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AFRICAN IMAGES & THEIR IMPACT ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION

What are the human rights implications?

HUMANRIGHTS RESEARCH



African images and their impact on public perception: What are the human rights implications?

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1.0 Introduction

The recent 'Kony' campaign illuminated the impact charity and media campaigns can have in reaching a worldwide audience and placing a particular focus on specific regions and causes.¹ The striking imagery (and accompanying documentary) of the Kony campaign increased awareness about the area in question. However, it also raised the discussion on the nature of charity campaigns in terms of their depictions of situations and issues of conflict, famine and poverty in particular areas of Africa.² These concerns centre on the composition of charity campaigns in terms of the accuracy and suitability of images and messages these campaigns convey. This evoked the long standing debates about the nature of such campaigns and the stereotypes that these images are reproducing about particular regions and their inhabitants. Given the abundance of charity campaigns focusing on Africa it is necessary to examine and assess the impact of charity images on individuals and groups identifying with the region, ethnically and/or culturally.

This report moves to engage with the debates on the nature of charity campaigns to assess the impact of charity campaign images on Africans and those of African descent in the context of Northern Ireland, as well as the implications for their human rights. This requires a consideration of the various factors influencing the nature of the composition of charity campaign images, the nature of the responses they elicit in audiences, as well as the impact on people identifying with Africa. The focus is on campaigns depicting Africa and Africans. It engages with academic literature where the topics of media images and representation have been discussed at length, documenting the arguments

¹ *KONY 2012* is a half-hour documentary is based on Joseph Kony. Kony is a warlord in Uganda believed to be responsible for the enslavement of more than 30,000 children. The campaign used social media as a vehicle to reach a huge audience and go 'viral'.

² *KONY 2012: what's the real story?* The Guardian March 8th, 2012.

Accessed at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/reality-check-with-polly-curtis/2012/mar/08/kony-2012-what-s-the-story?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>

surrounding the basis for the representation of Africa as well as exploring the underlying causalities for the use of images of a particular nature.

Given the focus of this research on charity campaigns in Northern Ireland, the following organisations were contacted and invited to contribute images employed in their campaigns: Concern, Oxfam, Trócaire and Save the Children. The three former organisations (Concern, Oxfam and Trócaire) gave their images and agreed to discuss the nature and direction of their campaigns and their use of images. Save the Children declined. This research also considers policy relating to ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland, specifically. It must be noted that the number of Africans living in Northern Ireland has proven difficult to assess due to the changing numbers of migrants arriving in the region.³ However, the Institute for Conflict Research engaged with ACSONI on this issue and conducted a number of focus groups and interviews were conducted with approximately twenty individuals who are African or of African descent. These individuals were drawn from various ACSONI member groups such as the Women of the Exponation's Project (PVN), The Association of Caribbean Nationals (ACAN); Sudanese Community Association Northern Ireland (SCANI); Ghanaian Association Northern Ireland (GHANI); the Zimbabwean community; and the Nigerian community.

³Nic Craith et al document this issue as one of main findings and arguing that there are no accurate numeric estimates of Africans in the UK, Ireland and Northern Ireland (p3). This is further reinforced with the confusion surrounding the nature of the categories utilised in the 2001 census which may have resulted in an inaccurate picture numbers of Africans in the UK. See: Máiréad Nic Craith, Elly Odhiambo, and Khanyisela Moyo. 'Giving Voice to Africans: West of the Bann'. In: *Challenges of Peace - Research as a Contribution to Peace-building in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Community Relations Council, 2009, pp. 191-206.

2.0 The Northern Ireland Context

The official discourses relating to Africans and those of African descent in the wider socio-political context of Northern Ireland must be considered given that it provides a context for how race and human rights are provided for more generally in the region and how this is informing how new communities are portrayed. The Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (RRO) echoed the provisions of the 1976 Race Relations Act in Great Britain. It outlaws discrimination on grounds of colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origin.⁴ However, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) has argued that this order requires further amendments to encompass a wide variety of issues that would bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK. They suggest the following:

*Currently, there is less protection from discrimination and harassment under the RRO 1997 on the grounds of colour and nationality, than on other racial grounds (such as race, ethnic or national origin). For example, the following provisions apply only to the grounds of race, ethnic or national origin under the RRO 1997, and not the grounds of colour and nationality; protection against discrimination by public authorities when exercising public functions, specific protection against harassment, certain exceptions, protection for office holders and former employees; **enhanced protection against indirect discrimination.**⁵*

⁴ The Order was amended by the Race Relations Order (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) in 2003 to implement requirements of the EU Race Directive 2003/43/EC. It was further amended in the Race Relations Order (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2009 to give full effect in Northern Ireland to Article 2(2)(b) (indirect discrimination) of Council Directive 2000/43 EC of 29th June 2000 ("the Directive") concerning the principle of the equal treatment between persons, irrespective of racial or ethnic origins, in the areas of employment (and related matters), social protection, social advantage, education and access to and supply of, goods and services which are available to the public, including housing.

Accessed at: <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/race-relations-order-intro>

⁵ See <http://www.equalityni.org>

These recommendations are according to ECNI required to 'strengthen protection for BME individuals against unlawful discrimination and harassment'.⁶ It is important to note the latter recommendation in that they articulate the view that there needs to be enhanced protection against 'indirect discrimination' in the context of ensuring the safeguarding of human rights for ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the nature of the portrayal of and imagery associated with specific ethnic groups will undoubtedly come under this recommendation. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 also had implications for how issues of race were approached in the region. It

...placed a statutory obligation on public authorities in carrying out their various functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity⁷

on the following:

- *between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;*
- *between men and women generally;*
- *between persons with a disability and persons without; and*
- *between persons with dependants and persons without.*

In addition to this, Public Authorities are also required:

[t]o have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, and racial group.⁸

Given the growth of new communities in Northern Ireland over the past decade it was deemed timely in 2005 to produce a strategy to approach the issue of race and equality for Northern Ireland specifically, i.e. The Racial Equality Strategy (2005-2010). This strategy established a framework

- *to tackle racial inequalities in Northern Ireland and to open up opportunity for all;*
- *to eradicate racism and hate crime; and*

⁶Ibid.

⁷ Accessed at: http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/equality/statutory-duty/section_75.htm

⁸ Ibid.

- *together with A Shared Future, to initiate actions to promote good race relations*⁹.

The strategy recognised the positive contribution of minority ethnic communities to social reality in Northern Ireland that extends beyond the economic sphere. Martynowicz and Jarman examined the Strategy and observed that it stresses that the ever increasing diversity of a society can transform its character and that the presence of increasing numbers of members of ethnic and national minorities have ‘a genuinely leavening effect on a society that has long been frozen in its ‘two traditions’ divide’.¹⁰

In terms official bodies in Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive has recently acknowledged the evolving nature of community composition in Northern Ireland in its *Race Relations Policy*, stating that this policy’s central aim is:

*To ensure that all Black and Minority Ethnic People in Northern Ireland can enjoy full and fair access to housing services and employment opportunities within the Housing Executive. It aims to support the promotion of good relations between and within ethnic groups and communities.*¹¹

Furthermore, it identifies racism as a serious obstacle to community cohesion and describes the four main ways in which it believes racism can manifest itself. These are:

- *Racist behaviour (including assaults, racist graffiti, threatening behaviour, and incitement)*
- *Discrimination*
- *Stereotyping*
- *Systemic (or institutional) racism*¹²

The inclusion of ‘stereotyping’ as an element of what constitutes racism is interesting as it acknowledges the negative impact of the promotion of stereotypes on new communities in Northern Ireland. The awareness on the part of the Housing Executive that ‘cultural sensitivity’ is required in the context of housing services for black, minority

⁹ A Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland (2005-2010). Accessed at <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/race-equality-strategy.pdf>

¹⁰ A. Martynowicz and N. Jarman. *New Migration, Equality and Integration Issues and Challenges for Northern Ireland*. Belfast: ECNI, 2009.

