



CHARITY REPRESENTATIONS OF DISTANT OTHERS

An analysis of charity advertising
supporting international causes
in UK national newspapers

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RESEARCH QUESTION

What characters and subject matters are depicted in charity advertising campaigns supporting international causes in UK national newspapers?

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

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Charity advertising comes in many forms such as: television, newspaper and magazines, social media, radio, pop up banners, posters amongst others. Most charities use these channels to fundraise while engaging with a variety of stakeholders. In the past charities have been criticised for their shock tactics and using images of suffering to generate emotions of compassion and pity.

They have also been accused of dehumanising those depicted in the photographs and unnecessary use of stereotypes driven by unequal power dynamics of 'us' and 'them'. Critiques of charity communications also discuss the failure of charities to highlight structural causes which reinforce ongoing histories of colonialism. This criticism often warrants questions such as: how should charities portray the people they are trying to support and what is the damage of these representations? However, as Cameron and Kwiecien rightly observe many of the critiques are ideological and fail to address the business case for using different types of imagery.



Most academic critiques of NGO representations of poverty and development fail to seriously consider the financial pressures that drive NGOs to use imagery and messages that may be ethically problematic. An argument left implicit in many academic critiques is that NGOs should prioritize the ethical representation of poverty and development over the need to raise funds. The difficulty from the perspective of NGOs is that the kinds of images and messages that would satisfy the ethical standards of critical academics could well fail to attract the attention and donations of supporters. To argue that NGOs should not use images and messages that fail to present full and accurate contextual information, that sensationalise development work (e.g. through the use of celebrities), that reinforce values of self-interest, or that seek to persuade through emotional hooks rather than cognitive engagement is effectively to argue that NGOs should voluntarily cut their revenue.

Cameron and Kwiecien, 2022, p227



CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

Brief research context and review of academic literature

From the earlier days of the 1984/85 Ethiopian crisis, conversations around representation have blossomed within academic circles. In particular critiques of “poverty porn” (images of suffering children and poverty) were launched against INGOs whose portrayal of their aid beneficiaries unwittingly reproduced colonial stereotypes, reflecting and reinforcing current power imbalance and structural inequalities between the Global North and Global South. Given a growing awareness of charities’ critical roles in shaping understanding of global poverty and influencing perceptions of distant others in the Global North, more attention has been paid to charity communications, occasioning a slow but steady shift away from the use of classic-type ‘starving child’ images (Lissner, 1981) to what Bhati (2021) refers to as images of ‘deliberate positivism’. The international development sector has also seen major attempts to regulate, standardize and mainstream ethical storytelling through the creation of policies and guidelines for charity communications.

Some progress has been recorded, especially in the reduced usage of ‘shock appeal’ tactics. Yet, as recent studies seem to suggest, there are pockets of disparity across geographical regions in policies and practice, as well as obvious knowledge gaps among development practitioners. For instance, Vossen et al (2016) argue that British charities continue to use ‘pitiful images’ twice as much as charities elsewhere in Netherlands and Flanders, while Cameron and Kwiecken (2022) records a low appreciation of the tensions between ethical and effective communications, among top Canadian NGO communications professionals. Moreso, with the preponderance of girls, women, mother and child images in charity communications

against the background of a demasculinised Global South (signalled by the almost total absence of men, male figures, or reference to bad male leaders) charities continue to reinforce difference and distance between the Global North and Global South, reiterating stereotypes of an active, dynamic giving Global North and its binary of a vulnerable, infantile, gratefully receiving Global South (Dogra 2012, Bhati 2021). By and large, there is growing evidence that more donors and stakeholders are beginning to demonstrate an appreciation and preference for well-rounded narratives. Imagery and communications that upset traditional power dynamics and present wholesome accounts of the communities they work in are now being chosen in favour of those that don’t (Devex 2023; Crombie and Girling, 2022; Li and Atkinson, 2020).

Several factors have accelerated charity strategies and policies to reconsider the potential damage of representation and the stories they tell. One of the main contributing factors is the need to decolonise narratives by reducing stereotypes and the “white gaze” through which we see other countries. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in 2020 were a significant catalyst in charities rapidly adopting or updating their ethical imagery policies. The COVID-19 pandemic was also instrumental in charities being forced to employ locally based photographers and filmmakers in the countries where they deliver programmes, as they were unable to “helicopter in” their staff based in the UK, USA, Norway etc due to travel restrictions. As Girls Not Brides say in their new guidelines for ethical communications “Before content gathering, it is a good idea to create a list of professionals in the location where the content is regularly gathered. This allows the person gathering content to move quicker with trusted individuals. The content gathering team should be assembled with

sensitivity to race, gender, ethnicity, age and cultural norms, and their intersections” (Girls Not Brides, 2022, p45). Using local photographers who understand the cultural context will help reduce the colonial discourses which have resulted in images which depict infantilised, feminised and racialised representations of subjects.

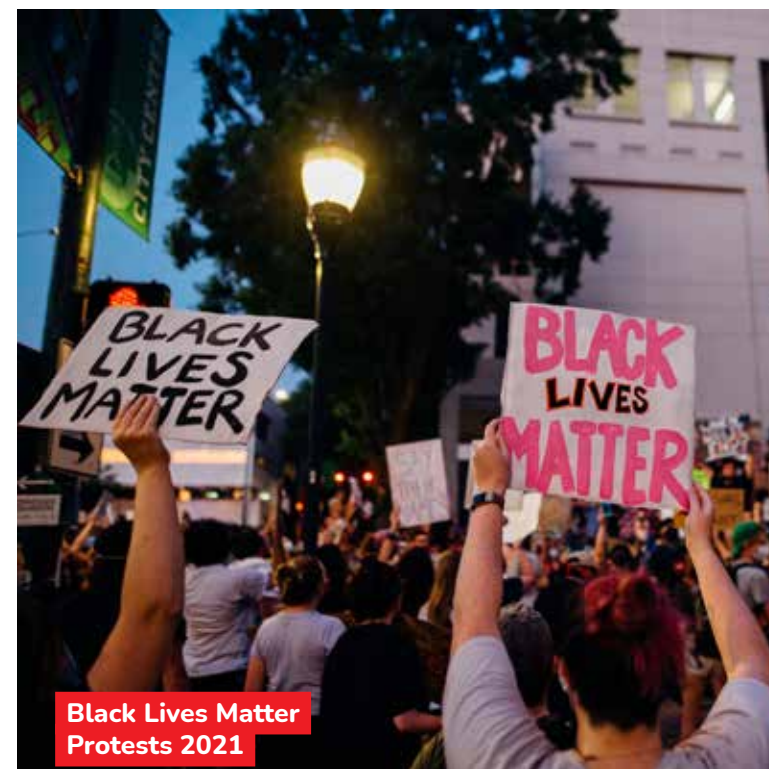


Image credit: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/protesters-holding-signs-4552841/>

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

Industry codes of conduct and charity ethical imagery guidelines

There have recently been many codes of conduct and industry-wide discussions to help “improve” the ethical use of imagery in storytelling and fundraising. See Table 1 below for a list of some of the guidelines published since 2005. Although there have been many recent codes of conduct from large international NGO consortiums some have been around since the early 1990s. However, many of these NGO consortiums do not have the time to monitor the effectiveness, so how do we know if they are successful?

