

YRA's Policy on Ethical Photography

Introduction:

At Yuva Rural Association, we take seriously our responsibility to uphold the dignity of the people we work with through respectful use of their photographs/imagery. We understand that there are negative implications of unfair representation, and so we endeavor to take a rights-based and progressive approach. We look at the challenges involved, and introduce our policy on Ethical Photography.

YRA's Mission:

“YRA is committed to facilitate social transformation through socio-economic empowerment of The Rural Poor by establishing their access over rights & resources that will promote social equity, ecological balance and enable them to participate in good and responsive governance through their Organizations and Institutions”.

To achieve such an ambitious mission, we need to inspire and motivate a huge number of people. Images and photographs play a vital role in helping us to do this. Through images and case studies, we can raise awareness of the various issues working on and bring our work to life. The images we choose to represent our work must show a true and accurate account of the ways in which people live. Authenticity is key to upholding our reputation.

Photography is a powerful tool that can create awareness and effect change. The visual narrative created through photographs can move individuals to a place and understanding of people, geographies and events that would otherwise be impossible. Used as a tool to document, educate, move and inform, photographs have the ability to be a powerful resource in the efforts of human rights practitioners when used effectively and ethically.

The gathering of photographs can cause harm if it is not carried out to a high ethical standard and they can cause offence if they are intrusive or inappropriate. The use of images can also be counter-productive if they are reproduced inaccurately or with manipulation.

As a people-centred organisation, we do our utmost to ensure we treat people with dignity and respect. This extends to all aspects of image gathering and reproduction. When taking photographs, we provide clear information about why we want to take a person's image and explain that it is their right to refuse

to participate or to change their mind. People should feel like an active participant in the image making process and happy for their images to be taken and used. As a Non-Governmental Organisation, we have a part to play in shaping perceptions of the people in villages in which we work. It is vital that we accurately reinforce the YRA's brand and ethos. Throughout the policy the word 'images' refers to both photography and film footage. The policy has been written following discussions held in board meeting around best practice produced by a variety of organisations including media organisations and it is to be reviewed every two years.

Anybody gathering or using images for or on behalf of YRA, or commissioning someone else to do so, must read the following guidelines before carrying out their work.

Anyone commissioning a Photographer or filmmaker or travelling with supporters taking images is responsible for ensuring that our ethical standard is adhered to at all times.

This Ethical image policy considers our organisational values of being respectful, accountable and acting with integrity.

Respect

We treat everyone with dignity and respect and champion the rights and contribution of all to achieve a fairer world.

Accountability

We are accountable to those whose lives we hope to see transformed, to those we work with and to those who support us.

Integrity

We act with honesty and conviction and our actions are consistent with openness, equality and human rights.

'Our working practices clearly reflect our culture, values and mission. They are people-centred and dynamic, drawing strength from our diversity and recognising the complexity of the contexts in which we work... We challenge ourselves to think creatively, innovate and take managed risks in order to further improve our effectiveness.

1. **Accuracy** - Photographs and the context in which they are used would avoid wrongful attributions, false information about places and people, misleading juxtapositions and inaccuracy in depicting the way we work. It is of the utmost importance that we only report on things we know are true. If we say a project is taking place in a community, we would be

sure it is happening. All those involved in gathering images and related case studies would accurately document the conditions that they see.

2. We will be accurate in the use of our photographs and ensure that:
 - We use the correct names and details of people and places. If people are happy to have their photos taken but do not want to be named we will respect this.
 - Quotes are correctly attributed.
 - We only include the facts we know and do not assume information. We do not imply that we will help someone if we know that this is not true.
 - For any communities featured in an appeal where we state that we will be working, we must confirm that work will take place there before using the images.
3. **Information** - A range of basic information should always be gathered with images where relevant. This includes the date, place, name of person, age (if known), family status (e.g. mother of four), existing situation, any restrictions on use.
4. **Consent** - As a people-centred organisation, we would ensure we treat people with dignity and respect. We will provide clear information about why we want to take a person's image and explain that it is their right to refuse to participate or to remain anonymous. Extra care will be taken to ensure they understand that not taking part in a shoot will not jeopardise project work. Consent would be freely given and will be recorded as either a signed consent form or a video recording. The request for consent will be presented in a manner which is clearly distinguishable from other information, in an easily accessible form, and using clear and plain language.
5. **Our pledge** to communities when gaining consent:
 - We will explain how and where photos will be used, using examples wherever possible.
 - We will represent people accurately and honestly.
 - We will only take images of people who want their images taken.
 - We will not identify people who wish to remain anonymous.
 - If a person initially agrees to have the image taken and subsequently withdraws their consent, this decision will be respected.
6. **Longevity** - We would carefully consider the wording used to accompany images and how long we should keep and use images for.

- On high profile resources, we advise including the date the photograph/case study was collected. Images are retained in accordance with YRA's Data Retention Process. We are not allowed to keep and use images for longer than is necessary. Moreover, anyone selecting an image to reproduce must consider the date an image or case study was gathered, and whether the content depicted is still relevant for his or her message.

- Images that are five years old or more are archived on Photo Bank on the basis of legitimate interest. We will get approval before using these images. Photo Bank is a platform for storing and archiving images, it will not be used as a project information system. It is the duty of all users to review the above considerations and where necessary check that the situation depicted in a photograph is still true at the time of publication.

7. **Manipulation** – What is and is not allowed in post-production.

8. **Child Protection** – We ensure that children featured in our photographs are safe from harm.

9. **Equality and non-discrimination** – Ensuring that our photographic practices includes everyone, even the most marginalised.

10. **Best practices for working with photographer** weather internal or external –

- It is critical to understand the importance of selecting or hiring reputable and experienced photographers for our work and to provide them with the space and freedom to operate. In order to obtain the best results YRA will be flexible enough with our intended outcomes to move away from a pre-determined “short list” and trust the photographer to explore the narratives of an organization's work. We would photographer to use their own eyes and hearts to find the human stuff that otherwise goes unseen, unheard of unexplored.

- Integrating the photographer into the planning process to ensure the photographer understands the mission and goals of the YRA and maximize the effectiveness of the photographs they produce. With the initial guidance of YRA staff, who are experts in their field, and recognizing the photographer as a storyteller, the photographs created will become an integral piece of our communication strategy. Best use of photography comes when a multi-disciplined team is working together.

- Whenever possible we would work with local photographer who understand the political and cultural contexts of the location. He would provide greater access to building relationships with those we wishes to photograph.
- Once photographs are taken and submitted to YRA, an integrated relationship between the photographer and YRA staff would continue in order to guarantee proper use of the photos, situating them within the appropriate context of the larger human rights issue and visual narrative.
- While we rarely discuss editing and framing with our audiences, YRA would further activate them as a viewer by engaging in a conversation about why a photo might be cropped and levels adjusted, or why an image should not be edited at all. This would help us think more critically about issues of representation and constructed narratives, and photographers make enormous contributions to this conversation.
- The editing and sequencing of photos is an important element in the way in which a viewer consumes and reacts to the imagery and communications medium. YRA would take time to assess the way in which a photo is being used. Context, aesthetic, framing, design, text, narrative and sequencing of photos will impact the way in which it is received.

Continuous Learning –

Looking ahead, we are exploring new ways to continually ground our photography in a code of practice that ensures respect, accountability and integrity. We would also design a training program for YRA staff to ensure every staff feels armed with both the technical and the ethical know-how to take good photographs.

As an organization we would continue to reflect on new trends in ethical photography practice, challenge traditional ways of doing things, and explore innovative approaches to storytelling and representation.