You've been reframed

How ought beneficiaries be represented in fundraising materials?

⊙ PAPER 3

Putting the contributor centre frame: What the people in our pictures think about the way we tell their stories.

Jess Crombie
May 2020

ROGARE
THE FUNDRAISING THINK TANK

Contents

About the 'you've been reframed' project and this paper

This is the second output from Rogare's project to explore how beneficiaries ought to be portrayed – or 'framed' – in fundraising and marketing materials, which itself is a part of our review of fundraising's professional ethics. This beneficiary framing project tackles both descriptive (what's happening/what works and what doesn't) and normative (what ought we do) issues. In order to make normative judgements, we must be in possession of the most robust and reliable evidence.

The first paper to be published examined the evidence for and against negative framing. Before we can decide if fundraisers ought to use 'negative' frames in their fundraising, we need to know whether negative frames are more effective than more positive frames, and even if they are, whether their use has any unintended or unforeseen deleterious consequences.

This second paper looks at the attitudes and perceptions of those whom nonprofit organisations frame in their fundraising material to the way they are framed. It is appropriate that if we are to make judgements on how certain categories of people are framed, then their opinions on that very subject are taken into consideration. Yet their voices are often absent.

This is a discussion paper and, in line with Rogare's Theory of Change, which encourages fundraisers to be more critical of their current professional knowledge, it is designed to provoke debate and to get fundraisers to dig out more information and ask better questions so that we can improve our professional knowledge and thus the decisions that we make based on that knowledge. This is not an academic literature review and it does not try to be. It is thus probably not comprehensive, (though we believe we have covered off the main papers to have explored these issues. Nonetheless, would

encourage fundraisers to refer to the original papers explored in this document to discover their own insights about ideas that are not described here.

One of the main objectives of the You've Been Reframed project is to close the gap (which is possibly an ideological gap) between fundraisers, who wish to use the images and messages that they believe raise most money, which often use 'traditional' negative frames; and other charity staff, who believe more positive frames should be used.

As part of this we are planning to publish six green papers.

1. Review of the 'philosophy' behind approaches to this topic to establish the philosophical/ ideological nature of the debate and hypothesise as to the degree of polarization in the discussion

2. Efficacy of positive vs. negative frames (Smyth and MacQuillin 2018)

3. How beneficiaries view their portrayal in fundraising (this paper)

4. Routes to communicate with beneficiaries

5. Commonalities and differences in relevant existing codes of practice

6. A final report presenting a normative argument about how beneficiaries ought to be framed in fundraising.

Although papers 1 and 6 bookend this project, there is no requirement that each paper is published in order (except paper 6) and we shall publish each paper as and when it is completed. ❻

Author

Jess Crombie

Jess Crombie is a leader in the field of humanitarian communications having created award-winning content and some of the most innovative approaches to working and in the NGO sector.

While global content director at Save the Children, Jess commissioned and with Siobhan Warrington co-authored *The People in the Pictures*, a ground-breaking piece of research asking those who feature in INGO content their opinions on both the process of sharing their stories and their final portrayal. Following this research Jess founded and now co-chairs the Bond-sponsored 'People in the Pictures working group', set up to bring about sector-wide change in the creation and use of images of poverty. Jess speaks and is interviewed as an expert commentator on humanitarian communications for, among others, the BBC, Sky TV, Barbican, Sheffield DocFest, Frontline Club, VR World, *Creative Review*, National Council for Voluntary Organisations, and at universities across the UK.

Jess now works as co-course leader for BA Photojournalism and Documentary Photography and senior lecturer on documentary image-making and ethics at University of the Arts London, and as a content and stories consultant for the NGO sector, helping organisations including the British Red Cross, AMREF Health Africa, the DEC, CAFOD, and the International Rescue Committee to tell their stories powerfully and ethically.

jesscrombie.com

About Rogare

Rogare (Latin for 'to ask') is the independent think tank for the global fundraising profession. We are the engine that translates academic ideas into professional practice, and we aim to bring about a paradigm shift in the way fundraisers use theory and evidence to solve their professional challenges.

All Rogare's reports and outputs can be downloaded at www.rogare.net

Follow us on Twitter: @RogareFTT

Or search for the Critical Fundraising Forum on Facebook.

Foreword

Ian MacQuillin
Director, Rogare – The Fundraising Think Tank

This whole project sits within Rogare's stream of work on fundraising ethics. When one thinks about the meat and drink of what is ethical in fundraising, and the ethical dilemmas fundraisers face in professional practice, how they depict and frame in their storytelling the people they are trying to help is not necessarily the first thing that comes to mind.

Ethics in fundraising is very often focused on fundraisers' duties to their donors and doing the right – i.e. ethical – thing by them. But charities' services users or beneficiaries (or contributors as they are termed in this paper) rarely feature in ethical decision-making processes or thinking.

We've tried to rectify that by formulating a theory of fundraising ethics that says fundraising is ethical when fundraisers balance their duties to their donors (which are principally to treat them well and not put them under undue pressure to give), with their duties to the beneficiaries.

The main duty fundraisers have to the people their charities help is to ensure those charities do actually have enough money to be able to help them. That's how we formulated this theory, with this main being the main duty to beneficiaries.

But of course that is not the *only* duty fundraisers have to the people whom NGOs set out to help.

They also have duties to treat them in particular ways, and to tell the stories about them that they want told, in the way they want them told.

But in what ways do the beneficiaries of NGO service want their stories told?

This is a massive missing piece of the ethical jigsaw. The voices of the people whom we don't just aim to help, but on whose behalf we also claim to speak, are absent from the debate about the right type of images that charities ought to use.

Well, they are not completely absent, but they are not widely reported and researched. That is why this paper by Jess Crombie is such a vital contribution to the debate on this thorny topic. Jess reviews and interprets the little research that has been done on this topic, and suggests how we might use that to move this issue forward, by allowing charity beneficiaries to speak for themselves – to become contributors to their own narrative rather than have someone else construct it for them.

If we claim to be an ethical profession, it's the least we should be doing. ❻

Executive summary

The debate about how images and content depicting the people who use NGO's services (called 'contributors' in this paper) ought to be gathered and used is often polarised between those who want to use images that will raise the most money ('fundraising frame') and those who want to depict contributors in a positive way, with dignity, and that focuses on solutions.

However, one crucial voice that is missing from this conversation is that of contributors themselves, with little research carried out into their opinions about, and attitudes, to how their stories are told in NGO content.

This paper aims to add contributors' voices by reviewing the research that has been done on this subject (which is not much – nine such papers are summarised in s3) and what we can infer from that research (though it is important to remember that no participant or group of participants can speak on behalf of all contributors everywhere).

Research summary

- There has been a focus on analysis of imagery rather than other types of content. Such a focus can provide incomplete data as NGOs never present imagery alone, and the copy or surrounding materials in a piece of content, as well as the wider communications landscape into which it is presented, can entirely change the context of an image and therefore the response to that image (s4.1).

- Donors' voices have been prioritised in research and NGO storytelling, arguably because donors have more power than beneficiaries. A result of this is that a 'right' way to tell contributors' stories emerges, one that conforms to the values frame, which labels the fundraising frame as 'poverty porn' (s4.2).

- There can be a tendency to assume that those who suffer, who feature in NGO content, are not also consumers of these communications. However, much of the research shows that contributors have a sophisticated understanding of the content-collection and generating process, indicating that they were regular consumers of these media, and demonstrated by empathy and sympathy for those whose plights were depicted, responding to sad images the same way as do donors (s4.3).

- Contributors do not 'like' sad images – because they empathise with the person in the image – but this preference for images that do not show suffering should not be misconstrued as contributors not wanting these images to be used at all (s4.3).

