

Policy & Guidelines for Communications & Reporting on Children

ChildFund Australia is committed to respecting the dignity of children by authentically and thoughtfully communicating their experience to supporters, other stakeholders and the general public. This is an important and necessary part of our role to connect people across the world, educate stakeholders about the issues and to mobilise support for development. However, particular care has to be exercised when reporting on children due to their age and vulnerability.

Communications and reporting in this policy refers to all images – whether still images (photos) or moving images (video), sound recordings, and text such as case studies, stories in newsletters, use of children’s details in media releases, reproduction of quotes from children, etc.

The policy and guidelines apply to all ChildFund Australia staff in Sydney and ChildFund Australia Country Offices. When using external journalists or other media partners this policy and guidelines are to be provided to them and they are required to comply through the use of suitable contractual instruments. Other ChildFund Alliance members are to be encouraged to adopt this approach.

Policy

All ChildFund Australia communications and reporting on children must:

- Represent children with dignity and respect. Images and text must present children with dignity in every instance.
- Do no harm to children. Reporting must not cause distress or increase risk for children.
- Protect the child’s privacy and confidentiality.
- Be undertaken with the informed consent of the child and his or her parent or guardian.
- Be authentic. Images and text must accurately portray the child and his or her environment.
- Endeavour to use the communications process to empower children.

Guidelines

Guidance relating to the six principles is provided below. In addition, ChildFund Australia staff and partners should ensure they adhere to C.1.3 Portrayal of Local People in the ACFID Code of Conduct.¹

1. Dignity & respect

Communications should never be demeaning, patronising or reduce children to passive victim. Stereotypic imagery should be avoided. Communications should try to convey the strength, resilience, diversity, uniqueness and resourcefulness of children. Images of naked children are not to be used. Images of children in poses that could be seen as sexually suggestive are not to be used. Images of children in severe distress may only be used if special clearance (see below) is given.

¹ See <http://www.acfid.asn.au/code-of-conduct>

2. Do no harm

Questions, attitudes and comments that are judgemental, insensitive to cultural values, cause embarrassment or humiliation, or that reactivate trauma for a child must be avoided. Involving children in a story that puts them at risk of familial or community or political backlash must be avoided. The best interests of the child concerned are to be protected over any other consideration (including advocacy for children's issues).

3. Privacy & confidentiality

For child protection reasons, use of the child's full name or information that identifies the child's place of residence are not permitted. Usually, the child's first name only is to be used. Children's wishes not to have something reported must be respected and complied with. When sending images electronically to outside parties, file labels must not reveal identifying information about a child.

4. Consent

The child and the child's parent or guardian must give permission for images or text about the child/family, to be used, as specified in the *ChildFund Australia Consent Policy*. This policy describes when consent should be obtained, where it must be written or verbal consent, and who can provide consent. When seeking consent, explanation is to be given in the child's language about how the information will be used. Children and parents/guardians must never be coerced into providing consent.

5. Authenticity

Images and text should accurately portray the child their environment. First names and places (ie, districts or areas, and countries) must not be changed - unless safety considerations require otherwise or the child/family specifically request it. 'Staging' of stories is not permitted (where children/community members are asked to adopt a contrived, artificial position/stance or tell a story that is not their own).

Communications should seek to understand and present the child's reality and context. Accurate captions should accompany all photos. Attribution of the photographer should also be included when non-staff photographers are used. (Please note, guidelines for taking quality photos are listed in the Communications Guidelines.)

6. Empowerment

Communications should aim to give as much control as possible to the children. Children's views about their situation and their direct quotes should be used as much as possible. Practices that give control over production of the story to children are encouraged; eg, children to record images in the way they choose, children acting as journalists, youth as paid reporters, etc.

Reporting back to children after the story or photo or video has been published is strongly encouraged as a mark of respect and to increase children's understanding about how their input has been used.

Decision-making

Approval of communications material to be published in Australia or posted on the ChildFund Australia website is the responsibility of the Sydney Communications Manager.

Approval of communications material to be published in Myanmar, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Cambodia and Laos is the responsibility of the Country Director.

Where there is uncertainty as to whether the communications material is consistent with this ChildFund Australia Policy (eg, images of children in great distress) or there is potential for controversy, the decision about publication is to be referred to the CEO.

References:

ACFID (2008) Code of Conduct Guidelines on the Production of a Child Protection Policy:
<http://www.acfid.asn.au/code-of-conduct/files/guidelines-for-the-development-of-a-child-protection-policy>

Australian Government (2009) Child Protection Policy:
http://aid.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Documents/child_protection.pdf

UNICEF Guidelines for reporting on children:
http://www.unicef.org/esaro/5440_guidelines_reporting.html