Available at <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ICRMigrantworkersJanuary2009.pdf>; p.14

¹¹ See: http://www.nihe.gov.uk/race_relations_policy.pdf

¹² See: http://www.nihe.gov.uk/race_relations_policy.pdf; pg. 17.

and ethnic (BME) communities is a key aspect of the approach, which aims to engage with representative groups of these communities so as to ensure the adequate provision of support services. This holistic approach is based on the Housing Executive working strategically and in consultation with new communities themselves rather than working on the behest of such communities. The inclusion of such provisions for and indeed understanding racism (i.e. stereotyping) in the Housing Executive approach to issues relating to race and the rights of BME communities illustrates the complexity of race relations and what constitutes racist practices. These approaches may have implications for how other groups and organisations conduct their work and approach the issues pertaining to race relations and the impact on new communities.

3.0 The European Human Rights Context

It is also important to position the use of charity images in the broader European context and how human rights have been provided for at an international level. The two main organisations involved in framing the discussion on human rights in the context of this research are the European Convention on Human Rights and Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

3.1 European Convention on Human Rights

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is an international treaty established to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe. It was initially drafted in 1950 by the Council of Europe and the Convention came into force three years later. All Council of Europe member states are subject to the Convention. New member states are expected to ratify the treaty in accordance with the principles of the ECHR. If an individual or group feel they have had any of the principles stated in the treaty violated then they may bring their case to the European Court of Human Rights. In terms of this research, there are several articles in this ECHR that provide protections for individuals/groups with regard to how they are represented and portrayed in images employed by campaigns. The first is Article 10: Freedom of Expression. This states that

Everyone has the right of freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

In terms of this research this relates to the charities themselves, with respect to the safeguarding the rights of individuals and groups to campaign on particular issues in an uninhibited way. However, the Article goes on to detail the restrictions on these freedoms and specifically outlines the need 'for the protection of the reputation or rights of others'.¹³ This brings into question issues around charity campaigns and how they choose to represent particular individuals, groups and regions and how this may have ramifications for the portrayal and indeed, rights, of individuals and groups. In addition to this Article 14: Discrimination states:

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

This places the rights for individuals and groups to be free from discrimination which may be viewed as being exacerbated by charity campaigns which essentialises and reduces the identities of individuals to a point where they are only recognised in terms of the ethos underlying a specific cause or campaign. This may be considered as discriminatory as it denies differentiation for individuals/groups/regions and contributes to a culture of stereotyping.

3.2 Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) is a United Nations convention. The Convention and its members are committed to the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of understanding among all races. It also compels its parties to outlaw hate speech and criminalise membership in racist organisations. Article 1 of the Convention defines 'racial discrimination' as

...[a]ny distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and

¹³ See: <http://www.hri.org/docs/ECHR50.html#C.Art17>

*fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life*¹⁴

Article 2 of the Convention condemns racial discrimination and obliges parties to 'undertake to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms'. It also compels parties to promote understanding among all races. In this light, both articles place a focus on the need for a consideration of the imposition of distinctions between groups in terms of their race or ethnicity.

They compel European states to work within their principles. The focus on the need to eliminate discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity, the issue of how images are impacting on the human rights of Africans and those of African descent is also encompassed.

3.3 Codes and Ethics for Charitable Organisations

Building on these national and international discourses relating to race and human rights, many organisations developed their own internal guidelines on their use of images. In conjunction with this there were also broader international guidelines issued such as the *Code of Conduct: Images and Messages Relating to the Third World*¹⁵ which was adopted by the General Assembly of European NGOs in 1989. Marzo details how this was also espoused in 2004 with a review to this code, which was pioneered by Dóchas (an umbrella organisation for Irish NGOs).¹⁶ Dóchas outlines in its code that imagery employed by organisations must adhere to the following principles:

- Respect for the dignity of the people concerned;
- Belief in the equality of all people;
- Acceptance of the need to promote fairness, solidarity and justice.¹⁷

These principles require each organisation that signs up to the code to contextualise any situation they are representing in images so as to aid the public in a wider understanding of the issues relating to aid and development. Similarly, it compels

¹⁴ See <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cerd.htm>

¹⁵ Accessed at: www.inizjamed.org/code_of_conduct_images_messages.doc

¹⁶ See: <http://www.dochas.ie/>

¹⁷ Accessed at: <http://www.dochas.ie/code/>

organisations to move beyond established stereotypes of people, regions and situations. The organisations must also gain the permission of each person depicted in these images, as well as ensuring to give them an opportunity to tell their particular story. In the context of this research Dóchas also state that each group must 'Conform to the highest standards in relation to human rights and protection of the vulnerable people'.¹⁸

While the Dóchas code appears to include all the elements that would ensure an approach that protects the human rights of the individuals/groups they are depicting, it has been argued that the images utilised by charitable organisations and campaigns has not evolved beyond established practices in relation to how groups and individuals are depicted. Indeed, it has been argued that there has in fact been a rise in emotive images of children in distress.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kate Manzo. *An Extension of Colonialism? Development Education, Images and the Media*. p 9.
Accessed at:
<http://www.imaging-famine.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/extension-of-colonialism.pdf>

4.0 Constructing Images

The cultural theorist Stuart Hall has commented that we give people, objects and events meaning by how we represent them.²⁰ In terms of the media more generally, he develops on this point, arguing that we construct our understanding within an ideology, and that this ideology enables us to 'make sense' of our social reality and our position within it. He views this as becoming unquestionable and in effect 'common sense'. His key point is that as these representations are ideologically constructed they therefore become the de facto 'truth'. Indeed, when we consider the issue of race, religion, gender and sexuality the impact of a lack of questioning of media representation becomes apparent as they effectively allow us to classify groups and individuals according to the ideology that is underlying the images/representation.

This means that images employed to portray a particular group/region (in this case Africa) will be viewed with a type of lens, one which is constructed within the discourses in which we are subject to (i.e. a Western/European/white one). This is a central point in how Africa has been 'constructed' in charity campaigns. It also builds on what the postcolonial critic Edward Said termed 'Orientalism', where he argued that the West established its identity in creating and establishing differences with the 'other' i.e. the East (or Orient), or in our case, Africa. He examined the distinctions that have been established between the 'East' and 'West' and the motivating factors behind them.²¹ By

²⁰ Stuart Hall. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 2007:1)

²¹ Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. (London: Penguin, 25th anniversary ed. 2003)

establishing the 'other', the West is able to build its own identity as an antithesis to that of 'the Orient':

In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation. The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient therefore relies very little, and cannot instrumentally depend, on the Orient as such. On the contrary, the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as 'the Orient'.²²

This involves central processes that require the constant interpretation and indeed, re-interpretation, of the West in comparison with the 'other'. The analysis is also based upon the premise that there are implicit power relations established, placing the 'West' in a superior position to that of the 'Orient'. Therefore, it requires us to examine the discourses constructing these oppositional images and perceptions. Jacques Derrida explained the nature of opposition and drew on De Saussure to explain his concept of 'différance'.²³ This concept maintains that established oppositions are in fact already *united* given that they depend on each other integrally; people, language, objects and images only exist in relation to an 'other'. Furthermore, the 'differences' we are presented with are arbitrary and ultimately subject to the socio-political context in which they are created and effectively promoted in. In this light, Said warns that these 'differences' open up the possibility of reductionist and misinformed concepts and stereotypes which may be viewed in the context of the research as effectively constituting a neo-colonial approach to regions and people. This reductionism inhibits the possibility of moving beyond stereotyping and over-simplified discourses relating to culture and identity around the globe.