- Contributors express a desire to have their voices heard, choose what stories are told and if possible, tell their own stories because, as the Niger proverb goes, "a song sounds sweeter from the author's mouth" (Warrington and Crombie 2017, p60), But they also understand that NGO content has to reflect the reality of their situations, and that those stories need to generate an emotional response in donors, for example, that "happiness doesn't move people" (ibid, p53). These finding would seem to suggest that the outcome of a portrayal showing suffering is not always problematic for the contributor, but it must be remembered that the very reason these people are being surveyed is because they are in a moment in their lives where they are in need (s4.3).

- Most importantly, all studies agree that while contributors do not mind being shown in a position of need, they do not want that to be the only way that they were depicted (s4.4).

- In all the published studies, there was a problematic space between the need (or desire) of NGOs to simplify a message of need for a donor, and the preference from the contributor to show the inevitable complexity of their own personal situation, a complexity that usually demonstrated agency on their part, alongside need. The tension is hard to resolve, but the risk of ignoring it is to end up in a polarised and dangerous discourse where a whole group of people, or indeed geographical location, end up becoming a stereotype, and nothing but a stereotype (s4.4).

- There is a widespread failure to ensure that contributors give their informed consent for their images and content to be used by NGOs, not because of lack of trying, but because a workable process has not yet been embedded. This represents a significant and urgent problem for the sector.

Conclusions and recommendations

Contributors clearly have much to say about the process of telling their stories and their later portrayal, but very few platforms on which to share these opinions. It is our responsibility to create these platforms, both privately in our processes and publicly through our content.

As the research shows, contributors want their voices heard and to have a greater say in the stories that are told about them. So to continue showing need without changing the process by which we gather stories, or without investing in other, broader depictions, would be to undermine the research findings entirely.

Consent processes need to be improved.

Some practical options are summarised from Save the Children's *People in the Pictures* report (Warrington and Crombie 2017) – such as such as making sure there are translators available and having child-friendly versions of consent materials – in the box on page 24.

The issue of framing needs to be rethought and reframed. The locus of human 'dignity' often resides in the image itself. However, the locus for addressing dignity should move beyond the image-making process toward the recognition that a contributor

makes to the process as a stakeholder. This shifts the focus from an imperative to remove images of suffering, to focusing on how we include the contributor in the process of telling their own story.

The notion that by removing certain types of imagery, or stories, we will imbue 'dignity' upon those who are suffering is problematic as it assumes that there is one universal way to experience dignity, and that it is possible to gift it to those who suffer. Both ideas are based in the assumption that there is one (Euro-American centric) world view, and that this is the 'right' way to tell stories.

This debate can be reframed using the lens of Rogare's Rights Balancing Fundraising Ethics (MacQuillin 2016a) by considering that fundraisers have twin duties to contributors/beneficiaries – to raise money to provide services (fundraising frame) and to take account of their opinions in how they wish to be depicted in NGO content. Another possible use of Rights Balancing Fundraising Ethics would be to consider whether fundraisers have a duty or responsibility to connect donors to aid recipients in a more meaningful way.

Concluding remarks

By adding contributors' voices into this polarised debate, this paper does not try to seek answers (insofar as they may exist); instead we seek to make the debate fuller so that all parties have a voice in this discussion.

We also aim to use the addition of these voices to reframe, or at least refocus, some of these arguments around the one area that all agree takes priority, the needs and wants to those that the charities have been set up to help, the contributors themselves.

Contributors are as important as donors in providing us with the wherewithal to carry out our work, and we ought to treat them and their opinions accordingly, investing as much in seeking their input on all areas of our work as we do in eliciting donor opinions. ◔

1
Introduction

Jess Crombie

In an era of multi-platform storytelling, the same story may be told in a variety of ways across content designed for multiple uses which encompass, exceed and support pure financial asks – for example campaigning, media engagement or pure brand engagement activity. One of the studies investigated in this paper, the *People in the Pictures* (Warrington and Crombie 2017), does not differentiate between materials meant for fundraising as opposed to other objectives, as today's audiences, and indeed those contributors that see finished content, are likely to see the same stories used across a variety of communications. This paper will therefore use the terms 'content' or 'stories' throughout, in this context meaning a narrative told about real people across various media for multiple uses, one of the primary uses being fundraising, but acknowledging that this will not be the only use.

This paper prefers the term 'contributor' to 'beneficiary'. As stated in New Philanthropy Capital's 2016 report, *User Voice: Putting People at the Heart of Impact Practice*: "Words carry meaning, and in this context also denotations of power relations." (Curvers, Hestbaek, Lumley, and Bonbright 2016, p4.) The term 'beneficiary' is one that describes a purely one-way interaction – those that passively receive rather than those that actively engage. If, as many NGOs claim, we as a sector are seeking to create a future of partnership with those we seek to help, we may want to consider using terminology that befits the intrinsically two-sided nature of

partnerships to help nudge cultural as well as practical change.

An underlying issue not seen wholesale, but which appears regularly enough to be a problem in the sector, is the often-polarised positions around how contributors ought to be portrayed in content. The positions are seen as between those whose responsibility it is to raise the money to pay for programmatic intervention, and those who deliver the programmatic intervention to the end users.

This first group, mostly made up of those who work in fundraising, marketing and communications teams, favour those images that they understand through their data analysis will maximise income. These images tend to show the problems facing beneficiaries, sometimes in a graphically illustrative way. Using terms from Ian MacQuillin's outline for the *You've Been Reframed* project (MacQuillin 2017), we are calling this the 'Fundraising Frame'.

The second group, mostly made up of office and field-based programme delivery staff, tend to favour images that focus on solutions to problems, often depicted in a positive way. We are calling this the 'Values Frame' (ibid). Both frames receive criticisms: for the Fundraising Frame this criticism is that it stereotypes contributors and does not afford them an appropriate degree of dignity; and for the Values Frame it is that it generates substantially less income and does not depict the situation with honesty by

An underlying issue not seen wholesale, but which appears regularly enough to be a problem in the sector, is the often-polarised positions around how contributors ought to be portrayed in content. The positions are seen as between those whose responsibility it is to raise the money to pay for programmatic intervention, and those who deliver the programmatic intervention to the end users.

showing the problems that have caused the charity to be working in that area.

These frames are themselves stereotypes of sector behaviour, and like any stereotypes they are not untrue, but only tell one part of the story and do not acknowledge the breadth of thinking and positive cross-working that happens every day within the sector. This should always be borne in mind when we refer to 'fundraisers' and 'service delivery' in this document.

In trying to unpick the debates between the Fundraising and Values frames, a great deal of research and writing has gone into analysing the content produced by charities with the aim of understanding the effect of this content upon an audience. This research and writing is insightful and important, and has certainly helped to consider the content produced and its effect upon audiences. However, very little research or writing has been undertaken that focuses on the voice and opinions of contributors, and what they think of how they are depicted.

By adding their voices into this polarised debate, we do not try to seek answers (insofar as they may exist); instead we seek to we make the debate fuller so that all parties have a voice in this discussion. We also aim to use the addition of these voices to reframe or at least refocus some of these arguments around the one area that all agree takes priority, the needs and wants to those that the charities have been set up to help, the contributors themselves. ✹

2

Why should we be consulting with those we seek to help?

Trust in NGOs among the public is low right now with the Edelman Trust Barometer in 2017 reporting that "in almost two-thirds of the 28 countries we surveyed, the general population did not trust the four institutions (of government, media, business and NGOs) to do what is right" (Harrington 2017) – the average level of trust in all four institutions combined was below 50 per cent. Media scandals such as those hitting both Oxfam and Save the Children in 2018 have damaged NGO reputations and supporter numbers are declining, as publicly announced by Oxfam (Bird, Dixon, Hope and Yorke 2018). Alongside these shifts in public perception, supporters and the media are asking for transparency, for demonstrations of changes made and maintained, for details on how work is carried out, where money goes, and for evidence of impact (Dolšak and Prakash 2016).

