



**Save the Children**

# **THE PEOPLE IN THE PICTURES**

**Vital perspectives on  
Save the Children's image making**



Images from a selection of the content used in the research, including printed Save the Children fundraising materials, online media features and Save the Children films.

**“The use of imagery across our communications is key to our engagement of supporters and audiences... Images bring the stories of those with whom we work to life, allowing us to share the need for our life-saving work, the positive impact that we have in the short term and the dramatic scale of the progress we are making more widely.”**  
*Imagery and portrayal in communications: statement of principles (Save the Children 2015)*

#### **Note**

This is an extended version of the Executive Summary of the full research report, which is available at: [savethechildren.org.uk/policy-and-research](http://savethechildren.org.uk/policy-and-research)

This research was commissioned by Save the Children in the UK with direct oversight by Jess Crombie, Director of Creative Content. It was undertaken by external consultants: Siobhan Warrington designed the research, completed the analysis and is the lead author of this report; Anna Gormley conducted the majority of the field work. Many individuals in the UK, Jordan, Bangladesh and Niger contributed to and supported this research; acknowledgements are presented in the full report.

# INTRODUCTION

**Images – both photographs and films – are fundamental to how Save the Children communicates its work. Images are used for fundraising, campaigning and advocacy and in these ways support the aims and objectives of the organisation.**

Debates about representations of global poverty and images of suffering have been going on for many years, yet the voices of the people featured in the images – the contributors – have been notably absent. There has been a tendency to consider and judge the image alone, rather than recognise it as the result of a process involving multiple stakeholders, one of whom is the person in the image.

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

In late 2014, Save the Children embarked on a four-country (UK, Jordan, Bangladesh and Niger) research project to listen to and learn from those who contribute their images and stories (contributors), as well as members of their communities and Save the Children staff.

This builds on the *Depicting Injustice* research carried out in 2010 into contributor responses to Save the Children photographs and the photography process in the occupied Palestinian territory, India, Kenya and Afghanistan (Miskelly & Warrington, unpublished).

It is believed that these two initiatives represent the first time that contributors have been engaged as part of formal research on both the process of image making and their portrayal in the resulting communications. The experiences and perspectives of contributors, and their communities, provide a much-needed input to discussions on representations of global poverty and communications by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs).

Save the Children's motivation in embarking on this research was to find out what they were doing well in relation to image making, and where they should seek to improve their practice. Many people in the organisation are concerned with responsible image making, and representation, and wanted to hear from contributors, whose lives are affected by the charity's work, and ensure their experiences and views provide the foundations for

improvements to image making and use. By investing in listening to and learning from contributors, the research demonstrates Save the Children's commitment to accountability in all areas of its work.

The research aimed to explore:

- What **motivated** people to agree to Save the Children filming or photographing them or their children?
- How did people experience and perceive the image-making **process**?
- How did people feel about their **portrayal** in the resulting Save the Children communications?

The research has highlighted many areas of good practice, as well as some concerns and challenges. Save the Children hopes that by sharing the findings, they will catalyse new conversations and contribute new perspectives to the long-running debates on image making by INGOs.

## The research

- The research took place across four countries: **UK** (Wales, London, East Anglia, Yorkshire), **Jordan** (Amman and Zaatar refugee camp), **Bangladesh** (Dhaka and rural Habiganj) and **Niger** (Niamey and rural Tessaoua and Zinder). At the time of the research none of these places were the location of sudden emergencies.
- A total of 39 interviews and 21 focus groups took place, using inclusive and participatory methods.
- In each research site, participants reviewed and discussed a range of Save the Children communications, including TV adverts, short films, media features and fundraising materials, all translated into relevant languages.
- Most of the image making referenced in this research involved a professional filmmaker or photographer. In Jordan, Bangladesh and Niger these image makers were often from overseas.
- There were 202 research participants: 69 women, 50 men and 83 children.
- Of these 202, 53 were contributors (men, women and children who featured in finished content), 19 were staff members, and 130 were members of contributors' communities who did not feature in the finished content (referred to as non-contributors).
- Interviews and focus groups took place between November 2014 and July 2015.

