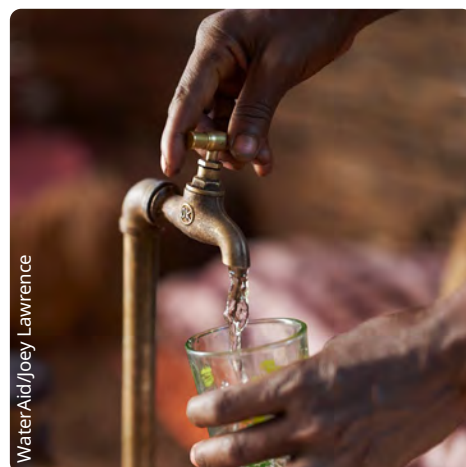


Representation in communications policy

July 2023



WaterAid/Guilhem Alandry



WaterAid/Joey Lawrence



WaterAid

1 Introduction



▲ Adama G Sheriff is a pump mechanic in Blama, Small-Bo Chiefdom, trained by WaterAid and MOPADA. Kenema District, Sierra Leone. May 2017.

Who this policy is for

This policy is mandatory reading for anyone, internal or external, who has anything to do with WaterAid communications of any kind, anywhere in the world. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Everyone who writes content for an internal or external WaterAid audience, for example, internal communications staff, regional communications managers, communications officers worldwide, digital content producers and editors, social media managers, partnerships communications managers.
- Everyone (internal or freelance/contractor) who uses a camera, film equipment or a recording device.
- Everyone who works with the creation of written or visual content, including agencies and freelance creatives conceiving and creating communications and content on behalf of WaterAid.
- Everyone who works with images in any way, for example, choosing photos, working in post-production, working with photo and design software, film editors.
- Everyone who works with WaterAid's social media in any way.
- External contractors, agencies or freelancers who are brought onto WaterAid projects.

Main front cover image: Oumou Traore is a Matron at Diaramana Health Centre, which now has drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities on site. Segou Region, Mali. April 2018.

Small front cover image: Water from a tap connected to an underground pipe system constructed by Leyew (Water Hero) is now sold by the jerry can in a coffee shop in Finote Selam, Ethiopia. February 2020.



▼ Leyew Animut is the Manager of the water utility office in Finote Selam, where he constructed an underground pipe system that brings water to a local businesses. Ethiopia. February 2020.

WaterAid/Joey Lawrence

Why this policy is important to what we do

At WaterAid, we believe everyone has equal rights, regardless of who they are, or where they live. Treating all people with the same respect is the first step to overcoming barriers and creating a more just society. How we address others is of utmost importance and should always be in a way that communicates, dignity and respect for the other person. The language we use should be based on human rights principles, such as dignity, equality, non-discrimination and participation.

WaterAid's actions are in service of a future where everyone, everywhere has clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene. We rely on funding to make this vision a reality. As an international non-governmental organisation (INGO), we contribute to shaping perceptions of the countries and communities in which we work. How we speak to and about each other within WaterAid is also fundamental in ensuring that all WaterAiders are treated with equal respect.

It is vital that our communications are authentic and do not distort reality. It is also important that these campaigns, and their representations of the people we work with, are respectful, accurate and consensual. This policy sets the values that are essential for our internal and external communications, and how to avoid conscious and unconscious biases and misleading use of imagery and language that can reinforce prejudices.

How to use this policy

This policy sets out the critical importance of accurate and fair representation of the communities we work with. It is to be used in conjunction with accompanying [Representation in communications guidelines and toolkit](#), which provides detailed information about how we do this.

You can also use this policy alongside our [People-centred language guide](#), which will help create a cross-organisational approach to respectful language and ensure our communications put people first.

Our commitment

WaterAid is an organisation whose work reaches countries where large communities do not have safe and sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The crisis has a disproportionate impact on those who are marginalised in their societies, including women and girls, older people, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people, and those from particular ethnic or caste groups.

WaterAid's commitment to people living with marginalisation and exclusion across the globe requires all of us to prevent discriminatory behaviour while achieving our mission. This policy has been created to provide a solid foundation for how we will guide our staff and external partners to understand how to communicate about the communities we work

with, without reinforcing harmful stereotypes. We are committed to upholding and actioning the contents of the policy and toolkit within our communications. We expect those we engage with to create or deliver communications to uphold the same standards.

WaterAid is committed to being an organisation where everyone is welcome, included and respected, and where diversity is celebrated. We are committed to standing against all forms of injustice and inequality in relation to fulfilling our WASH objectives, and we take meaningful efforts to address the power dynamics within and between WaterAid countries that hold us back from achieving our mission. These include, but are not limited to, sexism, racism, ableism, and discrimination based on caste and/or ethnicity.



◀ Jesus pushes Nicol (left) and Daneiris (right) on a cart full of jerry cans filled with water. La Guajira, Colombia. January 2021.



WaterAid/Ernest Randriarimalala

▲ Vonjy and Tahiana, have fun and play with water during a break outside their school. Analamanga region, Madagascar. May 2019.

▶ Kaniz, who has a visual impairment, drinks clean water from a new water point that was installed to improve WASH facilities at the school. Khulna, Bangladesh. November 2021.



WaterAid/DRTK/Habibul Haque

We commit to treating the communities with whom we work with respect and dignity. It is essential that we do no harm to the communities we work with through our communications, and instead support people to share their stories through our campaigns and activities. We have a responsibility to represent those stories accurately and authentically to the world. We will not reinforce inequity and harmful dynamics in our communications but will actively challenge inaccurate and stereotypical representations to shift our audiences' perceptions.