NGOs recognise that they need to make changes to their reporting to donors and that their content is a place where they can do it in an effective and engaging way. Because of this we are at a moment of real excitement and positivity when it comes to storytelling, with a part of that a movement to try to incorporate the voices of contributors more fully and in a less mediated way.

One of the ways that this is happening alongside content production is with organisations investing in listening projects to gather and hear what help contributors actually want in terms of aid, rather than that which we decide is right to give them. The 2016 report from New Philanthropy Capital, *User Voice: Putting People at the Heart of Impact Practice*, cites positive examples from UK charities CLIC Sargent, MAC-UK and the Thera Trust, which all focus on the health of young people, and which all involve users in decision making regarding the delivery of aid (Curvers et al 2016, p5).

In the area of storytelling and portrayal, so often discussed and so contentiously debated, there has been less investment of focus in finding out what those who feature in the thousands of pieces of charity content produced each year – the contributors – think about the process of sharing their stories, and their final portrayal. This dearth of research comes not just from the charities themselves, but also from some of their most vociferous critics in the academic sector. This is a missing source of information that is sorely needed within this narrative, not just to augment the argument, but also because it has the potential to change narratives, maybe even in a way that actively targets the downturn in trust and audience calls for authenticity and evidence of impact.

As a sector we have been suffering from originality inertia in the area of communications, having for decades invested in a model of communicating that places us and our donors centre frame. NGOs are positioned as the doers of good, and our donors as the facilitators of this good; but those who receive the aid remain narratively in the background. This worked for a long time. Because the giving public trusted us to deliver help to those 'other' recipients, they didn't ask how we got it there, or what those recipients thought about it: we existed in a space of authority, and our voice was the voice of authority. But now, in a world of multiple voices, of opinions forged and published from every corner of the world, the ongoing relative silence of those that we seek to help looks suspect. As people

> *"In a world of multiple voices, of opinions forged and published from every corner of the world, the ongoing relative silence of those that we seek to help looks suspect."*

who work for NGOs, we need to consider a move out of this frame, allowing and facilitating direct communication between contributors and donors, creating a space for authentic communication.

This shift in working – a progressive move to listen to contributors – will also counter the circular and unhelpful 'negative/positive imagery' debate, which is too simplistic from both an audience and contributor perspective, damaging to the NGOs themselves as it places them in the position of exploiter, and to the contributors, whose portrayal is maintained in the passive recipient stereotype (see also Smyth and MacQuillin 2018, p19).

In 2017 David Lammy MP criticised Comic Relief for their portrayal of Africa, stating:

"Comic Relief should be helping to establish an image of African people as equals to be respected rather than helpless victims to be pitied. So rather than Western celebrities acting as our tour guides to Band Aid Africa, why not let those who live there speak about the continent they know?" (Lammy 2017.)

David Lammy MP

> *As a sector we have been suffering from originality inertia in the area of communications, having for decades invested in a model of communicating that places us and our donors centre frame.*

Lammy's call for Comic Relief reflects criticism of the Western media's portrayal of Africa, which has included analysis that states "the most prominent issues seemed to emphasise a lack of contextualisation, bias, negativity, and a sensationalist approach to news" (Nothias and Cheruiyot 2019, p146). While this may be more relevant to the media than to NGOs who, while contributing to the communications landscape, are not media organisations, Lammy's point about people speaking for themselves is important and valid. Save The Children's *The People in the Pictures* report cites a proverb heard repeatedly in Niger – "a song sounds sweeter from the author's mouth". (Warrington and Crombie 2017, p60). NGOs should be embracing the potential created by the democratisation in storytelling practises to both hear and make the "sweeter" sounds of people speaking for themselves and mediating their own stories that have been present in social media storytelling practises for so long now.

It is not hyperbole to say that consulting with those we help, and subsequently changing our storytelling practises, are part of the keys to our ongoing survival. ❻

3
Existing research

There is only a small selection of studies that actively seek to hear and capture contributor opinions of their portrayal in content. In a widespread search of the literature, only eight published studies, and one unpublished one, came to light (though it is of course possible that there are more, so apologies to these authors for not including their work). These were:

Published:

1. *Deconstructing 'poverty porn' in Uganda* (Chung 2013)

2. *Faces of the needy: The portrayal of destitute children in the fundraising campaigns NGOs in India* (Bhati and Eikenberry 2016)

3. *Pictures of me: User views on their representation in homelessness fundraising appeals* (Breeze and Dean 2012)

4. *Representing disability in charity promotions* (Barnett and Hammons 1999)

5. *Slum discourse, media representations and* maisha mtaani *in Kibera, Kenya* (Ekdale 2014)

6. *The people in the pictures: Vital perspectives on Save the Children's image making* (Warrington and Crombie 2017)

7. *The production of a contemporary famine image: The image economy, indigenous photographers and the case of Mekanic Philipos* (Clark 2004)

8. *Which image do you prefer? A study of visual communications in six African countries* (Girling 2018)

Unpublished:

9. *Depicting Injustice: Internal report for Save the Children UK* (Miskelly and Warrington 2010)

# 1. Deconstructing poverty porn in Uganda

Leah Chung (2013)

This is a self-published Masters project by a communications advisor for USAID, for which she received funding to travel to Uganda to ask Ugandan people for their opinions on charity communications. It starts from the researcher's position that much of what charities create *is* poverty porn, which is slightly problematic, methodologically, as this opinion may have swayed results, and is colloquial and (self-confessedly) highly qualitative in terms of how it reports its findings. However, in a space where these types of studies are few and far between, hearing responses to the questions makes it a useful addition to this area of debate.

When asked how they felt about how Africa was portrayed generally, the respondents answered that "many were sick of the dark, pestilential imagery of poverty, war, and disease that the Western media kept feeding the public". When asked how they would prefer to be portrayed, the middle classes responded that "they wanted the positive aspects of Africans reflected in the media – hardworking, intelligent people independent of Western support"; but the poorer people living in slums mostly said that they just wanted support and were aware of the potential stories for support swap that can take place:

"According to Ismail, one of the interviewees from the Kikaramoja slums in Jinja, he was fed up with Westerners coming in and out of the slums, gathering dirty children, and taking lots of photos of them. He understood it was a business and expressed contempt towards the practice. However, if the incessant photo-taking came with support, whether that was free meals for the kids or patronage of the local paper jewellery business, it was fine."

Chung concludes that problematic stereotypes go both ways in terms of how Ugandans think about the Western world, as well as the more well-reported views about how the West views Africa. She argues that there is a need for consideration of who gets to take part in the debate about representation, and how they take part. She also concludes that the positive/negative debate is not helpful, as it doesn't provide an answer to this problem. Taking a more nuanced approach to storytelling is a more useful focus.

If a Western NGO were to fundraise for poverty alleviation, which advertisement would you prefer?
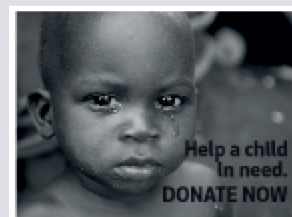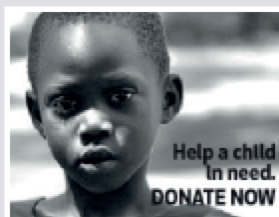
Leah Chung's research showed children preferred fundraising images with a smiling child. Is the response of adults because they are more pragmatic about fundraising, or that they have become habituated to "Afro-pessimistic" portrayals? See also the summary of Girling (2018) on p17, who also presented contributors with similar images.