Additionally, many charities and development organisations have published new or updated ethical imagery guidelines and policies, for example [Oxfam Content Guidelines](#) (2020), [USAID Photo Guide for Partners](#) (2020), WaterAid Ethical Image Policy (2021) and [Girls Not Brides Guidelines for Ethical Communications](#) (2022). Other organisations such as [Chance for Childhood](#) have produced a resource hub, whilst [Action Aid UK](#) has made a video to show donors how they produce images in their campaigns work. An even bolder affront on charity (mis)communication, is [MSF’s recent video campaign](#) which seemingly assumes responsibility for years of perpetrating white saviour stereotypes and racial colonial tropes, through their use of stylistic silence in their choice of imagery, as well as significant erasure in other aspects of their organizational communications.

Dochas. Report on the Review of the Code of Conduct.	2005
CONCORD Code of Conduct on Images and Messages	2006
Canadian Council for International Cooperation	2009
Dochas. The Illustrative Guide to the Dochas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages	2014
BOND. Putting people in the pictures first. Ethical guidelines for the collection and use of content (images and stories).	2019
The Dignified Storytelling Handbook	2021
DEVEX. Better Conversations about Ethical Storytelling	2023
Dochas Guide to Ethical Communications	2023

TABLE 1. List of NGO consortium ethical codes of conduct

An analysis of charity advertising supporting international causes in UK national newspapers

This research examines the use of advertising for fundraising and advocacy purposes by charities found in 17 national weekend newspapers in the UK for a period of six months in 2021. It is believed that this empirical data set is important for both practitioners and academics to assess the production of charity messages in the public domain. The analysis aims to understand who is represented and how they are represented. The full dataset is available to peruse at www.charity-advertising.co.uk.

As one of the largest and currently most updated collection of charity advert images publicly available, this open-access dataset yields enormous benefits across the board, including a readily available and reliable foundation for academic research, facilitating more nuanced understanding of evolving trends through evidence-based studies in the sector. Development practitioners and professionals can leverage this dataset to benchmark their charity communications and adjust their messaging to align with evolving expectations. This resource also holds potential value for longitudinal studies and comparative analysis, monitoring temporal patterns and identifying variations or consistency in representation of the distant other in charity advertising over time.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

For this study we collected 363 advertisements from charities, NGOs and INGOs in UK national newspapers. A six-month sampling period (6th March 2021 to 29th August 2021) was selected to examine the range of advertising supporting international causes. Each newspaper advertisement was analysed to produce a dataset which only included charities who were working in overseas countries, predominantly to help reduce poverty and inequality. However, all charity advertisements were included which also covered other subject matter such as advocacy, disaster relief, education, environmental impact, human rights and animal welfare. Both adverts and/or inserts are included in the analyses. A total of 187 advertisements/inserts were characterised as supporting issues in countries overseas. In total there were 541 images used across these 187 advertisements. Duplicate advertisements were retained in the sample to accurately assess how often the public are exposed to these types of images.

We wanted to compare this dataset from 2021 with a study by Dogra which focussed on messages from 2005/6 in national newspapers. Dogra's study was incredibly detailed and went on to form a whole book on the subject, *Representations of Global Poverty* published in 2012. For her analysis she included messages in newspapers as well as inserts, direct mail and leaflets (p20). The 2021 analysis presented in this report will only focus on newspaper adverts.

Dogra uses the expressions 'developed world' and 'majority world', which have been replicated in this study to assess the changes in charity messages since 2005/6. Developed and majority world were defined on the following criteria in this study:

Developed world (DW): West / North / Global World / First World / developed countries / rich countries/ self / we / us (our) / here

Majority world (MW): South / Global South / non-West / the Rest / underdeveloped / developing / less-developed / others / them / there / Third World / global poor / poor (countries, world, regions, communities)

Additionally, each image was also analysed to ascertain the subject matter, whether characters were depicted as active or passive, and the surroundings in which the images were taken. The supporting text was analysed to assess whether the characters were named, whether the location of the image was mentioned and if the photographer was credited or not. N.B. If images were credited as the organisation rather than a named photographer, they were coded as uncredited.

Saturday Newspapers	Sunday Newspapers	Weekend Editions
Daily Express	Daily Star Sunday	iWeekend
Daily Mail	Mail on Sunday	
Daily Star	Sun on Sunday	
Daily Telegraph	Sunday Express	
Mirror	Sunday Mirror	
The Guardian	Sunday Telegraph	
The Sun	The Observer	
The Times	The Sunday Times	

TABLE 2. List of 17 national weekend newspapers published in the UK used in the sample.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

Brief research context and review of academic literature

Lastly, we wanted to compare the data set with a more recent study of newspaper images (collected between January 2011 and December 2013) conducted by Vossen. We therefore adopted the same methodology to decipher how people were depicted and whether the images were deemed 'pitiful' or not. Vossen defines 'pitiful' as "people were visibly suffering from malnutrition, illness or hardship: crying, bleeding, dirty or sick".

Research Questions

RQ1. What characters are depicted in the images of charity newspaper advertisements in the UK?

RQ2. What subject matter is depicted in the images of charity newspaper advertisements in the UK?

RQ3. Which characters are depicted as passive or active?

RQ4. What is the frequency of 'pitiful images' of people in charity newspaper advertisements?

RQ5. Are characters named and geographic locations mentioned in the supporting text?

Limitations

Due to limited funding we were only able to purchase six months of national weekend newspapers. Ideally, we would have purchased mid-week newspapers and also extended the period to one or two years in length. A notable drawback is the potential ambiguities due to multiple images from the same charities e.g. MSF, the exclusion of which might have altered the results.

This, in effect, limits our ability to more accurately map an evolution of charity representation assemblage of cast and characters, particularly in their different roles as active/passive.

Although this study gives a good indication of how trends have changed in recent years, especially when compared to previous studies such as Dogra's (2012) and Vossen et al. (2016), it will be interesting to find out whether there are significant variations in charity adverts placed in midweek papers.

Moreso, given our exclusion of other advertising formats such as emails, direct mail, social media etc, from this study, further research can undertake a comparison to see if and how these possibly compound the already complex landscape of representation in charity advertising. We acknowledge that coding processes are by nature subjective, and that regardless of how comprehensive a codebook is, individuals will have different opinions on how to categorize an image. As such, another set of researchers with their worldviews and lived experiences could arrive at different conclusions over the same dataset. Lastly, the outcomes of any one study will undoubtedly be influenced by the world events at that time, therefore no studies will ever be directly comparable.

Notwithstanding the limitations, this study presents a valuable snapshot of evolution and trends in charity representation of the distant other, offering a basis of comparison for the past and a benchmark for further studies in the future. These may consider a longer time span, different geographical locations, and explore other methodological options, including analysis of dominant frames, and/or a textual analysis of supporting text and captions.



CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

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Number of charity adverts over six-month period

From the 6th of March 2021 to 29th August 2021 there were a total of 363 adverts in UK national weekend newspapers. Nearly two-thirds of these adverts (234 out of 363) were in just five newspapers: The Observer, The Guardian, iWeekend, The Times and the Daily Telegraph.

