

Putting Critical Learning at the Heart of Ethical Global Development Communications among INGOs

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 4

Executive Summary and Recommendations.....5

1. Setting the Context.....8

 1.1. Introduction9

 1.2. Aims of the Research9

2. Research Methodology and Process.....10

3. Background12

 3.1. Ethical Communications among INGOs in Ireland13

 3.2. Approaches to Training and Learning on Ethical Communications
 in INGOs.....18

4. Research Findings on Ethical Global Development Communications’
 Training and Learning22

 4.1. Brief Documentary Analysis of the Guide to Ethical Communications
 (Dóchas 2023)23

 4.2. Survey Findings24

 4.3. Findings from Peer-Sharing Workshop (October 2024)32

5. Conclusions and Recommendations35

 5.1. Putting Critical Learning at the Heart of Ethical Global Development
 Communications36

 5.2. Critical Learning for Ethical Global Development Communications
 in Practice37

 5.3. Recommendations.....38

Bibliography.....40

Appendix 1: Principles for and Guidelines on Developing a Critical Learning Strategy for
Ethical Global Development Communications in INGOs.....44

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**Executive
Summary and
Recommendations**

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Executive Summary

This research is designed to support the implementation of the Guide to Ethical Communications (Dóchas 2023), which reiterates the importance of ethical global development (GD) communications and suggests renewed commitment on the part of INGOs in Ireland to good practice in this area. In doing so, it explores the training and learning aspects of ethical GD communications practice among INGOs in Ireland. Drawing on a survey, research workshops and documentary analysis, it argues that if implementation of the Guide is to be meaningful, INGOs need to put training and learning at the heart of ethical GD practice.

This training and learning needs to apply an organisational learning approach rather than one focused on individual skills deficits or development. This requires that INGOs (individually or through Dóchas) offer many different opportunities for training and learning for all those working in and with INGOs, including all staff, management, volunteers, partners, board members and contractors, and that links are made between this training and learning and wider organisational policy and practice. In addressing communications at all levels of practice, relationships and culture within and across INGOs in Dóchas, approaches should ensure that training and learning spaces and facilitation support deep, critical, applied learning for ethical GD communications' practice among participants. Because of the challenges and complexities involved in ensuring ethical GD communications' practice, this training and learning needs to address the many power relations which underlie communications practices at different levels (see Diagram 1 below).

The research highlights the current tendency within many INGOs to limit 'training' to distribution of the Dóchas Guide, some induction training and / or short-term training for certain cohorts of staff, e.g., communications staff. This research shows that, at best, these practices only support surface level understanding of what's required for ethical GD practice. In its exploration of different approaches to training and learning around ethical GD communications, it shows that those framed by diversity and localisation concerns can help organisations go deeper into addressing power relationships in the organisations themselves. In order to address the deep roots of stereotyping, paternalism, 'othering', transactionalism, white supremacy, ethnocentrism and racism in GD communications, critical global citizenship education (GCE) or anti-racism approaches are also needed. When guided by critical and decolonial pedagogies and critical race theory focused on systemic change, these approaches support critical engagement and action around ethical GD communications at all levels.

In short, the research shows the need to put critical learning at the heart of GD communications' practice through the development of INGO critical learning strategies, which are well-resourced and supported by organisational management and Dóchas.

Recommendations

INGOs need to provide training and learning opportunities for all staff, management, board members, partners, volunteers and contractors. This includes induction as well as in-service / and ongoing training and learning refreshers. It should be integrated into a broader strategy on training and learning in ethical GD communications, and include appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes.

Training and learning in ethical GD communications should apply deep, critical pedagogical (facilitation and learning) and analytical approaches which go beyond surface level short-term training. These include anti-racism and critical global citizenship education (GCE) approaches which emphasise decoloniality, unlearning some assumptions and practices, and which address systemic racism and hierarchies within development relationships and INGOs.

INGOs need to ensure that training and learning opportunities and spaces, whether online or in-person, and facilitation styles used:

Are participatory, engaged, practical and relevant;

Are conducive to open and critical engagement with the challenges and complexities of the issues involved. This includes supporting participants to reflect on and question their own and their organisation's practice, culture and power relations;

Support peer sharing and learning;

Are given sufficient time to enable participants to address the multi-dimensional nature and the many challenging aspects of ethical GD communications.