ADULTS   Ages 18-50+

24%   33%   43%
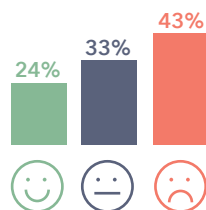
CHILDREN   Ages 12-17
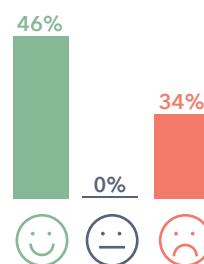
46%   0%   34%

2. Faces of the needy: the portrayal of destitute children in the fundraising campaigns of NGOs in India

Abhishek Bhati and Angela M. Eikenberry (2016)

This paper focuses on the portrayal of children in fundraising campaigns by NGOs working in India and answers the following questions:

- How do children feel about their portrayal in the images of fundraising campaigns?

- How do photographers or managers/directors affiliated with NGOs view their portrayal of destitute children?

Using image analysis, interviews and focus groups with both children in NGO programmes as recipients of aid, and the people working for the NGOs (whether as staff or contractors), this study demonstrates that children have a good level of understanding of how imagery is used to tell stories for fundraising. As with many of the other studies that gathered analysis directly from contributors, these children stated that they wished to highlight why they needed help, but also that they wished not only to be portrayed as needing help; they wanted to show the full story of their lives – the good and happy as well as the hard.

3. Pictures of me: user views on their representation in homelessness fundraising appeals

Beth Breeze and Jon Dean (2012)

Published in 2012, this research solicited the opinions of young people experiencing homelessness in five UK locations, using focus groups to glean their input and thoughts around how people experiencing homelessness were portrayed in charity communications. The intention of this study was to explore "the tension between discomfort at the use of potentially exploitative images and the goal of maximum fundraising success" (Breeze and Dean 2012, p133) in a domestic setting. The findings were largely similar to Bhati and Eikenberry's (2012) overseas study, in that participants expressed a sophisticated understanding of why imagery of suffering was often used, and did not particularly mind its use, but expressed that more nuanced communications that also contained a fuller story (for example *why* people had become homeless) would be preferable.

4. Representing disability in charity promotions

J. Barnett and S. Hammons (1999)

This short paper, published in 1999 by a social psychology researcher and a psychologist working at Broadmoor Hospital in Berkshire in the UK, examines the opinions of people with disabilities to two charity awareness raising adverts, one from the MS Society and one from the then-named Spastic Society (now called Scope). The researchers spoke to 139 participants, a relatively large number, which they divided into two groups, 80 from what the researchers called the 'general public' (people who did not identify as having a disability), and 59 who were registered as disabled. The findings were divided into 'active' and 'passive' responses. For active responses – people who saw the adverts and wanted to take action – the responses from the two groups were the same. For passive responses – which were described as responses that included "guilt, sadness, pity and sympathy" (Barnett and Hammond 1999, p313) – the disabled group strongly rejected communications which elicited these types of feelings, stating that:

"The strong rejection of such responses on the part of the 'disabled' [scare quotes in original] group gives empirical grounds for suggesting that posters evoking such a representation of disability are 'negative' from their point of view." (ibid, p313)

This paper is very short, with some areas of analysis missing, and also some problematic assumptions around what generates response in audiences, but is useful in that it is a very early example of eliciting subjects' response to their own portrayal.

---

5. Slum discourse, media representations and maisha mtaani in Kibera, Kenya

Brian Ekdale (2014)

Between 2009 and 2012, Brian Ekdale – an academic at the University of Iowa who specialises in media about Africa – spent 11 months in Nairobi investigating the difference between how the area of Kibera in Nairobi is depicted in media and by NGOs, and how its residents experience their lives there and their own narrative about the area.

He interviewed 22 community media producers, and 34 residents unaffiliated with these organisations. The findings demonstrate a consistent lack of nuance from the media and NGOs, who show Kibera as a place of suffering and hardship, in direct conflict with the residents who, while acknowledging the existence of hardship for some, consistently repeat messages demonstrating the nuance of living there and highlighting the importance of context in communicating any messages about Kibera.

In one particularly relevant section, Ekdale reflects on the benefits of this overriding negative narrative for the NGOs who work there, stating that "NGOs…benefit in multiple ways from the public's acceptance of exaggerated claims from this community. NGOs are constantly competing with one another for donor funds and media coverage, therefore pleas for additional resources and attention are amplified by the community's perceived severity of need" (Ekdale 2014, p103).

---

6. The People in the Pictures: Vital perspectives on Save the Children's image making

Siobhan Warrington and Jessica Crombie (2017)

This study – carried out between 2015 and 2017 by Siobhan Warrington (researcher and founder or Oral Testimony Works) and the author of this current paper (see bio on p4) – is the largest of the available documents. It interviews 202 people from four countries: the UK, Niger, Bangladesh and Jordan (where the interviewees were from the Syrian refugee population), who were contributors to Save the Children's content, as well as their wider families and communities. A small number of local staff then took part in a number of one-to-one interviews, focus group discussions and workshops to glean their opinions on three research questions. These were:

•   What motivated people to contribute to Save the Children's content?

•   What did they think about the process of having their story gathered?

•   What did they think about the portrayal in content?

Findings were varied but included contributors wanting to 'give back' as well as feelings of helplessness and hoping for more help when asked about motivations. There was a general feeling of positivity about the content gathering process, although it identified a failure to carry out a properly informed consent process (recognised as a sector wide problem). Most surprisingly there were no calls not to show negative portrayal, but alongside that most people expressed a desire to tell their own stories their own way and not to be seen in only one stereotypical way.

Images from a selection of the content used in the research

7. The production of a contemporary famine image: The image economy, indigenous photographers and the case of Mekanic Philipos

DJ Clark (2004)

This paper is a part of the Imaging Famine project, a large scale and interesting project carried out in the early 2000s to investigate how famines have been represented from the 19th century until the time of the study. Clark, a photographer and academic who has specialised in examining how famines are depicted, here explores the 'trade' in photographic images, the resulting economic models that depend on those images, and how this impacts what we are shown and by whom.

The study centres on a visit by Bob Geldof to Ethiopia in May 2003 and an image of Geldof holding a malnourished baby (Mekanic Philipos, whose name is mentioned in the title). It contains one short interview with the baby's mother, Bezunesh Abraham, where Clark asks her about her representation and how she felt about the image being discussed. While the quote from Abraham is extremely short, this is a very interesting paper examining how stereotypes are made and maintained, but also a very early example of someone asking the subject of an image for their opinion on their own image.

Clark concludes that the argument that images of suffering are 'pornographic' and that those portrayed would be horrified by their depiction is too simplistic as those who feature in the imagery often take a more pragmatic view, not liking the imagery, but recognising that it is a part of the economic process of gaining help.

8. Which image do you prefer? A study of visual communications in six African countries
David Girling 2018

This report, the second largest of the group and published in 2018, asked beneficiaries of aid about their perception and opinion of images used in aid communication, and aimed to find out what images these people might select for fundraising purposes if they were in a position to do so. Girling, an academic from the University of East Anglia, carried out research to find out what groups in six sub-Saharan African countries felt about existing NGO content from nine UK-based charities. It then went on to show three mock adverts depicting the same child – smiling in one, neutral in another, sad in the final version – and ask participants for their opinions on which image they would 'prefer', alongside other research questions designed to elicit responses about image use when depicting people from the African continent.

Findings reflected those from *The People in the Pictures* (Warrington and Crombie 2017), demonstrating that most people interviewed had a sophisticated understanding of the power of communications, and an acknowledgement that while the charity content viewed *did* represent an accurate view of Africa, these images made people feel sad, and that they would prefer greater diversity of representation, with Africa too often made to look "inferior and a continent in need" (Girling 2018, p11).

9. Depicting injustice: Internal report for Save the Children UK
Clodagh Miskelly and Siobhan Warrington

Save the Children's first foray into systematic collection of contributor opinions was carried out in partnership with Dr Paul Lowe from the London College of Communication. This study aimed to gather both UK audience and overseas contributor responses to photographs made by photographers for Save the Children to gather their responses to the types of images used by NGOs in their communications. While unpublished, the study paved the way for and inspired The People in the Pictures, and was used internally at Save the Children to analyse and review the use of images by the NGO.