It may be useful in the context of this research, to consider the images employed in charity campaigns as constituting a vehicle for this type of thinking, effectively evoking the 'otherness' that Said relates to discourses of power. These images may therefore be viewed as constituting ideological tools that can serve to reinforce hierarchical systems of inequality and subordination. The impact of the construction of such a

²² *Ibid.*, p17.

²³ J. Derrida, 'Différance'. *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1982.

dichotomy is to produce an image of a pan-Africa devoid of differentiation of its people and geographies or Africa as:

...[a] site of cultural, moral and spatial difference, populated by 'barbarians', 'heathens', 'primitives'... and generally underdeveloped.²⁴

Barthes²⁵ used the term 'myth' to denote what is produced by such images. This 'myth' universalises meanings specific to a small group and applies them to a much larger group or in this case region. Reflecting on the relationship between the obvious symbolic meaning of a photograph (which he called the studium) and that which is purely personal and dependent on the individual, that which 'pierces the viewer' (which he called the punctum). He also argued that such distinctions collapse when personal significance is communicated to others and can have its symbolic logic rationalised. Dogra articulates this and applies it in the context of NGOs and INGOs and their charitable campaigns:

The images studied seem to raise the question of I/NGOs possible contribution to the making and institutionalization of the existing 'myth' by their subtle but persistent depictions of a stereotyped 'agrarian' Third World made up of only farmers.²⁶

Therefore, how images are constructed has ramifications for the creation of generalised viewpoints of particular regions, peoples and cultures. The stereotypes that are perpetuated in their wake provide fertile ground for the abuse of the rights of those associated with such images.

²⁴ David Campbell. 'Documentary Photography and Imaging the Famine' in Francois Deberix *Rituals Of Mediation: International Politics And Social Meaning*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2003, pp 69-96) p69.

²⁵ Roland Barthes. *Mythologies*.(Paris: Seuil, 1970)

²⁶Nandita Dogra. 'Reading NGOs visually'—Implications of visual images for NGO management'. *Journal of International Development*. Volume 19, Issue 2, pp 161–171.

5.0 Stereotypes

A key element of considering the above theories in relation to African images and images employed in media outlets more generally is the issue of the apparent recourse to established stereotypes. The impact of these stereotypes lies in the argument that the audience or viewers of these images are for the most part not invited, provoked or indeed encouraged to reflect of their basis or to deconstruct them. Indeed, the employment of imagery that can be considered 'negative' in relation to its representation of Africa has been debated at length. Cohen describes how by the mid 1970s images of helplessness, dependency and suffering in 'traditional 'starving child' appeals' were being denounced in terms relating them to neo-colonialism as well as describing them as 'an allegory of pornography'.²⁷ This effectively constitutes a sense of 'development pornography' where images of women and children in distress are employed to evoke strong feelings in a target audience.

The media coverage in 1984-1985 of the Ethiopian famine saw the Western community 'outraged by the images of emaciated children and their desperate parents...'.²⁸ This coupled with the release of UK and US famine relief songs were central components in illiciting public support. Davishas also observed that this was criticised at the time for its

²⁷ S. Cohen. *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) p178

²⁸ H. Louise Davis. *Compassionate Consumerism: Mass Movements, Youth Markets, and the Evolution of an Ethic from Band Aid to Idol Aid*. Biblio Bazaar, LLC, 2011. p16.

ethnocentric and 'flawed one-world sentiment'.²⁹ Live Aid marked an important moment for how charity campaigns would be structured and promoted.

The key to this was the personalisation and what those involved with the campaign viewed as the 'humanisation' of the famine by relating the specific experiences of those suffering. It has been found that people donate more than double when asked to contribute for an individual about whom they have received personal information about in comparison to just receiving statistics on groups generally.³⁰ This is supported by Small and Verrochi who argue that people 'catch' the emotions displayed on a victim's face and they are particularly sympathetic and likely to donate when they see sad expressions versus happy or neutral expressions.³¹ The impact of Live Aid supports this in that the iconic depiction of a three year old starving child (see image below), Birhan Woldu, around the world at Live Aid in 1985 evoked mass support for the Live Aid cause.



(Image of Birhan Woldu on screens at 1985 Live Aid concerts)

²⁹ H. Louise Davis. 'Feeding the World a Line?: Celebrity Activism and Ethical Consumer Practices From Live Aid to Product Red' .*Journal for Nordic Studies in English*. 9.3 (2010): 89-118.

³⁰ H. Joffe. 'The Power of Visual Material: Persuasion, Emotion and Identification'. *Diogenes*. 2008, 55:84. p89

³¹ D.A. Small and N.M. Verrochi Coleman (2009), 'The Face of Need: Facial Emotion Expression on Charity Advertisements'. *Journal of Marketing Research*, December (46: 6), 777-787

Evoking the earlier discussion of 'Orientalism', the use of such images may also serve to reinforce the differentiation between 'us' and 'them' in that those depicted are promoted as in some sense base and in need of help from the 'West'. Thus, these stark depictions are endowed with a sense of the hierarchical position of the regions in which they were employed to evoke mass sentiment. However, this viewpoint cannot be resigned to have being only a feature of the approaches to charity campaigns in Africa in the 1980s. In 2005 it was decided that another attempt to recreate the support received for the 1985 campaign by reintroducing Birhan Woldu, now an adult.



(Madonna and BirhanWoldu on stage at Live 8 in 2005)³²

In stark contrast to the image of Woldu as starving three year old, the image that was sent out in 2005 was of a vibrant and healthy woman on stage with one of the world's most famous pop stars. Bob Geldof introduced her in the following terms:

She had 10 minutes to live 20 years ago. Because of Live Aid 20 years ago, because we did a concert in this city and in Philadelphia, last week she did her agricultural exams in the school she goes to in the northern Ethiopian highlands. She is here. Don't let them tell you that this doesn't work.³³

³² Accessed at:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_pictures/4545622.stm

³³ 'Live 8 stars issue a rallying call', *Mail on Sunday*, 3 July 2005

By 'this' Geldof refers to the needs for financial support for a campaign such as Live Aid. This spectacle of the 'transformed' famine victim was in effect a self-congratulatory moment for those 'Western' actors; they viewed themselves as having intervened to save this specific individual and evidence the positive impact that charity can have on regions experiencing famine and hardship.

