

**An ethical approach to using content in
communications**

IDS content guidelines

Stories are an intrinsic part of how communications professionals at IDS raise awareness, generate understanding and build engagement with the universal development challenges and our work to help those marginalised, living in poverty or with injustice globally. This makes the way we ‘tell’ stories vital as a powerful way of reaching and building understanding amongst audiences (such as funders, communities, partners, students) but also how we demonstrate our commitment to ensure diverse voices can be heard to foster inclusive, democratic and accountable societies.

Introduction

The following document provides guidelines for how IDS communications professionals, often in collaboration with others, gather and produce stories ethically and responsibly. Ethical content production begins with ensuring that the way we produce and manage materials seriously considers and where possible upholds contributors' rights to participate, is sensitive to individuals' circumstance, norms and values, protects participants from risk of harm, and does not perpetuate harmful stereotypes or uphold unequal power relations. Above all, that our approach deliberately considers the unequal power dynamics that could affect how stories are gathered, produced and distributed to make sure steps are taken early to mitigate risk and any negative impact on contributors.

These guidelines are designed to be used primarily by IDS communications professionals and, if appropriate, shared on with programme partners who are creating or sourcing images, video, audio or written text to be used in presentations, publications or in IDS communications such as the IDS blog etc. They apply when producing content that features a contributor – an individual or group who is/are sharing their story to be published – including when working with producers such as filmmakers, photographers or journalists who are creating content based on contributions related to an IDS project.

These guidelines can also be referred to by IDS researchers or students when collaborating with IDS communications professionals, but they do not supplant research ethics frameworks, including the [IDS Research Ethics Policy](#), that must be applied when gathering data and content in the course of research.

Contact

If you have any queries on these content guidelines then please [contact](#) a member of the IDS Communications and Engagement Team.



Terminology

- **Audiences** – the groups of people that it is important to make aware of IDS work. For example, partner organisations, communities, funders, students, researchers etc.
- **Communications** – activity to publish then promote content to reach audiences and raise awareness and understanding of IDS work. For example, publication of an IDS blog; publication of social media content on IDS social channels.
- **Contributor** – individual(s) who share their image and story so it can be produced as content for publication by IDS. For example, an oral or video interview; written case study or photograph.
- **Content** – a multimedia file created to communicate information. For example, an audio interview; video clip; photograph or written text (email, text, social media post, report).
- **Funders** – an organisation that is funding IDS research or training for example a government department; charitable foundation or trust; a bilateral or multilateral agency.
- **Partner** – an organisation or institution that IDS works with around shared goals and/or objectives.
- **Producer** – individual(s) who source a story and create as video, audio, image or text. The contributor and producer may be the same person. For example, a researcher writing up their fieldwork for publication as an IDS blog.
- **Stakeholders** – the groups of people that should be consulted either during production or at the approval stage of content to confirm it aligns with their perspective and organisational communications guidelines (e.g IDS Communications Team for IDS content; programme partners for programme content).
- **Stories** – individual or collective experiences used to bring to life a challenge that is being addressed through IDS' work.

Our approach to communications: the IDS vision and organisational values

Sharing evidence, research and first-person experiences is integral to all we do at IDS and to IDS programmes. This makes it important that the content we create, and share reflects our vision and values – it is our chance to 'walk the talk' in tackling power relationships, inequality and a lack of diversity in the representation of development challenges.

Our vision at IDS is to contribute to a more equitable and sustainable world where people live their lives free of poverty and injustice. We do this by delivering world-class research, learning and teaching that transforms the knowledge, action and leadership needed. We work in equitable and sustainable partnerships with governments, philanthropic foundations, non-governmental organisations, academics and civil society to transform approaches for progressive social, political and economic change in ways that ultimately make a difference to people's lives.

Our values at IDS are: engaged excellence, inclusive, resourceful, and respectful. When applied to how we communicate, it means that we aim to produce content that is:

- Adaptive and demand-led: content that is led by and responds to the needs of contributors and audiences including being accessible in language, format and design. (see also [IDS guidelines for Making our work accessible to all](#)).
- Reflects and values different forms of knowledge: content that amplifies the voices and conveys the lived realities of different communities and social groups, especially those who are marginalized, by sharing stories contributors want to share.
- Evidence-based and reflective of diverse, global voices: content that demonstrates the role of research, knowledge and evidence in transforming lives.
- Is provocative and challenging: content that questions norms and conventional/dominant ways of thinking.
- Is inspirational and values-driven: content that people want to engage with, share and contribute to.
- Is delivered in partnership: content that is created through collaboration to be relevant, timely and representative.