4
What the research tells us

4.1 Contributor research challenges

One of the challenges with research investigating contributor opinions is site specificity and remembering that no one person or community can speak for all represented in charity content. As stated in *Which Image do you Prefer?*, "this is a study based on a very limited selection of informants, and we cannot generalise from the findings of this research" (Girling 2018, p6). *The People in the Pictures* (Warrington and Crombie 2017) sought opinions from a significant number of people in four countries, but this is still limited and limiting. It is tempting to hear from those in these studies and position them as spokespeople for all who receive aid globally, but to do this would be to further silence those whose voices are not included. Instead we should remember that "the findings provide an interesting, if restricted, insight into how aid communications are perceived at the receiving end" (Girling 2018, p6), seek to hear from as many as we can, and take the opinions of those that we have sought as theirs and theirs alone, existing to inform our decision making and actions, but not be cited verbatim as a generalised view for anyone else that we seek to portray.

What also emerges from this research is the focus on analysing imagery, rather than wider content materials. It seems probable that this research focus is partly due as a response to the critical debates on 'poverty porn' (see s4.2 for more detail on the creation and use of this term) which have often focused on image making, and partly down to a preference for images over copy as a research tool due to the history of image elicitation in anthropological and ethnographic research; asking a participant to respond to an image will often generate a fuller response.

However, this focus can provide incomplete data as NGOs never present imagery alone, and the copy or surrounding materials in a piece of content, as well as the wider communications landscape into which it is presented, can entirely change the context of an image and therefore the response to that image, as described in a previous paper in this project (Smyth and MacQuillin 2018, pp14-17). *The People in the Pictures* analysed finished content as a whole rather than individual images, due to an awareness that this would be more likely to provide data that is indicative of real responses to the real world materials (Warrington and Crombie 2017, see pp12-16 for examples of content used in the study).

4.2 The prioritisation of donor voices and the 'right way' to tell stories

From both the NGO and the academic sectors, there are many more studies focusing on donor reactions to content than there are focusing on contributor opinions (Breeze and Dean [2017, p134] cite a long list for those that wish to investigate this further). From the NGO side, this is of course driven by a financial imperative – knowing how your donors react is critical to your ongoing existence. As Ostrander and Schervish (1990, p73) state, "philanthropy…tends to be driven more by the supply of philanthropic resources than by the demand for them based in recipient needs"; it is "supply-led and therefore…donors…have more power in the relation than recipients" (ibid, p92).

A recent paper on fundraising self-regulation published by the European Center for Not-for-profit Law - *Fundraising Self-Regulation: An Analysis*

> *"The goal of entirely eliminating stories of need is based in a belief structure where the opinions of those reviewing content are prioritised above those of the people who tell their own stories."*

and Review (MacQuillin, Sargeant and Day 2019) – explored the different accountabilities that NGOs have: upwards to donors and downwards to beneficiaries. The paper reports that studies have shown that donors often win out as they are the most powerful stakeholders, with "'downward accountability'…therefore weak, even though it has been argued that because [NGOs] claim to speak on beneficiaries' behalf, they have a moral obligation to be accountable to them" (ibid, p35).

Research on donor reactions has been well funded with anecdotal reports from observers of the use of ever more sophisticated ways of gauging reactions: from traditional focus groups to wiring up donors to machines that measure their eye movements, heart rates and brain activity in order to measure their emotional responses to content stimuli second by second. Even in early studies designed to capture contributor opinions, donor input was necessary to make it financially viable. *Depicting Injustice* (Miskelly and Warrington, unpublished) was ground-breaking in that it sought to gather contributor input on imagery, yet still focused 50 per cent of its energies on capturing donor reactions to imagery used in Save the Children content.

The meat (and heat) of this debate though is around representation and opinions on what constitutes the 'right' kind of storytelling. Arguments for a change in representation have, for many decades, remained focused not on reviewing who tells a story and whether there is a different story to tell, but instead on the goal of eliminating stories of suffering or tropes of storytelling seen as derogatory by the storyteller or audience (most often Euro-American). Storytelling that showed suffering was famously called 'pornographic' by United Nations Development Programme staffer Jorgen Lissner in 1981 (Lissner 1981, p23), a term that has since evolved into the colloquialism 'poverty porn', which calls for a cessation in the use of content showing people in need and which remains widely used today. While well-meaning, the goal of entirely eliminating stories of need is still based in a belief structure where the opinions of those reviewing content are prioritised above those of the people who tell their own stories. As The *People in the Pictures* states (Warrington and Crombie 2017, p.vii):

"Discussions about human dignity have long focused on the image itself, with much of what is

❝ *"The notion that by removing certain types of imagery, or stories, we will imbue 'dignity' upon those who are suffering is problematic as it assumes that there is one universal way to experience dignity, and that it is possible to gift it to those who suffer."*

considered 'famine' imagery, such as images of children suffering from malnutrition, being regarded as undignified. While it is important to consider different ways of visually representing suffering, we must not rely on this to resolve the dignity problem. Instead, the site for addressing dignity must move beyond the image to the image-making process and towards recognition of the contributor as a stakeholder in that process. For contributors, having a choice in how they are represented and a clear understanding of the purpose and value of sharing their image and story is dignified. It is this notion of dignity which has informed and is reinforced by this research."

This is a critical point, and one that shifts the focus from removing images of suffering, to focusing on how we include the contributor in the process of telling their own story.

The notion that by removing certain types of imagery, or stories, we will imbue 'dignity' upon those who are suffering is problematic as it assumes that there is one universal way to experience dignity, and that it is possible to gift it to those who suffer. Both ideas based in the assumption that there is one (Euro-American centric) world view, and that this is the 'right' way to tell stories.

4.3 Contributors as sophisticated consumers and analysts of NGO storytelling

There can be a tendency to assume that those who suffer, who feature in NGO content, are not also consumers of these communications. This has been analysed in terms of media consumption in Nothias and Cheruiyot's article exploring media criticism in Kenya, where they state that "there remains a remarkable gap in understanding of how these media texts are consumed and resisted by audiences on the continent" (Nothias and Cheruiyot 2019, p137).

This gap of understanding exists similarly in the NGO sector. Yet in the studies reviewed for this paper, contributors regularly demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of communications, therefore evidencing regular consumption. One area of understanding was that content created by NGOs generates an emotional response from donors; another an understanding of what motivates donors. In *Pictures of Me*, the young homeless people surveyed "clearly expressed a preference for both accurate imagery and successful fundraising but, on the whole, felt that if charities were placed in a position of choosing between these goals, then maximising donations has to be the priority" (Breeze and Dean 2012, p135). While in *The People in the Pictures*, contributors in a focus group with older children aged 14-18 in Jordan explained that "happiness doesn't move people" (Warrington and Crombie 2017, p53), and in a focus groups with men in Jordan that "if people see we are helping ourselves they will forget us and not want to help us" (ibid). Contributors, themselves responding to 'sad' imagery with empathy and a desire to help those in need, consistently demonstrated that they understood the fundraising model behind the telling of their story in a certain way.

The social psychology underpinning the need to create some sense of emotional arousal is described in the second volume of Rogare's relationship fundraising review (Sargeant, MacQuillin and Shang 2016, pp10-12), while the effect of sad faces is described in the *You've Been Reframed* project's paper on positive and negative framing (Smyth and MacQuillin 2018, pp14-15).

Contributors expressed the desire to choose what stories are told, but when asked what these stories would be about, they too picked stories showing need. The adult male focus group in Jordan during *The People in the Pictures* research listed many stories they wished to tell, most demonstrating need, and including (ibid, p52):

"There are no hospitals here, I would like to show sick people not getting help. We only get headache pills, nothing else."

"I would show people who were hurt in the war and lost their limbs."

