



# CHARITY REPRESENTATIONS OF DISTANT OTHERS

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An analysis of UK charity visual  
communications in direct mail campaigns

**David Girling:**

Associate Professor, University of East Anglia  
Email: [d.girling@uea.ac.uk](mailto:d.girling@uea.ac.uk)

**Deborah Adesina:**

Researcher, Consultant in Communications and Development  
Email: [deborah\\_adesina@yahoo.com](mailto:deborah_adesina@yahoo.com)

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What characters and subject matters are depicted in charity marketing campaigns supporting international causes, via direct mail?

How do British charities visually represent distant others (and global suffering) in direct mail, differently from in newspaper advertising?

# CHAPTERS

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**Deborah Adesina:** Deborah has led impactful research on development and communications. Her work currently focuses on critically analysing the nexus and discourses of media and development, particularly in the representation of global poverty. Her expertise bridges academia and practice, making her a sought-after voice in the field of development communications. She has presented her work at prominent conferences variously, as a keynote speaker, panelist and facilitator. Deborah is a distinguished alumna of the Commonwealth Scholarship program, holding a Master's degree in Media and International Development with distinction from the University of East Anglia. She aspires to deepen her expertise through future doctoral research.



**David Girling:** David Girling is an Associate Professor in the School of Global Development at the University of East Anglia. David is a Chartered Marketer with over 25 years' marketing, communications and PR experience in the public and non-profit sector. He has been actively involved on a number of committees and judging panels including The Chartered Institute of Marketing Charity Group and the Radi-Aid Awards. David is the author of Radi-Aid Research: A study of visual communication in six African countries and co-authored Who Owns the Story: Live financial testing of charity vs participant led storytelling in fundraising. He teaches humanitarian communication, media production, marketing and branding at both undergraduate and postgraduate level and is Course Director for the MSc Global Development Management.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

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**Charities play a critical role in addressing global inequalities, injustices, and poverty, yet their vital work often depends on their ability to raise funds in an increasingly competitive and economically challenging environment. Significant cuts to the foreign aid budgets of Global North countries, inflation and cost of living crisis, as well as the pressure to distinguish themselves and compete for funds in an increasingly oversaturated market, has led charities to adopt innovative, sometimes controversial, communication strategies.**

Visual storytelling has been central to these strategies, with certain images designed to evoke immediate emotional responses from audiences. However, reliance on shock tactics or “poverty porn”—depicting extreme suffering to solicit donations—has drawn significant criticism for harmful stereotypes and undermining the dignity of those being portrayed. While certain initiatives might be effective in raising individual donations, charities have often been guilty of perpetuating narratives that not only skew public understanding of global inequalities, injustice, and poverty, but also have dire economic consequences for the countries they portray.

For example, research indicates that Africa loses approximately \$4.2 billion annually in interest payments due to negative global media portrayals, which heighten perceptions of financial risk and deter investment ([Africa No Filter, 2024](#)). The pushback against such representations has gained momentum in recent years, spurred by movements such as Black Lives Matter and global conversations on decolonisation. Beyond academic and scholarly research, there is also a growing awareness amongst the wider publics, and rejection of narratives that reinforce a one-dimensional image of Africa as defined by famine, conflict, and despair, which is perpetually dependent on Western aid. For instance, forty years after its original debut, the Band Aid initiative and its song Do They Know It's Christmas? which typifies such portrayal, has faced backlash and widespread criticism, leading to popular personalities distancing themselves from it.

In view of such critiques, evolving public attitudes, global events, and ethical scrutiny, the landscape of charity communications has undergone significant shifts over the years, with more organisations rethinking their approach, and establishing policies and guidelines to improve storytelling processes and outcomes. ([For a broader overview of academic debates see – Girling, D. and Adesina, D. \(2024\) \*Charity Representations of Distant Others: an analysis of charity advertising supporting international causes in UK national newspapers\*. University of East Anglia, UK.](#))

The Charity Advertising project was developed to research the evolving strategies in charity communications across different channels, with an emphasis on visual storytelling and its potential impact on global publics. Our first study – *Charity Representations of Distant Others*, which analysed charity advertisements in UK newspapers supporting international causes, provided valuable insights into evolving trends. For instance, we observed changes in how charities depict their beneficiaries, with greater representation of professionals and leaders from the Global South and a notable decrease in the proportion of “pitiful” or shock-inducing images compared to earlier studies. Even so, challenges persist – 50% of characters depicted were women and children, while representations of whole families remained almost non-existent. Additionally, over half of the images focused on African countries, raising questions about geographic diversity in representation.



# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

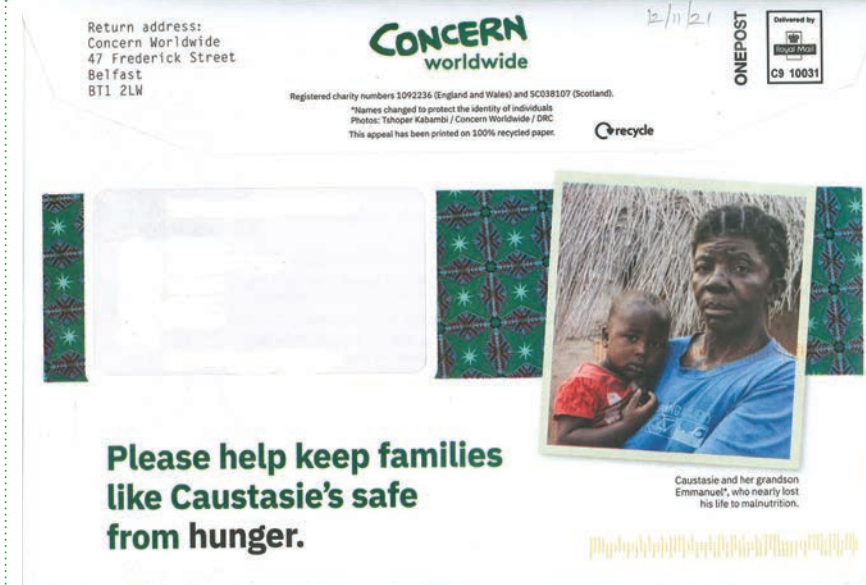
Building on these findings, the current study shifts focus to charities' use of imagery in direct mail campaigns. By analysing a sample of 589 images in 31 direct mail packs from nine British charities, we sought to understand the representations used in these campaigns, whether they differ significantly from those in newspaper advertisements, and how such imagery shapes public perceptions of distant others and understandings of global issues. In doing so, this study contributes to ongoing discussions about ethical charity communication and the impact of visual storytelling across a range of marketing formats.

