



# MSF GLOBAL DEI GUIDE

## FOR COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING CONTENT

MSF MOVEMENT-WIDE GUIDE TO **DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI)** IN MSF COMMUNICATIONS AND FUNDRAISING CONTENT STRATEGIES, PRODUCTION AND MATERIALS.

**Note:** This guide will be a living document, periodically updated for continuous improvement of our external communications. Your feedback and experience using this guide is welcomed at [52b7e0c0.msf.org@emea.teams.ms](mailto:52b7e0c0.msf.org@emea.teams.ms) (emails will be visible to members of the international MSF communications and fundraising EDI taskforce).

### INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVES

#### What is DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion)?

**Diversity** is a demographic mix of personal characteristics, making each person unique. Examples of diversity include (but are not limited to) race, colour, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, disability, medical condition, age, class, and religious, political or cultural beliefs.

**Equity** is the systematic fair and just treatment of people resulting in opportunities and outcomes for every individual that “create a level playing field”. Addressing inequities requires an understanding of the underlying causes of outcome disparities within the society, and differentials in power and authority.

**Inclusion** is the degree to which all people feel a sense of belonging, especially under-represented groups and their participation in decision-making processes. A truly inclusive group will by necessity be diverse, but a diverse group may or may not be inclusive.

#### Why do we need this guide in MSF?

MSF’s external communications should strive to show the reality and diversity of MSF’s work and the people we support in an inclusive, respectful and accurate manner. MSF also has a role to play in raising awareness among our readers, supporters and donors about the importance of being more inclusive and diverse.

MSF recognises that some communications and fundraising productions by the organisation have failed to be sensitive, culturally appropriate, display the true diversity of our staff, or show the agency of patients and communities. In the worst cases, some productions can be qualified as racist, stereotypical, non-inclusive, or reinforcing of white saviourism, neocolonialism or power imbalances.

The MSF movement has worked on addressing ethics related to its communications for years, with a number of existing practices and guidelines. Movement-wide discussions led to MSF's directors of communications and fundraising taking collective action to make DEI a fundamental value in our communications approach. A dedicated movement-wide taskforce was established to apply DEI principles to communications and fundraising strategies, productions and materials.

This guide is one of the key outputs of this taskforce. **This guide is meant to advise MSF teams on the creation of more respectful, ethical and inclusive public communications productions that accurately represent our staff, patients and the communities with which we work.**

This guide sets the following interdependent commitments to be followed by all MSF communications and fundraising departments: 1) To not use racist or discriminatory narrative or tone, including language and imagery, in MSF materials; 2) When writing, speaking or using images, aim to be conscious of and sensitive to, and reflect on, the impact of MSF communications on the people and communities being represented; and 3) To seek more information, advice and feedback when in doubt.

There will be discomforts, challenges and questions, and your feedback is essential to improve and enhance this guide.

## ◆ Who is this guide for?

This guide is for MSF communications, fundraising, and any other content-producing teams throughout the movement. Directors and senior managers of MSF communications and fundraising teams are expected to champion this guide in their sections and offices, by dedicating time to discussing and applying these principles with their teams, across departments, and beyond.

The Principles and Guiding Questions in this guide can also be shared with external parties responsible for producing public communications materials that represent MSF. This guide is recommended to be applied both when framing and planning the collection of original content from MSF projects (i.e. photos, video, writing; who locally or internationally will be collecting such content), and when adapting existing content.

## ◆ What does this guide contain, and not contain?

This guide aims to lay out a basic set of DEI Principles for informing MSF communications and fundraising content strategies, productions and materials, but is not meant to be prescriptive or comprehensive. A list of Guiding Questions is included for reviewing communications and fundraising materials through a DEI lens. These principles and questions were developed based on a review of existing MSF and external DEI guidelines related to public communications and branding (see 'Tools and References').

This guide is meant to be user-friendly, and to empower MSF sections and offices to make decisions on public communications productions that are respectful of DEI and are non-discriminatory. MSF sections/offices and field communications teams will need to adapt and build upon the information in this guide as is relevant and appropriate for their region and audiences, including for specific terminology and image selection.

Thus, this guide should be used in conjunction with:

- MSF sections/offices' own DEI-relevant communications, fundraising, or brand guidelines
- MSF international guidelines: International Office (IO) Style Guide, Content Production Guidelines
- Any other external DEI-relevant guidelines deemed fit for purpose by the MSF section/office

(See 'Tools & References' for links to the above.)