# KEY FINDINGS

## THE RESEARCH FINDINGS ARE GROUPED INTO THREE MAIN THEMES: MOTIVATIONS, PROCESS AND PORTRAYAL.

### MOTIVATIONS

The contributors' decisions to be photographed or filmed by Save the Children were informed by a range of factors and motivations, including:

- a desire to raise awareness of an issue and help others
- a desire to have a voice and be heard by others
- a belief that it could lead to assistance for their child
- an existing relationship with Save the Children.



Photo by a participant in the Inside Zaatari project. Save the Children

### PROCESS

- Good process matters for both contributors and Save the Children staff. When contributors felt they were treated with sensitivity and respect, they felt valued and good about their contribution.
- The use of consent forms was universal, but in Jordan, Bangladesh and Niger contributors appeared to have only a limited understanding of why Save the Children wanted to film or photograph them and how their image and story would be used.
- Feedback and follow-up after image-gathering were valued by both contributors and Save the Children staff, but were only standard practice in the UK.
- Children have strong views on image making. The children who participated in this research talked about the need for image makers to always seek permission to film or photograph children. The children in Jordan who had participated in a Save the Children photography project talked positively about the opportunity and the importance of creating images themselves.

The first-hand accounts of research participants presented here are all from people who have a relationship with Save the Children as a beneficiary, programme participant or staff member. Inevitably, this relationship introduced an element of bias: those who are benefiting

### PORTRAYAL

- Most contributors were satisfied with their portrayal. For those in Jordan, Bangladesh and Niger, the interview for this research was the first time they'd seen the Save the Children communications featuring themselves or their children.
- Media access influenced views on portrayal. Research participants with greater access to visual media, in the UK and Jordan, were more concerned with the potential negative consequences of their image and story being published.
- Research participants understood the need for the use of images of suffering for fundraising purposes.
- Research participants expressed their preferences for balance in portrayal – for images and stories that show resilience and solutions alongside those that show needs and problems.
- Research participants preferred content in which contributors are able to speak for themselves.

from Save the Children services or programmes are possibly less likely to criticise its image-making process and communications. In response to this risk, all participants were assured anonymity during the research and all names used in this report are pseudonyms.

# MOTIVATIONS

**WHAT MOTIVATED PEOPLE TO AGREE TO SAVE THE CHILDREN FILMING OR PHOTOGRAPHING THEM OR THEIR CHILDREN?**

Contributors described a range of motivations, from wanting to share their stories and raise awareness to hoping that contributing would result in help for themselves and others. Some UK contributors were evidently proud of their ability to help others by sharing their image and story, and were keen to give something back to Save the Children. In contrast, some contributors in Bangladesh and Niger agreed for their child to be filmed or photographed in the hope it would result in assistance for their child. For most contributors who were interviewed, their existing relationship with Save the Children was a crucial influencing factor. Members of the contributors' communities and Save the Children staff also shared their views on factors influencing a contributor's decision to participate in Save the Children image making.

*Contributors were motivated by a desire to have a voice, raise awareness and help others*  
A number of contributors at each research site wanted to raise awareness of an issue or a situation by telling their story to the world. Some contributors from the UK believed

that their story could encourage others to come forward and seek the help they need.

**“The photographs of our gardens were meant as a message to the world. Syrians deserve to live, they are humans and capable of creating beautiful things, even though everything is destroyed around them. The living conditions here in Zaatari camp are harsh and the weather is bitter, yet we have created something beautiful for the world.”**

*Mohamad, adult male contributor, Jordan*

**“My aim for us, having our pictures taken, was to make people more aware and to help families like mine... no one knows what it's like unless you're in that person's shoes. And the thing is, I didn't look like I was struggling, but I was. [I said] 'I'd love to give something back because of what you gave me, because it was a life-changing thing at the time.' So yes, we were more than happy to do our share.”**

*Mary, adult female contributor, UK*



*Rosie Thomson/Save The Children*

Contributors were motivated by a belief that sharing their image and story would lead to assistance for themselves and others

Many contributors in Bangladesh and Niger had a generally positive association with image making. They viewed it as an activity 'for good' that was likely to result in some form of assistance for themselves or others in a similar position. This highlighted the levels of trust from contributors towards Save the Children and therefore the need to manage contributors' expectations carefully.