Direct mail offers a unique set of advantages as a marketing channel. Whereas communications via digital outreach or via newspapers are fleeting and mass-targeted, direct mail is more personalised and often designed to foster deeper long-term relationships with supporters. The Chartered Institute of Fundraising's survey of over 200 fundraisers underscores its importance: direct mail ranks as a top method for both donor engagement and income generation (*Chartered Institute of Fundraising, Fundraising Mail Survey (December 2019)*). This makes it an invaluable tool for maintaining relationships with supporters, who are often more engaged and responsive due to their active choice to opt-in and receive such communications. With direct mail campaigns, there is often an established sense of trust and loyalty, providing a fertile ground for repeat donations and deeper engagement. Despite challenges such as declining direct mail use since 2005 and stricter data regulations post-GDPR, this medium remains a trusted and effective fundraising channel, which has witnessed a comeback since the Covid-19 pandemic. (*JICMAIL, Q2 2018 – Q2 2020 2; Royal Mail MarketReach, Coronavirus Research, Trinity McQueen 2020*). Research indicates that 76% of

people trust direct mail compared to other marketing channels (MarketingSherpa, 2017; MarketReach, *Customer Mail, Trinity McQueen 2021*) Physical mailings elicit stronger emotional responses and are perceived as more memorable than digital communications.

But direct mail offers more than just another channel for fundraising—it provides an opportunity for charities to unpack the complexities of their work and challenge donors' worldviews. With more space for storytelling and nuanced narratives, direct mail is uniquely positioned to shift public perceptions, moving beyond simplistic, stereotypical portrayals due to affordability and lack of space. Charities have an ethical obligation to ensure that their representations reflect the complexity and contexts of the places they work. They must therefore grapple with critical questions such as how their visual and narrative choices (via direct mail in this case) reconciles the tensions of ethical storytelling and securing continued financial support.

This study examined whether charities effectively leverage these affordances to balance their fundraising goals with a commitment to equitable and empowering representations. By investigating differences in representation of characters and subject matter depicted in charity direct mail against newspaper advertisements, the study contributes to a broader understanding of the dynamics of charity communications across the various marketing and fundraising channels available.



Direct Mail Envelope – Concern Worldwide – November 2021

# CHAPTER 2

# METHODOLOGY



## CHAPTER 2

# METHODOLOGY

This research examines the use of images found in charity direct mail campaigns for fundraising purposes. For this study, we donated a small amount of money to nine large charities in the UK who were chosen as they fundraise for international causes. The charities included: CARE International, Concern Worldwide, Christian Aid, Doctors Without Borders, Oxfam, Save the Children, Sightsavers, Tearfund and UNICEF. A one-year sampling period (March 6, 2021 to March 5, 2022) was selected to examine a broad range of approaches by charities and to cover the main fundraising seasons of Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. This one-year timeframe would ideally provide a snapshot of key elements within a typical supporter journey, such as welcome communications, updates, and donation requests.

The images in each mailout were coded against pre-set parameters from the [previous study](#). However, there was the need to expand the codes within certain categories, reflecting key changes in charities fundraising imagery in direct mail vs newspaper adverts. In total there were 589 images used across these 31 direct mail packs. Duplicate advertisements were retained in the sample to accurately assess how often their donor publics are exposed to these types of images.

Developed and majority world were defined on the following criteria in this study:

**Developed world (DW):** West / North / Global World / First World / developed countries / rich countries/ self / we / us (our) / here

**Majority world (MW):** South / Global South / non-West / the Rest / underdeveloped / developing / less-developed / others / them / there / Third World / global poor / poor (countries, world, regions, communities).

### Research Questions

- RQ1. What characters are depicted in the images UK charities use in direct mail
- RQ2. What subject matter is depicted in the images UK charities use in direct mail
- RQ3. What is the frequency of 'pitiful images' of people in charity direct mail
- RQ4. How do the characters and subject matter depicted in direct mail communication compares to charity adverts in UK national newspapers.

### Limitations

Due to differences in frequency and distribution of communications across both formats, it was difficult to achieve parity between direct mail and newspaper advertising datasets. In additions five of the charities included in this study—CARE International, Concern Worldwide, Oxfam, Save the Children, and Tearfund—did not run newspaper advertisements during the corresponding period analysed in our first report in this series, which further complicated direct comparisons. While we have tried to achieve a representative sample of the UK charity

sector, the nine charities analysed in this report cannot be uncritically accepted as fully reflective of the sector's practices. To some extent, the inclusion or exclusion of additional organisations with specific thematic focus such as health or education, could alter the findings, particularly with respect to subject matter of charity communications. Ideally, we would have donated to a broader range of charities to develop a more comprehensive dataset; however, this was not feasible due to funding constraints.

As with the other reports in this series, we acknowledge that coding methodology, while systematic, has its own drawbacks. Even with efforts to create a robust and detailed codebook, different researchers will categorise images differently based on their worldviews and lived experiences. Additionally, by focusing on images only, this study does not fully account for how supporters interpret images in the context of accompanying text and other contextual cues within the mailouts. These variations remain outside the scope of this study, presenting opportunities for further studies.

Despite its limitations, this research makes a significant contribution to the ongoing critique of charity representations of distant others. It addresses an important gap in academic literature and industry analysis, being one of the first studies to spotlight the use of imagery in charity direct mail campaigns. To our knowledge, charity direct mail campaigns has received little or no scholarly attention for its visual representation of global poverty.

# CHAPTER 3

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

# CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

## Number of charity mailouts over one year period

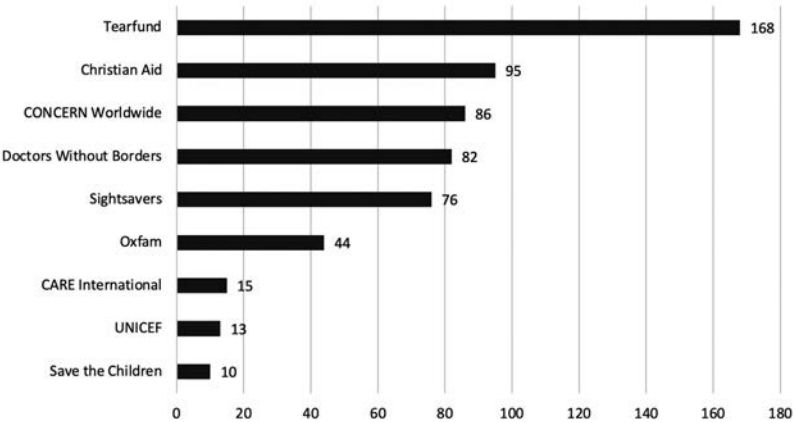
A total of nine charities sent 31 direct mail packs in the period of this study, resulting in 589 images. Concern Worldwide sent out the most direct mail packs, while Tearfund had the most images (168), more than double that of any other organisation. Four other organisations had over 70 images each: Christian Aid (95), Concern Worldwide (86), Doctors Without Borders (82), Sightsavers (76). These five organisations presented 86% of all the images (507 out of 589).



Dispatches Mailout by Doctors Without Borders - Winter 2021

Out of a total of 589 images in the 31 direct mail packs, almost 90% of these came from just five charities: Tearfund, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Doctors Without Borders and Sightsavers.