"I would show people whose tents have been flooded."
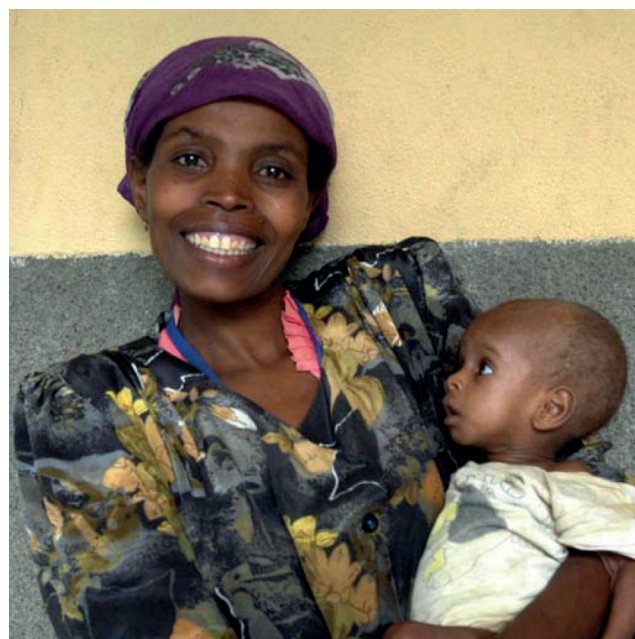
Bezunesh Abraham and her baby Mekanic Philipos in 2004. Even though an image showing her with a look of despair as she held Mekanic was widely in the global media, Abraham was not troubled by this, and even asked for a copy of the photo to be put in her home. Photo © DC Clark. Thanks to DC Clark for his permission to use this image.

These finding would seem to suggest that the outcome of a portrayal showing suffering is not always problematic for the contributor, but it must be remembered that the very reason these people are being surveyed is because they are in a moment in their lives where they are in need.

When those who are experiencing suffering were asked their opinions on content showing *their* suffering, the responses, while complex, did not tally to the widely-held assumption from those that subscribe to the Values Frame that these images were abhorrent to those who featured in them. In *The Production of a Contemporary Famine Image*, the author describes the response of the mother, Bezunesh Abraham, of the malnourished child discussed in the paper:

"Abraham clearly felt that having her picture taken contributed to the well-being of her son and therefore happily obliged. Given that UNICEF benefited from the coverage and were responsible for her son's medical treatment, this appears to be justified. Fiorente's [the photographer] contact sheet of the event shows a variation of facial expressions including her smiling, but all those published show a look of despair. Abraham was not troubled by this and asked

for a copy to put in her home." (Clark 2004, p20.)

In *The People in the Pictures*, a woman in Niger who featured in a DRTV (Direct Response Television) advertisement showing her child suffering from malnutrition explained that while she felt sad watching the film and remembering how sick her son was at that time, she also felt that the film is a true reflection of their situation:

"What was filmed is the way it is. There is no lie in it – that is the way it is… even what he said about the soup being prepared without salt." (Warrington and Crombie 2017, p58).

And in *Which Image do you Prefer?*, a 58-year-old man from Ethiopia said that "the ads show the problem that exists. The shortage of water or the problems that are shown exist in real life" (Girling 2018, p16).

While this means that the call for eliminating stories showing suffering may not be the correct response to this issue, this does not mean that contributors were satisfied with their wider overall portrayal, or the process by which they shared their stories. These responses do not mean that these people *liked* these representations, but rather that they didn't *dislike* them. Instead "participants…suggested that, as well as the problems, it was important to also show the positive outcomes of development programmes" (ibid, p11). Overall there was a strong sense that the monolithic representations of those who experience suffering was one that almost all participants in the related studies wished to challenge and overturn.

Alongside this wish for broader and less monolithic representations, somewhat unsurprisingly contributors responded to 'sad' images as do donors, with empathy and emotion. In *Faces of the Needy*, when picking images that they 'liked' or 'disliked' children "did not like the image of the new-born baby who is sick or maybe dead", or another of a child begging in a major traffic thoroughfare, stating

> ❝ *"With empathy comes a humanising of the story subject, and a sense of responsibility, a fuller understanding and therefore a greater desire to help more completely than just giving a pound."*

that "the mother of this child might have died and the child is an orphan now" (Bhati and Eikenberry 2016, p36). For a human capable of empathy, this content is not pleasant to look at, and for someone who is also in a position of need, these images will potentially have an even greater emotional resonance. However, this preference for images that do not show suffering should not be misconstrued as contributors not wanting these images to be used.

There was debate amongst contributors in the Breeze and Dean study about the need to generate empathy rather than just sympathy. Sympathy was felt to be too much of a surface response, incapable of achieving real change. As one homeless young man stated:

"For the majority of people, you show a young kid looking sad, you show an old man freezing to death, it's gonna play on people's heartstrings... but I don't think it's gonna do anything about the issues." (Breeze and Dean, p139).

With empathy, it was felt, comes a humanising of the story subject, and a sense of responsibility, a fuller understanding and therefore a greater desire to help more completely than just giving money.

> ❝ *"There was a strong sense that the monolithic representations of those who experience suffering was one that almost all participants in the related studies wished to challenge and overturn."*

This debate needs further unpacking as it is larger than can be covered in this paper, but it is worth considering that as longer form stories are starting to have great traction on online platforms, that a story told more fully may create a richer donor engagement based in the deeper feelings of empathy than one told purely to elicit a momentary response based in sympathy.

4.4 The need for nuance
In all the published studies, there was a problematic space between the need (or desire) of NGOs to simplify a message of need for a donor, and the preference from the contributor to show the

inevitable complexity of their own personal situation, a complexity that usually demonstrated agency on their part, alongside need. This played out in multiple interviews. In *Pictures of Me*, homeless contributors "felt that most images were too generic and failed to contribute any understanding to the issues surrounding homelessness to potential donors" (Breeze and Dean 2012, p136). In *The People in the Pictures*, one contributor from the UK said that though she got good feedback from people, there had been a couple of internet stories that had been "quite nasty about me", which she found frustrating, as those people weren't shown the "full story" and therefore didn't understand why she found herself in a situation where she needed help (Warrington and Crombie 2017, p47).

These contributors expressed a desire to either show the agency that they are demonstrating in their own difficult circumstances or be given the space to explain that they are not at 'fault' in finding themselves in need. NGOs simplify to draw attention deliberately away from this complexity, as with more information comes further questions, and with questions inevitably comes judgement as to whether the individual featured is "deserving or undeserving, worthy of scorn or sympathy" (Hester 2014, p214). Keeping the story simple "serves to give the abstract idea of poverty a human face, but…the issue is reduced to the level of the atomised individual viewer feeling" (ibid) rather than humanising the person whose story is being told. This tension continues, but the investment of many NGOs into either more long form storytelling, or using one person's story on multiple channels simultaneously, the total of which adds to a fuller story, is an interesting step in a direction where this tension may be resolvable.

Adjacent to the issue of complexity is the issue of the level of need that is necessary to drive donations. Children interviewed in *Faces of the Needy* explained that "they liked the photos where they were portrayed as happy with clean clothes and proper hair" (Bhati and Eikenberry 2016, p35), a position that many of us would agree to preferring when we are captured in an image. This may seem like an issue at odds with the requirement to show need, but even from these children the overwhelming consensus from contributors was that "while…children said that they like to see themselves as happy and in a good light [they] also

wanted to showcase the problems they face in their daily life to the outside world" (ibid, p37).