**"When they came, they said they will take our pictures; we only thought of it being something good... we were happy that they came... we said we will reap good things from it some time in the future."**

*Zoulaye, adult female contributor, Niger*

**"We didn't say no. We thought if they were taking pictures it will be for our good only... if they were doing something, it must be for our betterment. That's why we didn't stop them. I don't know if we'll get help or not."**

*Aklima, adult female contributor, Bangladesh*

**"They told me that if my son is shown, there'll be advantages... I thought, 'Our area is not getting any facilities; if they can show this, and we get a few facilities, why not? Along with my son, all the others can get something.'**

*Retna, adult female contributor, Bangladesh*

The relationship with Save the Children influenced the decision to contribute

It's not a neutral situation for an INGO to ask someone who is a past, existing or potential beneficiary to contribute their image and story. For many contributors, it was their relationship with Save the Children that had the most influence on their decision to contribute, whether their agreement was out of gratitude, as a reciprocal gesture, a sense of obligation, or in anticipation of assistance for their child.

**"Why will they [agree to be photographed or filmed]? Not to be on television in England. I don't think that is a specific objective for these people. I think that if they were granted a service, and they have enjoyed it, if the relationship with Save the Children was positive, then I think they're [agreeing] to give something back to Save who came to do this job without asking for something in return."**

*Staff member, male, Niger*

Many non-contributors (people who are part of a contributor's community but do not feature in the finished content) believed that vulnerability or desperation were factors driving some to participate in Save the Children photography or filming

During focus groups at all research sites, desperation was cited as the reason why some parents may have agreed for their children to appear in some of the Save the Children communications shown to them.

**"If it were to the point where my children were [suffering] because we couldn't afford heating, or where we were having to give them just toast or something, then yes, I would do anything in my power to try and improve that situation. If it meant putting myself on TV in the hope that someone would help, then of course I would do it."**

*Focus group with women, UK (in response to a TV advert on childhood poverty in the UK)*

**"[They let Save the Children take the photograph] because they really needed to – if they didn't really need help, they wouldn't let someone take the photo. It's not just for them, it's for other people in the camp."**

*Focus group with children (aged 14-18), Jordan (in response to fundraising poster for Syrian refugees)*

**"They did it to raise money; they don't get anything to eat. Due to the pangs of hunger they've given permission to take such pictures."**

*Focus group with boys (aged 14-18), Bangladesh (in response to a feature on child malnutrition on the BBC website)*



# PROCESS

## HOW DID CONTRIBUTORS AND STAFF EXPERIENCE THE IMAGE-MAKING PROCESS?

Images are produced for others, but the process happens to, and affects, contributors. The research showed that, for both contributors and Save the Children staff, good practice in the image-making process matters. When contributors felt they were treated with sensitivity and respect, they expressed this, and clearly felt valued and good about their contribution. However, some contributors' accounts raised some concerns around consent and follow-up in the image-making process.

**Most contributors were satisfied with the image-making process**

At all research sites, most contributors were satisfied with the process of image making, with a good number referring to their enjoyment or sense of pride in taking part. Several referred to it as being a 'fun' experience, and others talked positively about their interaction with the staff and image makers involved.

**"...they came to my house. I sat with the photographer, we spent the day together, and we had lots of fun."**

*Yusuf, 17-year-old male contributor, Jordan*

**"I felt good... they took my pictures; everyone will see my picture; they took my pictures very affectionately... they talked to me very nicely, they did everything nicely."**

*Retna, adult female contributor, Bangladesh*

**"Everything was clearly explained, so, if there was anything we didn't want to happen, it wouldn't... For us, everything was perfect..."**

*Nicola, adult female contributor, UK*

**The use of consent forms was universal, but contributors in Jordan, Bangladesh and Niger didn't fully understand the purpose of image making**

All but two contributors remember completing a consent form. In the UK, contributors describe a multistage and thorough consent process, resulting in their clear understanding of the purpose of image making, and their ability to make an informed choice to contribute. In contrast, most contributors in Jordan, Bangladesh and Niger only had a vague idea of the purpose. For two contributors in Niger, the image gathering happened at a time when they were fully occupied with their sick child, which could have impaired their decision to contribute.