INGO Management need to:

Provide adequate resources to ethical GD communications' training and learning to ensure that it is organisation-wide, deep, critical and meaningful;

Lead a process for developing a training and learning strategy plan (see Appendix 1). In doing so, they need to ensure that it is developed with meaningful input from and participation by staff, partners, Black and minority ethnic (BAME) members of the community as well as GCE, anti-racism and / or equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) learning specialists;

Implement a process where training and learning experience, monitoring and evaluation feeds into policy development of ethical GD communications and ethical GD practice more broadly;

Consider how emerging policies around localisation, decolonisation, anti-racism and EDI should or will affect approaches to learning adopted.

Dóchas needs to comprehensively support ethical GD communications among members more broadly. As part of this Dóchas should:

Initiate a process which supports INGOs to develop strategic plans in the area and to design different training and learning opportunities for their organisational cohorts (see Appendix 1);

Ensure sufficient staff to support ethical GD practice and communications, including around the implementation of policies on EDI, localisation, decoloniality and anti-racism, as well as the training and learning aspects of these, and ensure adequate support for this work through accessing funding and broader institutional support from Irish Aid and other funders;

Support organisations with the provision of online and more in-person informal peer-to-peer learning, as well as some formal training and learning opportunities where appropriate. These need to be designed bearing in mind the need for deep, critical organisation-wide training and learning opportunities that cannot be realised in short, one-off workshop-style training courses;

Further engage with IDEA and Comhlámh on the training and learning aspects of their code implementation;

Support organisations through the development of more specific guides for ethical GD communications training and learning;

Ensure the Dóchas resource hub, developed in association with this research, is advertised and kept up-dated with appropriate resources, and encourage use of these resources by members, e.g., participation in the E-Tick ethical communications online course;

Consider re-establishing a working group to promote ethical communications among Dóchas members.

Involving critical GCE, EDI and anti-racism educators, perhaps in association with relevant networks and organisations such as IDEA, the Irish Network Against Racism, Akidwa or Comhlámh, in the design and facilitation of any training or learning opportunities to be offered by Dóchas could help to ensure critical, relevant and transformative learning in this area in the future.

A blue-tinted photograph of a cave entrance, viewed from inside looking out. The cave walls are rough and textured. The entrance is a large, irregular opening. The text is overlaid on the left side of the opening.

