

Caritas Australia

Ethical Storytelling Guidelines



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SCOPE

This guide applies to all Caritas Australia staff, volunteers, partners, freelancers and contracted agencies. It is based on a number of codes of conduct, charters and policies that Caritas Australia is a signatory of, including:

- · Caritas Australia's Communications and Transparency Policy
- · Caritas Australia's Development and Humanitarian Policy
- · ACFID Fundraising Charter
- · ACFID Code of Conduct
- · DFAT NGO Accreditation Guidelines
- · Fundraising Institute of Australia (FIA) Code

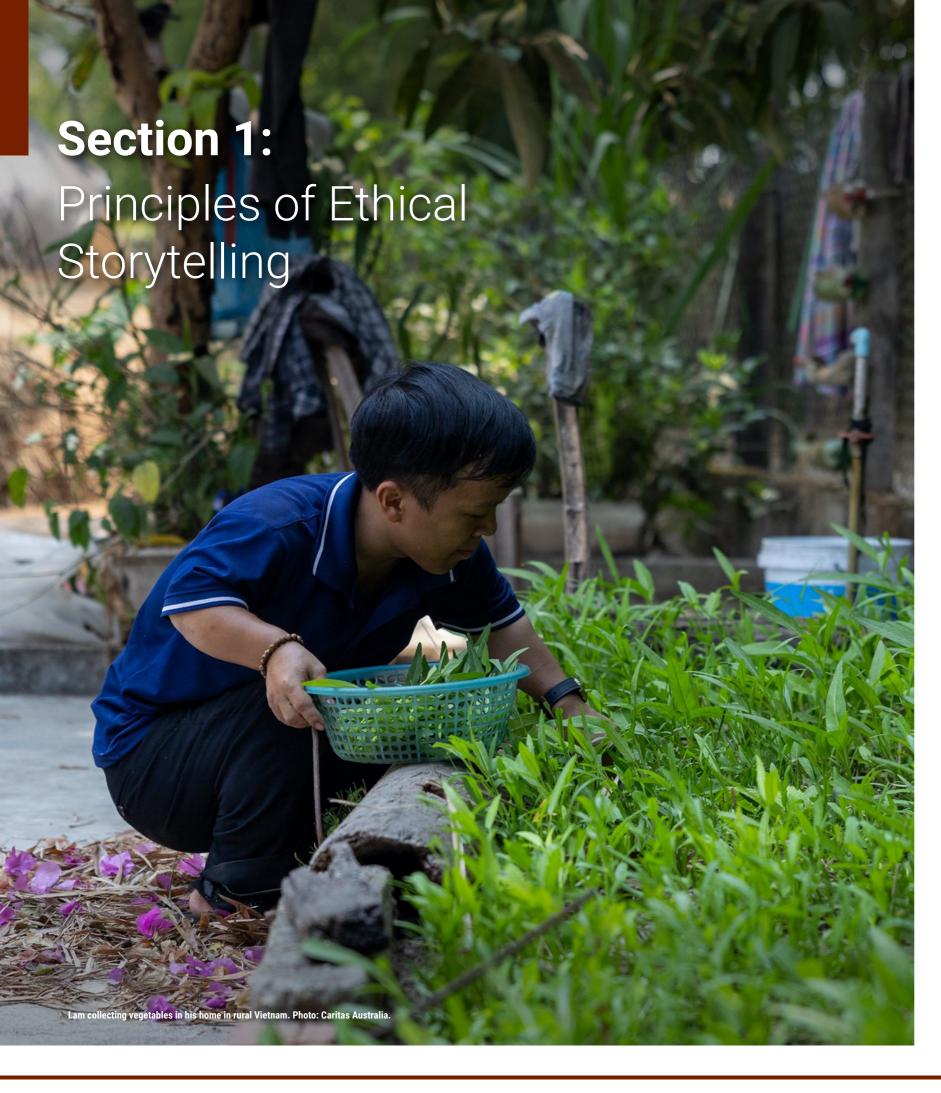
This guide covers photos, video imagery, stories that are recorded or transcribed, written interviews and direct quotes. It applies to all materials collected and published by Caritas Australia regardless of the format including: information, research, evaluations, case studies and other types of public engagement material for donors, supporters and the wider public.

This guide can be used in conjunction with the Caritas Australia Style Guide.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- · We do not 'own' participants' stories we are stewards of their stories.
- Our storytelling adopts the principles of Catholic Social Teachings, embodying an Accompaniment model that uses a Strengths-Based Approach to storytelling.
- Informed, freely given and prior consent must be obtained and documented before any photo or video is taken.
- · We seek to be as participatory as possible during the content gathering process.
- All images and videos should be accurate and present participants in a dignified manner and active agents of their own transformation.
- Our written content is truthful and presents a balanced view of reality, showing resilience in the face of suffering.
- We reject stereotypes and white saviour language that infringe the dignity of participants.

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Catholic Social Teachings

The work of Caritas Australia is shaped by the Catholic Social Teachings, and our stories – and the process by which we acquire them - also reflect these key values.



THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

No human being should have their dignity compromised in our visual, audio or written content, or in the process of content collection.



THE COMMON GOOD

Storytelling can be used to have a positive impact on both an individual's life and on a wider societal scale.



SUBSIDIARITY AND PARTICIPATION

All people have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. This extends to content collection, where participants are active agents in telling and sharing their stories with the world.



SOLIDARITY

We stand alongside the communities we work with. We avoid language, processes or imagery that connotes white saviourism or paternalistic approach to development.



PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

We should always prioritise the wellbeing and dignity of the communities we serve.



ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Our partners and participants should never be exploited for financial gain during the process of content collection.



CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

We must be mindful of the ecological impacts of travel during story collection and seek ways to minimise our damage to the local and global environment.



PROMOTION OF PEACE

The content collection process should not disrupt the peace and harmony of a community, or bring harm to the reputation and safety of a participant.