## PRINCIPLES

Public communications should follow the working principles of MSF, and should ultimately be determined by what the people with whom we work or serve express as their best interest. We must bear in mind that what is considered appropriate is constantly evolving. The definitions we use in our principles may differ in different parts of the world, and what may be an appropriate term in one language or culture may carry another meaning in a different one. These principles allow people to think thoroughly about how we depict a situation, story, person or place to live up to the organisation we want to be – diverse, equitable, inclusive, anti-racist and non-discriminatory.

### ■ Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

As MSF, we have the power to shape the public narrative and influence change. Hence, as communicators and storytellers, we have a responsibility to contribute to counteracting inherent bias in our society by shifting perspectives, adding context to the stories, and framing conversations and visuals that advance diversity and equity. We strive for visual and written communications that accurately present the diversity of the communities we work with and our project teams.

Our storytelling will ensure that people, particularly those who may be disproportionately disadvantaged, are seen and heard. Such groups may include women, girls, children, LGBTQI+, racially marginalised groups, people of a discriminated faith or religion, persons living with disabilities, or older people.

The production of our communications should engage with the diverse people depicted in a meaningful collaborative manner and be respectful of their individual preferences.

### ■ Respect and Dignity

We should always depict people respectfully and with human dignity. Treating people with dignity implies treating them with empathy, courtesy and kindness, but it also means respecting their rights, giving them freedom of choice, listening and taking into consideration what they say, and respecting their wishes, decisions and actions, even if one disagrees.

Any communication when it includes community representation needs to consider the following elements: honesty, empathy, courtesy, understanding, confidentiality and privacy.

It is important to try to understand the local communication landscape in terms of social, cultural, economic, and political aspects, and local power dynamics. The perspectives of the subjects and communities should be sought proactively when possible; such perspectives, whether positive or negative, solicited or unsolicited, are important and must be respected.

Communications also require a careful assessment of vulnerability of and risk for subjects and communities, such as in contexts of armed conflict, violence, disease, marginalisation, or stigmatisation. It is important to be mindful and respectful of potential risks in public communications, and to put into place adequate safeguards, including informed consent and personal data privacy and security.

## ■ Voice and Agency

Agency is a situation where people have the ability to employ their assets and aspirations to make or influence their own decisions about their lives and set their own goals, as well as to act upon those decisions to achieve desired outcomes.

There are three critical, interrelated processes of agency: voice, choice and power.

**Voice** refers to an individual's ability to actively advocate for what they want.

**Choice** is the ability to make and influence decisions.

**Power**, the enabler of both voice and choice, is the ability to influence or be influenced by others, and can enable or constrain agency. Power operates in visible and invisible ways.

Narratives of helplessness, poverty or other lack of agency strip away the voice from the communities. Space must be made for people to convey their real voice and accurately present the complex nature and context of their situation and its impact.

Noting a person's name and identity as expressed by themselves in our communications can be an important affirmation and recognition of their voice, assuming consent.

Gender neutrality in voice is also an important principle in those languages that may be heavily gender-based.

First-person testimonies, and the person's wishes of how to use their story, are one of the most potent communication tools to achieve this.

## ■ Stereotypes and Othering

Awareness and exposure to a range of perspectives are needed in words or visuals to avoid perpetuating stereotyping or 'othering' of subjects, and stripping away their agency, dignity or humanity.

Intolerance, racism and xenophobia are fed by stereotypes and prejudices that must be prevented and eradicated at every level. Visible minorities are too often depicted by conveying a stereotyped image of their culture and traditions.

When we stereotype, we draw conclusions about entire groups of people based on common assumptions. Communications using stereotypes are often inaccurate and can lead to negative repercussions, regardless of intent. The effects of stereotyping in communications can be far-reaching, feed racism and discrimination, and have an impact on communities, staff, and the MSF we represent. MSF's work in humanitarian crises and related human suffering can put us at greater risk of perpetuating stereotypes about certain populations or countries.

In our communications, differences in culture, language or context must be carefully considered, as they can cause misunderstandings that lead to stereotypes and othering.

## ■ Representation

Who is being shown, or who is representing and speaking out for MSF, has the power to shape the audience's understanding of the issue, topic and diversity of the organisation. Accurate multidisciplinary representation of the people who work for MSF, and the people MSF works among, can powerfully influence ideas and attitudes.