Live Aid and the manner in which its campaign was orchestrated requires us to question the use of children in African charity campaigns. However, a key to the analysis of the impact of the employment of such imagery was the nature of the emotions is evoked in the audience: was it compassion, or indeed was it pity?³⁴ It has been argued that a child is a common symbol of humanity³⁵, therefore when an image is presented of a suffering child, or a child in need, it evokes a response that may be deemed more universal than that of a suffering adult, for example. However, as the impact of this focus on children in African charity campaigns, presents Africa as in effect infantilised and requiring the assistance from the West. Indeed, it is this focus that feeds perceptions of Africans as passive, needy, unable, or indeed, unwilling to help themselves. Implicit in the understanding of these images is the sense of Africans as inferior or as discussed earlier, 'under-developed'.

The issue of the use of children in charity campaigns represents a fundamental predicament for the depiction of Africans in images employed by charities. That is to say, in order to attract funds a human face appears to be required to attract donations and illicit support from people in a given area, all the while ultimately (mis)representing or indeed stereotyping the individuals from a specific geographical region.

The underlying motivation for employing imagery of children (or in some cases mothers and children) has been argued as not being based in such ideological constructions but simply rather that of the financial pull of imagery of children in charity advertisements. Studies have found that people intend to give more money when presented with images

³⁴ R. Bleiker and A. Kay 'Representing HIV/AIDS in Africa: Pluralist Photography and Local Empowerment' *International Studies Quarterly*. Volume 51, Issue 1, pages 139–163, March 2007

³⁵ E. Burman. 'Innocents Abroad: Western Fantasies of Childhood and the Iconography of Emergencies', *Disasters*, vol. 18:3, 1994, pp.238-53.

of children rather than adults.³⁶ Gidley encompasses this point in arguing that fundraising departments of aid agencies 'say the starving baby pictures tug heart strings and bring in cash'.³⁷ Studies have found that people intend to give more money when presented with images of depicting children rather than adults.³⁸

The issue of representations of children and women in African charity campaigns is not solely confined to issues of stereotype or even ideology; it also has ramifications for how the poverty and lack of financial independence the charities are bringing to our attention is addressed. The representation of Africa (and Africans) as disempowered, disenfranchised or simply 'agrarian' effectively prioritises aid rather than investment. This is drawn out by the Manzo who discusses various forums in which concerns relating to the 'Afro-pessimism' have been aired, particularly by the brewing and distilling corporation Diageo, who stated:

*Reporting exclusively on politics, conflict, famine and disease is perpetuating an unbalanced picture of Africa and fuelling the appetite of audiences for further pessimistic coverage. It also contributes to undermining investor confidence in Africa.*³⁹

Thus, while charities may appear to utilise images in a bid to gain as much funds as necessary the point has to be made that this is often at the cost of negative representations and perceptions of Africans and the region. The central crux of this argument on whether or not charities should be employing images of this nature of Africa and individuals/groups in need is based on the conflict between short term and long term goals. This is summed up by Marza who agrees:

*...dominant media images of the majority world promote emotion without understanding, charity without structural change*⁴⁰

³⁶Joffe, op.cit. p89.

³⁷ R. Gidley. 'NGOs Still Fail Standards on Appeal Images'. Reuters Foundation, AlertNet, See: <http://www.trust.org/alertnet/news/ngos-still-fail-standards-on-appeal-images>

³⁸Joffe, op cit., p10.

Diageo. *Africa: the Marginalised Continent*.

Accessed at <http://www.diageoafribusinessreportingawards.com/downloads/MarginalisedContinent.pdf>

⁴⁰Op cit.

Therefore, charity campaigns in representing Africa, Africans and those of African descent are frequently seen to be motivated by short term needs. This is reflected in what may be viewed as the emotive, if not sensationalist, imagery they are often seen to employ, whereby the campaigns invite little consideration of the multi-levelled socio-political issues at stake in areas of Africa.

6.0 African images and their impact on public perception

Three central themes emerged in conversations with Africans or individuals of African descent living in Northern Ireland. These were Africans as helpless or needy and the basis for these views; representations of African women; and Africa as a monolithic, undifferentiated region.

6.1 Africans as helpless

In the focus groups and interviews conducted in the course of this research an overwhelming theme that emerged was the perpetuation of images of helpless Africans in charity campaigns. This was viewed as continuing despite many of the organisations mentioned having ascribed to the Dóchas principles. This helplessness was often attributed to their need for intervention on the part of Western European countries to 'help' the groups depicted out of their predicaments, whether that be in terms of famine, poverty or war. This draws on the earlier discussion related to Live Aid in that in many of the charity campaigns focus on the need for Western assistance for the regions/groups/individuals in Africa they are campaigning for. One focus group participant encompassed this:

...they are not true representations. The companies are doing Africa a big disservice. These companies have big offices and pay their staff big salaries.... The media creates negative stereotypes that make me feel guilty when I'm sitting in my sitting room. Looking at it more closely it's a media gimmick... I think it's very wrong.

This comment covers various issues but most notable is the impact these images have on the individual in question. That is to say that images employed by organisations have an acute impact on how people are being made feel personally about their ethnic/cultural origins. This was also related by another participant who gave an example of a news programme in the UK showing images of people hunting and eating insects in a particular region of Africa:

It's being conveyed that Africans are useless and need your help. I resent it as I come from one of those countries that they focus on and saw a programme that they said that

things had gotten so bad people were eating bugs... To put this into context if you go to parts of Asia, right, a market in China let's say, and there are some insects that are considered delicacies and are seasonal. I think it was Channel Four that they did that as they went during the rainy season to Zimbabwe, where some people eat these caterpillars, we call them flying ants... people were going about their business hunting for them, enjoying them and the TV wanted to give a negative slant that we were that badly off that we had to eat bugs.

The key issue here is that while the news programme may have deemed this as evidence of poverty or desperation for food, it neglected to unpack the cultural context of the practice. This results in an image that resonates with UK viewers as effectively 'backward'. However, the primary impact of such inaccurate depictions of communities in specific regions of Africa is to emphasise differences between the cultural worlds of the watcher and the watched; to magnify their 'otherness'. This may be viewed as having a basis in the arguments proposed by Said and Hall discussed earlier and is predicated on a lack of knowledge and understanding. This point was expanded on by a focus group participant who argued in terms of charities:

The image of black people and the objective of those charities; how could any organisation attempt to help somebody or a group if one they cannot understand them, or they can't understand why they are trying to help them. Are they trying to make the world a better place or the area, or are they focusing on themselves?

Thus, similarly to the nature of the arguments raised in the literature relating to the subject of images of Africans, there appears to be an awareness on the part of Africans and those of African descent living in Northern Ireland that there is little time given to unpacking the basic stereotypes of Africans and the region, generally.



This photo on Oxfam Ireland's Flickr account (and used on their website) is representative of many of the images that the organisation employs in campaigns relating to Africa

Indeed, images promoted by groups and organisations in a bid to attract attention to specific causes are often seen to adhere to the principles of codes aimed at ensuring that the images truly represent the groups/individuals in question in a fair and respectful manner and ultimately protect their human rights. However, in considering the nature of the images employed by organisations it is often the case that many of the pictures are composed in a manner by which to emphasise particular colours, focal points and scenarios.