## Number of images from each charity



## Number of direct mail packs and images by charity

It is interesting that CARE International, Oxfam, Save the Children and UNICEF choose to send one mailout per year. In a completely different strategy, Concern Worldwide sent out eight direct mail packs in a 12-month period. The number of pages per mail pack varied – while the majority of the charities like Christian Aid and Sightsavers tended to send mailouts of between 6 and 13 pages, inclusive of letters, leaflets or magazines and the mailing envelopes, others like Oxfam and Tearfund had up to 20 pages (more for the latter) in their mail packs. In total, we received 437 pages in one year, from the nine charities.

CHARITY	DIRECT MAIL PACK	IMAGES	PAGES
CARE International	1	15	12
CONCERN Worldwide	8	86	70
Christian Aid	7	95	90
Doctors Without Borders	5	82	62
Oxfam	1	44	21
Save the Children	1	10	8
Sightsavers	4	76	48
Tearfund	3	168	113
UNICEF	1	13	13
TOTAL	31	589	437

# CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

## World location

Africa continues to visually dominate (51%) charities direct mail communications. This leads to the question of whether the volume of images from specific regions aligns with the extent of a charity’s work in those areas or whether it reflects a strategic decision to use imagery that resonates most strongly with donor publics. To explore this, we analysed the 2021/2022 annual reports of some of the charities in our sample to unpack the link between the countries they worked in and the representativeness (or lack of) in the images they choose to display. This highlighted some potential disconnect. For instance, Christian Aid, which used 68 images of Africa (72% of its total images), worked in 14 countries according to their annual report (2021/22), only half of which are African. These findings suggest that charities communications risk amplifying visual representation from Africa beyond what their operational footprint would suggest.

This raises important questions about the motivations underlying these choices. Are charities prioritising narratives from Africa because they believe these images carry a stronger emotive impact on donors, and in so doing reinforce deeply entrenched associations between Africa and poverty? Such choices also pose ethical challenges as it may inadvertently marginalise other regions where significant work is conducted, such as Asia or Latin America, thus reducing their visibility in donor consciousness. Furthermore, these practices can perpetuate a transactional view of humanitarian work, wherein the depiction of suffering becomes a tool to secure funding, rather than a medium to cultivate an enlightened donor base with a deeper understanding of how development works. By contrast it diminishes the agency and dignity of the communities being represented.

The overrepresentation of Africa contrasts sharply when juxtaposed with official development assistance (ODA) data. In 2021, Africa received 33.6% of global aid, compared to Asia, for instance, which received 23% of development assistance (data.one.org). While the allocation of aid suggests a significant share for the two regions, why do charities disproportionately depict Africa, with Asia visually represented in only 12% of the images?

The disparity signals a possible misalignment between where aid is directed and the visual focus of fundraising campaigns, and highlights a need for further study, to determine the nature of relationships between the allocation and country representation. While Africa remains a critical region for overseas development assistance, the overuse of its imagery risks reinforcing outdated stereotypes of the continent, overshadowing its progress and diverse realities. Furthermore, as aid budgets shift—evidenced by increasing allocations retained within donor countries or used for unspecified purposes—the incongruity of this overrepresentation grows, especially considering the declining share of aid reaching African countries, now at its lowest point (25.6%) in over two decades.

WORLD LOCATION	DIRECT MAIL	DIRECT MAIL %	NEWS PAPER ADS	NEWS PAPER ADS %
Africa	302	51%	306	56%
Asia	71	12%	32	6%
Middle East	26	5%	158	29%
Latin America and Caribbean	38	6%	17	3%
UK	82	14%	2	
Europe	1	0%	6	1%
North America	5	1%	0	
Unspecified	64	11%	20	4%
TOTAL	589		541	

Images by World Location Comparison between Direct Mail and Newspaper Adverts

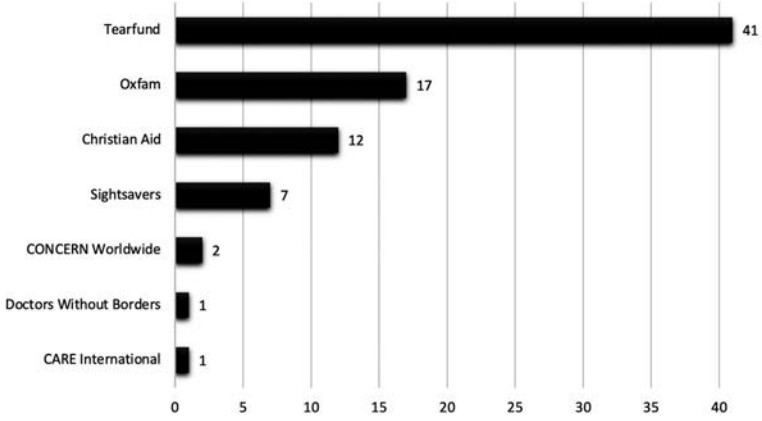


# CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

## Number of adverts by charity

It is also interesting to see that images from within the UK also feature significantly, with images of charity supporters, leading or participating in fundraising activities; and staff members of the charities in supporter-facing communications. The bulk of the 81 images focusing on the UK come from three Charities – Tearfund, Oxfam and Christian Aid.

## Images from UK by charity



## TOILET TWINNING

'It is great to know that, through my toilet twin, a community can be educated about hygiene and sanitation.'

Dave



## TAP TWINNING

'I love my Tap Twinning certificate. It reminds me not to take clean drinking water for granted. I want to make it a reality for the millions of people who don't yet have it.'

Claire



## BIN TWINNING

'Twinning your bin is a good way to help stop and reverse the damage being done to planet earth.'

Liu



## FRIDGE TWINNING

'Covid-19 affects us all but I never want to forget that others are a lot more vulnerable than me. My dad is Yemeni, so I've twinned my fridge with Yemen.'

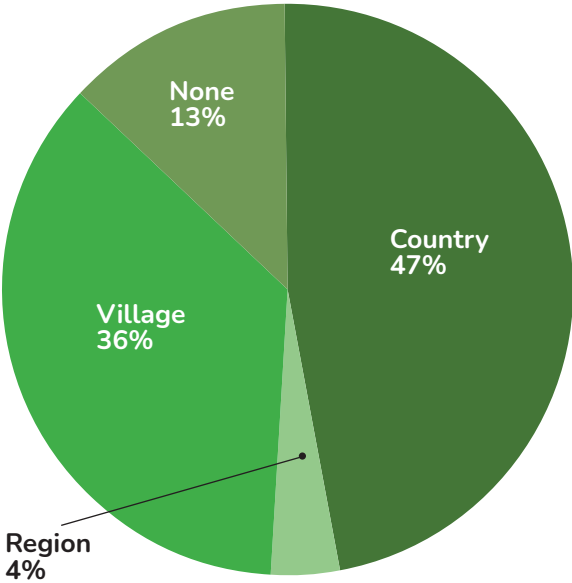
Mel





# CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

## Specific location



Out of 589 images, 279 (47%) included the name of the country within the supporting text, and 213 (36%) give the specific village. The top ten countries mentioned are listed below. It is interesting to find that the United Kingdom dominates as the country where the most images originate 81 (twice more than any other country), although with regards to size/scale, these images from the UK often occupy a much smaller portion of the page than others. Of the 589 images, only one features a European country in an appeal context – Ukraine, despite the prevalence of humanitarian crisis in the region. This limited representation may be partially attributed to the longer production timeline of direct mail campaigns, compared to newspaper adverts, which can be designed and released within days to reflect emerging crises.

