"The correct image of me" - a guide to ethical use of images of children for fundraising

Introduction

"The correct image of me" is a project initiated during the spring of 2022 by War Child Sweden and SOS Children's Villages Sweden with funding from ForumCiv. When using images of children for fundraising, children's rights are sometimes violated. Within the framework of the project, Sweden's largest children's rights organizations have in collaboration with Giva Sverige (the Swedish Fundraising Association) run two workshop sessions, resulting in, this guide in collaboration

The following organizations have participated in the development of the guide: the Swedish Children's Fund, Clowns Without Borders, Läkarmissionen, Plan Sweden, Save the Children, Red Cross Sweden, SOS Children's Villages Sweden, UNICEF Sweden, War Child Sweden, ForumCiv and Giva Sverige.

Purpose

The aim of this guide is to facilitate the ethical use of images of children by civil society organizations.

The goal of the guide is to:

- Raise awareness of the ethical use of images of children.
- Serve as a starting point for organizations wishing to develop or revise internal guidelines.
- Create consensus and encourage a common minimum standard in the non-profit sector.

Limitations

These guidelines are limited to the use of images of children for fundraising purposes. For example, advocacy or portrayal of other vulnerable groups is not within the scope of this guidance. However, they can be used as inspiration for other image policies where it is deemed appropriate.

The Rights-Based Approach anthe Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Rights-Based Approach, RBA, is a normative approach based on internationally recognised human rights. A child rights perspective sees children, as much as adults, as rights holders and competent key actors in their own development. The role of the organisation in relation to children and young people is thus to empower rights holders to

claim their rights and to ensure that duty bearers assume their responsibilities in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In all work relating to children, four fundamental principles are taken into account and are present throughout - from problem formulation, planning and implementation of interventions to evaluation, follow-up and communication:

Article 2: All children are equal and have the same rights. No one shall be discriminated against.

Article 3. In all decisions concerning children, primary consideration shall be given to what is considered to be in the best interests of the child.

Article 6. Children have the right to life, survival and development.

Article 12 Children have the right to express their views and to be heard in all matters concerning the child.

This means that we always need to ask ourselves whether we are promoting these principles or not when we choose images. Other articles that also can be taken into account in image management are the following:

Article 16: Children have the right to privacy.

Article 19: Children shall be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

Article 32. Children have the right to be protected from economic exploitation and from work that is harmful or interferes with their education

Article 36. Each State shall protect children from all other forms of exploitation that may harm the child.

Basic principles:

- Rights rather than needs

- Rights are indivisible and cannot be compromised

- Rights are individual and held by each child

Guide to ethical use of images of children for fundraising purposes.

Images we avoid using

The following are types of images that the working group has identified as particularly problematic and therefore should be avoided for fundraising purposes.

1. Images of naked children

2. Images of deceased children

3. Images of injured children who aren't represented in a caring context

- For example, a picture of a child with a leg in plaster may be okay, but not a picture of a child with an open wound.

4. Images of severely malnourished children

5. Images of children convicted of a crime

6. Identifiable images of children in transit

- The use of images of children in transit may worsen the already vulnerable safety situation of the child in question.

7. Images that are stigmatised in the child's own context

- This includes images that illustrate the child doing or representing something that is taboo in their own context and therefore may pose a security risk.

8. Sexualised images

9. Images that reinforce the stereotypical structural power relationship between "north and south"

-This may include, for example, one-sided portrayals of countries as hopeless or insecure investment targets that high-income countries need to "save" rather than showing the structural factors that have caused a problem. It can also include so-called "white saviourism" where a white person is portrayed as the saviour of non-white people.

10. Images of active child soldiers

11. Images of emotional vulnerability

- For example, where the child is crying, having a panic attack or a tantrum.

12. Heavily manipulated images

- This is from an editing perspective, e.g. no details in the image may be manipulated away or the environment altered to the extent that it distorts the truth.

13. Images that are taken under pressure or where benefits are promised for participation.

Toolkit: What to consider when using an image

Principles for using images of children in vulnerable situations ethically

- **Consent:** Consent should be given for a predetermined time and use. It should also be possible to withdraw consent at the request of the child portrayed or his/her caregivers. Clear information on the procedure should be provided at the time of consent.

- **Portrayal of vulnerability**: The environment, context or circumstances may indicate vulnerability, but the child itself should be in a less vulnerable situation, e.g. with an adult next to it, in the arms of its parents. We avoid stereotypical images and descriptions of children as victims.