**"We had some paper we signed... he left me his number saying they won't be offended if we say 'no, we don't want these publicised', or 'we don't want this put out'. He said, 'It's fine, it's up to you...!' So we didn't feel as though we were pressured into anything."**

*Dave, adult male contributor, UK*

**Tariq: "Yes, we signed a form... we didn't understand what they were going to use the film for, they didn't tell us. They told us they were going to make a film about a little girl. We didn't know why."**

**Reem: "I thought the film would be about the living conditions here in this camp."**

*Tariq (male) and Reem (female), parents, contributors, Jordan*

**“We were in such a poor condition, we thought if they took pictures it may be for our betterment... we had this hope we may get help. We had no idea why they took the photos, what did we know? We thought that as we are in a helpless state, it'll be helpful for us.”**

*Sanchita, adult female contributor, Bangladesh*

**“I didn't ask them [about the filming]. When they filmed, all I wanted was to see that my child got cured. That's all... at that time, it was only the boy that was on my mind... his condition was my main problem.”**

*Zara, adult female contributor, Niger*

**Feedback and follow-up were valued by contributors and staff, but were only standard practice in the UK**

Only in the UK is returning photographs to and sharing final communications with contributors considered standard practice. While some contributors in Jordan, Bangladesh and Niger were shown images on the back of a camera at the time they were taken, only one had received a copy of a photograph. Several participants, including staff, expressed their disappointment with this lack of follow-up. (All contributors interviewed for this research received copies of photographs/communications at the time of the interview.)

**“I got a follow-up call asking how it all went and if there were any problems. We even got a Christmas card, the DVD, and some photos.”**

*Sarah, adult female contributor, UK*

**“We expected to see what they filmed. Nothing more and nothing less.”**

*Reem, adult female contributor, Jordan*

**“I know all the reporters that came here; no one ever comes back.”**

*Yusuf, 17-year-old male contributor, Jordan*

**“No. I didn't [see the film after it was taken], it was never brought to me. It was taken, but it was not brought here.”**

*Zoulaye, adult female contributor, Niger*

**Child research participants felt strongly about image making and consent**

Most of the children who participated in the research (most of whom were not contributors themselves) spoke positively about photographs of themselves, associating them with days out, celebrations, friends and family. Children, did however, feel strongly about the need for image makers to always seek permission from them. Children in the UK, without any prompting, shared their dislike of being photographed by relatives without their knowledge, when busy playing or asleep, for example. Children in Bangladesh and Niger explained how they would assert their right to be asked if someone tried to photograph them. Some child research participants said they didn't like having their photograph taken, and a number were aware of the potential negative consequences of being portrayed in INGO communications. Some of the research participants aged 14-18 years in Jordan were involved in the participatory photography project, *Inside Zaatari*. They shared positive feedback on their experience of being supported to become image makers themselves.

**“If someone wants to take my photo, he must ask me, then he can take it, but if he doesn't ask me, then we may fight... If he asks me plainly then it's ok, I will agree. But don't go and put me all over town.”**

*Focus group with boys, including some contributors (aged 14-18), Niger*

**“I don't like photos, only sometimes... sometimes you're a bit like 'oh I'll have my picture taken', sometimes you're like 'no – go away from me, no picture'.”**

*Focus group with children (aged 9-11), UK*

#### **Sensitive and responsible staff**

Interviews with staff at all the research sites served to demonstrate their empathy with, and sense of responsibility towards, contributors. A series of responsibilities emerged to:

- protect those who are vulnerable, especially children
- manage expectations
- ensure established policies and procedures are followed
- communicate clearly with contributors
- maintain relationships
- understand context and culture
- protect dignity and avoid stereotyping
- provide reassurance and good translation
- feedback with contributors after image making.

**“We learned that we don't have to take pictures with a professional camera to take excellent pictures.”**

*Focus group with children (aged 14-18), Jordan (in reference to the training received as part of the Inside Zaatari project)*

**“...it's about keeping promises... and making sure they feel safe and looked after. It's about consistency – that they always get copies of things to keep... it's just treating them as part of a team, in the same way you would if somebody had done a fantastic piece of work for you. It's about adhering to promises that you make so they walk away from it with their head held high, thinking, 'That was a good experience. I might do that again.' [Ensuring that] they don't walk away feeling a little bit used.”**

*Female staff member, UK*

# PORTRAYAL

HOW DID CONTRIBUTORS  
AND MEMBERS OF THEIR  
COMMUNITIES FEEL ABOUT  
THEIR PORTRAYAL?