The tension is hard to resolve, but the risk of ignoring it is to end up in a polarised and dangerous discourse where a whole group of people, or indeed geographical location, end up becoming a stereotype, and nothing but a stereotype. In Brian Ekdale's study focusing on Kibera, a neighbourhood (often described as a slum) in Nairobi, Kenya, the author acknowledged that "there is a significant disconnect between the lives experienced by Kibera residents…and the prevailing discourse about Kibera" with "sensationalism and distortion… rampant, while caution and complexity…[are] hard to come by" (Ekdale 2014, p93). While Kibera is viewed by outsiders as "a dreadful place defined by what it lacks" (ibid, p93), people who live there describe their experience as much more varied – "we have different classes of life. We have those who live, we have those who struggle, and also we have those who survive" (ibid, p99). This single story of neediness does nothing to challenge the stereotyping of the people of Kibera, or the children in India's *Faces of the Needy*, and it does nothing to address what they want to show of their lives.

As we have demonstrated, all studies agree that while contributors do not mind being shown in a position of need, they do not want that to be the only way that they are depicted. This is a critical point and worth dwelling upon. To continue showing need without changing the process by which we gather stories, or without investing in other, broader depictions, would be to undermine the research findings entirely, and fail to recognise the "clear frustration" from contributors that "charitable imagery could reinforce existing stereotypes" (Breeze and Dean 2012, p136), ignoring questions heard in research such as "what about Africans helping Africans?" and "where are the black doctors in these images?" (Girling 2014, p12).

Contributors clearly have much to say about the process of telling their stories and their later portrayal, but very few platforms on which to share these opinions. It is our responsibility to create these platforms, both privately in our processes and publicly through our content. There is a recognition within the NGO community that stories could be told differently, and many have utilised the wealth of existing community-based, participatory and

collaborative projects to create communications materials; but we have not yet seen these penetrating the fundraising formats so often used in any mainstream way.

4.5 Practical steps

We have recognised that there is a real dearth of materials that allow us to hear what contributors want to tell us. But what is even more scant are studies that put forward tangible solutions for NGOs to trial. *Which Image do you Prefer?* contains a list of suggested questions to consider when using images of people (Girling 2014, p33), but *The People in the Pictures* is the only study that contains a recommendations section that lists a series of practical steps (Warrington and Crombie 2017, pp67-71 – see p24 of this paper). While many of these have been tested or testing is under way by Save the Children, the findings of these tests have not been made public. There are initiatives to tackle this by Bond, which now hosts The People in the Pictures group[1] for internal debate and data sharing by NGO sector workers, but sector-wide learnings are hard to come by, and so steps forward remain small and locally focused rather than widespread.

Before we come on to conclusions, one practical failing of the sector as a whole must be flagged. This is in the area of consent. In all studies reviewed for this paper – except *Which Image do you Prefer?* which didn't ask about this area – contributors expressed concern about consent. In *Pictures of Me* a young mother "discovered a photo of herself and her child in a charity newsletter for which she claimed that her permission had not been sought". It is worth noting that she went on to state that she didn't mind this as "I'm using the homeless charity (and) they do great things for me" (Breeze and Dean, pp135-136). In *Faces of the Needy* "no child expressed understanding that the purpose of images is to generate funds for NGOs" (Bhati and Eikenberry 2016, p38). And in The *People in the Pictures*, examples were found from Jordan, Niger and Bangladesh of contributors who didn't fully understand and often didn't even remember giving their consent, despite the fact that the consent form is universally used by Save the Children, with evidence of those very contributors having given their consent.

This represents a significant failing of the sector. There are many ways to improve this process, some detailed in *The People in the Pictures*, but what must be recognised is that an effective consent process is the keystone of partnership, and that without significant investment in improving, testing and monitoring this process, it will be difficult to ever claim true collaboration with contributors. ⑥

---

1   https://www.bond.org.uk/groups/people-in-the-pictures - accessed 11 March 2020

Practical recommendations

Incorporating contributors into the content-gather process

Summarised from People in the Pictures (Warrington and Crombie 2017, pp67-71)

1. Invest in creative and collaborative approaches to image-making, e.g.:
   - Enable contributors to become image-makers themselves
   - Invest in multiple stories over time with the same individuals.

2. Uphold contributors' rights and fulfil the duty of care.

3. Informed consent to be understood as a process with clear procedures in place
   - It is a two-way and multi-stage process
   - Ensure there are child-friendly version of consent processes.

4. Commit to sensitive and effective communication before, during and after image-gathering
   - Communication with contributors before the shoot is essential to support informed consent and manage expectations
   - Develop resources (and approaches) to effectively convey purpose and use to contributors
   - Invest in and insist on good translators to support good communication with contributors
   - Ensure personal consistency by making sure that contributors' contact with [the NGO] before, during and after image gathering is with the same individual
   - Invest in follow-up with contributors and the return of photographs and content.

5. Ensure that human dignity is upheld in the image-making process, not just in the image itself.

5
Conclusions and next steps

What has become clear through this review is that aid recipients are currently not able to state their desires for portrayal fully. As stated in *User Voice: Putting People at the Heart of Impact Practice*:

"There is often a lack of reflection from charities about why they do or do not prioritise user voice, and there is a tendency towards tokenistic or selective use of feedback" (Curvers et al 2016, p6).

What is also clear is that when recipients are consulted, the results are interesting and practical; in all eight studies contributors put forward both useful opinions and powerful creative ideas about how their own stories could be told, demonstrating the potential for fruitful partnership. With NGOs focused on the donor responses, the flip side of the coin is that the other group to whom their responsibilities lie – the contributors – is neglected. This creates an ethical challenge, and a real financial risk, both in regard to negative PR to the charities, as negative critiques of existing portrayal become more widespread, and to the potential for new types of fundraising that create greater connection and trust between donors and recipients.

Framing the question this way – as a tension between two stakeholders to whom fundraisers owe ethical responsibilities – brings the framing question within the ambit of Rights Balancing Fundraising Ethics, which principally argues that fundraisers must balance the duties they owe to donors and beneficiaries, so that any outcome is optimal for both while causing neither significant harm (MacQuillin 2016a; MacQuillin and Sargeant 2019). This approach has already been used in this debate to argue that the duties fundraisers have in respect of raising money and considering contributor's choices are both duties they owe to contributors (or 'beneficiaries' as they are termed in the MacQuillin paper), rather than between donors

and beneficiaries (MacQuillin 2016b, 2016c). This insight, it is argued, gives a different perspective on the Values Frame vs. Fundraising Frame question, giving us new insights on how resolve this tension (ibid).

Another possible use of Rights Balancing Fundraising Ethics would be to consider whether fundraisers have a duty or responsibility to connect donors to aid recipients in a more meaningful way. Right now, the relationship between the donor and the recipient of aid "remains indirect and impersonal" and heavily "mediated by various… organisations and individuals" (Ostrander and Schervish 1990, p81). As Ostrander and Schervish posit "engagement between donors and recipients has the potential for transforming the practise of philanthropy in a more profound way" (ibid, p95) by providing donors with material opportunities – and not just psycho-social rewards – through their relation to recipients. In turn, recipients (i.e. beneficiaries/contributors) are given "various kinds of nonmaterial resources – in addition to material support – such as respect, empowerment, and esteem when philanthropy is recognised and carried out as a reciprocal social relation" (ibid, pp95-96). The creation of this reciprocal relationship could mean the difference between the useful but ultimately cost-heavy cycle of acquisition and short-term donating, and the more cost-effective and desired process of donor retention and growth of support.

Aside from *The People in the Pictures,* these studies are also all carried out by academics, who are clearly knowledgeable about the NGO sector, and who write from a useful position of impartiality, but whose use of language can sometimes be alienating and confrontational to the NGO sector. Breeze and Dean's study on homelessness describes donor responses to content by stating that:

"…research shows that the public are more likely to respond to advertisements that <u>demean</u> sufferers than those in which charitable beneficiaries are shown in a <u>positive</u> light…" (Breeze and Dean 2012, p133, emphasis added.)