Strong and positive representation can also help break down stereotypes detrimental to individuals and communities. When a group of people is only ever represented in negative ways, it adversely affects the way others see them, as well as the way they see themselves.

Also important is who is actually writing the story and taking the photos or filming. The ideas and beliefs held by the people telling the story influence the way in which certain subjects are recorded and represented.

## ■ Accuracy and Honesty

We must tell people's stories with honesty and accuracy, letting the work, the stories and the people speak for themselves, and letting our audiences form their own opinions. Our commitment to tell fuller stories, and providing as much context as possible with credible information, must be geared towards fostering clear understanding by the public about the situations and broader contexts facing the people with whom we work.

Priority should be given to the exchange of accurate, useful, timely information from trusted sources, including managing false or misleading information, in an appropriate language and format. This is a two-way exchange that requires in-depth understanding of the local communication landscape.

As a medium of people's voices, we need to be conscious of proper interpretation and appropriate translations of subjects in their mother tongue, and what could possibly go wrong in the process.

## ■ Avoiding the Hero Narrative

The work our staff do every day is something we are rightly proud of, but we should be extremely careful about any narratives presenting MSF as heroic or being a saviour, or represented as such in language, voice and images. We should not use any overt suggestion of heroism, 'white saviour' or other superiority narrative in our communications.

When accurate, we should avoid simplistic messaging of MSF or other international agencies being the sole sources of assistance to passive communities, and mention the work of civil society if relevant. In the rare occasions of critical emergencies or conflict where MSF can genuinely be considered as the sole provider of lifesaving assistance during a period of acute intensity, we should not be shy to say so, but absolutely avoid white saviourism and superiority narratives.

We should ensure that any communication that includes experts, celebrities or other status-based individuals shows them as equals with the subjects, rather than as people whom the subjects are dependent on for assistance, knowledge or pity. Featuring such individuals visiting the people MSF works with could play some part in perpetuating the myth of the saviour and needs to be carefully managed to avoid this risk.



## GOOD-PRACTICE GUIDING QUESTIONS

Rather than being exhaustively prescriptive, this guide offers here a list of ‘good practice’ guiding questions to ask when producing and reviewing MSF communications and fundraising materials that respect DEI.

These Guiding Questions are meant to be used in conjunction with an MSF section/office’s own specific DEI-relevant communications and branding guidelines, especially for more specific needs such as acceptable terminology, acceptable imagery, and ‘Do’s and Don’t’s’; the International English Style Guide; international Content Production Guidelines; and any external guidelines deemed appropriate for use by the section/office. (See ‘Tools & References’ for links to a selection of these key documents.)

### ▼ Guiding Questions: Reviewing MSF Communications And Fundraising Materials With A Dei Lens

As MSF adopts DEI principles in all its work, all communications and fundraising materials should be created and reviewed with a DEI lens. Everyone involved in an MSF public communications project should look critically at all the materials with DEI in mind, and raise any questions or concerns for discussion. These questions are meant to guide you in your own decision-making.

MSF produces a wide variety of materials. Understandably not all materials will be able to comply with every one of these questions. Nevertheless, for all materials, consideration must be given to the narrative and image being projected by MSF in line with the DEI communications principles outlined in this guide.

#### **1. Are you collecting and recording original content with a DEI lens? Are your content creators and reviewers using a DEI lens? Do all the creators and approvers, within MSF and externally, have access to this guide, and the various internal and external guidelines? (see ‘Tools & References’)**

MSF and external creators and staff may include writers, editors, researchers, designers, photo selectors, digital teams and any MSF staff required for content development, feedback or approval. If possible, the use of local content producers is recommended. While everyone involved in the work should raise any DEI concerns, it may be helpful to have a focal person to follow adherence to DEI reviews of materials.

## **2. Is your content anti-racist, diverse, and inclusive?**

- a. Does the material have a diversity of people and contexts that are accurate?
- b. Does the material challenge the narrative that humanitarian assistance is mostly delivered by white-presenting people (i.e. perceived to have white skin and Caucasian features), often people from high-income western countries?
- c. Do the images and graphics have an accurate diversity in skin tone, facial features and activities, for the given context? Conversely, do the images and graphics make one identity stand out more than the others in a way that could be perceived as stereotyping?
- d. Does the material consider religious and cultural diversity?
- e. Does the material respect and include diverse gender roles and identifications (eg, not reinforce only traditional or binary gender roles)? Does the material use gender-neutral language (eg, avoiding masculine as default in certain languages), and language that is respectful of self-identified gender terms?
- f. Does the material respectfully consider sexual orientation?
- g. Is the language written not to be ageist?
- h. Are people with disabilities portrayed, when relevant?
- i. Will the materials be translated into relevant languages?