Section 1

Setting the Context

1. Setting the Context

1.1. Introduction

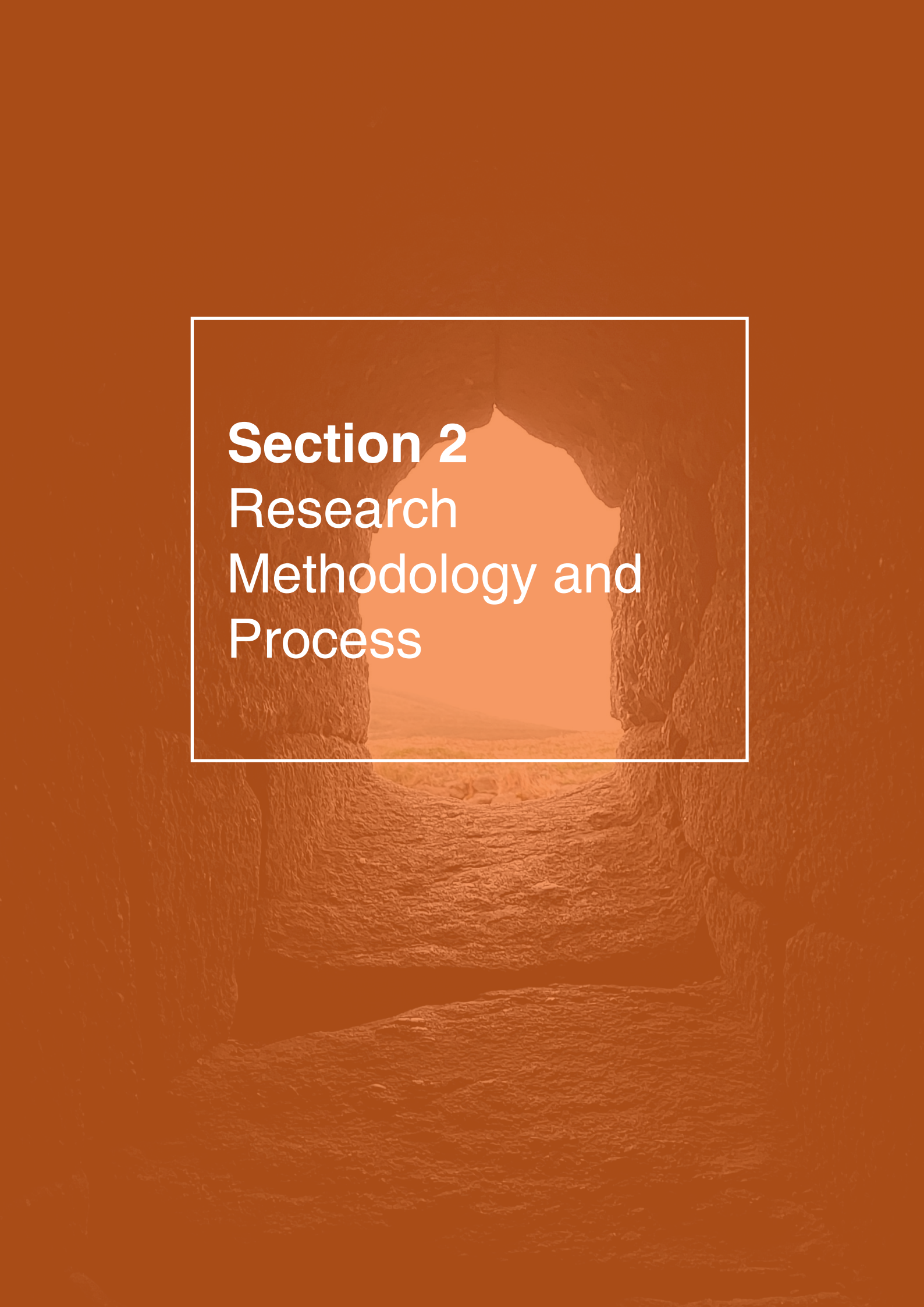
The need for ethical communications around global development and humanitarianism has never been greater. In the face of complex global challenges - genocide and displacement; rising populism and division; racism, homophobia and misogyny; poverty, climate destruction and denial; and in an era of hyper social media, false news, fake news and sound-bite attention spans, how international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) represent themselves, their work, the people they work with and the issues they work on has become of vital importance. Thus, INGO communications are no longer seen as an add-on to ‘the real work’ of INGOs. As central to all aspects of INGO work, the messages communicated and images used are now recognized as the engine of INGO identity and support creation, and the means through which they frame their interpretation of global challenges and responses to them. These days, without a social media presence or means of communicating with partners, supporters, educators, funders, activists, decision-makers or other relevant ‘publics’ (Hudson et al. 2020), INGOs would barely function. While media representations are also an intersecting, important area of concern in global development (GD) communications, this research addresses ethical communications among INGOs. Specifically, it explores the training and learning aspects of ethical GD communications among INGOs in Ireland.

The importance of ethical communications has long been recognized among INGOs in Ireland, as has the need for training and learning within INGOs, and in the sector more broadly, to support good practice in the area (Dóchas 2007; Dóchas 2014). Training and learning was a central part of the infrastructure in place to support implementation of the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, to which all Dóchas members were signatories, from 2007. The need for more, deeper, more systematic, practical and critical training and learning across all organisations emerged very strongly in research conducted on the state of ethical communications among INGOs by this author in 2021 (Dillon 2021), and training has been recognised again as essential in the most recent Dóchas Guide to Ethical Communications (Dóchas 2023).

1.2. Aims of the Research

Given the importance of training and learning to ethical communications practice, this Irish Research Council – funded ‘New Foundations’ research was undertaken in 2024 to explore the issue further; to find out what organisations were actually doing in the area of ethical communications’ training and learning, or not, what they needed to be doing more of, and what supports and resources were required to better support their training and learning in this area. A mixed-methods approach to research was employed including a survey of Dóchas members (25 responses), 3 x workshops (49 participants) and documentary analysis of the Guide to Ethical Communications (Dóchas 2023). This report explores these issues in light of the changing context within which INGOs work and communicate. It gives a brief outline of the research methodology used and the findings derived from the mixed methods research undertaken with INGOs in Ireland in 2024, through a survey and research workshops. It also offers some insights, recommendations and guidelines for organisations around training and learning practice in this area.