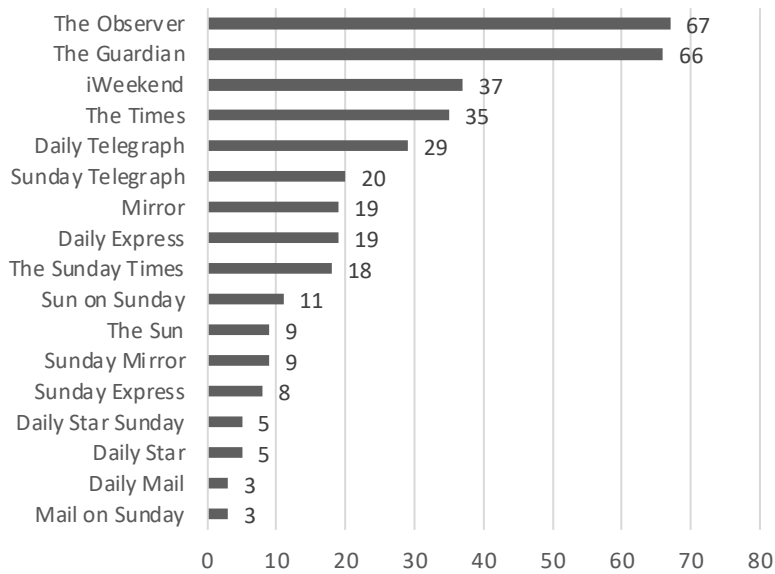


FIGURE 1. Breakdown of UK national newspapers with numbers of charity adverts in each

Categories of charity adverts

Just over half of the adverts (52%) during this six-month period were categorised as focussing on issues relating to international development. The next most popular categories were all aimed at supporting causes in the UK. The three most popular causes (in the UK) being Health (21%), Animal welfare (15%) and Hunger (6%) (see Figure 2).

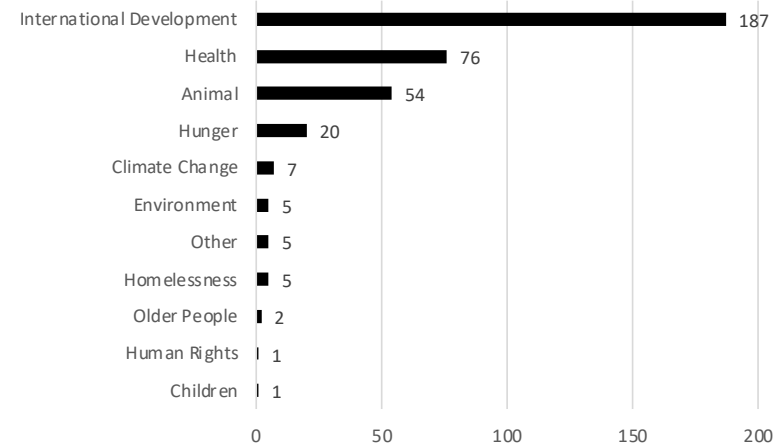


FIGURE 2. Categories of charity adverts in UK national newspapers.



CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Charity adverts supporting international causes

83% of adverts supporting international causes were concentrated in four of the main newspapers: The Observer (56), The Guardian (43), iWeekend (34), and The Times (23). The remaining 17% of adverts were placed in six newspapers: Daily Telegraph (12), Sunday Telegraph (8), The Sunday Times (6), Mirror (2), Sunday Mirror (2), Mail on Sunday (1). There were no adverts supporting international development causes in the Daily Express, Daily Mail, Daily Star, Daily Star Sunday, The Sun, Sun on Sunday and Sunday Express. This finding is interesting in itself – why do charities who support international causes concentrate their advertising efforts, thus increasing competition for attention, in ten national newspapers? When was the last time they trialled placing adverts in the weekend editions of the Express, Star or Sun? Does this targeting produce an unbalanced understanding of international causes in different UK demographics and newspaper readers?

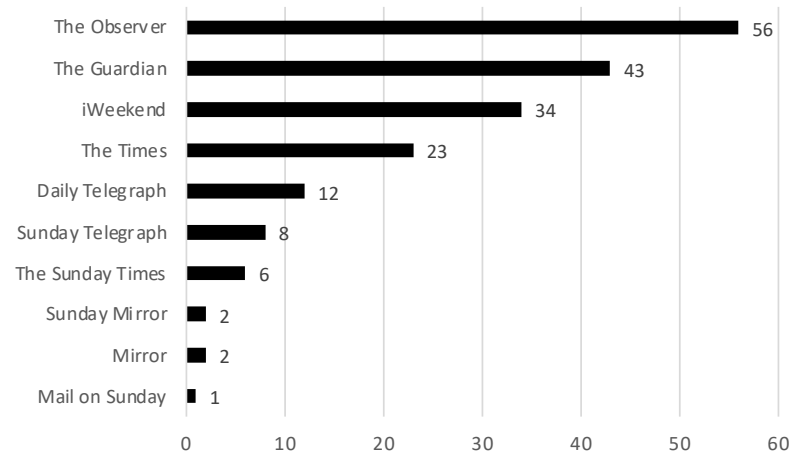


FIGURE 3. Breakdown of charity adverts supporting international causes in UK national newspapers

The rest of the research data provided will only focus on the 187 adverts supporting international development.

Adverts supporting international causes by month

Adverts were placed fairly evenly across each of the six months apart from May. The sharp increase in adverts were mainly aimed at raising funds for famines in Yemen and Kenya and to support the COVID crisis in India which spiked at this time.

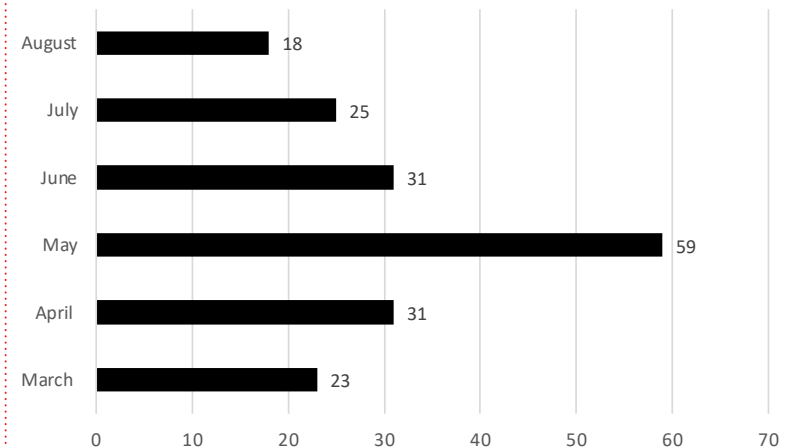


FIGURE 4. Number of charity adverts supporting international causes per month

CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Number of adverts by charity

A total of 27 charities placed an advert or insert within the national weekend newspapers during the study period. Doctors Without Borders placed the most advertising messages (53), which is more than double any other organisation. Four other organisations had over 10 messages: UNHCR (22), Sightsavers (20), UNICEF (17) and British Red Cross (14). These five organisations presented 67% of all the messages (126 out of 187). This mirrors Dogra's (2012) finding that "the relatively low power of smaller organisations to reach mass audiences compared to giant INGOs does have implications for overall plurality of messages".

Sightsavers had the largest number of inserts (20), followed by Doctors Without Borders (12) and WaterAid (8). These three organisations represent 58% of all inserts. Interestingly, Sightsavers and WaterAid had no adverts within the printed pages.

Four organisations had 10 or more printed adverts representing 76% of all adverts (90 out of 118) Doctors Without Borders had the largest frequency (41), followed by UNHCR (22), UNICEF (17) and British Red Cross (10). Neither UNHCR or UNICEF placed any inserts during the six month study period.

Charity	Total	Ad	Insert
Action Against Hunger	2	2	0
Age International	1	0	1
Amnesty International	7	4	3
British Red Cross	14	10	4
Christian Aid	5	1	4
Christian Blind Mission	1	0	1
Comic Relief	4	1	3
Disaster Emergencies Committee	8	8	0
Doctors Without Borders	53	41	12
Ethiopia Aid	2	2	0
Fauna and Flora International	2	1	1
Freedom from Torture	3	3	0
Leprosy Mission	1	0	1
Medical Aid for Palestinians	1	1	0
Mercy Corps	1	0	1
NEMO	2	2	0
Operation Smile	2	0	2
Safe Haven for Donkeys	2	2	0
Shared Interest	1	1	0
Sightsavers	20	0	20
SPANA	1	0	1
The Gorilla Organisation	2	0	2
Tree Aid	4	0	4
UNHCR	22	22	0
UNICEF	17	17	0
WaterAid	8	0	8
Zimbabwe in Crisis	1	0	1
TOTAL 187	187	118	69

TABLE 3. Number of charity adverts and inserts supporting international causes in UK national newspapers



MEDICINS SANS FRONTIÈRES
DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS

YEMEN EMERGENCY APPEAL

"After six years of conflict, the situation is desperate. Yemeni women and children need our help now more than ever."



