

## CODE OF CONDUCT

### IMAGES AND MESSAGES RELATING TO THE THIRD WORLD

The folder you hold in your hand is a **code on images and messages relating to the Third World**. It is addressed to European non-governmental organisations who are actors or partners in the global development process. Hopefully it will inspire a debate on images and messages and encourage European NGOs to examine their own materials.

For all European NGOs it should serve as a challenge and as a guide in their work.

The code was adopted by the 1989 General Assembly of the Liaison Committee of Development NGOs to the European Communities. It is now up to you to use it.

#### **PREAMBLE**

Over the last ten years, the European public has been regularly inundated with emotive images and messages relating to disaster situations in certain Third World countries. The public has been required to assimilate diverse interpretations of these situations and been urged to help those peoples in difficulty, primarily on the grounds of charity. Although campaigns of this nature have undeniably saved thousands of lives, they have also shaped the public's image of the Third World, of its problems and possible solutions and relations with Third World countries. The combination of emotionally charged images and catchy slogans does make for good cinema, television and posters but recourse to sensationalism in order to attract the public's attention can mean that the less spectacular fundamentals of an issue are overlooked and the positive elements obscured.

This phenomenon has become a determining factor in future collaboration between Europe and the Third World. **The images and messages projected of the Third World by the media or NGOs themselves can undermine the work of development organisations for the quality of development co-operation and solidarity with the Third World is dependent upon the type of images and messages used by NGOs in their public awareness raising activities.**

Detailed research carried out by several European and African NGOs within the framework of the "images of Africa" project and a recent survey co financed by the Commission of the European Communities on "Europeans and Development Aid in 1987" reveal widespread misunderstanding of the situation in the Third World. For the majority of Europeans, the Third World is a supplier of raw materials (63 %) and provides an outlet for European products (59 %). One European in two believes our relations with the Third World are based on the Third World's need for aid from the rich countries. The survey also shows that the European public takes a consistent interest in the information supplied by the media on the Third World.

A Code of Conduct relating to the images and messages projected of the Third World is, therefore, essential.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Objectives of Development Education**

The term "Development Education" is open to many, and often ambiguous interpretations because of the range of issues concerned. One's definition of the term is determined by one's view of development, one's analysis of social change and one's ideological and philosophical convictions.

Although there may be no single definition of the term development education, its various forms share certain underlying objectives which should be recalled when producing images and messages for the public, namely:

- to promote an **awareness** of the problems related to development: causes and solutions, interdependence and reciprocity for increased mutual understanding;
- to stimulate **participation** in the debate to support appropriate political, economic and cultural cooperation;
- to strengthen **solidarity** between peoples through increased mutual understanding;
- to increase the commitment of NGOs, governments and the EC to **structural change** in favour of the underprivileged.

To succeed in the above development education, its objectives and their attainment should be an integral part of the tasks laid down in the statutes of all development agencies.

### **General objectives of the Code of Conduct**

- This Code is both a challenge and a guide for European NGOs. Its aim is to encourage NGOs to ex-amine the material they produce on the Third World and to be especially attentive to images that over-simplify or concentrate on the apocalyptic or idyllic aspects of life.
- It invites NGOs engaged in fund raising activities to re-examine their appeals to the public.
- It serves as a reference for NGOs working to strengthen the solidarity, cohesion and force of the NGO movement.
- It is recommended that the EC Commission take this Code of Conduct into account in its work with European NGOs.

### **NGOs and Fund Raising**

Several systems of fund raising are used by Northern NGOs. These include large scale annual appeals, thematic campaigns or emergency aid campaigns. The means applied can involve mailings to regular donors, the production of posters or the holding of sales (books, cards, crafts, background material, etc).

A lot of images and messages are produced by NGOs during these fundraising activities and the type used is determined by the particular viewpoint of the NGO concerned. Each NGO must decide on the best system to adopt whilst ensuring that the methods applied and the messages sent out by the NGOs, its partners and its sponsors do not present an image of dependency or "hand-outs".

**NGOs should avoid the following:**

- Images which generalise and mask the diversity of situations;
- Idyllic images (which do not reflect reality, albeit unpleasant), or "adventure" or exotic images;
- Images which fuel prejudice;
- Images which foster a sense of Northern superiority;
- Apocalyptic or pathetic images.

**CODE OF CONDUCT**

We, development NGOs established in the member states of the European Community representing a variety of humanitarian non-profit making associations engaged in activities to support the development process in the South and in the North, adopt this Code of Conduct as a guide in our daily work in order to improve the images projected by the North of the South.

**This Code calls on European NGOs to:**

- **Examine** their work and review their working methods so as to put an end to the old notions of „emotional shock" and disaster relief and to ensure the right kind of development education is undertaken;
- Promote greater **unity** among NGOs and other social movements to enable an improved distribution of information;
- Undertake to examine the **content of the messages** sent out in disaster appeals to ensure these do not undermine the work of development education which calls for long term response;
- Provide **adequate training** for members of staff who are responsible for producing information material and seek specialists to advise them in their work;
- Above all, ensure that the **viewpoint of the South** is taken into account when producing images and messages.

If international development co-operation is based on the principles of solidarity and the sharing of resources, then the participation of our Southern partners in public awareness raising activities is essential for the correct projection of images and messages. In this day and age we can no longer speak about the Third World and project images thereof without previous consultation.

This is not an easy task as the communications possibilities vary significantly from one developing country to another and from NGO to NGO. Communication is hindered in some places by the remains of the colonial system or the effects of control of the international

communications system: the traditional media either give no coverage of South or they do so from a Northern perspective.

### **NGOs should work towards:**

- guaranteeing the Third World **right of access** to the major means of communication in the North ;
- guaranteeing the **circulation of Southern cultural products** in the North, beyond the traditional market outlets;
- promoting **local and autonomous cultural production**;
- **facilitating further the movement of people** in both directions. To ask Southern visitors for their opinions on Western society and to share their knowledge and experience.

**True solidarity is not a one- way process.** Is it not arrogant to wish to resolve single-handedly the development problems of the South when our own society is itself suffering from widespread development problems?

### **RECOMMENDATION**

In the fight of the above, European NGOs will undertake to review their development education material and the content of the messages produced. Messages should aim to improve the public's understanding of:

- the **realities and complexities** of the countries of the Third World in their historical context;
- the **obstacles** posed to development;
- the **diversity** of situations in these countries;
- the **efforts** being made in the South itself;
- and the **progress** made.

### **PRACTICAL GUIDELINES**

1. Avoid catastrophic or idyllic images which appeal to charity and lead to a clear conscience rather than a consideration of the root problems;
2. All people must be presented as human beings and sufficient information provided as to their social, cultural and economic environment so that their cultural identity and dignity are preserved ' Culture should be presented as an integral part of development in the South;
3. Accounts given by the people concerned should be presented rather than the interpretations of a third party;

4. People's ability to take responsibility for them must be highlighted;
  5. A message should be formulated in such a way that generalisations are avoided in the minds of the public;
  6. The internal and external obstacles to development should be clearly shown;
  7. Interdependence and joint responsibility in underdevelopment should be emphasised;
  8. The causes of poverty (political, structural or natural) should be apparent in a message in order to enable the public to become aware of the history and real situation in the Third World, and the structural foundations of these countries before colonisation. It is the situation today, coupled with knowledge of the past, which should be the starting point for examining ways in which extreme poverty and oppression can be eliminated. Power struggles and vested interests should be exposed and oppression and injustice denounced;
  9. Messages should avoid all forms of discrimination (racial, sexual, cultural, religious, and socio-economic);
  10. The image of our Third World partners as dependent, poor and powerless is most often applied to woman who is invariably portrayed as dependent victims, or worse still, simply do not figure in the picture. An improvement in the images used in educational material on the Third World evidently requires a positive change in the images projected of Southern women;
- 1 1. Southern partners should be consulted in the formulation of all messages;
  - 1 2. If an NCO calls on the services of other partners (institutions, organisations or private companies) for a fund raising activity, it should ensure that the recommendations of this Code are respected by all parties. Reference should be made to the Code in the sponsoring contract(s) between the NCO and its partner(s).

## **CONCLUSION**

The information in our daily news too often presents the Third World in a way that is incomplete and biased-starving people portrayed as the helpless victims of their own fate. This fatalistic approach can be overcome with the provision of **more realistic and more complete information**, thereby increasing

**awareness** of the intrinsic value of all civilisations of the limitations of our own society and of the need for a more **universal development** which respects justice, peace and the environment. It is the duty of NGOs to provide the public with truthful and objective information which respects not only the human dignity of the people in question but the intelligence of the public at large.

*This Code was adopted by the General Assembly of European NGOs meeting in Brussels in April 1989. The Liaison Committee's Development Education Working Group was called upon to formulate a strategy for its implementation and follow-up.*