Significant among the findings are the need for a critical, applied, multi-layered approach to training and learning on ethical communications across organisations that engages all in exploring power relations and addressing the deep cultural dimensions of communication practices. Findings show the need to put critical learning at the heart of GD communications’ practice through the development of INGO critical learning strategies, which are well-resourced and supported by organisational management and Dóchas. These issues are explored in detail below.



Section 2
Research
Methodology and
Process

2. Research Methodology and Process

This qualitative, engaged research adopted a mixed methodological approach. Designed to support the implementation of the new Dóchas Guide to Ethical Communications, published in 2023, it set out to investigate the training and learning needs of staff, including global development communications' practitioners and global citizenship educators, working in INGOs in Ireland. As such, it sought to gather insight based on practitioner experience of the area and focused on ensuring in-depth understanding rather than on broad knowledge. The budget and scale of the research were small, as was the sample of those consulted. Methods used included a documentary analysis of the Dóchas Guide, a survey of Dóchas members, as well as two online and one in-person research workshops.

The research was designed to be undertaken, in association with Dóchas, in five phases.

Phase one, Oct – Dec 2023 – involved the development of a short literature review, identifying existing learning and training resources, and the establishment of a research project advisory group involving Dóchas staff and members. The advisory group was set up in January 2024 with the assistance of the Dóchas communications officer.

Comprising 10 members from across different Dóchas members and others with expertise in the area, the research advisory group met initially in January to advise on the development of a survey of Dóchas members and again in May to discuss the initial findings from the survey. Advisory group members were kept abreast of progress on the research and invited to participate in a workshop to develop guidelines for good practice arising from the research so far in October 2024.

Phase 2, Jan. - March 2024 - involved the design and distribution of a Dóchas member survey around learning and training needs and practice in this area. Ethical approval for a survey was sought and granted from Maynooth University in January 2024 and the survey was designed and distributed to Dóchas working group members (60 plus) in late January 2024. Reminders were sent in February with responses to be received by mid-March 2024. Twenty five responses were received to the survey.

Phase 3, April / May 2024 – involved the collation of the findings and analysis from the survey into a short draft research report. This was carried out by the researcher with key findings shared, initially, with the Dóchas CEO and new Media and Communications Manager in April 2024. A presentation of findings was shared with advisory group members at the second meeting of the advisory group, May 8th 2024.

Phase 4, June / July 2024 – A documentary analysis of the Dóchas Guide was undertaken. Findings from the survey were shared with the wider INGO sector in two workshops in July 2024, with a view to receiving feedback on draft findings. One workshop was organised with Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) members (17 participants), and the other with members of Dóchas working groups (22 participants). Feedback from these workshops led to a final peer-sharing workshop to develop Guidelines for Good Practice. This was held in October with 10 participants from among advisory group members and others who expressed an interest in participating.

Phase 5, Aug. – Nov. 2024 – involved the dissemination of the research findings. This included the presentation of findings at the Development Studies Association of Ireland (DSAI) conference, held in Cork in October 2024. Relevant resources were assessed, categorized and uploaded to a new hub on the Dóchas website and Guidelines for good practice were developed and disseminated through the Dóchas website. This report is also available to download free of charge by open access on the Maynooth University MURAL website.