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Recognising power and privilege

At Caritas Australia we continually seek justice, alongside ending poverty. Tackling poverty is not just about band-aid solutions, it also requires radical changes to unjust systems and prejudices that keep communicates locked into disadvantage. Caritas Australia recognises that inequality often lies at the root of many issues that lead to poverty.

Unequal power relations can also exist in content creation. Those with power and privilege can control the narrative, shaping how stories are told and what aspects are highlighted. Power dynamics can determine who gets to tell the stories, how they are represented and whose voices are amplified or silenced. Unconscious bias can influence the way photos are captured and shared.

To counteract the influence of power and privilege in communicating stories about international development, it's essential to strive for inclusivity, diversity, and equity in storytelling. This involves amplifying the voices of marginalised communities, recognising participants as contributors and cocreators, challenging dominant narratives, and promoting a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of global issues. Placing participants as equal partners at the heart of our content gathering processes can help address some of these power imbalances and uphold communities' right to dignity, privacy and participation.

Strengths-Based Approach and Accompaniment

We believe that storytelling can be more than just meeting marketing and fundraising objectives; it is also a process through which individuals and communities exercise their rights to speak and to be heard.

As an organisation dedicated to ending poverty, we are committed to ensuring the content gathering process is an empowering experience for all and that principles such as strengths-based approach and accompaniment are embedded within all our content collection process and production.



What is a Strengths-Based Approach?

Our Strengths-Based Approach identifies and builds on the existing collective strengths of communities. This approach leads to more sustainable change and empowers everyone in the community to participate in building a better future.

A Strengths-Based Approach in storytelling focuses on highlighting the existing capabilities, assets, and resilience of communities rather than solely emphasising their challenges or deficits. It encourages a shift away from the narrative of poverty and helplessness, instead showcasing the resourcefulness, creativity, and agency of the people being supported.

What is Accompaniment?

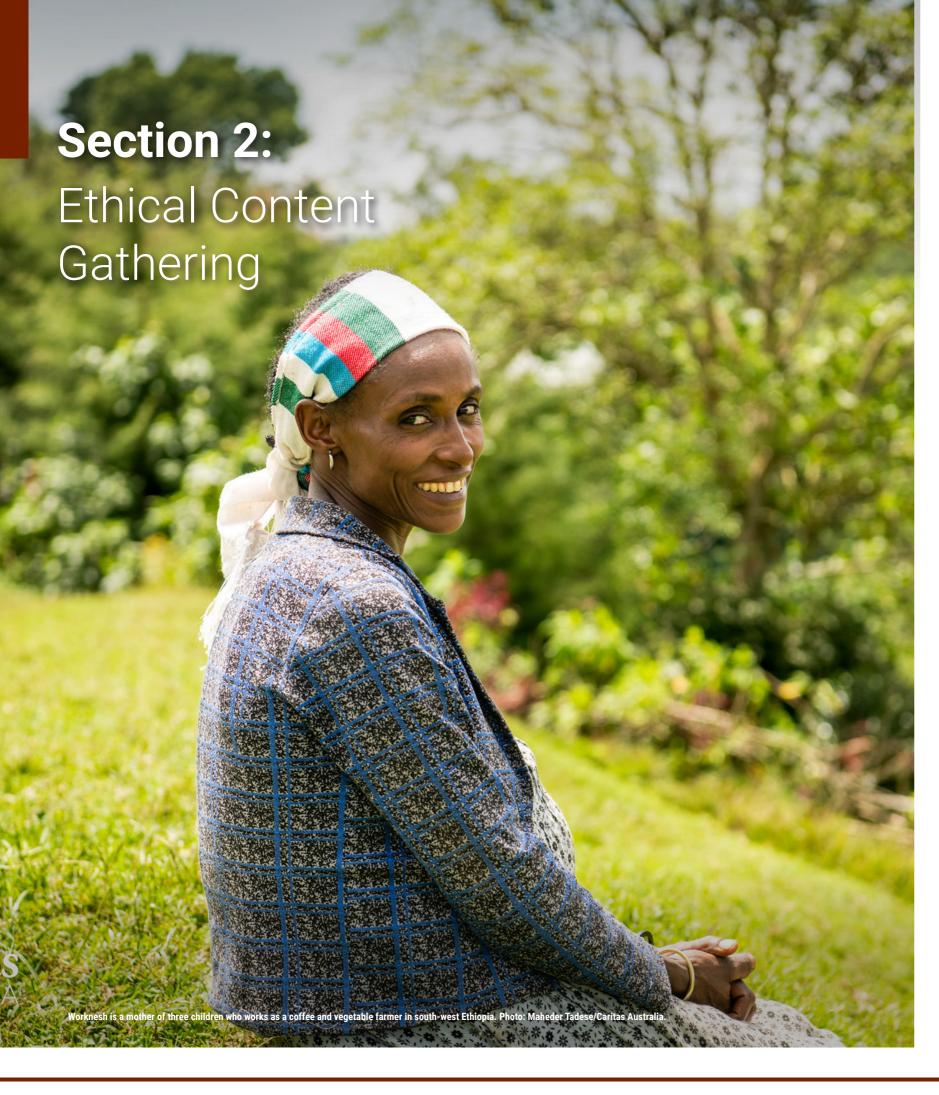
Accompaniment means walking side-by-side with our program partners and participants. It means supporting them and following their lead. We use the Accompaniment Model to work alongside communities to assist our partners to create meaningful change, including during the content gathering process.

During the entire storytelling and publishing process, keep these three questions in mind:

- 1. If I share this story, will this person be safe?
- 2. If I share this story, will this person be empowered?
- 3. If I share this story, will this person feel respectedby themselves and others?
- From ACFID GUIDANCE ON ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATIONS



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Partnership model to content collection

Caritas Australia's partners play a central role in facilitating and supporting content trips. Without their support, it is not possible to collect and share any stories from the field. We must always treat our partners with respect and be guided by their advice, particularly around cultural customs and ways of working.

