

LESSON 4.3

GLOBAL SOUTH REPRESENTATION IN CAMPAIGNS OF GLOBAL NORTH 2

The way in which humanitarian and other international development organizations portray people in the global South plays a key role in public understanding of development, migration and in shaping the balance of power between North and South. The image of the global South that is constantly portrayed to the public through fundraising campaigns is one that is particularly:

- disguises the power of the people living in the Global South and portrays them as powerless victims;
- conceals the power relations (economic, political, social dimensions) that influence poverty, thereby diverting attention from issues of social and human rights violations and encouraging charity and mercy;
- promote the superiority of the North by promoting the idea that the solution to end poverty can be thought of solely by the people of the North.

One of the most criticised images used to represent poverty in the Global South is that of the lonely, starving child, who is shown completely out of context. This image has led to the development of stereotypes and, in many cases, when such an image is presented out of context, it does not reflect a particular current situation, but rather a permanent image that represents an entire country or even an entire continent, such as Africa. Such images are so enduring that people "equate famine with Africa and Africa with famine, reducing a continent containing 54 countries, almost 1,4 billion people and many different cultures to a single, impoverished country". Add to these images the images of Northern aid workers and food distribution, and a distorted impression is created of a poor, suffering continent that is incapable of helping itself and is totally dependent on the handouts given to it by the West. Such images help to create stereotypes, which in turn create the basis on which we communicate with the Southern 'other'.



Lamers' research has paid particular attention to the way in which 'others' from the South are portrayed in campaigns compared to 'us' from the North and has identified the following characteristics:

The scourge of negative images used to represent the global South began to grow in the mid-1970s, when images of starvation and suffering were criticised as 'metaphors of colonialism'. The greatest wave of outrage, however, was triggered by media coverage and images appearing in campaigns to raise funds for Ethiopia, which was hit by a severe famine in 1984. At that time, international and national humanitarian organisations began to question the images they were using to represent the global South. The moral obligation of NGOs to respect the dignity and humanity of those they represented became evident, and the question of whether the funds raised through humanitarian action could justify the use of undignified and sensationalist images of suffering came to the fore.

SOURCE AND RECOMMENDED READING:

[*Guide to the development of a Code of Conduct for the design of messages*](#)