Thus, while many of the resulting images adhere to principles set in place to reduce the negative portrayal and impact of such charity campaign images, what results are contrived images which are often perceived as being subject to the discourses which brought the stereotypical 'poster-child' images into being. However, while the 'poster-child' analogy was raised as a caricature of charity campaigning in relation to Africa, this research found that images of this nature are very much the focal point of many campaigns. One charity representative acknowledged this in the context of fundraising:

In terms of content in the frame of the photograph we do try and steer clear of those stereotypical images...It's hard though, for fundraisers as that's their first instinct

While another individual working in a charitable organisation argued:

We don't look at children in isolation. Where we do use children it is often to link with our target audience, so schools, young people and parents. The child represents the family and we document the story of their family and community.

However, the key issue for many of the participants in this research was how these images of children reflect on Africa as a region but also its inhabitants and Africans and those of African descent living elsewhere. The 'poster-child' has become another mechanism by which Africa is indeed infantilised and depicted as requiring help and nurturing from the West.



(Image from Concern January 2012 Concern Worldwide *East Africa – The Crisis Continues*)

This functions at its most problematic at the psycho-social level of those identifying with the cultural context of those being depicted. One focus group participant articulated this:

As a collective consciousness, when we see these images that things aren't so good in Africa... these images have to erode at our social conscience as a people. African people start resenting each other, as it makes me feel different to them, and it destroys a collective people.

These images feed into a negative self image of Africans living elsewhere as they effectively alienates those removed from the region from those who remain. It also has the impact of creating an identification of the images with people of a particular ethnic origin, thus as the participants discussed, creating a need for Africans and those of African descent in Northern Ireland to distance themselves from the Africa/Africans as they are represented in these images:

We are the diaspora and we think we know everything... People [from Africa] over here think we're the brains that left Africa... the so called 'brain drain'... There is a perception that Africans in Africa cannot manage themselves

This illustrates the lack of suitability and indeed accuracy of the imagery in this context, and the impact this has on Africans and those of African descent. Another focus group participant articulated this:

How would you feel if an advert came on like that?... You block it out and this reaction is conditioning you as you need to block it out. People from here don't understand how hurtful it is.

Thus, the consequences of these images for Africans and those of African descent living in Northern Ireland is felt at a group level but also acutely at the level of the individual. While many organisations employing images of a particular nature work within the framework of principles and effective codes of conduct on the use of imagery, the reality is that many of these campaigns and the images utilised give little consideration to the negative impact of these images not only on those communities they are photographing but also the groups/individuals from the region that have to deal with the emerging stereotypes and negative connotations of Africans and those of African descent.

The causality and basis for the recourse to images portraying Africans as needy, helpless or indeed incapable was emphasised by Africans and those of African descent in the focus groups as being based in the need for charitable organisations to attract donations and ultimately sustain themselves. Indeed, many of the focus group participants felt that organisations aim to publicise images with a view to promoting specific views of Africa. One argued:

The camera people look for this stuff. They want it to be dramatic.

As discussed earlier, research as has illustrated that more charity donations are received if charity organisations use images of a particular nature, i.e. individuals/children/groups in particularly harsh circumstances. This was also acknowledged by a charity representative:

We showed a smiling mother and baby, and I can see why we do that, but as a fundraiser there's a conflict as it appears[in the photograph] that the job's done!

However, many of the participants felt that these charities often undermine the basis of their campaigns by effectively exploiting the people they view themselves to be helping. This view is well encompassed by a focus group participant:

While I think people can be well intentioned they are not helping...the charity they are doing doesn't help the people.... If you go and drill a well in Nigeria or Zimbabwe you're not teaching people how to drill their own or maintain them. What the companies are doing is creating more business for themselves, this is from my perspective.....it's against their goals [to make Africans self sufficient] as they want to sustain themselves. They are businesses not charities... Once you're able to hire billboards it's a business.

The nature of charity organisations themselves and how they apply and distribute the funds they receive in the wake of particular campaigns was viewed as being a root cause for the portrayal of Africa and Africans in a particular light. Many viewed the 'pulling at the heart strings' technique of depicting the worst scenarios with images of individuals/groups in distress as not only exploiting the people they are photographing but also creating a 'donation' culture. That is to say, that by creating a situation whereby those being targeted as potential donors are being appealed to at a level where they will react on an impulsive reaction to a particular image without understanding the context or background to a situation means that the cycle of the use of 'development pornography' is perpetuated.

In practice this means that by employing stark imagery or indeed 'poster children', the charities run the risk of creating a cycle of short lived donations or indeed creating a culture of complacency whereby imagery has to become increasingly extreme or emotive to illicit support from the public. This was related to a general approach to

Africa and countries within it, where the need to 'help' was often short lived or indeed fulfilled some transient need within an individual. One participant believed that the use of images and the nature of the charity culture it was perpetuating could be directly correlated with the increase in what he termed 'development tourism':

There is a thing which is basically poverty tourism now... where people want to 'help' the Africans... Kibera has tourism of poverty and natives in Kenya... when an organisation makes that part of their programme to address an issue by making a token visit, and a lot of people on the ground are against it because they feel exploited because of their poverty.

Those who participated in this research believed there is a need to deconstruct the images we are presented with in terms of the impact on the communities and individuals they are depicting but also the subliminal messages that are being conveyed about an entire continent, its inhabitants, and those who have left the region yet are subject to the messages conveyed in the images.



(Image courtesy of Trócaire)

In addition to this, many focus group participants related the imagery associated with African charity campaigns to the broader discussion on the causalities of Africa's difficulties. This echoed issues discussed earlier on what Said viewed as the construction of hierarchical systems of inequality and subordination. One focus group participant stated:

The main governments that run this world, the ones that hold the power, they conveniently wipe out certain aspects of history. The reason some African countries are in the situation they are in is as they have been continuously exploited. It's not an excuse. I'm not saying feel sorry for Africans...

This discussion further centred on the exploitation of African resources and how many of the focus group participants felt that this could be directly correlated with the nature of images depicting the region in the 'West'. One participant articulated his view on this in the following terms:

The media is controlled by the western powers who control the global financial system. There is no reason why any country in Africa should be dependent on any other country.

Thus, while the issue of the nature of images impacting on the human rights of individuals in Northern Ireland, the focus groups demonstrated an acute awareness on the much broader and power related issues feeding the narrative the world receives on Africa and as a result Africans.

6.2 Representations of African women

A key finding of this research was the concentration of images of women among African charity campaigns. Supporting the literature on the subject of media portrayals of Africans, this was viewed as an affective tactic of charity campaigning by one focus group participant:

From the media narrative about war they always categorise women and children together and describe the situation and highlight these groups and that they are suffering more. The fact that if it's a war everyone suffers. Some organisations realise they can make money out of this and create projects around it.

The vast majority of images depicted in charity campaigns concerning Africa involved women as the focal point of the campaigns. Women or groups of women are often seen to be accompanied by children, drawing on the earlier discussion of the infantilisation of Africa through the depiction of children. In a broad context, the impact of such imagery is to in effect present Africa as a place apart; devoid of the accepted Western construct of what constitutes the family unit.

This has the combined impact of exacerbating the portrayal of Africans as needy but also brings into focus the issue of 'orientalism' and 'otherness'; that is to say that by conveying the African family unit in such terms it not only demeans the social structures in place, but also emphasises the 'need' for Western intervention and aid. However, it must also be acknowledged that there are instances where the reality of the situations in given regions and countries in Africa justify a focus on women and children in their campaigns. One charitable organisation representative articulated this in relation to the plight of the recent famine in East Africa:

One of the things for east Africa was that it was mainly women and children on the move and the men had taken the animals to different pastures.