It takes considerable time for partners to host a content trip, so we must always be mindful that we do not place undue stress and pressure on our partners, at the detriment of their programs. Often, our partners travel far distances to very remote places and spend time away from their families to collect case studies from the field.

All content trips are a collaboration with the partner and the local community. We do not dictate, instead we provide guidance and work alongside our partners, learning from and listening to them. The material gathered by the content team should also be shared with our partners for their own promotional and marketing purposes.

Be relational, not transactional.

Our partners need to be given sufficient time to prepare for the trip. This includes time to brief the participants, collect their consent, collect case studies,

All partners should be reimbursed for all expenses accrued from the trip, including food, flights, accommodation, fuel and other expenses.

In some countries, it is preferred that partners are paid upfront. Where this is needed, the film crew will need to arrange this with the Program Coordinator in advance, with sufficient time to ensure the funds are deposited in time. In some countries, it is easier to transfer a large sum upfront than to pay in several tranches.

☑

- Check with the Program Coordinator in relation to the capacity of the partner to host a content trip.
- In many cultures, directly saying 'no' is considered impolite and disrespectful.
 Look for other cues such as body language, lack of affirmation and
 unresponsiveness to emails to gauge whether a partner is feeling
 uncomfortable.
- Educate yourself on cultural customs and norms before you undertake the trip. Some cultural faux pax are more acceptable than others. For example, eating food using wrong utensils may be embarrassing but harmless, whereas pointing at someone senior may be greatly frowned upon.
- You may need to meet with the village leader/elder/other key stakeholders before you can start filming, taking photographs or speak with community members. Please have a discussion with the partner beforehand to factor this in, as these initial meetings are crucial in fostering goodwill with the community.
- Before each content trip, ask whether it is necessary to have Caritas Australia team fly over or whether there is local capacity to collect content.
- Some partners may prefer to use freelancers they have worked with in the past.

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Consent

All participants need to provide free, informed and prior consent before they can be photographed or filmed. This consent must be documented, ideally in a Caritas Australia consent form or equivalent.

What is ethical consent?

Our Communication and Transparency Policy outlines three main factors that constitute ethical consent: **freely given, prior** and **informed**.

PRIOR

Participants must give consent before the images/stories are collected.

This is relevant for all people whose images/stories we collect – including schools and parishes in Australia.

FREELY GIVEN

Participants understand that they will have the same access to programs and activities whether or not they participate.

When you use the Caritas Australia consent form, this is covered by the section that states, "I understand that my involvement with Caritas Australia will in no way be affected by my decision to give or refuse permission."

INFORMED

Informed consent means that participants understand why, who, what and how.

This is done by using our consent form, which describes:

- Why their image story or personal details are being collected
- · Where and how they will be used and over what period of time
- · What we will do with the material
- · Who it is for

■ Documenting free, prior and informed consent

Consent must be documented in some form. This is usually done by signing a Caritas Australia consent form. A fingerprint or cross is acceptable in lieu of a signature.

Verbal consent

Where consent is provided verbally, this must also be documented. Literate participants can read and sign the form themselves. For participants who cannot read and write, verbal consent is acceptable. In these cases, read the form out to them and answer any of their questions. Fill out the form yourself on their behalf. Ask for the participant to sign an X or leave a fingerprint. Document at the bottom of the form that consent was provided verbally.

■ Video consent

A video recording is considered an acceptable form of documented consent, as long as the staff member or partner is recorded reading out the complete consent form to participants to ensure they are fully informed on what they are consenting to.

Consent for children and adolescents

Children and adolescents cannot sign for themselves – ask their parent or guardian to sign on their behalf. Children and adolescents should still have the consent form explained to them in age-appropriate terminology. Use the Visual Resource for Gaining Consent where appropriate.

Remember that children and adolescents may feel differently about their image being available online in a couple of years. Make sure the parent/guardian understands this and the process for withdrawing consent.

■ Consent for community

It may be impractical in large group settings to have every single person sign an individual consent form. In these instances, one person may provide consent for a group of people, such as a village leader. However, when a representative is signing on behalf of a group, they must fully understand everything on the consent form and have explained this to the **people they are signing on behalf of.** They cannot simply sign a consent form assuming that everyone else have consented.

Where people are specifically highlighted in content it is always preferable to have individual consent (except in the case of a couple or family who can use one form, as long as all the family members are named in the form).

■ Providing an option to withdraw consent

It is important to provide people with the opportunity to **withdraw their consent in the future.** The consent form directs people to email the Caritas media inbox if they would like to withdraw consent later on.

In some contexts, this isn't reasonable. We have a **Leave Behind Card**, which can be printed off and filled out with the details of local staff members or partners who can respond to any questions. Please note that **Caritas Australia staff cannot enter their personal contact details into these cards**, unless they are based in-country and the typical point of contact for the community.

■ Using third party consent forms (including from partners)

It is acceptable to use content from a partner if they have sought the appropriate permission, and the consent form is equivalent to Caritas Australia's consent forms.

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A consent form that is equivalent to Caritas Australia's clearly documents that consent was freely given, prior and informed.

Another organisation's consent form would not be equivalent in the following cases:

- It only asks for consent for a single use.
- It doesn't describe the ways we might use an image/story e.g. a school social media release form which does not describe national fundraising campaigns.
- It doesn't ask the participant to sign to indicate their consent.