ALISON CRIADO-PEREZ
MSF NURSE

The conflict in Yemen is now in its sixth year. In Marib, in central Yemen, nearly three million people have been displaced from their homes and are living in makeshift camps close to the frontline. Pregnant women and children are in desperate need of medical care. "When we arrived in Marib, we found the local hospitals overwhelmed by the sheer number of people and by an influx of war-wounded. Nearly 3 million people are in the province now, many of them displaced from elsewhere. People were living in makeshift shelters made of plastic and metal sheets. There were no latrines. People were worried about the risk of disease, and they had no food. We were very

concerned about the health of mothers and children, and pregnant women were also a major worry. Over the next month, our small team worked around the clock to set up clinics providing basic healthcare and to supply hospitals that were struggling. Getting medicines to this part of Yemen wasn't easy. Supplies often had to cross frontlines. One of our trucks carrying antibiotics, medicines and other supplies was hijacked. It was an incredibly difficult environment to work in. Along with general healthcare, we provided routine vaccinations for children and offered antenatal and postnatal care. We saw a lot of pregnant women and children and were able

to refer pregnant women with complications to larger hospitals for emergency caesareans. It made a real difference. The day we started working in a rural hospital near the frontline, a woman came in with a breech delivery who was having real difficulty. Our midwife assisted and everything went well. But who knows what would have happened if the hospital wasn't there. **AN URGENT SITUATION** Since I left, many more people have come to the area. But Marib is no longer a safe place to be. In recent weeks, the frontlines have moved into the province, causing large numbers of injuries and forcing thousands more people to flee their homes. "After six years of conflict, the situation is desperate. These people need our help now more than ever. Thank you."

Doctors Without Borders advert

DONATE TO SUPPORT OUR MEDICAL TEAMS **CALL 0800 055 79 85**
€44 COULD PAY FOR THREE SAFE DELIVERIES **SEARCH MSF CRISIS**



CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

Out of the 187 adverts 29 either had no image or an image without people in it. (These adverts have been taken out of the dataset for the purpose of the future analysis.) Out of the remaining 158 adverts there were 541 images in total, indicating the importance charities place on the use of images in their advertising. The old adage “a picture is worth a thousand words” still chimes true in the charity advertising sector.

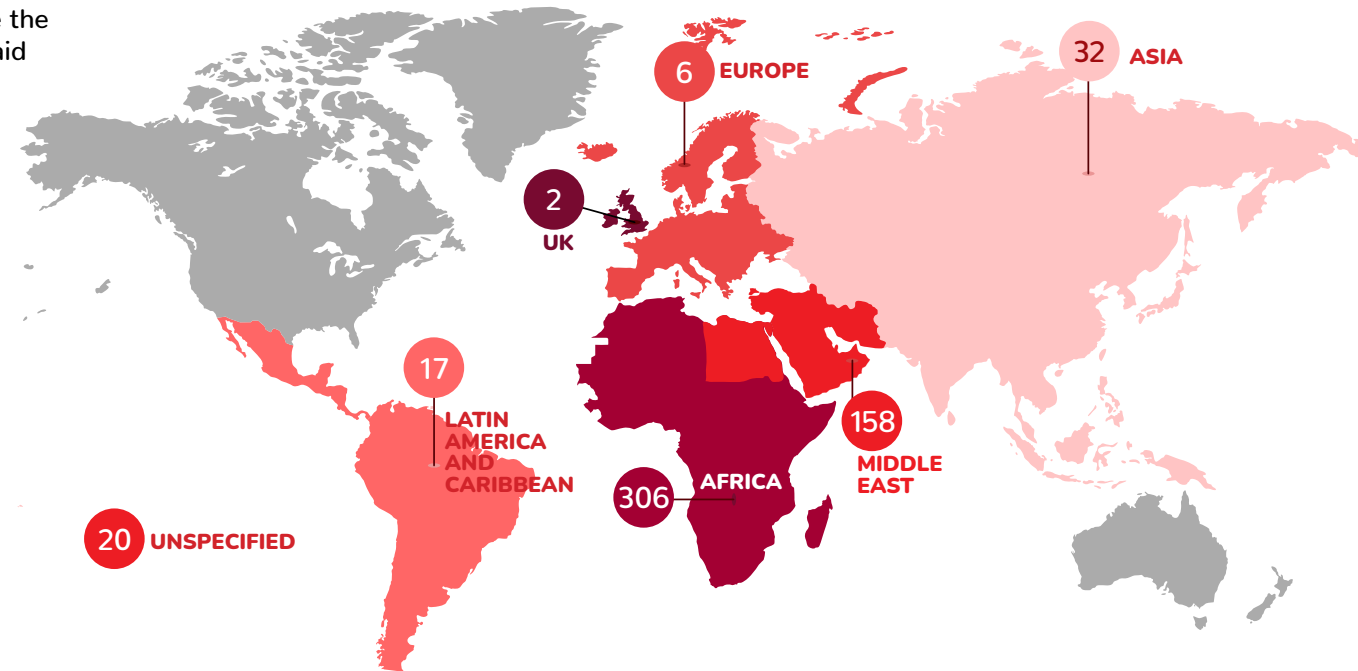
What is immediately striking is the continued predominance of images of Africa in charity adverts. Whether this reflects the concentration/distribution ratio of their work is another matter altogether. Notwithstanding, the constant barrage of images of Africa in INGOs appeals and campaign communications reiterates the colonial trope of blackness and poverty. This continuous majority casting of African nations in the theatre of global development as recipients of humanitarian assistance, serves only to aid and abet the colonial notion of Africa as one huge ‘begging bowl’. Surprisingly, this problematic view of aid, development and the distant other, finds lodgement within certain quarters of Britain’s elite. For instance, on the occasion of the merger between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development

(DFID), former prime minister Boris Johnson remarked “for too long frankly UK overseas aid has been treated as some giant cashpoint in the sky that arrives without any reference to UK interest.” Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the UK public views ‘developing countries’ as synonymous with ‘Africa’ and associate Africa with poverty and misery, which reflects the representations used in NGO appeals. The use of these representations in campaigns over several decades has promoted the view among members of the British public that there has been virtually no progress in Africa since the 1980s, and that in terms of charity and aid Africa is a ‘bottomless pit’ (DFID, 2000; Beswick et al., 2019).

World location

Over half of the images (56%) focussed on countries in Africa. The six African countries depicted in the images were Ethiopia (48), Kenya (41), Mali (16), Madagascar (12), Democratic Republic of Congo (10) and Cameroon (7).

Africa	306
Middle East	158
Asia	32
Unspecified	20
Latin America and Caribbean	17
Europe	6
UK	2
TOTAL	541



CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Specific location

Out of 541 images, 399 (74%) included the name of the country within the supporting text. The top ten countries mentioned are listed below. Over half of the countries represented consisted of just three countries: Yemen, Ethiopia and Kenya. It is worth noting that at the time of the data collection there was an emergency appeal in Yemen due to the ongoing conflict and another emergency appeal for the human rights atrocities being experienced in Tigray, Ethiopia. Additionally, 40 of the 41 images representing Kenya came from the same insert by Christian Aid. The Christian Aid images covered the drought in Kenya as a result of climate change. The specific city or village was mentioned in 32% of the adverts and the region 26%.