## **3. Is your content respectful and does it show people in a dignified manner?**

- a. Does the material reflect people as subjects (active participants) rather than objects (passive recipients)?
- b. Does the material show vulnerable patients and communities in a dignified manner (e.g. not unconscious, not in pain or distress out of context, not unclothed without relevant context)?
- c. Are you avoiding material that may be emotionally manipulative (e.g. close-up of a crying child with no visible carer)?
- d. Did you consult MSF staff with medical background (e.g. nurses, doctors, midwives) and consider their views on the portrayal or depiction of patients and people in a dignified way?
- e. Are all people portrayed represented with their names and identities (assuming informed consent)?
- f. Are you able to check if members of the group or community consent to being portrayed in this way?

## **4. Does your content enable the voice and agency of the people represented?**

- a. Does the material depict the agency of affected communities?
- b. Are people depicted as having power or say in their situation, or and not depicted as helpless or needing to be saved?
- c. Does the material avoid representing communities only through suffering, economic hardship or the need for aid?
- d. Does the material avoid passive black and brown bodies?

## **5. Does your content avoid stereotypes and othering?**

- a. Do your images avoid racial, gender, age, cultural or other stereotypes?
- b. Does the material avoid the risk of being interpreted as presenting an ‘us vs them’ or other unequal paradigms?
- c. Are you making sure to use material that does not depict people as inferior, or MSF as superior or knowing better what they need than the people themselves do?
- d. Are you making sure content with people with disabilities does not stereotype them or reinforce ableism (discrimination on the basis of disability)?

## **6. Is your content representative?**

- a. Does the material illustrate that most MSF project staff are from the country of operations?
- b. Who in the material’s photo/video or text is shown providing MSF’s medical care, and does it accurately illustrate that most patient care is provided by locally hired staff?
- c. Who is shown “in action”, at the centre of the narrative, wearing the MSF logo?
- d. How are the dynamics of different MSF staff presented – in collaboration or in hierarchy?
- e. Are we showing a balanced view of our work, in line with our operational realities, such as in regards to operations benefitting certain population groups (eg, children, women, diseases, etc)?

## **7. Is your content accurate?**

- a. Does the material avoid exaggerating, sensationalising, or ‘sugarcoating’ the story?
- b. Does the material avoid oversimplifying the complexity of the humanitarian emergency for the subjects and community?
- c. When describing a crisis where many people are suffering, have you considered incorporating narratives about the ‘norm’ that existed before the crisis, so as to avoid providing a one-dimensional image of need or suffering?
- d. Are you making sure to use images of people in fact related to the copy or content (e.g. avoiding stock images unrelated to the story, not using a different country/context)?
- e. Are we providing context, including the effects of colonialism and other systems of discrimination and abuse (eg, patriarchy), that may have led to the current crisis/situation?



**8. Are you continuously evaluating your communications through a DEI lens?**

- a. Have you conducted, or would you consider conducting, a DEI appraisal of your communications and fundraising strategies and materials, ideally by an independent external expert consultant? (This has been done by some MSF sections/offices.)
- b. If conducting a focus group or study on a particular communication, is that group diverse and able to give DEI-relevant feedback?

**9. Would you like more MSF support or input on your communications materials?**

If so, please contact the MSF DEI Communications and Fundraising Task Force Peer Feedback Group.

 **TOOLS & REFERENCES**

- DEI sections of **MSF section/office communications, fundraising, or branding guidelines**: including Disability Inclusion TIC, OCBA, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Germany, UK, South Africa
- MSF International Office (IO) **International Style Guide and related guidelines**
- MSF international **Content Production Guidelines**
- MSF **Anti-Racism Lexicon** (TIC project)
- Other **external DEI-relevant communications guidelines** that may be helpful:
  - **Sum of Us’s “A Progressive’s Style Guide”**
  - **Diversity Style Guides for Journalists**
  - Digital/social media specific: **“The Communications Network – DEI”, section “Digital”**
  - **Greenpeace Canada DEI communications checklist (Appendix A)**