Tips

- · Have the partners organise signed consent forms before the trip.
- If possible, have a virtual briefing with the participant prior to the trip to explain consent and the scope and purpose of the project.
- Use the Visual Resource when explaining consent to participants.
- Show examples of the types of content we have produced in the past so that participants have an informed understand of how their photos and videos will be used
- Remember, all consent must be **documented!**

When going to the field, content gatherers should provide a copy of **Caritas Australia's Informed Consent Toolkit** to participants. These toolkits contain the following:

- Visual Resource to informed consent
- Examples of fundraising and communications material
- Leave Behind cards with local partners' contact details
- Translated copy of the consent form



Interviewing

A crucial element of the story collection process is interviewing. This is an opportunity for participants to share their experiences and reflections in their own words. The interview should be an empowering experience for the participant to honestly express their story.

A translator is often required during the interview process. This can be a local staff member although in some instances a professional translator may need to be hired. Caution must be observed in the translation process to ensure that the interviewer or translator is not feeding answers to the participants to suit a narrative.

If at any stage an interviewee becomes uncomfortable, the interview should be paused immediately.

If there are potentially distressing topics that will be raised during the interview, these need to be discussed with the partner and participant before the interview begins.

Tips for getting ready for an interview

- Try to not start taking photos straight away when meeting a community for the first time. Take
 time to get to know the participant and listen to their story first before you start filming and doing
 the formal interview. These initial conversations can also help warm up the participant for the
 on-camera interview.
- Trust is the most important element of interviews. Try to get to know the participant a bit more before conducting an interview. It can be quite intimidating opening up immediately to a stranger.
- Be mindful of gender norms. In some countries, it may be more comfortable or acceptable for a woman to interview another woman.
- Organise ahead of time so participants have time to prepare. Send the interview questions ahead of time to the partner so they can translate for the participant.
- Find somewhere that is comfortable, private and quiet. Try to minimise the number of people present during the interview, so that the participant can speak honestly and openly.
- Seat yourself at the same eye level as the participant. Towering over them can be intimidating.

Every interview is different but there are often common interview questions that can apply in most contexts. We use the BRACELET approach as a starting point for framing our interview questions.

Before: Life before support from your organisation

Reaction: How the participant felt before they participated in supported activities

Action: What the participant did with support from your organisation

Change: Life during and after involvement in the supported activities

Effect: How the participant feels now

Looking forward: Hopes, dreams, long term impact on the participant's life

Expectations: What further changes the participant would like to see in their community

Thank you: An opportunity to express gratitude to those who have provided support

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Reporting back to partners and participants

As part of the content collection process, content that is produced are shared with our partners and participants, so they are aware of how the material is being used.

Given that content is shared with participants, it is imperative to ensure that participants are represented accurately, ethically and fairly in all communications. It is highly likely that participants will have mobile phones and internet access which will enable them to see videos and online material of their stories.



- 1. It can be helpful to bring some examples of pamphlets, booklets or other designed assets/videos with you during your trip to show participants and partners what the final product can potentially look like.
- 2. To build trust with photographed subject, you can show the preview of the photo on the back of the camera so that they can see what they will look like.

Remuneration

We do not pay participants to join in a content collection process. Partners need to make it clear before filming that the participant will still continue to receive access to the program services, regardless of whether they choose to participate or not. Transparency is important, as in most cases the funds raised by the fundraising campaign does not go back to the participant or the program specifically, but a general pool of funds. This needs to be explained to participants prior to filming to manage expectations.

It is important to recognise that participants give up considerate time to essentially volunteer for filming. In some situations and for extended shoots that take several days, participants have to take time off work or time away from their usual income-earning occupation to join the filming. It is appropriate to arrange compensation to covers the loss of income that may impact the participant (e.g. hiring a babysitter to take care of the children while the participant is away filming). These need to be arranged and discussed with the partner ahead of time.

It is acceptable to give culturally appropriate gifts to participants and partners at the start, during or at the conclusion of the filming.



A common gift that is given to participants are handmade crosses made by First Australians. However, this may not be appropriate in countries where Christianity is a minority religion, where there is religious tension, or where the participant is not Christian.

Remember to bring some gifts to thank the partners too.



Hiring freelancers

We support the use of local freelancers wherever possible. The use of 'fly in/fly out' contractors from Australia may take away opportunities from local talent from gaining income-generating opportunities. This is also good for reducing our carbon footprint by minimising long-distance flights.

Local photographers and filmmakers can also navigate cultural and language barriers that would otherwise may it difficult for overseas-based freelancers. Local staff or partners must accompany a freelancer at all times when they are visiting a community.

Partner accompaniment

In many countries that we have programs in, the local staff often have limited capacity to capture content from the field. A key part in empowering a sustainable approach to content development is sharing skills and knowledge with local staff to build their capacity to harness content for social change.

The Communications team hosts online webinars and tailored one-on-one consultations to help train local team members on content collection, photography and videography.

Before every content trip, the Communications team can discuss with the local partners regarding whether they will like an additional half-day or full-day training session with local staff.

Participant privacy and risk assessments

There are situations in which the safety of a participant may be at heightened risk if they are identifiable. These include:

- Survivors of gender-based violence
- Displaced people and refugees
- People living with a disability
- Children
- People with a criminal record
- Communities that are subject to persecution

P 16 Ethical Storytelling Guide P 17 Extreme care must be taken to ensure that no harm comes to the participants as a result of the storytelling process or dissemination. Some ways to heighten protection for these vulnerable groups include:

- Using a pseudonym
- Not showing their faces
- Consider mediums that do not make them easily identifiable (e.g. written content over audiovisual content)

Caritas Australia's **Ethical Decision Making Framework for Communications** must be used in all high risk situations.

The principle of **'Do No Harm'** must apply. The collection of content must not cause harm to people or the environment.