Countries	Total
Yemen	116
Ethiopia	48
Kenya	41
Iran	21
India	16
Mali	16
Afghanistan	12
Madagascar	12
DR Congo	10
Cameroon	7

TABLE 4. Top ten countries depicted in adverts supporting international causes

Contextualising the location used in charity images is not only a matter of geographical information, it is crucial for credibility, transparency and accountability, and ethical image usage. Proper captioning, including accurate location information, reduces the risk of unintended misrepresentation and generalisations, allows for verification of programme impact, and mitigates potential risks arising from image misuse. Accordingly, Oxfam's guideline (p.30) states that "taking care to upload detailed and accurate captions alongside each image, is respectful to the contributor and audiences and also guarantees that any use and re-use of images is appropriate to context, thereby minimising risk to contributor as well as any reputational risk resulting from inappropriate re-use of images. All images should be accompanied by clear captions and comprehensive additional information. Captions should be limited to 2-3 sentences and answer the five W's – what can you see in the picture, who, where, when and why. Additional information should expand on the issue at stake and on Oxfam's work."

Subject Matter

Images were coded for the subject they covered. 68% of the overall images were related to health issues. This is not surprising considering that at the time of the data collection we were still in the middle of the COVID pandemic. Moreover, 49% (91 out of 187) of all adverts were from organisations which specialise in health interventions: Doctors Without Borders (53), Sightsavers (20) and British Red Cross (14).

Given the proportion of images of children - a cumulative 31% - it is somewhat surprising that the theme of education is conspicuously absent. But again, this is perhaps attributable to the pandemic which saw education at a standstill with the closure of schools in many parts of the world.

Subject	Total
Health	368
Natural Disaster	46
Conflict and Violence	35
Other	34
Environment	32
Water and Sanitation	14
Poverty	12

TABLE 5. Images by subject matter

CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Types of characters

90% of all images (541 out of 599) focused on people. Other images mainly depicted animals or landscapes in adverts by organisations such as Fauna and Flora International, SPANA and Safe Haven for Donkeys. Ordinary MW people were the most prevalent characters with 63% of all advertising messages.

In order to assess progress since over the last 17 years the data (in Figures 5 and 6) will be presented using a framework developed by Dogra (2012) who conducted a similar study in 2005/6 where 71% of all images including ordinary inhabitants.

In 2005/6 42% of all characters were MW Children. The next most popular characters are MW Women at 30%, this category includes images of Mothers and Children at 17% of all characters. We can see a significant shift in the portrayal of characters in 2021 where 21% are of Children representing a 50% reduction compared to the 2005/6 data. MW Women in the 2021 study is still high with 29%, including images of Mothers and Children at 11%. Overall, the dominance of Children and Women in charity messaging has reduced from 72% to 50%. This figure is somewhat consistent with more recent studies of INGOs' representation of beneficiaries, in which more than half of the images (54.4%; 174 out of 320) show either girls, infants and mothers, or only women" (Bhati, 2021, p3).

The biggest changes between the two sets of data is Men and Women which has increased from 4% to 11% and DW Woman which has increased from 4% to 10%. Other MW People has also increased from 1% to 10%.

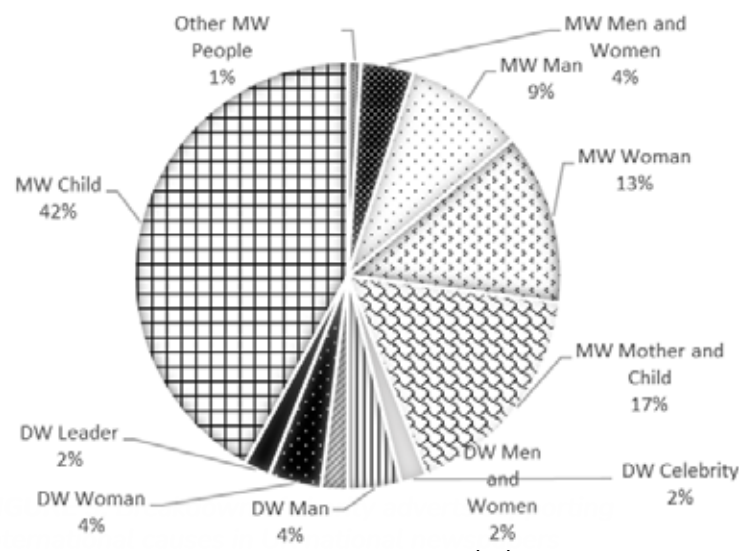


FIGURE 5. Breakdown of characters in INGO's messages 2005/6 (Dogra 2012).

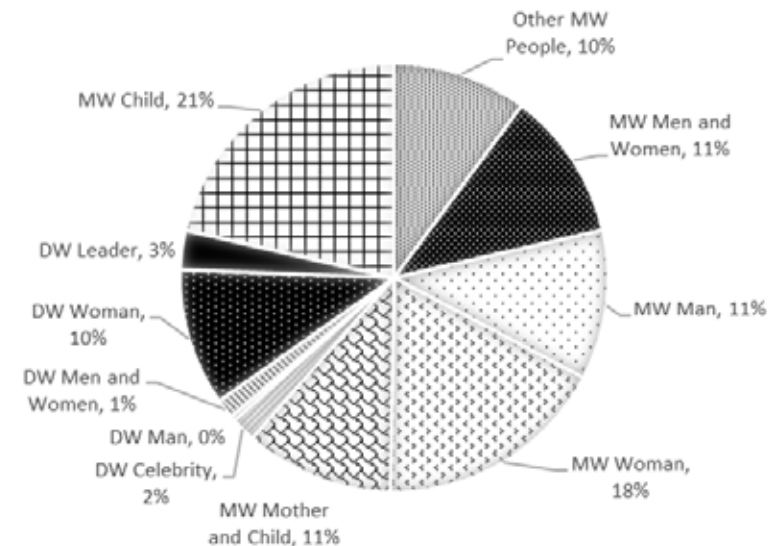


FIGURE 6. Breakdown of characters in INGOs' messages 2021 (Girling and Adesina 2024)

CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

How many professionals are depicted in the images

A study of visual communication in six African Countries by Radi-Aid (Girling, 2018) concluded that there was a need for more diversity in INGO messages which show a variety of ages, generations and backgrounds. The study also recommended including images of local doctors, teachers and aid/development workers. For this study we wanted to ascertain the types of leaders that are portrayed in charity messaging. In order to measure this, we added six new categories (in addition to DW Leader and DW Celebrity) to Dogra’s original criteria which helped us analyse whether charities are diversifying their characters by including leaders from both the ‘Developed World’ as well as the ‘Majority World’. All of the leader categories are listed in the chart below (Table 6)

20% of all images depicted MW leaders compared to 15% DW leaders. Many of the MW leaders were doctors, nurses and other development workers. The majority of the DW leaders were female (56 female characters versus 16 male). It is sometimes difficult to distinguish whether leaders are DW or MW as the supporting text does not often designate where the person in the picture is from. This is especially difficult with organisations such as Doctors Without Borders who often benefit from a strong group of regular volunteers as well as their permanent staff.