Focus group participants acknowledged that there are particular situations where the images are accurate in depicting women and children in isolation (such as in the case of East Africa), but feel it is rather an issue of a culture of charity imagery that focuses on women and children that has led to the problems of how African women feel they are being represented.



(Concern Northern Ireland newsletter January 2012)

In addition to this, the issue of presenting women in terms of their roles as mothers feeds into another aspect of the 'Orientalism' at play in these images; that of the nature of sexuality in Africa. In this context, campaigns such as (RED)TM present us with stark figures to convey the message about the reality of HIV/AIDS and its transmission in the region and have brought the issue to a western audience in an unprecedented manner.⁴¹ Similarly, many organisations employ the message about HIV/AIDS as an over-arching theme of all their campaigns.

However, there is an apparent emphasis on the prevalence of the disease amongst women. When we consider the combination of the images and messages utilised in relation to this issue we are left with the impression that African men are simply

⁴¹ (RED)TM is an organisation established by Bono from the band U2 aimed at eliminating HIV/AIDS by 2015. 22 million people with AIDS live in Africa. The disease is the leading cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa with approximately 3,600 people dying every day from AIDS See <http://www.joinred.com/>

spreading AIDS to women and children, while women are the submissive carriers. The overall sense is that HIV/AIDS in Africa is out of control and requires Western intervention to limit it.



(Image from 2011 Concern Mother and Baby Christmas Appeal)

Thus, while this research recognises the massive scale of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in areas of Africa, it has also found that those individuals identifying with the region in terms of their ethnic/cultural background are profoundly impacted on by the associated messages charity campaigns are conveying. Many of the respondents felt that these images and representations ultimately created a sense of fear amongst those viewing the campaigns, one participant stated:

The messages in the images, a message is conveyed by an image, people form their opinions from them. People are presented with images of people with famine, poverty and AIDS and that makes people who live here fearful.

This fear was not confined to Africans and those of African descent but also the basis for many stereotypical views which impact on the lives of those individuals now living elsewhere. One focus group participant related this to the representation of African women:

African women and ethnic minority women are misrepresented... Black ethnic minority women are viewed as breeding like rabbits... They relate them to acute poverty and as a scrounge on the system... That they need help from that system. Campaigns reinforce negative images and stereotypes.

This impedes the ability of African women and women of African descent to move beyond the stereotypes created in charity campaign images. That is to say, by being represented exclusively in terms of their roles as mothers and sole nurturers these images create an image whereby African women are defined by these roles. The focus groups viewed this as feeding into pre-existing fears surrounding immigrants more generally.



(Oxfam 2012)

In addition to the impact on perception of African women the emphasis on this group in areas of Africa, the charity campaigns may also be seen to be making a commentary on men in that region, as well as the societal norms and structures that facilitate the perpetuation of such circumstances for those deemed to be most vulnerable in society (i.e. women and children). This renders the region and its inhabitants as effectively emasculated. The stereotype of men as effectively abandoning women and children in favour of conflict or indeed to fend for themselves in periods of famine, drought or acute poverty does little to deconstruct the narrative of Africans as somewhat unevolved and requiring 'civilising'. A focus group respondent encompassed this, stating:

The perception of the black man as a brute or as savages and I think some of the images NGOs use are disempowering and make you numb.

A focus group participant stressed this point and related it to a wider perception of an undifferentiated Africa, devoid of law and order:

These charities don't make these messages up themselves... It's a very slick message... What they are trying to say that the black family unit is a shambles... The black men are either war lords or running around in a conflict.

This viewpoint has been evidenced recently in the Kony 2012 campaign, as discussed earlier. The campaign effectively employed the image and message that the problems of child soldiers, violence and corruption in Uganda may be attributed to the Lord's Resistance Army, and portrayed its leader, Joseph Kony, as the motivating force behind this violence. The implicit message here is that it is a man responsible for the level of violence and social instability in Uganda and women are effectively powerless. Therefore, emphasis here should be on the 'disempowering' impact of these images not only on the women and children depicted, the men conspicuous in their absence, or indeed by their depiction as warlords, and ultimately on the population of these areas as a whole. The reproduction of such images undermines efforts to challenge undifferentiated and indeed unsubstantiated narratives on Africa and Africans and as a result feed into well established discourses many feel are debasing Africans and their cultures.

6.3 Africa as a monolithic, undifferentiated region

Many of the participants in this research made many references to the lack of understanding of the region geographically and felt that this is fostered by charity campaigns. This was discussed in terms of the mechanisms employed by charity campaigns (such as that of the 'poster child') and ultimately based on the need to procure funds. It effectively constitutes a 'one size fits all' approach to Africans and Africa as a region. Many of the focus group participants viewed the information that the images project about Africa as not only reinforcing stereotypes about the continent and its inhabitants but also fostering a culture of ignorance in relation to the vast region and its diversity. One respondent encompassed this:

There is a lot of ignorance. There is a huge difference between the African nations and there are certain stereotypes, or the general view that is represented... There isn't the understanding of the culture. I talk to people who think that Africa's a country!

Many others attributed this as simple ignorance among people who have not visited the continent of Africa:

I think they don't know, it's just ignorance. Most people I know who have travelled is different.

Another participant echoed the view above and stated:

Many people I speak with are quite localised and they don't really look outside their own area and what they know of Africa is what they see on the TV or billboards.

The key to these issues was that many of the research participants felt that the concentration of imagery profoundly shapes how they view individuals and groups who identify with the region.

This pan-African imagery serves to deny difference in the region and reinforces stereotypes about what constitutes 'Africa' in terms of charity campaigns. While it is wholly inaccurate in practical terms, it is also problematic in terms of the message that it being conveyed about the region, its inhabitants and those who identify with the region.

Firstly, as discussed earlier, it may be viewed as a type of 'Orientalism', stressing the 'differences' between 'us' and 'them' and denying differentiation between drastically different social and cultural practices in different parts of Africa. In practical terms it further embeds the perception of what Africa is, drawing on the analogy of the monolithic 'dark continent'.⁴² Indeed, this was acknowledged in the focus groups with one participant arguing:

When you see one image of an African you think it applies to everyone.

The image of Africa as a monolithic region, devoid of cultural and national differentiation may be directly as result of the 'knee jerk' reactions to charity campaigns; in that by attempting to procure funds in a manner that appeals to individuals' and groups' emotions, the campaigns neglect to portray countries in Africa in an accurate, and thus differentiated, manner. Charity representatives also reflected the view that the image of Africa as a monolithic region may also emanate from the nature of the appeals themselves; i.e. they may be disaster appeals or reactionary in their nature. This may inhibit the ability of campaigns to go further than superficial representations of given situations and indeed, regions. A charity representative acknowledged this:

In emergency appeals it's complicated because the reality is the reality, and it needs exposure... But we don't use extreme images, or compromise people's dignity.

They further emphasised this point:

Our issue is that development is harder to fundraise than for an emergency. Whenever we are fundraising for development it is about case studies and information. We are telling stories about people and what they have been through.

Thus, the nature of disasters/emergencies the charity organisations are fundraising for is often seen to negate the ability of campaigns to go beyond the immediacy of the images presented to the public.