Content creation: the principles

1. We are committed to collaborating with people to create accurate and representative content that amplifies the voices of those involved

- We strive to accurately create content that represents the complexity of development situations and which demonstrates the agency and resilience of the people IDS and its programmes work with.
- We will be aware of the power imbalances that can exist between contributors and producers (IDS). When we create original content, we will seek to address these imbalances by seeking to co-create content with those with less power. This includes asking contributors prior to creating their story how they would like it to be represented in the content produced, including location, time, and style; and giving them opportunities to review, select and approve the text, images or videos to be later used.



When producing content, avoid stereotypes in how you frame it.

- We will seek to avoid stereotypes in how we tell stories within the content we create (e.g. 'Western aid worker tends helpless victim').
- We will seek to portray people's agency, and as independent of, rather than dependent on the intervention of external actors (including but not limited to researchers).
- We will aim for content to be inclusive of difference and reflective of diversity of people that IDS works with globally (in terms of age, gender, background, historical context and culture).



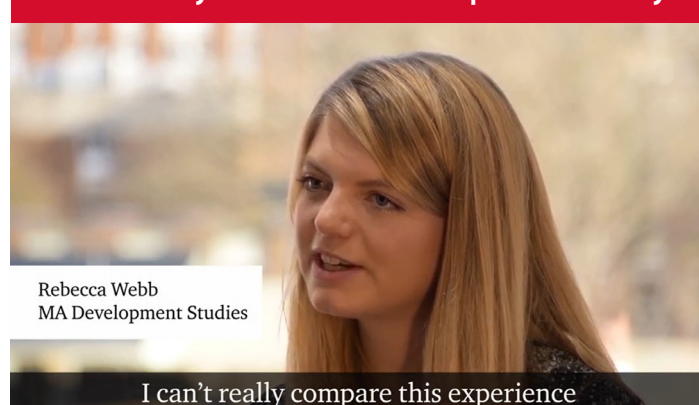
Image © IDS

2. We aim to do no harm when we create, publish and share the content we create

- In the process of creating content, we will aim to protect the vulnerable and take all reasonable steps to avoid offence. Should any offence be caused, and an issue raised with content produced and shared, we will either remove the publication from being further available online and in print, or we will work with those offended to provide additional information that contextualises the publication to build future understanding of the topic in question.
- We seek to ensure the way we source and produce content is sensitive to the context and circumstances shown. This includes being aware of cultural, social, religious sensitivities and applying all environmental and any legal requirements.
- We will never deliberately manipulate original content to distort its accuracy such as by cropping, changing colour hues or adding material that was not originally there. Additions will be used to add explanation and context to depict reality.
- We strive to quote contributors accurately, whilst maintaining the meaning and context of what is said.
- We will always be responsible in how we publish content including reviewing and responding to potential risks that those who contribute their stories may face, as well as the broader narratives that our content may uphold – both at publication but also in the future should circumstances change.

Image © IDS

Make sure you sub-title and caption correctly.



- When we create content that features contributors in close up images, interviews (audio/video/text) from which they can be easily identified, we will ensure informed consent is given (example consent form included in the appendix). This requires us to make sure the contributor understands why the content is being gathered, who is involved, how it will be used, that it will not be used, and examples of the audiences that may see it (under our control). It will also be made clear that the contributor has the right to refuse to participate or whether to be visibly and audibly identifiable, or have their real name cited. They also must be made aware that they can withdraw consent for their content to be used at any future date (see appendix for more information).
- When we use imagery from a stock library that features an individual in close up, we will ensure the photographer has followed ethical guidelines and that the correct captions are used. This requires reviewing the production approach of the stock library before using any image.
- If we create content in a public place to show a group in action, for example, market traders or people queuing for services, we will check applicable local policies to confirm if permission is needed before filming or photographing in those locations.
- Where we cannot secure informed consent from everyone recognisable in a group photo or video, then we will aim to produce the content as much as possible so as to avoid revealing individual identities. For example, when taking a photo of a market where groups of people are gathered around stalls, the producer should try as far as possible to avoid taking an image in which anyone is looking directly at their camera.
- We will take all reasonable steps to protect children and vulnerable persons featured in any content created including safeguarding their identity, reviewing potential risk to ensure they will not be placed at risk through contributing; and ensuring all content presents them in a dignified and respectful way. (see also [IDS Safeguarding Policy](#))
- We will produce and use images in line with our vision and values as an Institute



3. We will create and publish innovative, engaging and high quality content that seeks to raise awareness, explain and inform by combining evidence with person-led experience.