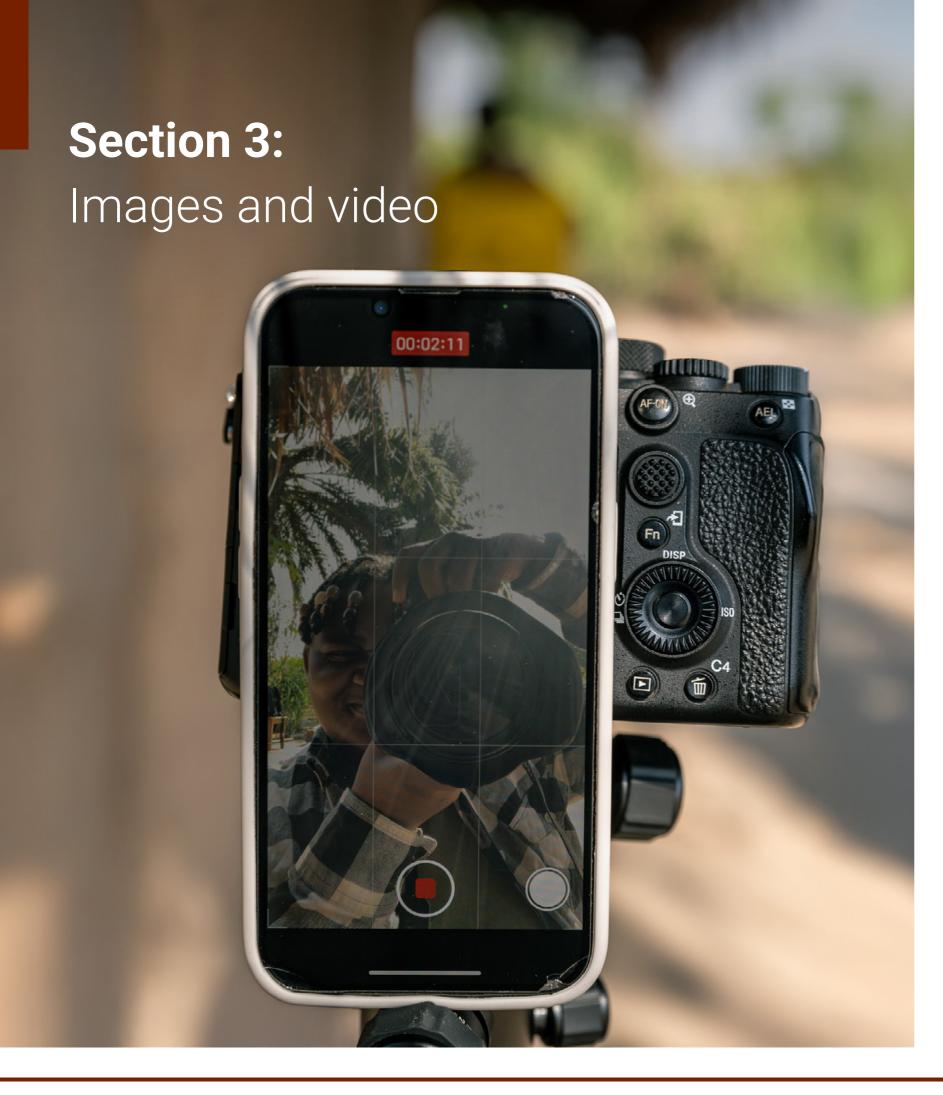
In some situations, the only way to protect a participant may be to not include them at all in the content collection process.

Regardless of the risk context, all program participants and communities should **not be identifiable**. This can be done by:

- Removing their surnames from all communications
- Not mentioning the name of the village (the region is acceptable. Large cities can also be named – e.g. Manila)
- Not mentioning the name of the school
- Using a pseudonym (if deemed appropriate and agreed with participant and partner)
- Making sure that visual signs don't reveal the location of a participant. This can include:
 - Village signs
 - Full names on a name tag or notebook
 - · School badges and logos



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Photos and videos are an emotive way to connect Australians supporters with the stories of participants in programs that Caritas Australia support. The publishing and editing of these visual materials must be done in a way that is consistent with our values, principles and compliance responsibilities.

ACFID Fundraising Charter

Images and messages used for fundraising will not:

- Be untruthful, exaggerated or misleading (e.g. not doctored, created as fiction or misrepresenting the country, etc.).
- Be used if they may endanger the people they are portraying
- Be used without the free, prior and informed consent of the person/s portrayed, including children, their parents or guardians.
- · Present people in a dehumanised manner.
- Infringe child protection policies and in particular show children in naked and/or sexualised manner.
- Feature dead bodies or dying people.

During filming and post-production, there are certain rules that we abide by to ensure that participants are represented accurately, ethically and with dignity.

- We avoid photographing vulnerable individuals from above, as this can diminish
 their dignity to the viewer and convey a sense of powerlessness and dependency
 on the viewer, as if they are begging or pleading for help from the viewer.
- Images should be captured at eye level, particularly when depicting situations of 'need'.
- We rarely use black and white images as this can connote that a person has died.
- We do not crop an image in a way which misleadingly distorts the reality of the situation.
- Where the photo is cropped for visual design reasons the context of the situation should be evident either by the remaining image or by the text descriptions.
- We take photos that show a range of emotions, while maintaining dignity at all times. We do not just focus on solely sad or happy images as the aim is to capture the reality and complexity of a person's lived experience as much as possible.
- We avoid placing text over people's faces or crop out part of their faces.
- When an image is shared publicly, it must not be used to misrepresent a country for marketing or expedient purposes. For example, an image from Malawi cannot be used to represent a story from Tanzania.

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Dignity

Caritas Australia is committed to ensure that photographs, films, videos and stories present all subjects in a dignified and respectful manner and not in an undignified or submissive manner. We treat all subjects in our photography and videography as **equal partners in action**.

Even in difficult circumstances or under intense hardship, all participants must still be portrayed with dignity. This does not mean that every photo needs to show a smiling face. It means humanising those who are photographed and filmed so that they are not just an object.