The depiction of Africa as a monolith was directly related by the Africans and those of African descent participating in this research to the issue of a sense of superiority they

⁴² For further discussion on the metaphor of Africa as the 'dark continent' see: L. Jarosz. 'Constructing the Dark Continent: Metaphor as Geographic Representation of Africa'. Series B, *Human Geography* Vol. 74, No. 2 (1992), pp. 105-115.

feel pervades charity campaigns. This relates to the earlier discussion on the impact of Live Aid and the sense of 'the West' as 'saving' Africa. The reality of this view was in fact acknowledged by a charity representative:

The media don't pay attention until they see a white person going in... It's a damning indictment of us as a region

The wider media portrayal and narrative regarding charity campaigns was also considered by organisation representatives. One placed emphasis on the role of the local media in Northern Ireland in this context:

The local media are a challenge... There's one page in some of these newspapers on international news... They want the Northern Ireland angle and our view is 'well the angle is that your readers have raised so much money for international development'.

The wider local media in Northern Ireland is therefore also a crucial element in how Africans and Africa are depicted and represented in images. The view of the charity representatives is that the media often only gives exposure to more extreme situations and therefore it should also be also held accountable for how Africans and those of African descent are being impacted on by imagery of Africans and Africa.

7.0 The implications of these images

This research by addressing the topic of images in these charity campaigns has sought to investigate the impact of such images on groups of people who are profoundly negatively impacted on by these images and the messages they convey. It is not simply a matter of the representation of individuals and groups in a particular region but also the human rights implications of these representations for those who identify with these regions in ethnic or cultural terms in Northern Ireland. One focus group participant argued the following:

The image says there's no food, we're starving. If David Cameron or Theresa May says people were let into the UK without checks, and my skin colour gives away that I'm not born here... an average guys reads this and blames me. They are being fooled by the politics of the land and by the charity campaigns who reinforce this view.

Therefore, these images cannot be considered in a vacuum, they require deconstruction in the socio-political context in which they are promoted and perpetuated. That is to say, these images have far-reaching consequences beyond merely being the subject of a specific campaign. Rather, they are a component in a much broader narrative that is negatively impacting on Africans and those of African descent in Northern Ireland. This narrative implicitly emphasises the 'otherness' of these individuals and groups and ostracises many new communities and reinforces the perception of them as on the periphery of society in Northern Ireland. This, in tandem with the reproduction of images of Africans as needy and requiring aid, means that Africans are presented in terms of their need for financial assistance. This is a precarious message in terms of those who identify ethnically/culturally with Africa in Northern Ireland as it effectively places charity campaign images as a central element in the perpetuation inhibiting integration for new communities. This was encompassed by one focus group participant:

You find more abuse towards immigrants. If somebody is out of a job they want to blame somebody; these people are taking our jobs. A lot of Africans and Caribbeans are here to do something, like study. The media puts out the image they are here stealing jobs.

The concentration of these campaigns of the need of Africans in Africa means that this message is effectively transposed onto those who are identified with the region; that they too will require help and assistance. This demeans those who are living in Northern Ireland and compromises their ability to integrate in a meaningful manner. It also constitutes an explicit abuse of the human rights of Africans and those of African descent living in Northern Ireland given that it is predicated on stereotypes and false imagery. Furthermore, these campaign images are entirely at odds with the official narrative relating to black, minority and ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. Good Relations may be defined in the following terms:

*The growth of relationships and structures acknowledge the religious, political and racial context of this society, and that seek to promote respect, equity and trust, and embrace diversity in all its forms.*⁴³

However, as a primary vehicle for the representation of Africans, charity campaigns and the nature of the images they promote frequently endorse messages which are at odds with Good Relations. Indeed, the apparent continuing stigmatisation of a particular group on such a large scale should constitute a fundamental issue for Good Relations as the impact of these messages in terms of human rights goes beyond those who are identifying with those depicted in the campaigns. They compromise moves towards promoting diversity and equality. This was recognised by one focus group participant who stated:

If the government is serious about community cohesion and good relations then there is a disconnect between these images and these aspirations. If you're trying to promote cohesion then you need to address how groups of people are being presented in images

Indeed, one focus group respondent used the example of areas of Northern Ireland to relate the scale of the lack of suitability of many of the charity campaign images:

I could take pictures of Northern Ireland and I could go to Derry to a particular street, where a lot of people go to drink and there are a lot of social problems and I could take a photo of this and put it on Facebook and ask for money to help the people of Derry, but it's not a true reflection of the place or its people. Would it be altruistic or cruel and stereotyping?

⁴³ See: <http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/Good%20Relations%20Summary%20Guide.pdf>

Thus, it is within the framework of human rights in Northern Ireland that the issue of human rights and charity campaign images should be approached. That is to say that the continuing acceptance of the promotion of a particular ethnic group in the terms outlined above should not be treated as an acceptable practice for charitable organisations; rather the use of such images should be subject to the same Section 75 protections as other practices.⁴⁴

The *Racial Equality Strategy (2005-2010)* set out a long term vision for

*A society in which racial diversity is supported, understood, valued and respected, where racism in any of its forms is not tolerated and where we live together as a society and enjoy equality of opportunity and equal protection.*⁴⁵

and stated it was concerned with

*...ensuring that everyone within Northern Ireland is accorded her or his human rights.*⁴⁶

The Strategy focuses on unlawful forms of discrimination (direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation). Indeed, this research has found that those participating feel that they are subject to all of these forms of discrimination to varying degrees as a result of the nature of charity campaign imagery. It is from this point of departure that the urgency of addressing the issue of how Africa and Africans are depicted in such campaigns is made clear. Furthermore, this not only has an impact on Africans and those of African descent living in Northern Ireland, but also other groups and regions that are currently in focus in charity campaigns (for example, Indian and Haiti).

⁴⁴ Under Section 75 of this Act, public authorities are required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- Between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- Between men and women generally;
- Between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- Between persons with dependants and persons without.

Accessed at http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/section_75

⁴⁵ Op cit.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

7.1 Positive images and messages

As outlined earlier, many charities utilising images of Africa, Africans and those of African descent in Northern Ireland have ascribed to the Dóchas Principles. Similarly, the charities who participated in this research articulated an awareness of the issues at stake in terms of the impact of the use of images of Africa and Africans in their work. This is evidenced in the evolving nature of existing and emerging campaign imagery being utilised by organisations.



(An example of what many research participants viewed as more 'positive' imagery. Image courtesy of Oxfam, accessed at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/oxfamireland>)

These images reflect the views of the focus group participants who articulated a need to move beyond negative images of desperation to emphasise the positive elements of life in areas of Africa as well as the ability of groups and individuals to support themselves. This evokes the issue of whether charitable organisations are emphasising aid or development. It was recognised that many images utilised are evolving beyond the traditional stereotypes to reflect developmental framework of many projects and campaigns focusing on regions in Africa.



(Image courtesy of Trócaire)

Many of the women interviewed articulated views in this light and believed that the increased emphasis on images of development is appropriate and necessary, with one participant stating:

I come from a place where women are empowered, people are industrious and they don't sit at home. Even in the villages women farm and work and are so much more than just mothers.

They welcomed a move beyond images simply defining women in their role as mothers and rather to reflect the realities of life in regions of Africa.