UNICEF advert - March 2021

Characters	Total	Characters	Total
MW Child	94	MW Men and Women	11
MW Mother and Child	61	MW Women	10
MW Woman	54	MW Men	10
Other MW People	54	DW Celebrity	10
DW Leader Female	54	DW Men and Women	6
MW Leaders Male and Female	50	DW Man	2
MW Leader Female	31	DW Men, Women and Children	2
MW Leader Male	29	DW Woman	0
MW Children	22	DW Leader Female and MW Child	2
MW Man	22	DW Leader Male and MW Child	2
DW Leader Male	14	MW Man, Woman and Child	1

TABLE 6. Cast of characters in charity adverts in UK national newspapers - 2021

CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Characters - Named versus un-named

It is promising to see that 55% of characters are named, but this still leaves 45% who remain nameless. Some inserts include a large number of characters and therefore it is not easy to name every single person. There are also other instances such as the image below where the character has deliberately not been named to protect their identity e.g. "The name has been changed and a model has been used in the photograph to protect the identity of the torture survivor and their family. The story is true, as told by a survivor of torture."

Unnamed individuals in charity advertising images function only as a symbolic presence - a timeless set of people with no identity, no voice and no agency. This depicts them merely as passive receivers of aid, as appendages in the western representation of development practice. The implication is that the subject is rendered as good enough to validate and legitimise western development intervention, but not good enough to enjoy the privilege of representing her/himself. Whereas, naming image subjects presents a convenient slippage between representation and intervention, in which the named subject concomitantly becomes the identified/able partner in development (Lidchi, 1994, p147). Naming humanises people, helping to create intimacy and attachment rather than rendering them as mere props for a message (Crombie and Girling, 2022, p13). DOCHAS (2023, p6) encourages INGOs to name regions, localities or communities and, where possible and appropriate, include exact information about people and places. However, in line with the 'do no harm' principle, the need for contextual accuracy must not overrule considerations of the safety of potentially at-risk groups or individuals (Dignified Storytelling Handbook, 2021, p53; BOND, 2019 p7).

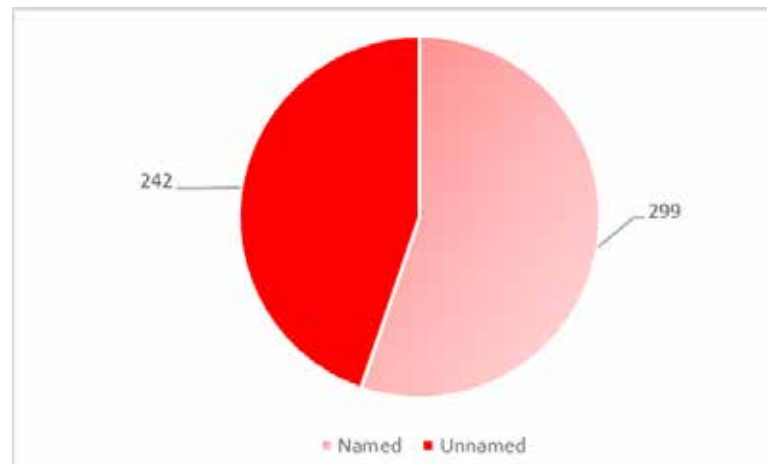


FIGURE 7. Characters named versus un-named



Freedom from Torture advert using an anonymised character

Passive versus active depiction of characters

In images portraying the MW people as passive, they are often framed as helpless victims of a situation over which they have no control. Conversely, images that effectively challenge this, do not simply follow the doctrine of deliberate positivism (which only exchanges one set of stereotype for another). Instead, INGOs are beginning to show their beneficiaries in ways that highlight their agency, portraying them as dynamic, capable and complicit in the effort for change. Such images offer a more nuanced representation of the local communities, depicting them as sources of solution and collaborators in the story of development and progress.

Even so, stereotypical narratives remain, as women/girls continue to be shown in roles and responsibilities that reiterate traditional expectations of their confinement to domestic and familial spaces (Kim and Wilkins, 2021, p204). For instance, out of 94 images which portrayed MW Children, only 6 of those were coded as "active", and all of these images were of children collecting water in WaterAid adverts. See page 21.

CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Passive depiction of characters

So, although in the images MW Children are presented actively, in the same breath they are at once cast as victims of circumstance, their vulnerability heightening and legitimizing the need for outside intervention. In her 2012 study, Dogra (p58) observes 'nearly half of MW children, who are the most popular figures in INGOs' messages, fall under the 'active' category as they are frequently shown to be engaged in activities such as play or study. Thus, it does not suffice to merely portray MW characters as active or having agency of any sort, without attention to the scenarios in which they are depicted and/or the roles they are given to play'. Admittedly, only so much can be communicated via pictures alone, thus appropriate captioning can complement visual efforts to show the active roles that people play in their own lives. Sadly, in these cases above, the text accompanying these seemingly active MW children, have not done justice.

Character	Passive	Active
MW Child	88	6
MW Mother and Child	61	0
DW Leader Female	48	5
MW Woman	47	7

TABLE 7. Most passive characters

Look again at Roumina. Think of her future. With this one gift of clean water, so many other gifts will follow. We call this the ripple effect. **The first gift is survival**, because Roumina is now more likely to reach her fifth birthday and stay healthy as she grows up. She has hope too. Having a water pump in her village means she won't have to trek miles to collect water, but instead she will have time to study. That means she can get an education and earn a living when she grows up. That means she can find a lasting way out of poverty.

Fact: 40 billion hours are wasted by women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa every year collecting water. This is equal to the hours spent by the workforce of the world's sixth largest economy: France. So imagine if all these women and girls weren't forced to waste their time in drudgery but could invest it in education. Imagine the astonishing human potential that, together, we could unlock. Progress always comes back to education. As a mother, I love seeing children in schools learning the nine - yes nine! - steps to proper handwashing: the world's simplest and most effective vaccine against deadly conditions like diarrhoea, pneumonia, influenza and ebola. Every pair of hands scrubbing themselves with soap and water is another life possibly saved.

I'm passionate about progress because I've seen the opposite. In my late 20s, I was in Armenia when the Soviet Union collapsed and every public service crashed. Water was only turned on for one hour a day. The most cherished sound at home was the buzzing of the water in the pipes. I'll never forget those days: the link between running water and progress is absolutely visceral for me. It's why I'm in this job. It's why I do what I do.

I don't work for WaterAid to uphold the status quo. I'm here to make progress and, today, I'm asking you to join the momentum. The progress we're making is the very best reason to donate. There are still millions of people we need to reach, but our success proves that your monthly donations will make an extraordinary difference.

Right now, I'd like to invite you to give a monthly gift of progress. This will fund tangible, effective and intelligent technology to supply clean water. Not just hand pumps and wells, but equipment to harvest rainwater; dams, water pipes and fresh water springs; gravity fed water systems and school latrines. Each one built to last. Each one built to save lives. Let's protect more children against disease and, using the power of the ripple effect, let's see what happens when we help to give 40 billion hours back to women and girls (I think a lot will change).

Today, over 800 children will die from drinking dirty water. But it doesn't have to be this way. Please fill in the enclosed form and give a monthly gift to WaterAid.

Together, let's solve this crisis. Let's push for progress. Let's make history. Thank you.

WaterAid Insert - March 2021

Here goes. We need your help to bring clean water to everyone, everywhere within a generation.

I'm about to ask you to get behind something that will change the world, forever. That may sound daunting but I need you to carry on reading, because together we really can bring clean water to everyone.



If everyone, everywhere has clean water, children like Ibrahim won't risk their lives drinking filthy, deadly water. Please start giving a small gift of £2 a month today.

Gulp. I'll start at the beginning.

It starts with a child like Ibrahim, in Sierra Leone. The water you see him collecting is filthy and makes him dangerously ill. But he has no choice, it's the only water there is and every sip could kill him. Just like it kills over 800 children every day. This has to change.

