable individuals in a queue outside an HIV testing centre, or in many refugee camps, or at a political rally is different. Publication of their images could lead to risks for themselves or their families and consent should never be assumed.

Unless it is possible to facilitate informed consent with everyone who is recognisable in that scene, images need to be taken in ways which do not reveal the individual identities of those at the scene, or you should blur the faces of anyone whose consent you don't have.

Storage of the evidence of informed consent

Consent documentation will often contain personal information (places, names, contact details) which must be stored securely so that there is no risk that this information is published alongside the content. It is important to have a system in place to ensure that the content files (images, case studies, notes etc) can be linked to evidence of consent, but this evidence should not be accessible to all users of the content. Consent forms (or verbal recordings of consent) may be stored on a separate server or be password protected with limited access.

It should be clear to the users of content, at the point of selection and using an image that there is: a) evidence of consent; b) the date at which content was gathered; and c) information about any restrictions/instructions on use.

Evidence of consent should be kept for as long as you are still processing the personal data which is based on that consent.

Responsible portrayal

Accuracy and context

Ensuring accuracy and communicating context respects both contributors and audiences. Our communications should accurately represent contributors, their stories and their situations. We should commit to telling fuller stories: providing audiences with credible evidence and context that both generates empathy and improves public understanding of the challenges and circumstances facing the people we work with. Images and stories without context can risk perpetuating the myth that issues of poverty and global inequality are natural phenomena "rather than a result of broader, social, economic or political factors."[18]

When gathering images...

• Take the time to ensure all TORs (Term of Reference) for content gathering contain verified information about the immediate and wider context (if known) of the individual(s) and the issues to be communicated. All those involved in content gathering should be familiar with this.

• Record additional information about the context at the time of content gathering. File this information with the content gathered so it is available to those planning to use the content.

• Produce comprehensive captions that answer who, when, what, where, and why to accompany images. This information will support responsible use of images.

• Work with experienced interpreters, so that, as far as possible, you can accurately record and represent contributors' stories without any jargon. Many contributors will not be able to communicate their story effectively in their own words to you without one. Poor interpretation risks misrepresentation. Translation may also be required during the content production process, particularly when reviewing and editing video footage.

• Interpreters should be made aware that they should not report or probe for the information that they think content gathering teams want to hear. Interpretation must be honest and accurate – reflecting the individuals' turn of phrase in as much detail as possible.

• Where possible, make an audio recording of any interviews carried out. This will mean you have an accurate record of the contributor's words (in case you feel you need to get any of the interpretation checked).

• Photographs and films will generally be to some extent staged or set-up. It is essential that you take care to replicate individuals' realities when you do so. For example, if a child who is visually impaired moves around by holding their parent's hand, do not set up a photograph or film that shows the child by themselves, not holding anyone's hand.

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[18] The Illustrative Guide to the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages (2014).

It can be beneficial to carry out your interview first and then use this detailed information to re-create the story in imagery. If in doubt, talk to your contributors to check that your set-up is an accurate reflection of their experiences or circumstances.

When selecting images to use in your communications...

• You must not use an image of an individual or group of individuals to illustrate a story or an issue which has nothing to do with them. For example, if you are running a campaign about HIV treatment for women in Zimbabwe, you should not use an image of Zambian women accessing maternal health services.

• You should avoid using images from one location to illustrate a story in another location, unless you can make this clear in the caption.

• Do not create "composite stories" where several different people's stories are merged together into one "generalised" story as this can dehumanise the individual contributors and their personal circumstances.

• Take care when using images taken at a previous time to represent a current situation in the same place. Talk to others in your organisation, and check with people on the ground/in that place about whether the image continues to accurately depict the situation or place. There is no exact guidance on when an image becomes out of date; as with many ethical decisions what is important is to be aware of risks and make a considered decision. Ensure you use the right tense in your writing and if in any doubt date your image and caption so that it is clear when it was gathered.

• Wherever possible, enable your audiences to easily find out more about the context in which an image or a story was gathered, as part of your commitment to telling fuller stories. For example:

• Avoid using images without captions.

• Where the channel/design does not allow for full captions, create a clearly visible link for people to access further information - a clear and short user journey from a single image to the fuller story.

• Use multiple channels to provide depth, context and detail: a short TV advertisement can be complemented by a fuller more complete story online.

Digital manipulation - no changes that change meaning

It is understood that designers and those editing and using images will make some post-production changes (such as cropping) for reasons relating to design and lay-out. It is not, however, acceptable to make any changes to an image (photograph or film) which change its context or meaning. It is important that our audiences can rely on our images as "credible evidence" and proof that something happened at a certain time and place.

Do not crop, edit, colour or do anything else that enhances the perception of poverty or abandonment.

At times, NGOs will manipulate images to use these in creative or fictional ways that are not intended to communicate reality. In all cases, it should be made clear to the audience that these are "set up" and never presented as reality.

Take care with captions

The need for an accurate caption must not override the need to manage risks in relation to disclosing someone's identity through sharing their name, location or circumstance. With images of children do not include any identifying information in the caption, for example exact location or parent's surname.

Accompanying text affects how an image is interpreted. It can incriminate contributors or stereotype them in an unfavourable way that they would not agree to if asked. For example, people whose images are used in communications about Ebola, child soldiers, or rape survivors will be assumed to have experienced those issues themselves. Using imagery where individuals are unidentifiable to illustrate stories about sensitive issues may be the best approach.

Avoiding stereotypes

"If you show a people as one thing over and over again this is what they become... If all we see is how poor people are it becomes impossible to imagine them as anything else, their poverty becomes the single story... The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story"

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) from her TED talk, The danger of a single story.

Our communications must strive to balance a commitment to accurate representations of the realities faced by the people we work with, while avoiding the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. NGOs have a responsibility to gather and communicate images (negative and positive) that convey people's experiences in ways which generate empathy, respect and understanding. All NGOs must consider the role their images play in the representation of people, places and activities and avoid "the dangers of the single story."

Many Bond members will be signatories to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement](#) and NGOs in Disaster Relief[19] which states: "In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognize disaster victims as dignified human beings, not hopeless objects." We must continually challenge ourselves to find ways to communicate the issues facing the people we work with, without demeaning them and reducing them to symbols of helplessness and need.

The content gathering assignments of different NGOs are distinct in many ways. The guidance below will not apply to all NGOs' communications/ content gathering all of the time. Nevertheless, the following are important to consider and discuss with others involved in planning, gathering and using content.

- We will represent a diversity of people and voices in our communications.

- We will not only show a person's problems, we will show their personality either through their voice, or through other details about their lives which are distinct from the problem being shown.

- Across our communications we will gather content which illustrates people supporting or caring for each other, leading work, or being capable agents of change.

- Where possible we will show examples of the changes that people are driving themselves and how the people we work with are contributing to solutions.

- We will gather content which shows local and national staff supporting contributors and feature their voices and full names.

- Content that features celebrities should serve to amplify rather than silence the voices of the people we work with. We should not frame the celebrity as the hero of the piece, but instead use them to help frame an issue.

- We recognise the existence of the problematic white saviour trope and will ensure that any communications which include white celebrities or experts show contributors as their equals, rather than as people who are dependent on their knowledge, assistance or pity. We recognise that all communications featuring white experts or celebrities visiting people of colour living in poverty play some part in perpetuating the myth of the white saviour and we will continue to explore alternative approaches to communications that are effective in terms of audience engagement and support.

- We will avoid images of lone vulnerable children and children who appear to be abandoned, as this very rarely represents reality.

- We will avoid images that look down on someone with the intention of creating a greater sense of vulnerability or need.

- Image makers will never take images of topless pubescent or post-pubescent girls, or images that display the genitalia of people of any age.

- We will always ask partners and country programmes if there are any additional cultural sensitivities to be aware of when taking photographs or filming certain places, objects or actions.

- We will take care with the language we use to refer to people and their contexts and seek guidance on what is most appropriate to use, recognising that this can be subject to change. For example, while some UK organisations refer to working with people with disabilities, there is an increasing preference for the term disabled people.

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[19] https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/who-we-are/the-movement/code-of-conduct/

Using third-party content

Many organisations at times use images produced by others, including images purchased from commercial media and photography agencies, as well as those that are freely available under a Creative Commons license. Research-based organisations and think tanks are more likely to use image libraries to find images to illustrate their reports and articles than an NGO that runs programmes and services directly.

Third party content is used by many organisations in the immediate aftermath of a rapid onset emergency. In these instances, NGOs are under pressure to generate awareness of the emergency, and raise funds, as soon as possible; urgent communications cannot be held up by the lack of images. Some organisations work to the principle that, in these contexts, they will use third party content until they are able to generate their own communications.

While it is recognised that it is impossible to apply these guidelines in their entirety to all third-party content used by NGOs, they should still inform NGOs' decision-making when it comes to the selection and use of images.

Some third-party images will have been gathered and processed as journalistic and are therefore unlikely to have any evidence of informed consent associated with them. It is advisable that NGOs develop and use an internal sign off and risk assessment process to identify the risks of using such images before publication.

Film crew documenting child cataract surgery in Blantyre, Malawi. Before filming could begin, consent was given by the family after talks with local health staff. On arrival, the crew explained how the content would be used with examples of past appeals.

Photo: © Jason Mulikita / Sightsavers

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