Specific Location	Total
Country	279
Region	22
Village	213
None	75
TOTAL	589

COUNTRIES	DIRECT MAIL	COUNTRIES	NEWS PAPER ADS
United Kingdom	81	Yemen	116
South Sudan	36	Ethiopia	48
DR Congo	23	Kenya	41
Malawi	21	Iran	21
Kenya	20	India	16
Senegal	18	Mali	16
Nigeria	17	Afghanistan	12
Bangladesh	16	Madagascar	12
Congo	16	DR Congo	10
Afghanistan	13	Cameroon	7

Only two countries (Kenya and DR Congo) were represented in both datasets. It is difficult to compare the datasets as five of the charities (CARE International, Concern Worldwide, Oxfam, Save the Children and Tearfund) did not place any newspaper adverts during the data collection period. However, the data still gives an indication of the countries that charities focus on in their direct mail fundraising activities. Considering that 51% of images are taken in Africa, it is not surprising that seven countries in the Top 10 are African countries. What is surprising is that the most represented country was the UK with 81 images – which accounts for 12.4% of the subject matter, cumulatively more than all other subject matters apart from Health). This consisted of Staff and Supporter Actions images – which typically depict DW characters active

participating in fundraising, advocacy, and volunteering towards resolving these issues in the Majority World. This perhaps illustrates Chouliariaki’s argument that contemporary humanitarianism, shaped by market-driven approaches (such as consumer-focused strategies) and the digital media, has shifted focus from a morality of ‘common humanity’ in the 20th century towards a ‘morality of the self’ as the motivation for action, in the 21st (Chouliaraki, Lilie & Vestergaard, Anne. (2021). p17). The prominence of the UK-based images however warrants further critical consideration particularly in light of the dataset’s composition. For example, Tearfund alone accounts for 41 of the 81 UK-based images, and thus significantly skews the results. Consequently, the observed trends can be taken as influenced by the communications practices of specific organisations rather than reflecting sector-wide patterns.

# CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

## Subject matter

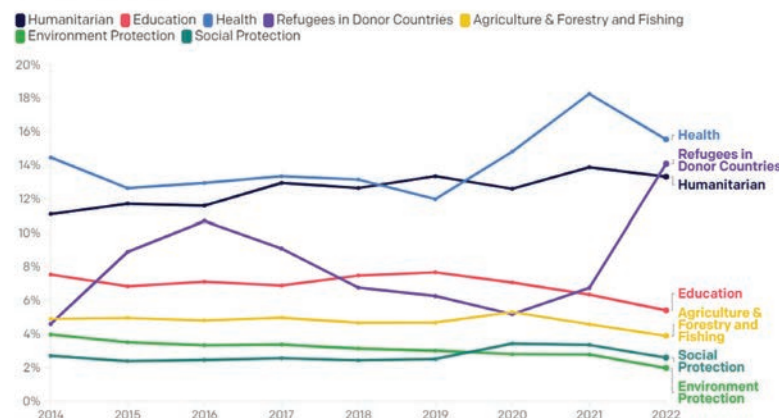
The images were analysed to reveal the subject put before donor publics through the charities direct mail communications. Health issues dominate, accounting for one-third (34%) of all images. While the focus on the subject of health in direct mail is seemingly less than in newspaper advertisements (68%), the depiction overwhelmingly positions MW characters as consumers and passive recipients of care, neglecting narratives around training local staff or investing in infrastructure to build self-sustaining health systems. This continuing trend of dominance may simply reflect the number of images from charities providing healthcare interventions e.g Sightsavers (76 images) and Doctors Without Borders (82 images), yet it raises questions about whether charities generally prioritise health interventions over other development matters.

In both ads and direct mail, health continues to be by far the single most significant subject matter represented. With direct mail, however, charities seem to have more space to showcase a broader range of subject areas they work in. Thus, whilst charity ads highlight natural disasters (8.5%), conflict and violence (6.5%) as key areas, in direct mail, charity publics are exposed to issues of hunger (9%), which was totally absent in newspaper ads; increased focus on environment (7.8%) and water/sanitation (7.1%). Direct mail also features supporter actions images (8.1%) which typically portray DW characters actively working towards resolving issues in the majority world.

Education is strikingly underrepresented, with minimal coverage in direct mail (2.5%) and complete absence in newspaper ads, despite children being the second most depicted character (37.5%). This disparity suggests an emphasis on short-term humanitarian relief rather than long-term development goals, such as investing in education or economic infrastructure. Data One's reporting of Official Development Assistance or global aid, confirms this trend;

## Share of aid to selected sectors

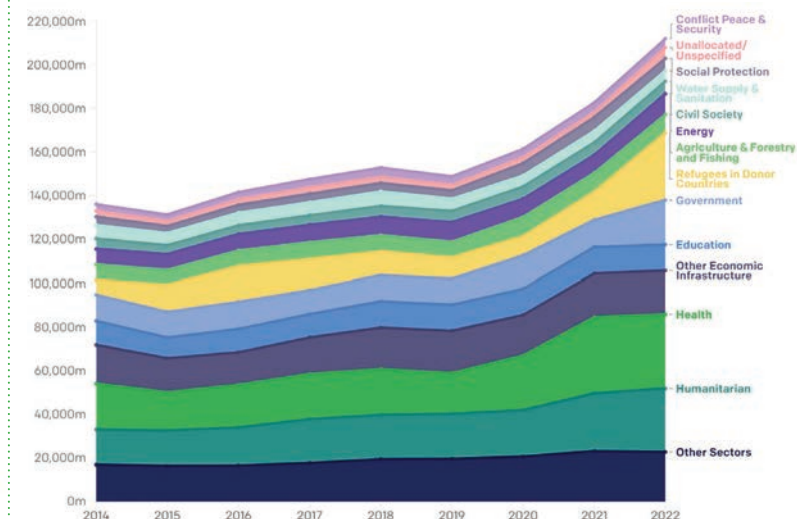
DAC Countries, Total



Sources OECD DAC (CRS).

(<https://data.one.org/topics/official-development-assistance/#the-geographic-distribution-of-aid-flows>)

DAC Countries, Total



Sources OECD DAC (CRS).