But, here's the good news. We've already worked in Ibrahim's village, helping to bring the community clean water that can save lives. But that's not enough. We need to bring water to many, many more children around the world. **Just £2 a month from you today could help make that happen.**

Together we can help every child - until we've helped them all.

It doesn't stop there. There are 785 million people like Ibrahim in the world who still do not have clean water. Reaching them all might seem impossible, but we have to think big. Because if more people - like you - give £2 a month then, child by child, village by village, we know it's possible to get clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene to everyone in our lifetime.

How can I be so sure? Because I know how powerful we can be as a team - together. We work with local experts and communities to install reliable, long-lasting pipes, pumps and taps. In fact, we reach almost 1,000 people with clean water every single day. We do everything we can to ensure governments around the world deliver on their clean water promises too.

So what do you say?

Just imagine that day, when a child like Ibrahim tastes clean water for the first time. When his mother doesn't have to worry that the next sip could kill him. Then imagine the moment we reach every child, everywhere.

Let's bring clean water to the world within a generation. **Please fill in the donation form to start giving £2 a month today, every penny counts. Thank you.**

Johny Gray, WaterAid UK.

Since we visited Ibrahim, WaterAid has delivered clean water to his community. Millions of children still face the terrible conditions and choices highlighted above.

Visit wateraid.org/uk/gulp | Call 0300 123 4341*
*Calls charged at local rate

Part of 2019-2020 financial annual report. Registered charity numbers 288751 (England and Wales)

WaterAid Insert - April 2021

CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Active depiction of characters

It is somewhat surprising to note the complete absence of images of 'Active MW Mother and Child' in this current study. This echoes Dogra's (2012, p58) observation of the tendency to portray MW mothers with children, in passive modes, sitting around waiting for help in a clinic or camp. Symbolically, depicting MW women and children as helpless or passively waiting for some outside intervention only furthers the notion of a vulnerable infantile/feminine MW, evoking paternal patronage from the DW. It is necessary to contest dominant representations that portray active MW women in largely instrumental roles - limited to those undertaking some form of low-level economic activity, whereas DW females enjoy more complex and nuanced portrayal of themselves as capable of doing (and being) something, but most importantly of doing (and being) many things! (Kim and Wilkins, 2021, 204; Dogra 2012, p54)

Character	Passive	Active
MW Leaders Male and Female	2	48
MW Leaders Male	1	28
DW Leader Female	3	28
MW Woman	32	24

TABLE 8. Most active characters

Cathleen's cataracts could be removed through straightforward surgery that will restore her sight. But, living in poverty, the cost is far too much for her for her family to afford.

Your donation to Christian Blind Mission will **Light up Lives** and enable children like Cathleen to see again. It means they will be able to get an education and live independently. It means parents like Frimina will be able to earn a living again. And because of your generosity, people like Cathleen and Frimina will be able to lift themselves out of poverty.

Give before 20th May 2021 and every £1 you donate to our Light up Lives appeal will be doubled by the UK government.

It's a chance to fund cataract surgery for twice as many children, to provide follow-up care to twice as many people.

I do hope you'll take this opportunity before 20th May.

Thank you and God bless you,

Louise

Louise Shute,
CBM Programme Manager

Cathleen's story

Although she's only three-years-old, Cathleen's life has been full of adversity. Her mother, Frimina, became pregnant at 17 and was forced to raise Cathleen alone. When Cathleen was almost two years old, Frimina noticed that something was wrong with her daughter's eyes. "She stumbled all the time and couldn't grab things that fell down", her mother says. Cathleen was losing her sight because of cataracts in both of her eyes. Frimina told us that her daughter's sight deteriorated when she was a toddler.

Frimina didn't know what to do. The family share a one room mud hut. Like many people living in slum communities across East and Southern Africa, including in Zimbabwe, they face extreme poverty. Their mud home is overcrowded and unsafe. There are now seven people living and sleeping in one room with just one bed.

Although Frimina managed to work as a cleaner when Cathleen was a baby, when she was a toddler, she could no longer be taken along as she couldn't be put down - she would constantly fall or bump into things.

Frimina could barely afford food for the two to eat - without a steady income there was no way she could afford good healthcare for her small daughter.

With your support a child like Cathleen can go to school when she is old enough, to gain an education and build a future of hope and opportunity.



Christian Blind Mission - April 2021

UNICEF Advert - May 2021

CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Pitiful images

A study by Vossen et al (2016) was designed to study the frequency of 'pitiful images' of people from developing countries in NGO advertisements and news media photos. In addition to analysing media images they collected 284 advertisements from Dutch, Flemish and British NGOs that were published or broadcast between January 2011 and March 2014. These advertisements were collected from television as well as from magazines. The research focussed on poverty frames, but all images were also coded to see if the visuals emphasized human suffering – for which they used the term "pitiful". Images were coded as pitiful when the images depicted people suffering from malnutrition, illness or hardship: crying, bleeding, dirty or sick. In order to assess progress in the use of pitiful images since 2011-2014 it was decided to use the same coding to compare INGOs advertising images in 2021.

Only two adverts included images which were deemed as pitiful. These adverts were from Sightsavers and Operation Smile. However, this represents 11% of all images (62 out of 541). Compared to the study in 2011-2014 this is a significant drop as their analysis found that 34% of the British adverts used pitiful images.

Three of the images were from a Sightsavers advert, which was inserted 20 times in national newspaper between March and August 2021. If we take this advert out of the overall data, it means that only two images could be deemed as pitiful across a six-month period.

Below: Sightsavers Insert - April 2021

The image displays a collage of Sightsavers advertisements and a donation form. The top row features three versions of an advertisement. The first version asks, "Will you help protect children from cruel, blinding trachoma?" and shows a woman holding a child. The second and third versions feature a close-up of a crying child and say, "Nalukena gets closer to blindness with every blink... Just £5 from you could save her sight." The bottom row shows a detailed donation form. It includes sections for "Trachoma steals sight with every blink..." and "£5 could protect a class of children". The form has fields for name, address, and payment details, and a section for "Thank you for your support".

CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Surroundings

The majority of photographs used by INGOs have a similar theme. They are usually of children, or women and children, and depict rural areas and poverty. As a result, whole areas and regions of the world can become reduced to poor women and children living in 'unnamed rural places' (DOCHAS, 2014, p12). The most common settings for the majority of characters in charity adverts continue to be household (e.g kitchen, bed, backyard); place of labour (factory, farm, office) or at a special event (political rally, fundraising meeting, etc). There is however a notable disparity between the settings of images showing only female subjects as opposed to male. This difference in setting also translates to images of recipients in the MW and donors in the DW (Kim and Wilkins, 2021, p204). Overall, the geographical homogenisation in the stories/images of locations within which INGOs work, effectively serves to paint a picture of an Africa frozen in time, furthering the colonial notion of 'Africa' as one big village. The overuse of villages in charity communication to the exclusion of urban settings, constructs an Africa that continues to be backward and underdeveloped as opposed to a post-industrial DW (Dogra, 2012 p.70).