There were also suggestions of how these promising developments in charity campaign imagery could be further developed to safeguard the rights of groups and individuals being depicted as well as those identifying with the region in Northern Ireland. Charity campaign images from organisations not focusing of Africa but also fund raising were evoked and the point was raised that many of these campaigns did not place emphasis on negative images or even individuals or groups but rather placed focus on symbols

and inanimate objects to convey their message. One participant encompassed this view:

I don't discount the reality on the ground, but I think there is a better way that could be adopted by NGOs to raise funds. We can compare Action Cancer... they use symbols rather than images to convey their messages. If they can be that creative in that context so should the African NGOs be able to be. It's about a respect for humanity, and is essential.

This they felt meant that the facts/messages were not skewed and the individuals/groups they are campaigning on behalf of are not effectively exploited or compromised in the process. However, this idea was countered by a charity representative:

People don't relate to symbols or statistics... People expect us to tell them a story, in a positive way. We always try to tell the human story, These peoples' stories deserve to be heard, not in a way to focus on the negative things but to show what can be done through the images.

Thus, there appears to be a tension between the nature of images that have worked positively in terms of fundraising for charity campaigns in the past and how the nature of these images may evolve to reflect the considerations of the changing composition of the population of Northern Ireland. Other participants articulated the need to move beyond the negative imagery depicting needy Africans to images, and hence messages, where individuals/groups are portrayed in a manner that demonstrates respect and understanding of the people and regions involved. This was articulated by a participant who put it in the following terms:

The focus needs to be on empowerment and actually hearing peoples' voices and where they want to go.

The central point here is it that campaigns themselves need to be informed by those whom they are seeking to support. Furthermore, the organisations campaigning also discussed how there is very little contact by way of cross-sectoral coordination on the nature of images in campaigns. While many organisations are ascribed to the Dóchas principles, this is often seen to be the only common thread between the approach to charity campaigning and images. This was echoed by a charity representative:

We don't [work together on images] and we haven't for years. The last time it was discussed was when the Dóchas principles were on the table.

Therefore, there appears to be a disconnect between the organisations in terms of a coordinated an approach to the nature of campaign imagery depicting regions of Africa. To affect change in the nature of imagery being employed (and hence it's negative impact on individuals identifying with Africa) it may be considered necessary to coordinate a sector wide approach to this issue.

8.0 Conclusions

This research has found four central areas that need to be considered in relation to charity images concerning Africa and the human rights implications for Africans and those of African descent living in Northern Ireland:

8.1 Review of charity principles

While this research outlined both the international and local context of codes and principles that inform the nature of charity campaigns and how they employ imagery, there is a clear need for a review of how these principles are being applied and adhered to. The reality is that while many of these principles appear to safeguard the rights of those being depicted in charity images, despite their existence individuals and groups who identify with Africa continue to feel they are being stereotypes and exploited (particularly in terms of the focus on specific cases and children who are named). While many of those who participated in this research believed that the existence of such a code is a positive step in how charity organisations are considering the impact of their imagery and messages, it nonetheless requires a re-evaluation. In terms of the principles and a possible review of their content, they may benefit from a more rigorous adherence to European and Northern Ireland human rights provisions, as well as the region specific strategies such as Good Relations.

8.2 Addressing established approaches to campaigns

This research has detailed a clear need to address the nature of approaches to fund raising that charity campaigns are conducting in Northern Ireland presently. A key finding of this research has been that there is a need to move beyond established practices in terms of charitable organisation's imagery and how individuals and groups are being represented and portrayed. This may involve a re-evaluation and consideration of how charities in alternative sectors (such as those promoting cancer awareness and fund raising) are approaching fundraising campaigns in a manner that

does not compromise any individual/group identifying with the cause. Indeed, as one focus group argued, these campaigns are in fact more 'creative' and move beyond a superficial understanding of particular issues. This may also have the added benefit of increasing the investment of donors to particular causes by eliminating 'knee-jerk' emotional responses to specific distressing imagery, and removing the possibility of 'altruistic fatigue'. In addition to this, the efforts that have been made to provide context and background information on individuals/groups depicted in charity campaigns needs to go further to ensure that campaigns are not simply designed to attract funds. The educational opportunity afforded by the exposure these images and their publicity create must be utilised to a greater extent. This is supported by those working and advocating on behalf of charitable organisations, with one interviewee stating:

The challenge is to ensure that all our advertising is not just fundraising but that it's a message of justice and other issues for these groups and regions

This is a key point in relation to the issue of how people are depicted in charity campaigns, but also how those identifying with a particular region are affected in their wake.

8.3 Region wide application of principles governing the use images

In terms of the charity organisations themselves, the political and geographical positioning of Northern Ireland also needs to be considered in the context of charity campaigns.. While some of the organisations involved in this research are All-Ireland in their management structures and hence adhere to the Dóchas principles, others are organised from London and thus are not signatories of the Dóchas code. In this context, there needs to be a wider regional debate on the issue, so as to remove any confusion on the accepted principles for charity campaign images.

8.4 Greater cooperation between charities

Another central requirement for the mainstreaming of the human rights of Africans and those of African descent living in Northern Ireland in relation to charity images would also be the sector wide cooperation by charity organisations themselves. Charity representatives participating in this research themselves outline that there is currently little/no cooperation on issues of the nature of images employed in campaigns. While this research acknowledges that organisations such as Coalition of Aid and Development Agencies in Northern Ireland (CADA)⁴⁷ provide an important and necessary forum for agencies and organisations campaigning on issues relating to Africa as a region, it may be useful for the sector to consider more formalised linkages on the subject of campaigns and their imagery. Furthermore, it may also be necessary to work in conjunction with local media on this subject, to move beyond the tendency to only depict extreme situations, or indeed stories where they are deemed to have a local 'angle'.

⁴⁷ CADA is an umbrella organisation. CADA supports sustainable international development by:

- Enhancing awareness and a better understanding of development issues in Northern Ireland;
- Influencing policy at local, national and international government level;
- Supporting its members to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of their activities

See: <http://www.cadani.org/>

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Appendix

Dochás: Code of Conduct on Images and Messages

(accessed at <http://www.dochas.ie>)

Guiding Principles

Choices of images and messages will be made based on the paramount principles of:

- Respect for the **dignity** of the people concerned;
- Belief in the **equality** of all people;
- Acceptance of the need to promote **fairness, solidarity and justice**.

Accordingly, in all our communications and where practical and reasonable within the need to reflect reality, we strive to:

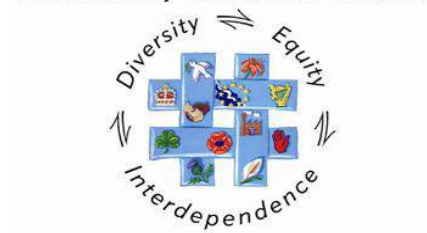
- Choose images and related messages based on values of respect equality, solidarity and justice;
- Truthfully represent any image or depicted situation both in its immediate and in its wider context so as to improve public understanding of the realities and complexities of development;
- Avoid images and messages that potentially stereotype, sensationalise or discriminate against people, situations or places;
- Use images, messages and case studies with the full understanding, participation and permission of the subjects (or subjects' parents/guardian);
- Ensure those whose situation is being represented have the opportunity to communicate their stories themselves;
- Establish and record whether the subjects wish to be named or identifiable and always act accordingly;
- Conform to the highest standards in relation to human rights and protection of vulnerable people.

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AFRICAN IMAGES & THEIR IMPACT ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION