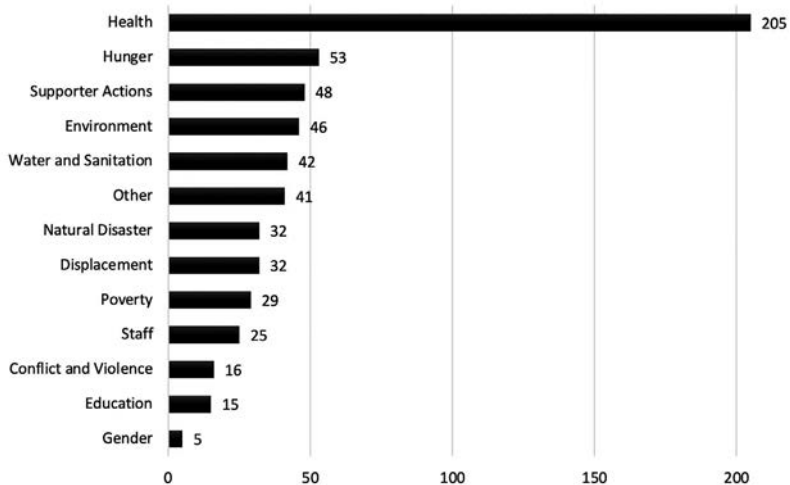
(<https://data.one.org/topics/official-development-assistance/#the-geographic-distribution-of-aid-flows>)

# CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Although it is impossible not to intervene in humanitarian crises (displacement, natural disasters, conflict and violence etc) short-term relief framing risks obscuring long-term development needs and may contribute to donor disillusionment when tangible progress is not evident.

Ultimately, these findings highlight the need for charities to critically re-examine their programmatic priorities, and whether their visual storytelling genuinely reflects or perpetuates reductive narratives designed primarily for donor appeal. Addressing this imbalance is crucial for a nuanced understanding of global poverty and consequently fostering informed support for sustainable development efforts.

Subject matter



Number of images by subject matter

SUBJECT	NUMBER OF IMAGES	PERCENT
Health	205	34.8%
Hunger	53	9.0%
Supporter Actions	48	8.1%
Environment	46	7.8%
Water and Sanitation	42	7.1%
Other	41	7.0%
Displacement	32	5.4%
Natural Disaster	32	5.4%
Poverty	29	4.9%
Staff	25	4.2%
Conflict and Violence	16	2.7%
Education	15	2.5%
Gender	5	0.8%
TOTAL	589	100%

Subject comparison between direct mail and newspaper adverts

SUBJECT	DIRECT MAIL (%)	NEWSPAPERS (%)
Health	205 (34.8%)	368 (68.0%)
Hunger	53 (9.0%)	-
Supporter Actions	48 (8.1%)	-
Environment	46 (7.8%)	32 (5.9%)
Water and Sanitation	42 (7.1%)	14 (2.6%)
Other	41 (7.0%)	34 (6.3%)
Conflict and Violence	16 (2.7%)	35 (6.5%)
Natural Disaster	32 (5.4%)	46 (8.5%)
Displacement	32 (5.4%)	-
Poverty	29 (4.9%)	12 (2.2%)
Staff	25 (4.2%)	-
Education	15 (2.5%)	-
Gender	5 (0.8%)	-
TOTAL	589 (100%)	541 (100%)

# CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

## TYPE OF CHARACTERS

MW Women and MW Children together continue to be the most important characters in charity fundraising communications. Whereas in ads the MW child is the most represented character (17.4%), direct mail showcases the MW Woman as the most (17%). In both channels, women and children cumulatively account for over one third of all images used, reflecting their continued importance in charity fundraising narratives. Although we have maintained the character coding as 'mother and child', it was clear that this category contained images of sisters, aunts, grandmothers and portrayal of other familiar relationships in the direct mail dataset. This was less obvious in the newspaper adverts, which is undoubtedly due to lack of space.

Direct mail introduces character types that are completely absent from newspaper ads, such as **MW father and child** and **DW children** – the latter invariably depicted as actively fundraising in all images. Also, whole family units (images of father, mother and children) are slightly more represented in direct mail (13/589 compared to 1/541 in ads).

WORLD LOCATION	DIRECT MAIL	%	NEWSPAPERS	%
MW Child	74	12.6%	94	17.4%
MW Mother and Child	87	14.8%	61	11.3%
MW Woman	100	17.0%	54	10.0%
Other MW People	19	3.2%	54	10.0%
DW Leader Female	12	2.0%	54	10.0%
MW Leaders Male and Female	9	1.5%	50	9.2%
MW Leader Female	23	3.9%	31	5.7%
MW Leader Male	39	6.6%	29	5.4%
MW Children	38	6.5%	22	4.1%
MW Man	39	6.6%	22	4.1%
DW Leader Male	19	3.2%	14	2.6%
MW Men and Women	12	2.0%	11	2.0%
MW Women	26	4.4%	10	1.8%
MW Men	8	1.4%	10	1.8%
DW Celebrity	1	0.2%	10	1.8%
DW Men and Women	5	0.8%	6	1.1%
DW Man	19	3.2%	2	0.4%
DW Men, Women and Children	4	0.7%	2	0.4%
DW Woman	27	4.6%	0	0.0%
DW Leader Female and MW Child	0	0.0%	2	0.4%
DW Leader Male and MW Child	0	0.0%	2	0.4%
MW Man, Woman and Child	13	2.2%	1	0.2%
MW Father and Child	9	1.5%	-	-
DW Child	6	1.0%	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>100%</b>

# CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

## HOW MANY PROFESSIONALS ARE DEPICTED IN THE IMAGES

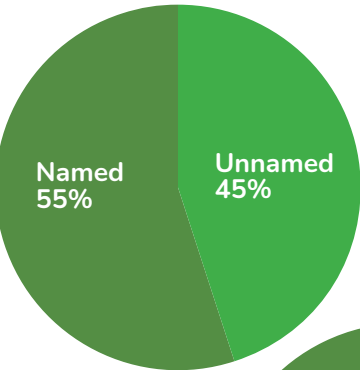
While the number of MW Leaders Male slightly increased in the mailout, instances of MW Female Leaders and Male and Female leaders portrayed together, were reduced compared to in newspapers. Overall MW Leaders account for 12% of all direct mail images, as opposed to 20.3% in newspaper ads. Professional roles were mostly limited to MW characters depicted as healthcare providers or facilitators for awareness sessions, and as faith leaders.

CHARACTER	MAILOUT	%	NEWSPAPERS	%
DW Leader Female	12	2.0%	54	10%
DW Leader Male	19	3.2%	14	2.6%
MW Leader Female	23	3.9%	31	5.7%
MW Leader Male	39	6.6%	29	5.4%
MW Leaders Male and Female	9	1.5%	50	9.2%
Total of MW Leaders	71	12%	110	20.3%

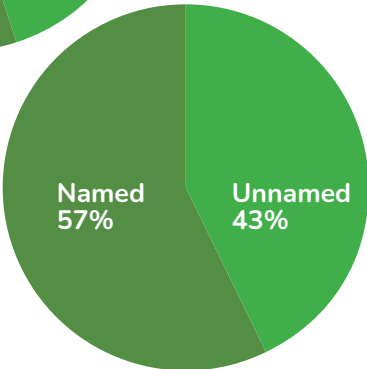
## CHARACTERS - NAMED VERSUS UN-NAMED

In 337 (57%) of the images used in the mailouts, characters are named, leaving 43% (252) who remain nameless. As with the newspaper ads, for images that include a large number of characters it is not easy to name every single person. There are also instances where the character has deliberately not been named or their name changed to protect their identity.

Newspapers



Mailouts



Character Named – Christian Aid – January 2022



# CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

## ACTIVE VS PASSIVE CHARACTERS

### Most PASSIVE characters

CHARACTER	PASSIVE	active
MW Mother and Child	76	11
MW Child	64	10
MW Woman	66	32
MW Children	28	10

### Most ACTIVE characters

CHARACTER	ACTIVE	passive
MW Woman	32	66
MW Leader Male	25	14
MW Man	18	22
MW Women	15	12

Generally, MW Characters were more likely to be framed as passive than active, with women and children as the most passive characters. Out of 87 images in which they appeared, MW Mother and Child was coded as passive in 76 (88.4%). This pattern is quite similar to the images used in newspapers ads, where, out of 94 images which portrayed MW Children, only 6 of those were coded as “active”, while all 66 images of MW Mother and Child were coded as passive. MW mother and children, appear predominantly in health-related contexts—receiving treatment or receiving training.

Active images of MW children in direct mail were typically framed as playing, writing, or studying, but they are also depicted carrying NGO-distributed kits or drinking water from recently completed projects. This is in stark contrast to DW Children who though appear in smaller number (6 out of 589 images) are represented 100% of the time as actively fundraising.

It is interesting to see that although the MW Woman was depicted more passively (in 66 images) than actively (32), it is the character most coded as active, with a huge number of those images portraying them as participating in farming activities.

## Example of MW Children – Save the Children



**THANK YOU SO MUCH!**

Save the Children

It's fantastic that you've agreed that your gifts can be treated as Gift Aid donations. You can find an explanation of how the scheme works below.

*giftaid it*

Thank you for agreeing to a Gift Aid Declaration on 03/03/2021. This is to confirm that you want Save the Children to treat all donations you have made for the last four years and all donations you make in future as Gift Aid donations, until you notify us otherwise.

Please note, for each tax year covered by this declaration, if you pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in the current tax year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all your donations, it is your responsibility to pay any difference.

Save the Children will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 you have given.

You are entitled to cancel your Gift Aid Declaration at any time up to 30 days from receiving this letter without any tax being claimed by us during this period.

Your additional support will help to fund Save the Children's vital work across the world.

**Want to change how you hear from us?**

If you'd like to talk to us about our work reaching every child, or simply need to start, stop or change how you hear from us, including by post, please call our Supporter Care team on 0207 012 6400 or email [supportercare@savethechildren.org.uk](mailto:supportercare@savethechildren.org.uk).

We're committed to protecting your personal information. For more about how we collect, use and look after your details, please read our full privacy policy at [www.savethechildren.org.uk/privacy](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/privacy)

FR Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

25016 LT1

# CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION



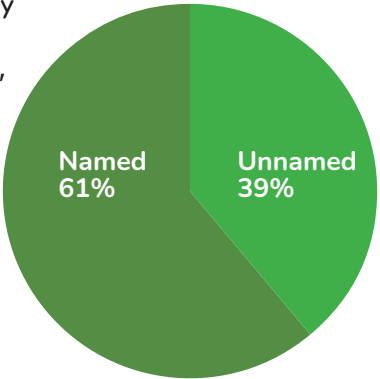
## PITIFUL IMAGES

Four adverts included images which were deemed as pitiful. These adverts were from Sightsavers and Save the Children. However, this represents 0.679% of all images (4 out of 589) which were deemed as 'pitiful'. Compared to our study of newspaper ads, this is a significant drop as the analysis found that 11% of the UK charity adverts used pitiful images. The images coded as pitiful represents less than 4% (3/76) of all Sightsavers images and 1 out of 10 of Save The Children's.

## PHOTOGRAPHER CREDIT

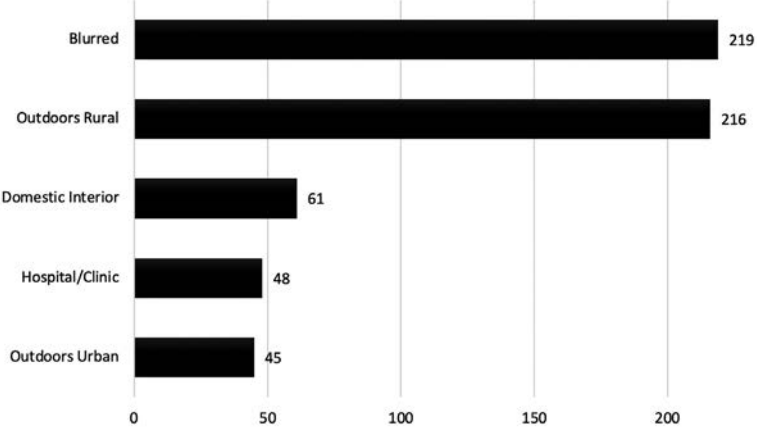
The analysis reveals that photographers were credited in 61% of the images within direct mail campaigns, a notable improvement compared to 42% in newspaper advertisements. While photographer attribution is not technically part of the ethical representation of the contributors, it reflects good practice, recognising the creators' work and fostering transparency. In view of the potential integration of generative AI for fundraising content creation, accurate captioning and crediting becomes especially crucial for trust and authenticity.

Additionally, as the development sector emphasises localisation, it will be interesting to examine whether or not charities actively engage local photographers in their story-gathering. However, identifying the photographers' origins based solely on names remains challenging and outside the scope of this report.



## SURROUNDINGS

37% of the images used in mailouts are cropped or presented against a blurred background so it is difficult to ascertain their surroundings. For others, the vast majority of images are set outdoors in rural places – especially farmlands. Unlike with newspaper ads, the direct mail ideally offers charities space to portray a wider array of places. Thus recycling familiar visual tropes of a pre-industrial rural Africa frozen in time, signals a missed opportunity for charities to educate audiences with more nuanced pictures of the places and people they work with. Compared to newspaper ads, images in direct mail are set more within domestic spaces including homes, offices, places of worship, schools etc. Significantly more images were captured outdoor in rural settings mostly farmlands. The image setting also features disaster sites, refugee camps, hospitals, reflecting the themes of conflict and violence, natural disasters, displacement, and health.



# CHAPTER 4

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



# CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## CONCLUSION

In this phase of our research on charity advertising, we aimed to examine how INGOs represent distant others in direct mail communications compared to newspaper advertisements, building on findings from earlier studies. While the direct mail format offers greater potential for nuanced storytelling, our analysis reveals both continuity and emerging shifts in the dynamics of charity advertising, underscoring the complexities of this medium.

Positive developments include an increased attribution of images to their creators, a practice that will gain significance as AI-generated content becomes more common. Additionally, the decline in pitiful imagery in direct mail compared to newspaper advertisements signals progress toward more ethical representation. These trends highlight incremental yet noteworthy changes in visual storytelling.

However, the continued overrepresentation of Africa across direct mail and newspaper advertisements raises critical questions about the motivations and strategies driving charity communications. This trend suggests a potential disconnect between visual narratives and operational realities, warranting deeper scholarly exploration. Similarly, the persistent focus on health as the dominant subject matter—often at the expense of narratives on education, economic infrastructure, or capacity-building—highlights the emphasis on short-term relief over long-term development.

Thus, while there is evidence of progress, charities must strive to balance their visual narratives against operational realities. The necessary shifts highlighted will require significant overhaul at strategic levels but are vital not only for fostering a more informed and engaged donor public but also for advancing ethical and equitable representations of development and the Majority World.

## Example of Grandmother and Child Image - Tearfund

12: Tearfund Feature

'That makes it difficult for us to go out and catch fish. Extreme weather means we can't really go out to fish. We can go to shallow water to get some fish for our family, but it's not enough. Sometimes it gets too hot or too cold, our kids often get sick.'

'God has given us the environment to provide for our daily needs. Creation is a blessing to us from God. So we need to take care of it. All of us. Because we all benefit from creation. We must help each other to care for our environment. If we don't, more floods and landslides will come.'

**'We need to teach our children to care for creation'**

'We need to plant more trees, not to throw trash into the seas. We need to teach our children to care for creation and keep our beaches beautiful. Here in our community, we tell people to help one another to take care of their environment. We all have to work together.'

**God's call to care for creation**

'We have happy times and good times living in this community,' says Francisco. 'But most of the time, it's difficult, especially fishing. The catch is often barely enough for our daily needs. The fish are very deep underwater these days because of the bad weather.'

'God gave us his creation. It is the only source of food for people like me. If I don't care for it, I will have more difficulties in life and I will get poorer. I will always be in need.'

As the climate emergency continues and more extreme weather hits communities like Albay, Tearfund has been helping vulnerable people prepare for increased threats. In the Philippines, our local church partners have been supporting

communities to reduce their risk when a disaster strikes and training to respond immediately. They have also helped communities to diversify their sources of income, so that they're not solely reliant on livelihoods that may be destroyed.

**Prepared for the next typhoon**

These, and other measures, have proved to be very effective. While Super Typhoon Goni was similar in strength to 2013's Super Typhoon Haiyan, the number of fatalities was significantly lower.

'We are now really prepared for the next typhoon,' says Ariel. 'We don't want to experience the same destruction again. Now we know how to keep our houses stable to withstand storms in the future. And we know how to warn our communities and go to higher ground when storms come.'

**'I know we will recover, one step at a time'**

The support from PhilRads and the training in how to be alert and prepared for any future storms has helped Ariel be determined to start again. 'I think we will be able to recover. I can say that for my family, as well as for my house, we can slowly rebuild. I am hopeful that my kids will be able to study and finish their education. I know we will recover, one step at a time.' ➔

Ariel's aunt teaching her granddaughter to write

Photo: Raynolds & Co. / Tearfund

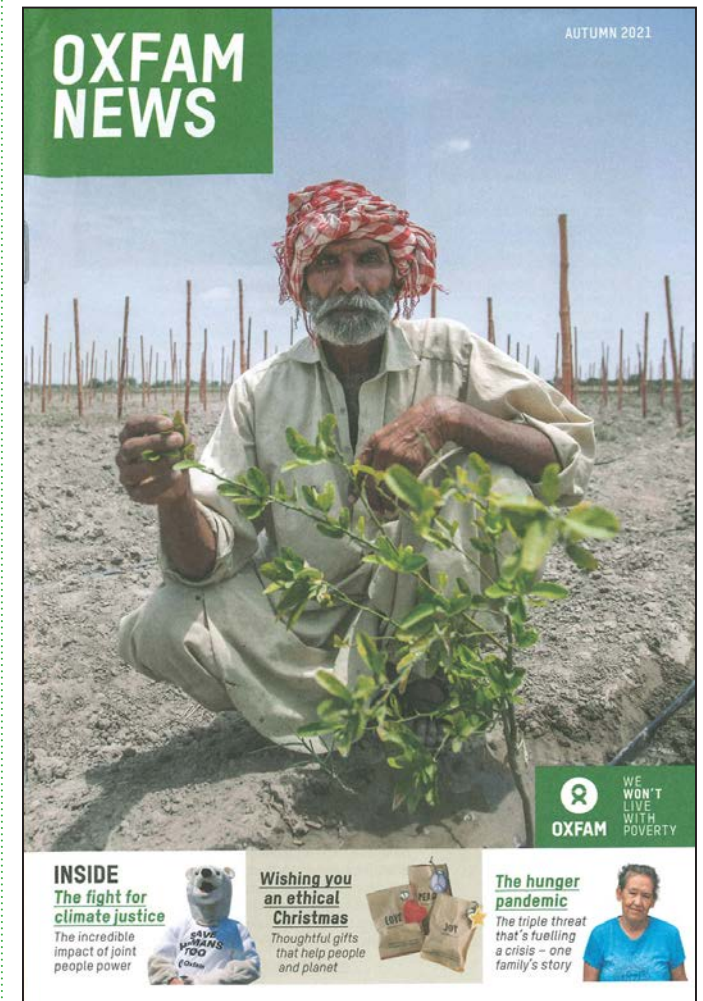
# CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 View the Charity Advertising ([www.charity-advertising.co.uk](http://www.charity-advertising.co.uk)) website to explore examples of best practice.
- 2 Regularly review and update communication strategies to align with ethical standards, best practice and reflect any changes to your organisation's development focus. Consider inviting external experts to provide fresh perspectives or reveal blind spots.
- 3 Leverage existing resources, such as this project's database and past reports, to review trends and to compare practices with those of peer organisations.
- 4 Diversify Geographic Representation – 51% of images still focus on Africa. Charities should align their visual communications with operational realities and aid allocation.
- 5 Work with local heroes and celebrities rather than relying on global North celebrities in order to avoid 'white saviour' notions.
- 6 Always obtain informed consent when photographing individuals, and respect their dignity and privacy. Ensure that the subjects are comfortable with being featured in your campaign materials
- 7 Ensure the subjects are aware that their images are used for advertisement/campaigns in media/social media etc
- 8 Hire local photographers and storytellers wherever possible. They will nearly always understand the language and culture far better than someone outside the community.

- 9 Capture a range of emotions in your photos. Show moments of joy, resilience, and determination alongside the challenges faced.
- 10 Provide a location to contextualise the image and story being presented to the audience, preferably the county/region, city or village as well as the country. Name people wherever possible. Obviously, there are some situations that require pseudonyms.
- 11 Credit the photographer wherever possible. This should be standard practice.
- 12 Cultivate Cross-Sector Collaboration - Ultimately, progress in humanitarian communication is not the sole responsibility nor exclusive interest of marketing/comms teams. There is the need for more deliberate research collaborations between academics, communications practitioners and programmes teams.
- 13 Share this report with your CEO, Board and other departments which use imagery for communications whether it is in direct mail, newspapers or social media etc.

## Oxfam News Cover Page - Autumn 2021





# CHAPTER 5

## BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER READING

## CHAPTER 5 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER READING

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# APPENDICES

## EXAMPLES OF CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

# APPENDICES CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

MW Child



MW Mother and Child



Other MW People



DW Leader Female



MW Leader Female



MW Leaders Male and Female



MW Leader Male





APPENDICES CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

MW Children



**THANK YOU SO MUCH!**

Save the Children

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*giftaid it*

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We're committed to protecting your personal information. For more about how we collect, use and look after your details, please read our full privacy policy at [www.savethechildren.org.uk/privacy](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/privacy)



MW Man



Francisco from Philotha

**£16**

**Pray for Francisco and his family**

When asked how people can pray for him, Francisco says, "If you have compassion for people like me, please pray for me and my family, that we will have relief from our hardships."

"I would like to see some great changes without impact. And I hope to have our family house fully repaired."

"The other day, I caught a rather big fish which means I earn money."

For Francisco, the support he has received from Philotha has helped him start again. Unfortunately, when the day is good I get a good catch, and I have even money. Just the other day, I caught a rather big fish, which means I earn money. I would like to see some great changes without impact. And I hope to have our family house fully repaired."

Francisco's support and prayers today and help from Philotha has helped him start again. Unfortunately, when the day is good I get a good catch, and I have even money. Just the other day, I caught a rather big fish, which means I earn money. I would like to see some great changes without impact. And I hope to have our family house fully repaired."

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DW Leader Male



**Thank you for your gifts and prayers**

A response like no other

This year we have seen our resources stretched like never before as we responded to the coronavirus pandemic. Thank you for giving us £1. It's only through your faithful support that we were able to reach so many people.

Through your generosity, we're receiving £1.8 million to help us bring the city's work to people living in poverty.

Every single pound means a huge amount, and every single pound will bring us one more person closer to safety.

**From Tearfund to the ends of the earth**

Q&A with Marrin Rice, Mayor of Bristol

Interview by Peter Shaw

Born and raised in Bristol, Marrin Rice was elected mayor in May 2016 and re-elected in May 2020. He is the first mayor from the City of Bristol to have been elected a mayor of the City of Bristol. He began his working life with Tearfund, working in the City of Bristol. He began his working life with Tearfund, working in the City of Bristol. He began his working life with Tearfund, working in the City of Bristol.

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MW Men and Women



**Together we did it!**

4 **Through against**

6 **Wings to the challenge**

8 **As the challenge**

12 **Through against**

10 **Through against**

**My Sightsavers**

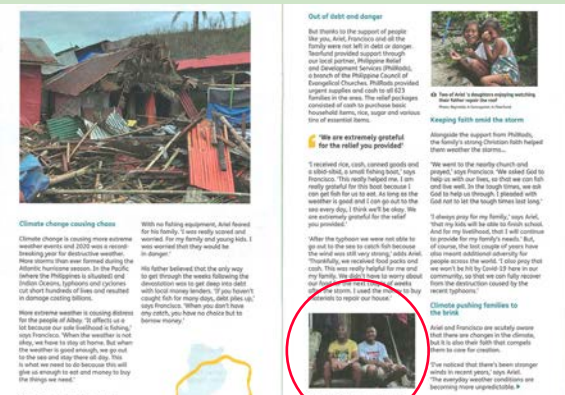
Call to see us on the changing work you support, share your feedback, building ideas, give us comments on the work you support and much more. Whatever you want to see, say or share, it's connected our way.

Visit [Sightsavers.org](http://Sightsavers.org) email [info@sightsavers.org](mailto:info@sightsavers.org)

Follow @Sightsavers write to [Feedback@Sightsavers.org](mailto:Feedback@Sightsavers.org)

See [Sightsavers.org](http://Sightsavers.org) Thanks for your support!

MW Men




**Climate change causing chaos**

Climate change is causing more extreme weather events and 2020 was a record-breaking year for destructive weather. More storms than ever formed during the Atlantic hurricane season. In the Philippines, typhoons and storms caused hundreds of deaths and millions of people were displaced.

More extreme weather is causing chaos for the people of Africa. It's difficult to get a lot because our infrastructure is falling apart. When the weather is not what we need, we have to stay at home. But when the weather is good enough, we go to the sea and stay there all day. This is what we need to do because the sea will give us enough to eat and money to buy the things we need."

Francisco's support and prayers today and help from Philotha has helped him start again. Unfortunately, when the day is good I get a good catch, and I have even money. Just the other day, I caught a rather big fish, which means I earn money. I would like to see some great changes without impact. And I hope to have our family house fully repaired."

MW Women



**Christian aid**

**Together, we uplift each other**

By sharing knowledge about nutrition, mothers in South Sudan are making sure more little ones get off to a good start.

Achya Kak Achya leads a session on the importance of breastfeeding and nutrition with a Mother to Mother group in Juvir county, South Sudan.

Mother-of-five Achya says the majority of pregnant mothers in her area did not have much knowledge about nutrition. But that was before mums like her took action together with Christian Aid's local partner, and supporters like you.

Achya's husband passed away in 2011, so it's been down to her to care for and feed her children. That's a big responsibility at the best of times. But for Achya it's also been a real struggle.

The climate crisis, conflict and isolation have made diets very limited, and malnutrition rates high, across this part of South Sudan.

Yet there are solutions. And Achya, who trained to be a health facilitator with one of our local partners, is helping to implement one of them.

She supports Mother to Mother groups set up by our local partner, and shares information about nutrition and the importance of breastfeeding.

The group members then help spread this knowledge to other mums.

Achya also promotes good hygiene, which has meant more mums are delivering their babies safely in health facilities - and that more newborns can be checked for malnutrition.

All of this has reduced malnutrition in children among the families of the Mother to Mother group members and the wider community.



**Save a trip to the postbox**

Scan the code with your phone to donate online or go to [cald.org.uk/strength](http://cald.org.uk/strength)

Scan me **Thank you**



# APPENDICES CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERS IN CONTEXT

DW Celebrity



DW Men and Women



DW Man



DW Woman



MW Father and Child



DW Men, Women and Children



MW Man, Woman and Child