The majority of research participants understood that Save the Children gathered stories and images for a positive purpose – to help bring assistance to those in need – even if this understanding was based on a limited awareness of how this would be achieved, or who would be assisted. While the initial reaction to many of the films shown was often one of dislike in relation to what was depicted (for example children suffering from malnutrition) – when discussing the fundraising purpose of the same films, many research participants shared positive remarks about the content in relation to these aims.

Contributors' responses to their portrayal in Save the Children communications were influenced by their own access to visual media, their understanding of the purpose of the communications, their proximity to the intended audiences, and their relationship with Save the Children. Contributors and their communities were neither homogeneous nor static in terms of their relationship with visual media and their attitudes towards what is portrayed.

**Contributors were largely satisfied with their portrayal in Save the Children communications**

All contributors in the UK were familiar and happy with most of the content they featured in. For contributors in Jordan, Bangladesh and Niger, the interview for this research was the first time they'd seen the communications featuring themselves or their children. Feelings about their portrayal reflected the immediate pleasure of seeing the images for the first time; some, however, also expressed their sadness at seeing their child who at the time of filming or photography was

ill. In Bangladesh, several associated the content with their vulnerable situation.

**“What was filmed is the way it is. There's no lie in it, even what he said about the soup being made without salt.”**

*Zoulaye, adult female contributor, Niger*

**“Everybody can see this magazine, and will come to know about me and my child. They will think that I'm leading a happy life with my daughter... I like to see these pictures; I'm feeling proud of it. It may lead to further improvements. The hospital can improve further.”**

*Parveen, adult female contributor, Bangladesh*

**“We liked the film, it represents our story and helps people to better understand the meaning of being a Syrian refugee... when they were taking pictures of me while cooking, there was some garbage in my tent. I didn't want them to take pictures of that. I didn't like that part.”**

*Reem, adult female contributor, Jordan*

**“If I had a good life then I would feel good, but in reality, I'm in this profession (sex work). If I were in a good position, I'd be able to say that this is a good photograph... looking at this photo, I feel like I'm in a vulnerable position. I am vulnerable, that's why the photograph was taken.”**

*Habiba, adult female contributor, Bangladesh*

**Concerns about consequences**

Research participants in the UK and Jordan – who have greater media access and are closer to the audiences for whom the content is intended than those in Niger and Bangladesh – were more aware of the potential negative consequences of their contribution. They mentioned the stigma of being seen as poor (in the UK) or as a beggar (in Jordan) and the fear of reprisals for themselves or relatives in Syria if recognised (in Jordan).

**“[I think actors were used] because poor people may not want other people out there to know they're poor, they may want to keep it a secret... So if there was a real poor person in the film, maybe his school mates would see him, then when he went back to school he might have been bullied because he was poor.”**

*Focus group with children (aged 9-11), UK (in response to It Shouldn't Happen Here film)*

**“There is something I didn't like about it – I've got to be honest... saying that about the poor families – that the children are failing at school, I don't believe that's true at all.”**

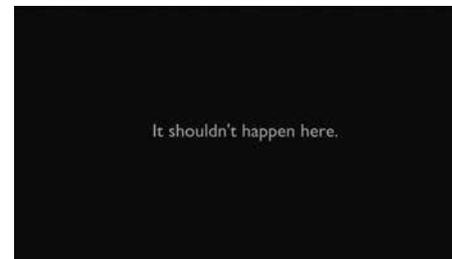
*Focus group with women, UK*

**“We would like to get some guarantees that our pictures will be used in the right way. We wouldn't like to make the world think that people living in Zaatari camp are beggars or terrorists.”**

*Mustafa, adult male contributor, Jordan*

**“Our relatives were afraid that we might get arrested by the Syrian regime if we ever went back to Syria because we appeared on TV.”**

*Reem, adult female contributor, Jordan*



**Research participants understood the need for the use of images of suffering to support fundraising**

Even research participants with limited media access understood that, while they may not like seeing images of children suffering, such depictions are necessary to raise funds to assist those in need.

**“These children with problems should be shown... since we're truly with problems now, [that suffering] should be shown so that those who can help will help.”**

*Focus group with women, Niger*

**“The boy (featured in the TV advert) is sick and people should help him. People have heard about him, now they can help him so that he can be healthy. The boy is sick and he's going to die. People should quickly bring their donations.”**

*Focus groups with boys (aged 14-18), Niger*

**“Happiness doesn't move people.”**

*Focus group with children (aged 14-18), Jordan*

### Research participants expressed preferences for balance in portrayal

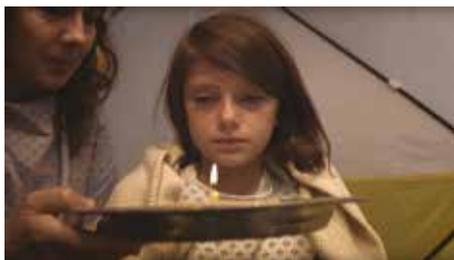
At all sites, clear preferences were expressed for more balance in Save the Children communications – showing solutions as well as problems, and resilience as well as need. In Jordan, participants wanted to share stories about the lives of Syrians before the conflict, and not only be represented by their current situation as refugees. When asked how they would like to be portrayed in the future, children in both Niger and the UK listed positive and purposeful behaviours and activities, such as 'working', 'being kind' and 'helping others'.

**“People don't really understand that Syrians had a normal life. They were middle-income earners. They went to school, they had houses, they had gardens, they had cars. I think [the *Second a Day* film] put it into perspective.”**

*Female staff member, Jordan*

**“For me, it's the film *Djamila's Story* [that is my favourite] because she is speaking by herself, and although she's suffering, she's also part of the solution for it. That means she's not a dependent any more, but a provider.”**

*Focus group with men, Niger*



### Research participants preferred content in which contributors are able to speak for themselves

Many research participants expressed preferences for communications where contributors speak for themselves. In Jordan, research participants who had been involved in the participatory photography project, *Inside Zaatari*, expressed their desire to continue to be image makers (as opposed to contributors).

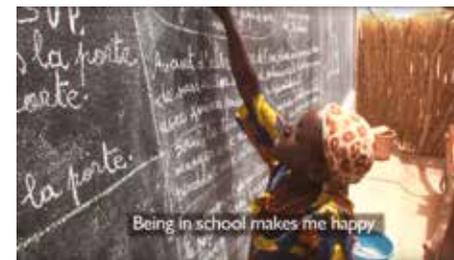
**“*Ouaka a bakin mey ita, tahi dadi* – A song sounds sweeter from the author's mouth.”**

*Hausa proverb shared by several research participants, Niger*

**“I want to take the photos, not be an object.”**

**“We want to show people the truth and how we're living... the world needs to see pictures taken by us.”**

*Focus group with children (aged 14-18), Jordan*



# RECOMMENDATIONS

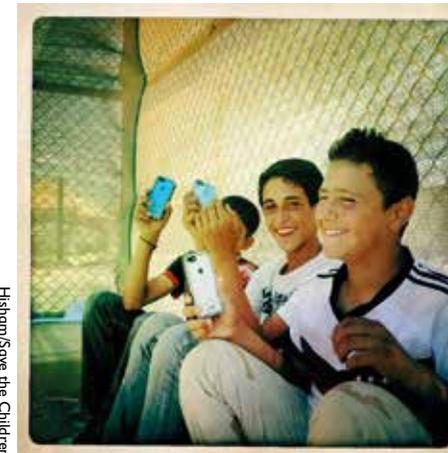
**The aim of the research was to allow contributors' (and members of their communities') voices to be heard and to understand their experiences and perceptions of the image-making process and the resulting Save the Children communications.**

The recommendations presented below support improved image making that is responsible, accountable, and that respects the rights and priorities of contributors. As the research demonstrates, much of this happens already, but not everywhere, and not all the time. This research requires Save the Children to put in places changes to guidelines, policy and procedures to ensure responsible image making is a reality for all contributors all the time. Recognising contributors as stakeholders, not just within this research but in future image making itself, requires Save the Children to find ways to ensure contributors:

- have knowledge and understanding of the purpose of the image making
- experience genuine choice about whether to be portrayed or not
- are able to share any preferences and concerns about their portrayal
- have opportunities to express themselves and tell the stories that are important to them
- receive copies of the content they contributed to.



Patrick Willocq/Save The Children



Hisham/Save the Children

## Invest in more collaborative content

Save the Children's on-going *Inside Zaatari* project, and a recent photography project with child refugees led by Patrick Willocq, enable contributors to become image makers themselves or actively collaborate in the creation of images. The findings of this research support Save the Children's efforts to continue to invest in more creative, collaborative and participatory content, while recognising that such initiatives are not always possible and do not necessarily result in content that is effective for fundraising. Save the Children will continue to ensure its communications provide a balanced portrayal of the individuals and communities it works with. It will also continue to explore and test the potential

of more collaborative, contributor-led content for different purposes, including fundraising. Other possible approaches include:

- increased use of first-hand accounts and contributor-led narratives
- engaging contributors as spokespeople on issues, as well as in telling their own stories
- image making with the same individuals over time – enabling contributors to take a more active role in their portrayal, and the sharing of stories that show need, support and impact.

#### A duty of care and contributors' rights

The image-making process (as well as the image) should reflect the values of Save the Children. During the image-making process, responsible staff should ensure that contributors are able to exercise their right to participation alongside their right to protection, and that filming or photography never furthers a contributor's vulnerability. Save the Children should work towards image making being a positive and empowering interaction between staff, image makers and contributors. Save the Children, first and foremost, has a duty of care towards potential contributors – children and adults – many of whom experience multiple vulnerabilities.

#### Informed consent as an essential process

It's widely recognised that informed consent is a result of dialogue and not form-filling alone. In the UK, it's clear that contributors' consent results from sensitive and effective communication before, during and after image gathering. Some of the non-UK contributors, however, gave their consent on what could not be termed a truly 'informed' basis. Save the Children is currently reviewing its image guidelines and consent process to improve procedures for all stakeholders: image makers, Save the Children, and particularly, the contributors.

New approaches for testing include:

- consent based on an essential multi-stage process that is followed by all image makers, ensuring sufficient time between dialogue and the actual filming or photography
- two-way consent: as contributors give their consent, Save the Children commits to use their images responsibly and to return that image (unless the contributor is particularly difficult to trace at a later date)
- establishing a clear channel of communication for contributors to be able to withdraw consent, if required, after image gathering has taken place.
- child-friendly versions of consent procedures.



Delphine Diallo/Save the Children

### Sensitive and effective communication before, during and after image gathering

The findings point to the importance of communications during the image-making process. Dialogue with contributors should go beyond building rapport – to ensure meaningful engagement that results in more informed contributors (and image makers). Practical approaches include the following:

- Prioritise communication with contributors before any image gathering, and create time and space between this communication and the filming/ photography so they can consider whether to participate or not.
- Develop location- and language-specific resources to communicate image use more effectively; to support contributors' understanding of purpose and to help manage expectations.
- Invest in experienced (and where necessary, female) translators for all image gathering involving image makers who do not speak the same language as the contributors.
- Ensure consistency by making sure that contributors' contact with Save the Children before, during and after image gathering is with the same individual.
- Ensure contributors are left with appropriate contact details should they wish to withdraw consent.
- Feedback and follow-up must become standard. This can achieve much more than just the return of photographs: it can help manage expectations, it demonstrates a duty of care, and it enables Save the Children to check if contributors are still happy for photographs to be used in future communications.

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

In debates over image making, discussions about human dignity have long focused on the image itself. While it's important for Save the Children to explore different ways of visually representing the people they work with, resolving the problem of dignified portrayal should never be about pleasing the sensibilities of Northern audiences. Those involved in representing global poverty must consider who defines dignity. Dignity can mean different things to different people, with individuals' values and views on what constitutes dignity changing according to their circumstances.

The research findings point to the image-making process as the site for realising dignity. Without wanting to place the full burden of representation on individual contributors, addressing dignity must involve consideration of how contributors feel about their portrayal and offering them genuine respect and agency in the process of image making. For contributors, having a choice in how they are represented, and coming away from the image-making process with a strong clear understanding of the purpose and value of their contribution, is dignified. For contributors, dignity involves listening, choice, and voice.

The Save the Children Fund

1 St John's Lane

London EC1M 4AR

+44 (0)20 7012 6400

[savethechildren.org.uk](http://savethechildren.org.uk)

A limited company registered in England  
and Wales (178159)

Registered charity England and Wales (213890)  
Scotland (SC039570)

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**Cover photo**

Teenage girls taking part in a photography  
assignment in Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan,  
as part of the *Inside Zaatari* project.

Photo: Michael Christopher Brown/Magnum/  
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