This commitment extends to people who have been marginalised in our audience. We recognise that campaigns that perpetuate inequity and stereotypes do harm to these communities too.

We are committed to creating content that inspires and motivates audiences to work with us and to actively avoid causing offence. We will hold ourselves accountable to this commitment, both individually and collectively.

Core values pertaining to representation

We commit to our organisational values of Respect, Accountability and Integrity as being the three pillars of our representative communications:

Respect

We treat people who have been marginalised with dignity and respect. We champion the rights of everyone and we are committed to working with communities to achieve a fairer world.

Accountability

We are accountable to those whose lives we hope to see transformed, to those we work with, those who are impacted by our work, and to those who support us. We are also accountable to ourselves to be representative and equitable in our work and interactions with one another.

Integrity

We act with honesty and conviction. Our actions are transparent, equitable and measurable. We question and evaluate to ensure we learn and grow.

Our approach to respectful communications

Working with communities

WaterAid's communications must be respectful of the communities they portray and uphold the integrity of the communities with whom we work. All communications must interrogate and break down the power dynamics in the relationship between the storyteller and the subject.

Refer to Section 2 of the [Representation in communications guidelines and toolkit](#) for further detail.

Accuracy and context

WaterAid's communications must accurately represent the communities we work with. Inaccurate communications are at risk of perpetuating stereotypes. Communications are less likely to worsen stereotypes if they show life in the communities where we work with nuance.

Refer to Section 3 of the [Representation in communications guidelines and toolkit](#) for further detail.

Consent

As part of WaterAid's commitment to treating people with respect, we must provide clear information as to why we want to involve communities in our content and give them the right to refuse to participate or to remain anonymous.

Refer to Section 4 of the [Representation in communications guidelines and toolkit](#) for further detail.



▲ Jennifer Nyaaba Apotele is a teacher in the Asaloko community, where she has worked hard to get clean water and decent toilets for the local area. Ghana. February 2020.

Remuneration

It is not our policy to pay communities to take their images, particularly during short visits and where the time commitment of people is not more than a few hours. This would create difficulties in obtaining informed consent and would also challenge the authenticity of their answers.

However, in exceptional circumstances where we require a longer commitment, it may be appropriate to compensate people on a loss-of-income basis.

Refer to Section 5 of the [Representation in communications guidelines and toolkit](#) for further detail.

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

Safeguarding is of the highest priority to WaterAid. We have a duty to minimise the risk of someone coming to any form of harm through our activities. Through a principle of 'do no harm', we will not expose our partners, communities, staff, or anyone working with or on behalf of WaterAid to immediate danger or harm through our actions.

WaterAid has a Global Safeguarding Team that can be contacted directly for advice and guidance. Safeguarding focal points are also located in each country programme and regional office. If you have any questions or concerns regarding safeguarding within a particular country/community, please contact them.

WaterAid will not ask, direct or instruct anyone to drink water or carry out any other practices known to be unsafe for the purpose of collecting film or photographic content.

Child protection

WaterAid refers to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that a child is anyone under the age of 18.

Working with children can be sensitive and extra care must be taken to ensure children featured in audio or visual materials are protected and their needs respected. All those visiting a WaterAid community or event are required to undertake some level of safeguarding awareness.

Refer to Section 6 of the [Representation in communications guidelines and toolkit](#) for further detail.

- ▶ Kailash and Arbind laughing and eating together in Lahan, Nepal. September 2021.

Working with third-party content creators

When WaterAid (both member countries and country programmes) is hiring third-party content creators, preference in the hiring of these positions must be given to filmmakers, photographers and creatives working in the countries and communities where content is to be gathered.

However, where cultural sensitivities between the community members and content gatherers exist and have the potential to create negative power dynamics – such as around gender or caste, a suitable crew is hired regardless of location.

Putting communities first

WaterAid is committed to serving the communities it works with. While our donors and supporters are investors in the work we do and critical to achieving our mission, it is essential that we always place the needs of the community above those of the funder.





◀ Abubeker Kedir (right), WaterAid's Project Coordinator and Water Engineer for WASH for Jabi Tenan, takes research notes. Frat, Ethiopia. February 2020.

Post-production

We understand that alterations need to be made to content during post-production. It is essential that these alterations never manipulate the recorded content. We define manipulation as occurring when alterations are made that change the accuracy of the content.

Sign off

To mitigate against conscious and unconscious biases, WaterAid is committed to ensuring content goes through a rigorous process of being sense-checked by multiple stakeholders before it is distributed. It is important within this that the voices of people with lived experience in the countries where we work advise on the authenticity of our content. Content should not be released without sign off by the appropriate parties.

Distribution

When content is distributed by WaterAid, we are committed to keeping our primary focus on the communities we work with. It is essential that the communities we serve and their needs do not become secondary to the needs of the audience. We create content as a means of securing support for and understanding of the communities in the countries where we work.

Key project indicators (KPIs)

Adherence to this policy will be embedded in the KPIs for every communications project. Non-adherence will be dealt with in line with the *Accountability framework*.

Evaluation

We are committed to reviewing and evaluating content after it has been distributed. We recognise that the discourse on anti-racism and aspects of representation related to other identity characteristics will develop and change over time.

Content we have published may become outdated and will therefore need to be removed or perhaps updated. We must stay actively engaged in the relevant discourse and regularly review (every two years) each piece of content we publish.

Auditing

We are committed to a biennial audit and review of the content we have published.

This will ensure content remains in line with our *Representation in communications policy* and is still accurate.

WaterAid is an international not-for-profit, determined to make clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene normal for everyone, everywhere within a generation. Only by tackling these three essentials in ways that last can people change their lives for good.

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