- We understand that the content we create will be shared and republished online, across social media and therefore anyone – including children – may come across IDS and IDS programme material. This means we will be sensitive to how we portray and represent contributors, societies and environments with dignity in our content.
- Where possible, we will collaborate with those partner organisations we work with to create content that is evidence-based in how it depicts an issue and response.
- When working with external or freelance content creators such as writers or photographers we will brief them on these content guidelines and how to apply them to protect contributors.
- When working with interpreters, we will brief interpreters on IDS content guidelines including the need for accuracy and respect towards contributors.
- Before we publish any content externally for example on the IDS website, as a newsletter or podcast, we will review to ensure it meets these content guidelines.



Image © Jung Getty

Ensure subjects are presented in a dignified way.

Science Documentary Background - 9Min
ITEM ID: 138735784
By: mv_production Commercial Usage
8:49 £32 144 BPM / wav / stereo / 89.0MB
BEST PRICE GUARANTEE
VIEW TRACK DETAILS ADD TO COLLECTION DOWNLOAD PREVIEW SHARE
ADD TO CART

Ensure every piece of copyrighted material is purchased correctly and has the right license.

4. We will always attribute imagery and content appropriately

- We will provide contributors with the information they need to decide whether to participate in the content creation including explaining how the content will be used (and shared) and potential risks.
- We will aim to only use content where people are individually recognisable where we have their full, free and informed consent.

- We will make sure that any image, video or audio file has the following attributable information:
 - Name of the source if from a video or image library with confirmation on image release, licensing and copyright
 - Name of the content creator
 - Copyright notice
 - If from an external source, URL to the original material and confirmation on license arrangements for the specific image
- Whenever we use images in print, IDS or IDS programme publications and websites, we will make sure they are captioned correctly including credit to the source of the photo along with 2-3 sentences that includes information about who can be seen, where it was taken, when and why including the issue and IDS connection. An example of a correctly captioned photo is here:

Cover image: People wait for relief aid at Shahjahanpur area in Dhaka, disregarding social distance guidelines amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Photographer: © Fahad Abdullah Kaizer/UN Women (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

- When publishing images on social media, because of the restrictions of space, we will use credit detail for the photographs.

For video content, it is not appropriate to use captioning therefore instead full credit information to footage used will be included within or alongside the video file.

5. We commit to storing and managing imagery responsibly

- We will ensure all content is stored securely with all personal data protected according to IDS data guidelines and [data protection laws](#).
- Where audio, image or film footage is commissioned and paid for by IDS, the appropriate rights usage license must be secured. This includes allowing IDS to use the content as it chooses to on the basis that the content producer has followed these IDS guidelines and obtained consent from people filmed or whose imagery had been taken.



Appendix

Further reading

- [Which image do you prefer? RADI-AID research](#)
- [The People in Pictures – Save the Children research](#)
- [Photographers Without Borders – Code of Ethics](#)
- [Ethical considerations in the production of content – BOND](#)

Informed consent – considerations

- Introduce IDS and who the individuals/their roles in recording the content
- Explain why you would like to photograph/ film/interview them and how the content will be used
- Clearly communicate contributors' right to consent and that they can refuse to participate, and the right to withdraw their data at any time during the data collection phase (including after an interview has been completed)
- Explain how the content will be published and who it could be seen by
- Describe how the content will be stored and managed including how long it will be kept for
- If they are happy to go ahead, confirm consent either by collecting a signature on an informed consent form or a video/audio recording of their consent, ensuring that the elements above are included (or referred to) in that recording.

[Template consent form](#)

Stock image and video libraries – recommended

Library	Free or Paid	Notes
Adobe Stock	Paid	Good quality, reasonably priced photos.
Climate Visuals	Both	Images illustrating impacts of climate change.
Corbis	Paid	Good for development images. Only use where sufficiently high budget is allowed. Images on this site can be expensive.
Flickr Creative Commons	Some images are free to use with attribution	Note that some Creative Commons licences have certain restrictions. For example, images might be free to download but licences should be checked as some are restrictive.
Getty Images	Paid	Only use where sufficiently high budget is allowed. Images on this site can be expensive.
Life of Pix	Mostly free	Always check whether the image is free.
Panos	Paid	Good for development.
The Greats	Free	Illustrations for social change organisations. Only available for non-commercial activities, i.e. cannot be used for IDS courses or fundraising.