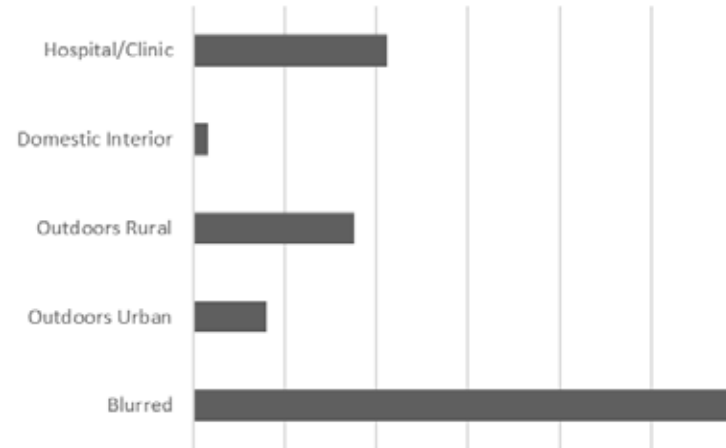
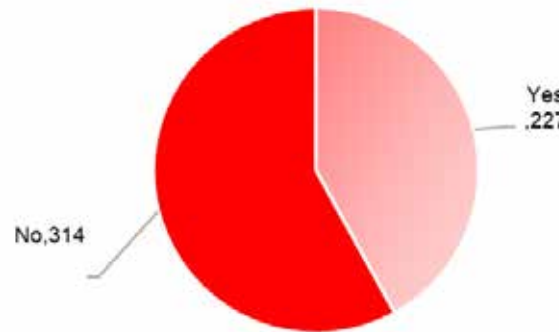


FIGURE 8. Background surroundings of image



Photographer credit

It is disappointing to see that that the photographer has been only been credited in 42% of the images within the dataset. Although crediting the photographer is not technically part of the ethical representation of the contributors, it is good practice to credit the image maker. Girls Not Bride's (2022) recent ethical communication guidelines clearly state that images should be credited appropriately. "Images from a picture supplier or from an individual should be published with a credit alongside. Usually, the agreement to licence the image will require a credit." Oxfam's (2020, p33) ethical content guidelines mirror this instruction. "All images used in Oxfam communications should be accompanied by a caption which provides the individual pictured with a name (or pseudonym), a location, and relevant context, as well as a credit that attributes the photographer and Oxfam (or other agency). The standard format for credits is 'Credit: name of photographer / Oxfam' or in the case of 3rd party content 'Credit: name of photographer / name of agency.'"

Left: FIGURE 9. Number of images where the photographer is credited

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We are pleased that this project has provided evidence indicating an improvement in the representation of distant others in INGO adverts. On the whole, there is a marked difference in the organisation of cast and characters present in charity's communications imagery and pitiful images are nearly entirely absent, while individuals are presented more as named than unnamed

Slightly fewer photographers received credit for their images. The bulk of images however continue to be from/about African nations, presented largely in rural settings. Although whole family units continue to be grossly under-represented, almost entirely absent, more men are featured in charity adverts in the period under review. Indeed more MW leaders are depicted, which is a good break away from what was obtainable previously, although it is difficult for us to know in what capacity leaders from both worlds are presented. Furthermore, considering recent trends in celebrity humanitarianism and the use of celebrity ambassadors, it is surprising that there are no portrayals of such from the majority world. This could be argued to be a missed opportunity for INGOs to re-present a different image of the global south.

Striving to present varied accounts or diverse casts of characters begins with the inclusion of those in development work in the first instance. As INGOs face increasing pressures on how to effectively communicate development and 'look good' to various

stakeholders, they must constantly critically question the intentions and assumptions behind the choice of where they work and the stories they choose to tell. Such weighty decisions cannot be governed by the desire to look good at the expense of actually doing good. One risk is that communities with genuine need will often be ignored if perceived to have lesser newsworthiness, as is sometimes the case with interventions in regions of humanitarian crisis. Similarly, many powerful unconventional stories may be silenced or worse, reconstructed to conform with traditional frames believed to evoke more media attention, thus replicating other variants of the same inequality that NGOs seek to unseat.

If the number of INGO ethical communications guidelines publicly available are anything to go by, much progress has been made, at least as regards an awareness of these tensions. Even so, INGOs must continually reflect on and rethink their understanding of development, their approach to it and communication about it, as these have significant implications for mediating, administrating and shaping spaces of interactions between the developed world and the majority world. Communications professionals must acknowledge and approach their work as not mere storytellers, but with an acute awareness of the inherent power dynamics involved in representing distant others, acknowledging how this maintains, reinforces or challenges symbolic and material inequalities in global North-South relations.

This report is to be considered neither comprehensive nor conclusive. We have only begun to scratch the surface as regards what research is possible with this dataset,

presenting only a top-level report of our findings. We therefore consider this an invitation to scholars, researchers and practitioners to dig deeper into the issues raised and to ask other more critical questions of the available data.



CHAPTER 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

1 View the Charity Advertising (www.charity-advertising.co.uk) website to explore examples of best practice

2 21% of images still focus on children. However, this is a significant drop since 2005/6 from 42%. Ensure that images and stories represent a diverse demographic

3 Consider using contributor-led storytelling techniques as recommended in the 'Who Owns the Story' report

4 Name people wherever possible. Obviously, there are some situations that require pseudonyms

5 Provide a location to contextualise the image and story being presented to the audience, preferably the county/region, city or village as well as the country

6 Establish or update ethical image guidelines. Consider producing them in different formats e.g. video or a one-page toolkit which are quick and easy to consume

7 Hire local photographers and storytellers wherever possible. They will nearly always understand the language and culture far better than the someone outside the community

8 Work with local heroes and celebrities rather than relying on global North celebrities in order to avoid "white saviour" notions

9 Capture a range of emotions in your photos. Show moments of joy, resilience, and determination alongside the challenges faced

10 Always obtain informed consent when photographing individuals, and respect their dignity and privacy. Ensure that the subjects are comfortable with being featured in your campaign materials

11 Also ensure they are aware that their images are used for advertisement/campaigns in media/social media etc

12 Credit the photographer wherever possible. This should be standard practice

13 Improve dialogue between the communications and programmes teams when generating content

14 Share this report with your CEO, Board and other departments which use imagery for communications whether it is in newspapers or social media etc.



British Red Cross advert

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APPENDICES CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

CHARACTERS

MW Child



MW Mother and Child



MW Woman



CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

MW Child



MW Mother and Child



MW Woman



CHARACTERS

Other MW People



DW Leader Female



MW Leaders Male and Female



CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

Other MW People



DW Leader Female



MW Leaders Male and Female



CHARACTERS

MW Leader Female



MW Leader Male



MW Children



CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

MW Leader Female



MW Leader Male



MW Children



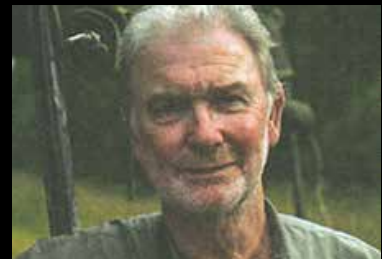
APPENDICES CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

CHARACTERS

MW Man



DW Leader Male



MW Men and Women



CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

MW Man



DW Leader Male



MW Men and Women



CHARACTERS

MW Women



MW Men



DW Celebrity



CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

MW Women



MW Men



DW Celebrity



CHARACTERS

DW Men and Women



DW Man



DW Men, Women and Children



CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

DW Men and Women



DW Man



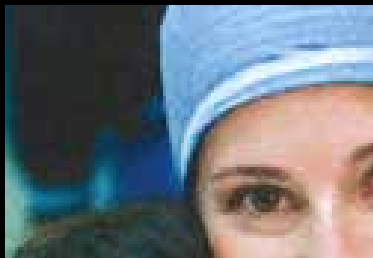
DW Men, Women and Children



APPENDICES CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

CHARACTERS

DW Leader Female and Child



DW Leader Male and MW



MW Man, Woman and Child



CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

DW Leader Female and Child



DW Leader Male and MW



MW Man, Woman and Child