Our photos, videos and written content should reflect the **complexity of reality**. While it is easy to present a simplified narrative to fit a specific agenda such as a fundraising need or an advocacy goal, to do so can reinforce stereotypes that leads to further harm.

Given the interconnected nature of the world today, it is expected that all participants will see the stories published online and we therefore must ensure that our use of language to describe participants remains authentic, truthful and dignified.

Dignity is an inherently subjective term and can mean different things to different people.

When judging dignity, there are two questions that you can consider:

- Ask the participant directly whether they are happy with the way they are portrayed in marketing material.
- Ask whether you would be happy for yourself to be portrayed in this manner.

Example of photos that do not show dignity:

- A frail baby on the verge of death
- A crying woman captured in a moment of emotional agony
- An old man sitting on the side of the road in obvious emotional distress
- A shellshocked, dust-covered survivor of an earthquake

Child nudity in images and videos

For child protection reasons, we never include nudity and partially clothed imagery in our material. We do not publish any images of children who are topless.

In many countries, it is natural for children to be topless, especially during activities like swimming. It is advisable for the country partner to discuss with the community beforehand to explain that any images or videos of topless children cannot be used.

Use of Artificial Intelligence in content generation

With the increasing use of AI (Artificial Intelligence) in content creation, it is important to set parameters on how it can be utilised.

While AI can assist in generating content, it's crucial that any information generated is verified by a human to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the information before publishing or sharing it. AI technology can be used to create highly realistic fake videos, audio recordings, or images.

The following use of AI is acceptable:

- To generate content ideas
- To improve efficiency
- To translate video interviews
- To extend a background in a photo or video

The following use of AI is not allowed:

- To distort a person's facial expression
- To create a fake person
- To distort a person's voice
- To change the original context of a photograph or video

Prioritising the contributors' voice

We amplify and prioritise the voices and experiences of communities. This means providing a space for them to tell their own stories and provide their own perspectives rather than speaking or narrating on their behalf.

We do not give them a voice, or act as their voice. We seek to amplify their voices. Where possible, we seek to remove ourselves from the narrative and give space for participants to speak for themselves. There is nothing more powerful than people sharing their own lived experience.

All images and videos should have the name of the participant or program partner, so that they are given an identity and not just a 'nameless other'. However, for program participants only their first name should be used, or a pseudonym.

There is an increasing shift in the international development sector from donor-centred storytelling to **contributor-centred storytelling**. How can the program participant (or contributor) play an active role in shaping the narrative, messaging and visual imagery?

All videos that feature a program participant or partner speaking in a foreign language should feature English subtitles in place of a voiceover. This is to maintain the authenticity of the speaker and to ensure their voices are not replaced by an actor.

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However, there may be some circumstances in which a voiceover may be necessary. This is the case in settings such as parishes where the audience may have difficulty reading subtitles. In these situations, it is acceptable to use a voiceover.

Sourcing images during emergencies

During emergencies, it may be difficult to source images from the field. On occasion it may be acceptable to use images from news outlets. When using images from news media agencies, it is assumed that they do not have consent. Therefore, we can only use images of people whose faces are not identifiable.

Stock images

At Caritas Australia, we pride ourselves on sharing authentic stories featuring real program participants. Our brand integrity rests on the fact that every story we tell supporters is a real-life example of change and transformation. This is why we avoid the use of stock images and videos where it features a person.

In some circumstances, it is acceptable to use stock images and videos of scenery and landscape or to illustrate the aftermath of a disaster, particularly where images are not readily available from our partners on the ground. Where a stock image is used, it is credited appropriately and clearly.

Use of images after a participant has passed away

Program Coordinators need to inform the Communications team as soon as possible when a participant or former participant has passed away. In most cases, we will cease using images and videos of participants who have passed away. This will be done in consultation with the families of the deceased to honour and respect their preferences.

In the case of First Nations people, care and sensitivity must be shown most as in many communities the reproduction of a deceased person's name and image is considered culturally inappropriate.

The First Australians Program Manager will notify the Communications team as soon as practicable if any program participants pass away so that any images of the deceased can be removed, or have warnings added as appropriate. They will also need to liaise with the community and/or family members to ensure that Caritas Australia observes the correct death protocols.



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Need and suffering

When documenting 'need', we believe it is important to do so while also respecting individuals' inherent dignity, inner strength, and resilience. This does not mean we don't show any 'negative' images - it is important to share this to reflect the harsh reality of poverty. But it is not the only narrative - we also show images of strength, and determination.

It is okay to show suffering if this is the reality, but it is rarely the only story. We will strive for authenticity in all our content, which means showing both the harshness of reality and the resilience of individuals in the face of it.

Additionally, we never capture images of individuals who have passed away, are in the process of dying, or are experiencing extreme emotional distress.

Accuracy

We commit to depict all people and their issues accurately, respectfully and truthfully, retaining the intended meaning of the information they provide and ensuring honest visual portrayals.

We do not make gratuitous use of images of extreme suffering. We do not manipulate the subject in a way which distorts the reality of the situation (e.g., we do not ask them to cry for the camera).

Case histories/descriptions are not fabricated or exaggerated to elicit a stronger emotional support. We do not exaggerate or sensationalise the context or a person's story for fundraising purposes. Above all, we always strive to remain accurate and do not mislead or tell lies to elicit more sympathy from supporters.

We also seek accuracy and transparency in communicating how supporters' funds are used. This means that we do not mislead supporters in thinking their donations are going towards an individual or country when it is going towards a general pool of funds.

Language to avoid when raising money for general funds	Alternatives
Your gift will fund	Your gift can help support activities like
Your gift will fund the Dignity program in Cox's Bazar.	Your gift can help support programs like the Dignity program in Cox's Bazar
Your donation means Sakhina can have food on the table	Your donation can help mothers like Sakhina put food on the table

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Stereotypes

Stereotypes are a convenient way to simplify stories, but they can create false narratives and perpetuate power imbalances. Furthermore, our supporters may lose trust in us if we stray from our commitment to present authentic and real stories of real people.