The choice of the words 'demean' and 'positive' contains subjective judgement, and their use creates tension and can contribute to poor working relationships between academics and NGOs who often feel under pressure to be more 'ethical' while also being asked to raise very significant amounts of money, a tension that as we have examined can be difficult to navigate. A more fruitful approach towards a shared goal is possible, but would need both parties to come to research with an impartial view, a willingness to learn from the other, and an empathy for the pressures and practical considerations that exist in the complex process that is the delivery of aid.

Finally we need to recognise two things.

First, that there is potential for telling different stories. We can achieve this by acknowledging that there is a common discourse that runs throughout NGO content debates about *how* we should tell

"A possible use of Rights Balancing Fundraising Ethics would be to consider whether fundraisers have a duty or responsibility to connect donors to aid recipients in a more meaningful way."

stories and *what* stories should be told – as Ekdale states "for a discourse to be challenged, it must first be named and recognised as something other than common sense" (Ekdale 2014, p104). It is only when we acknowledge this potential that we can take steps towards telling different stories in different ways.

Second, that contributors are as important as donors in providing us with the wherewithal to carry out our work, and treat them and their opinions accordingly, investing as much in seeking their input on all areas of our work as we do in eliciting donor opinions.

Changing our cultural thinking around these two areas is the first and most important step to creating a new way of telling stories, and a new way of doing business as NGOs. ◔

References

Barnett, J., and Hammons, S., (1999). Representing disability in charity promotions. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 9(4),309 – 314.

BBC (2019). Charities' sexual misconduct scandal. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cme28xx5grnt/charities-sexual-misconduct-scandal – accessed 5 March 2020

Bird, S., Dixon, H., Hope, C, and Yorke, H. (2018). Oxfam sex abuse scandal takes its toll as more than 1,200 people cancel monthly donations. *The Telegraph*, 13 February. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/02/13/oxfam-loses-donations-sex-abuse-scandal-takes-toll/ – accessed 1 March 2020.

Bhati, A., and Eikenberry, A.M. (2016). Faces of the needy: the portrayal of destitute children in the fundraising campaigns of NGOs in India. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 21(1),31-42.

Breeze, B., and Dean, J. (2012). Pictures of me: user views on their representation in homelessness fundraising appeals. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, *17*(2), 132-143.

Chung, L.E. (2013). Deconstructing 'poverty porn' in Uganda. https://leahericachung.com/deconstructing-poverty-porn – accessed 1 March 2020.

Clark, D.J. (2004). The production of a contemporary famine image: The image economy, indigenous photographers, and the case of Mekanic Philipos. Imaging Famine.org, 2004. http://www.imaging-famine.org/papers/djclarkfamine1.pdf accessed 10 March 2020.

Curvers, S., Hestbaek, C., Lumley, T. and Bonbright, D. (2016). *User voice: Putting people at the heart of impact practice*. London: New Philanthropy Capital.

Dolšak, N., and Prakash, A (2016). NGOs are great at demanding transparency. They're not so hot at providing it. *The Washington Post*, 22 February https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/02/22/ngos-are-great-at-demanding-transparency-theyre-not-so-hot-at-providing-it/ – accessed 1 March 2020.

Edelman (2017). *Edelman Trust Barometer*. https://www.edelman.com/research/2017-edelman-trust-barometer – accessed 1 March 2020.

Ekdale, B. (2014). Slum discourse, media representations and *maisha mtaani* in Kibera, Kenya. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies 35*(1), 92-108.

Girling, D. (2018). *Which image do you prefer? A study of visual communication in six African countries*. Oslo, Norway: RadiAid/SAIH –The Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund. https://www.framevoicereport.org/media/4513/rapportplusradiplusaidweb.pdf accessed 10 March 2020.

Harrington, M. (2017). Survey: people's trust has declined in business, media, government, and NGOs. *Harvard Business Review*, 16 January. https://hbr.org/2017/01/survey-peoples-trust-has-declined-in-business-media-government-and-ngos – accessed 1 March 2020.

Hester, H. (2014). Weaponizing prurience, in: Korte, B., and Regard, F. *Narrating Poverty and Precarity in Britain*, pp205-224. Berlin, Germany: DeGruyter.

Lammy, D. (2017). Africa deserves better from Comic Relief. *The Guardian*, 24 March. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/24/africa-comic-relief – accessed 1 March 2020.

Lissner, J. (1981). Merchants of misery. *New Internationalist*, 100: pp23 – 25.

MacQuillin, I.R. (2017). *You've been reframed: how beneficiaries are and ought to be represented in fundraising materials. Project outline and terms of reference*. London: Rogare – The Fundraising Think Tank. https://df618d67-1d77-4718-ac14-01d78db8f9d0.filesusr.com/ugd/8bc1412d3c55f8144d4e1d92f33f4d7a0cb202.pdf accessed 1 March 2020.

MacQuillin, I. R. (2016a). *Rights Stuff – fundraising's ethics gap and a new theory of normative fundraising ethics*. London: Rogare – The Fundraising Think Tank. Available at – https://www.rogare.net/normative-fundraising-ethics

MacQuillin, I.R. (2016b). You've been reframed part 1 – are fundraisers and programmatic delivery 'ideologically' divided about beneficiary images? *Critical Fundraising*, October 27. https://criticalfundraising.com/2016/10/27/new-ideas-youve-been-reframed-part-1-are-fundraisers-and-programme-delivery-ideologically-divided-about-beneficiary-images/ – accessed 1 March 2020.

MacQuillin, I.R. (2016c). You've been reframed part 2 - how we need to rethink the question of beneficiary images. *Critical Fundraising*, October 27. https://criticalfundraising.com/2016/10/27/new-ideas-youve-been-reframed-part-2-how-we-need-to-rethink-the-question-of-beneficiary-images/ – accessed 1 March 2020.

MacQuillin, I.R. and Sargeant, A. (2019). Fundraising ethics: A rights-balancing approach. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 160(1), 239-250.

MacQuillin, I.R., Sargeant, A and Day, H (2019) *Fundraising self-regulation: An analysis and review*. The Hague, Netherlands: European Center for Not-for-profit Law.

Miskelly, C. and Warrington, S. (Unpublished, 2010). *Depicting injustice: Final report*. Internal report for Save the Children UK.

Nothias, T., and Cheruiyot, D. (2019). A "hotbed" of digital empowerment? Media criticism in Kenya between playful engagement and co-option. *International Journal of Communication*, 13, 24

Ostrander, S.A., and Schervish, P.G. (1990). Giving and getting: Philanthropy as a social relation, in: Van Til, J. (editor). *Critical Issues in American Philanthropy: Strengthening Theory and Practise*, pp67-98. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/

Sargeant, A. MacQuillin, I., and Shang, J. (2016). *Relationship fundraising: Where do we go from here? Volume 2 – theory from social psychology*. London: Rogare – The Fundraising Think Tank.

Smyth, R. and MacQuillin, I.R. (2018). *You've been reframed – discussion paper 2: What does research tell us about whether positive and negative framing raises more money*. London: Rogare – The Fundraising Think Tank.

Warrington, S and Crombie, J (2017). *The people in the pictures: Vital perspectives on Save the Children's image making*. London: Save the Children. https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12425/pdf/thepeopleinthepictures.pdf

Get in touch

Ian MacQuillin - Director
ianmacquillin@rogare.net
+44 (0)7977 422273

www.rogare.net
Twitter: @RogareFTT

Rogare – The Fundraising Think Tank CIC is a
community interest company registered in the UK,
registration number 11807930.

Rogare brand identity created by Rebecca Woodall
at Bluefrog Fundraising.

Associate Members

Rogare is supported in its work by a number of
Associate Members – partners to the fundraising
sector that share our critical fundraising ethos.
Our Associate Members are:

Ask Direct
Creative agency (Ireland)

Bluefrog
Creative agency (UK)

Stephen Thomas
Full-service fundraising
agency (Canada)

Ethicall
Telephone fundraising
agency (UK)