Questions to ask when choosing an image:

- Would I want a child close to me to be portrayed in this way if the contextual situation was the same?

- How was the picture taken and for what purpose? Make sure you use the image in the **right context![1]**

- If the image is published in a different context from the one in which it was taken, could the image be misinterpreted/used for inappropriate purposes? (see footnote 1)

- Is it possible to have the child portray himself/herself?[2]

- Does the child appear to have been able to make the decision to be portrayed in that situation?

- Is the child aware that he/she is being photographed? (see footnote 2)

- If the image leaks into the child's environment, can the child be comfortable with the portrayal?

- How well does the image age? Images remain forever. Can the child portrayed be comfortable with the image in 5, 10, 20 years?

- What is driving us to use the image for the donor? (what do we want the donor to feel?)

- Is the child used as decoration? [3](see footnote 3)

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[1] E.g. a girl dressed up for a festival celebration used in a campaign against sex trafficking or a picture of children playing in a mud puddle used to illustrate poverty.

[2] Research shows that campaigns that are designed with the participation of the fundraising target group can produce better results and be more accurate. https://amrefuk.org/media/25fjc0ua/amref-health-africa_who-owns-the-story_report_final.pdf

[3] E.g. set up in front of a newly built school with a sign thanking the donor.

Protecting the child's identity

A risk when using photos of children is that they can be identified, which can put the child at risk. One way to avoid this is to start from this triangle and always exclude one of the following. Photo means the image itself where the child can be identified.

PHOTO

NAME   **PLACE**
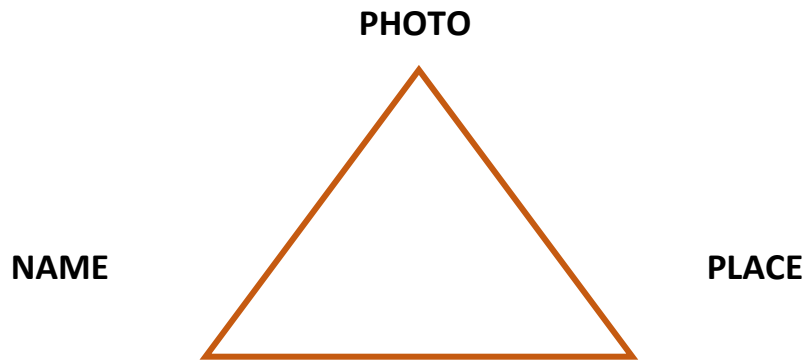
Rights-based communication checklist

This table will help organisations reflect on the type of images of children they use. If you are unsure whether the image you intend to use is rights-based, go through the list and see which side you check of most.

	✗	✓
THE CHILD is portrayed as a	Victim	Participant
THE CAUSE of the situation is	Individual	Structural
THE SOLUTION is	Simple	Complex
THE DONOR'S DRIVING FORCE is	Pity	Fulfilling rights
THE ORGANIZATION	Solves the problem	Empowers parties to solve the problem themselves

Good examples and alternative ways to create engagement

- **Absence of children where there should be a child.** For example, an empty swing set in a destroyed playground to illustrate children at war or an empty school desk or hospital bed to illustrate illness.
- **Let the child portray themselves.**
- **Portray the child as a rights-holder with their own agency.**
- **Use products.** Images of products that exemplify a problem and its solution such as vaccination kits or "soft products" such as "bedtime stories"

- **Images without children** but illustrating the vulnerable situation in which children find themselves. This could include showing starvation through a plate with just a little food, instead of a malnourished child or pictures of a sippy cup with dirty water.
- **Illustrate a situation when things have improved,** but describe what it was like before the children got the support they were entitled to. For example, "We used to drink this water".
- **Use a collage of pictures** to give a more diverse and less stereotypical picture.
- **Zoom out to provide context.** Heavily zoomed in images can become contextless. Zooming out gives the viewer more information and can reduce the risk of stereotypes being cemented.
- **Use objects associated with children.**

Further reading and resources

- https://criticalfundraising.com/2022/04/18/news-charities-should-have-ethical-policies-on-their-use-of-service-user-stories-and-images-new-approach-to-framing-ethics-recommends/

- https://www.sida.se/partner-till-sida/metoder-och-material/human-rights-based-approach-rattighetsperspektiv

- https://efa-net.eu/news/challenges-of-decolonising-charity-communications-highlighted-in-study

- https://centreforhumanitarianleadership.org/the-centre/pledge-for-change/