Our goal is to present a genuine and accurate depiction of how people live, staying away from reinforcing stereotypes about those in poverty.

Stereotypes often reduce individuals to simplistic, one-dimensional caricatures, stripping them of their humanity and individuality. This can lead to a lack of empathy and understanding of their actual circumstances and challenges. They can create false impressions about the causes of poverty, the capabilities of individuals, and the potential solutions to address poverty effectively.

▼ Tip: Avoid using 'labels' to describe participants

Labels can remove the context from a story and misleadingly portrays a story or manufactures artificial need. It can objectify a person and erase their strengths, character and unique histories.

Examples of language that labels and demeans participants:

- · 'Hunger has a name and it's named Chiquito.'
- · 'Starving children'
- 'Uneducated mothers'

Some common examples of stereotypes about people living in poverty that we seek to avoid include:

- Treating Africa as a monolithic entity that ignore the continent's diverse cultures, languages, and socio-economic conditions
- Treating all people who live in poverty as the same
- · People who live in poverty need and want to be more like 'us'.
- · People who are poor shouldn't own mobile phones or watches.
- People who live in poverty are desperately yearning for the western world to save them.
- · People who live in poverty are sad and miserable.
- If people are happy or smiling in a photo, it means they don't need support.
- Overpopulation is the main cause of poverty and therefore people who are poor are to blame for their own poverty.
- · People who live in poverty need the 'western world' to save them from their primitive ways.
- People who live in poverty are all uneducated and need us to teach them how to live and connect with civilisation
- Using language or iconography that treats everyone in the country as the same
- · 'Donate to save an African child'
- · We are the experts with all the answers



White saviour language

When communicating stories from the field, it is important to remember that participants are active agents of their own development. Caritas Australia is not the hero. The donor is not the hero. The participant is the hero of their own story. While both Caritas Australia and donors play an active part in walking alongside participants to tackle poverty and inequality, they must not present themselves as the saviours.

Participants are not problems for the donor to solve, or people for the donor to save.

The way we talk and represent program participants has evolved drastically over the past few decades. Many of the 'old school' practices of using exploitative imagery and language (depicting emaciated children with flies in their eyes) is now seen as exploitative and harmful to the dignity of people who live in poverty and perpetuates stereotypes that further stigmatise those living in poverty. For decades, NGOs have been criticised for portraying people as helpless and passive subjects.

We aim to portray individuals as resilient and dignified human beings, not as submissive, helpless victims or objects of pity awaiting aid from a "white saviour." People are portrayed as survivors actively engaged in work, life, and initiating positive change.

Using exploitative images and language that can potentially garner higher fundraising returns goes against the Catholic Social Traditions. The dignity of the participant should always come first.

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Tips for avoiding saviour language (see appendix for more glossary of terms)

Avoid phrase that robs the participant of agency.

'Your donation will feed starving children who desperately need you'

This statement removes the child's parents from the narrative and reduces the participant to a passive subject that needs the supporter to save them.

'You can support farmers to feed their families'

This puts the agency and power back on program participants, who often are already working hard every day to feed their families.

Don't use guilt or sensationalise the issue to imply that the donor is a saviour.

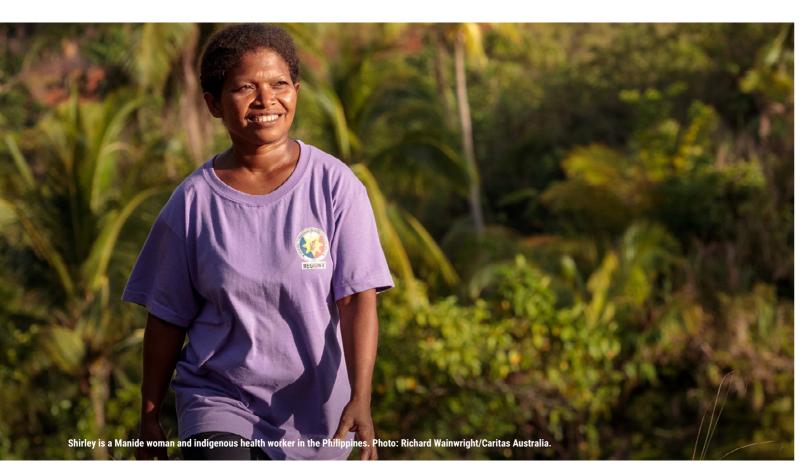
'Margaret, without your help, these children will be doomed to a life of suffering'.

'Us' vs 'them' language

Effective development requires local participation, input, and leadership. The use of "us" vs. "them" language implies that solutions come from outside, rather than empowering local communities to take ownership of their own development.

This type of language can perpetuate stereotypes and notions of white saviourism – that 'we' are here to save 'them' from their life of poverty and suffering. It can create a sense of pity rather than solidarity.

Our preferred approach is to focus on unity and our shared humanity – helping others not because they are different or 'poorer' to us, but because we are all part of the one human family.



Acknowledging partners and government

When communicating the impact of our programs, it is important to acknowledge the central role that our partners play in implementing the program. The role of our partners should not be erased in favour of promoting Caritas Australia or the supporters' impact.

Example of acknowledging the partner while also remaining supporter-centric

'With your generous support, our partners Caritas Hwange helped provide Priscilla with seeds and a chicken.'

For programs that are funded by the Australian government, appropriate acknowledgment must also be given. Programs that are funded by the Australian NGO Co-operation Program (ANCP) can be acknowledged by including the following statement (or something similar).

"Along with your generous support, this program is supported by the Australian government through the Australian NGO Co-operation Program (ANCP)"

All communication materials should include the Australian Aid identifier together with text that acknowledges the Australian Government and the ANCP. Communication materials include signage, publications, presentations, digital media and social media.

For more details, please refer to the ANCP Manual Section 8.

Using quotes

Our preference is always to have participants tell their stories in their own voices. One of the ways of doing this accurately is by using verbatim quotes. This is to ensure their voices are heard without distortion.

Despite the temptation to enhance or modify statements to maximise emotional impact, we adhere to strict accuracy, preserving the original meaning, emotion, and context of the speaker's message.

- Direct quotes from a participant cannot be altered unless it is for grammatical error, or for clarification.
- · Any modifications to a quote cannot alter the original intended meaning by the participant in any way.
- If an offensive or derogatory word is used in a quote, it can be replaced by a more acceptable word that has the same meaning.
- Words cannot be added in or omitted that change the meaning of the guote.
- Occasionally, words need to be added in to give extra context to the reader and to ensure the
 participant's quote is not taken out of context. This needs to be done by using brackets (e.g. "We are
 proud of what we have achieved because [the water tank] was constructed by the community")
- Quotes can be shortened in situations where the quote is particularly long and rambling or irrelevant. This is done by using an ellipsis. Any shortening of the quotes cannot change the original meaning.

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Use of statistics

When statistics are used, they should be from a recent source (ideally within the past four years) and from a trusted and reputable source. Examples of trusted sources include:

- United Nations
- World Bank
- World Health Organisation
- UNDP
- Asian Development Bank
- UN Women

We try to avoid using statistics from another NGO or from am unverified source. Government sources can be a good source, although care must be taken as some governments may inflate figures.

Use of emergency language in food security

We refer to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Acute Food Insecurity Scale when describing the food security situation in a country. The terms 'crisis', 'emergency' and 'famine' can only be used when it meets the criteria as set out by the IPC.

Phase 1: Minimal food insecurity - Households have adequate food access and can meet their basic needs without engaging in atypical coping strategies.

Phase 2: Stressed - food consumption is adequate but limited. Household livelihood strategies are required to meet food needs, such as depleting savings, relying on food assistance, or consuming less preferred or less expensive food.

Phase 3: Crisis - Household food consumption gaps are evident, with significant shortfalls in food access leading to high levels of acute malnutrition or depletion of livelihood assets.

Phase 4: Emergency - Household food consumption gaps are extreme, resulting in very high acute malnutrition or excess mortality. Livelihoods are critically compromised, and immediate humanitarian assistance is required to prevent further deterioration.

Phase 5: Famine / Catastrophe - Even with humanitarian assistance, there is widespread starvation, death, and total lack of food access, leading to extreme malnutrition and death. This is the most severe phase and requires urgent and extensive humanitarian intervention to save lives.



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APPENDIX

Glossary of phrases to avoid for ethical storytelling

Terms to avoid	Alternatives	Notes
Disabled person /deaf/blind	Person with a disability, a person who is blind/deaf	Alternatively, ask the participant themselves how they want to be referred to.
You can give dignity to	You can partner with	We cannot give dignity to participants – they have inherent dignity.
Poor, poorest of the poor, Poverty- stricken	Experiencing poverty	We refrain from using these terms as they are generally considered to be outdated within the humanitarian and development sector. We also try to avoid using quotes where these phrases are used unless necessary. The exception is when a participant is self-describing as poor, and it is important to the narrative.
Victims	Survivor	Referring to people as "victims" can reinforce a passive image and undermine their agency and resilience.
Desperate, helpless, hopeless	Facing significant challenges Working to overcome hardships	Describing individuals as "desperate" or "helpless" reinforces negative stereotypes and strips away the agency and resilience of people in crisis. It also goes against our strengths-based approach.
You are their only hope You can their life around Without you, they have no future You can change the course of their lives Her future is in your hands You can be a hero for her Her future depends on you Her survival depends on you	You can walk alongside them You can partner with them to build a better future.	These are examples of saviour language that undermines the participant's ability to drive their own change
Beneficiary, recipient	Participant, community member	

First world/Third world Developing country/developed country	Name the country Low-income countries	These are an outdated terms that reinforces a hierarchy between countries
The West	High-income countries	This promotes an 'us vs them' narrative.
You can save lives Lifesaver Lift them out of poverty	You can partner with communities	Save lives is white saviour language
Donors	Supporters	
Give hope	Supporting communities/ families to create a hopeful future	
Save or rescue	"Support and partner with communities." "Work alongside local communities."	Phrases like "save" or "rescue" can imply a saviour mentality and reinforce unequal power dynamics.
Build a brighter future for [NAME OF PARTICIPANT]	Support [NAME OF PARTICIPANT] to build a brighter future for themselves and their families	Puts agency on the subject
Sakhina can't take care of her children	Stand with with mothers like Sakhina so they can care for their children	
Give a voice to	Amplify the voices of	The people we work with already have a voice. We seek to elevate their voices so that it is heard on a larger and more global scale.
Indigenous/Aboriginal	First Nations people Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people First Australians	

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Ethical Decision-Making Checklist

These questions can be used when encountering an ethical dilemma. For the full version, please refer to the Ethical Decision Making Framework for Communications

Questions	Yes	No
Are the people featured portrayed in a respectful way?		
Would you feel comfortable showing this to a person who is featured in the communication?		
Would the people featured feel proud to share their image, story or message with their family and friends?		
Does this comply with the level of consent provided by the person featured?		
Are we being true to this person's story?		
Are we honestly representing the need in this community?		
Are we honestly representing the diversity of this community, and the people who participate in and benefit from our programs?		
Are we honestly representing the potential outcomes of our programs and the impact of donor support?		
Is this course of action consistent with the principles and values of Caritas Australia and the ACFID Code of Conduct?		
Does this course of action maintain the character or common practices of our organisation?		
Is this course of action prioritising concern for the person/people featured over the needs of our organisation?		
Would I be happy for this decision to be on the public record and my actions open to public scrutiny?		



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