Section 3
Background

3. Background

3.1. Ethical Communications among INGOs in Ireland

3.1.1. *The Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages*

The Origins of the Code

In the 2000s, partly due to the growing diversity of Irish society, and influenced by international calls for improved practice in this and other areas of development practice, INGOs in Ireland revitalised a European Code of Good Practice on Images and Messages. Framed around good practice in the use of ‘images and messages’ by INGOs (Dóchas 2007), and focusing on values such as dignity and respect, solidarity, human rights and equality, there was considerable support for aspects of this work in the mid 2000s in Ireland. The earlier European-wide Code of Conduct on Images and Messages had been agreed by members of the NGO EC Liaison Committee, including Irish NGOs, in 1989. Kennedy (2019: 224) explains that that code had initially been developed in the UK through the “‘Images of Africa’ project [which] provided space for aid workers, and British development educators specifically, to contemplate the impact of images on perceptions of the developing world’. The portrayal of Ethiopia during the ‘Live Aid’ frenzy of 1985, sparked concerns more broadly and the 1989 code ‘challenged humanitarian organizations to enact their values publicly through their communications and advertising’ (Kennedy 2019: 224). Kennedy highlights that though the code was innovative, it was institutionally weak. ‘Despite early success raising awareness and though several major agencies adopted internal guidelines, the Code lacked a secretariat or focal point; by the mid-1990s, it was moribund. As the Code faded from view, the feeling grew among its supporters that portrayals of the developing world “had slipped back towards the 1984 apocalyptic-type images”’ (ibid). I was involved in a Comhlámh campaign which brought this code to the attention of the NGOs in Ireland in the mid-1990s, arising from the simplified and stereotypical portrayal of the genocide in Rwanda in the media and by INGOs. We used it to remind INGOs of the standards they had signed up to and the values they said were theirs. Though we couldn’t really measure the immediate effect of the campaign, it was one of the first attempts in Ireland to engage INGOs and the public on this complex and controversial topic.

Ten years later, Kennedy explains that ‘ongoing discussions in the Dóchas Development Education and Action Group (DEAG) culminated in the decision, in 2004, to propose a new Code of Conduct at the European Union level. The Code was revived, but also significantly revised’ (2019: 224). Drawing lessons from previous UK efforts, Kennedy explains that it was both ‘an inspiration and [as] a cautionary tale: leaders in Dóchas’ “small, close knit” group recognized that the vitality of their movement depended on institutionalization through Dóchas’ (ibid.). The central role of Dóchas in promoting and supporting ethical communications among INGOs in Ireland was to become evident in the years that followed, as was its lack of support for it when it came in the late 2010s.

Code Implementation 2007 - 2020

The Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, hereafter ‘the Code’, was framed around values and commitments to ethical communications, and all Dóchas members were required to be signatories. Notably, signatories agreed to portray people and development and humanitarian situations in a way which respected the values of ‘respect for the dignity of the people concerned; belief in the equality of all people; and acceptance of the need to promote fairness, solidarity and justice’ (Dóchas, 2007: no page). The Code gained widespread support among Dóchas members in the 2010s and signatories to the Code numbered 107 in March 2018 (Kennedy 2019), including Dóchas members and others. At the time, Dóchas employed a part-time communications officer to support signatories, to research their engagement with it, to organise annual meetings and to engage with Dóchas members on the issue. Training was also organised for INGO staff at organisational and sector level.

Other support projects were initiated, including youth development education work on the issue (Mahon and Hayes 2010), and an Africa Centre poster and resource for secondary schools entitled 'Africa Also Smiles' (O'Halloran, Jabbi and Madide 2012), as well as a three-year EU-funded DE project on images and messages, led by the Africa Centre with partners in Northern Ireland and Slovenia. Around that time, the Dóchas DEAG also commissioned research, which followed similar research undertaken in the UK, entitled 'Finding Irish Frames' (Murphy 2014). Highlighting the prevalence of transactional framing of INGO communications, alongside their ubiquitous use of (mostly African) women and children for fundraising campaigns, the report offered convincing evidence and useful analysis of the ongoing problems and limitations of the communication messages still coming from development INGOs, years after the re-introduction of the Code. Murphy suggested that change was needed across all INGOs, and that Dóchas 'should 'consider how it can open up a debate in the Irish NGO sector around creating synergies between development education, fundraising and marketing departments in order to work towards a frames shift in public communication material' (2014: 59).

In the 2010s, alongside these various attempts at education, training, research and debate on this issue within the development sector, a review of the implementation of the Code was undertaken (Dillon 2012). This came at a time of growing frustration among Code signatories. Some were critical of the type of implementation mechanisms required, and there were also tensions resulting from the lack of compliance with the values of the Code in INGO communications on the part of some (Dillon 2021). Many signatories also became critical of the principles and commitments within the Code, considering them aspirational and vague. As such, they could be interpreted in many different ways, making meaningful and consistent compliance with ethical communications practice difficult to achieve (Dillon 2021). This lack of accountability around code compliance was buttressed by the depoliticized values framing of the code, which did not address the causes of poor ethical communications' practice. At the same time, Dóchas adopted a 'carrot' rather than a 'stick' approach to compliance with no negative repercussions for any Dóchas member that fell back on using old stereotypes, victim narratives or racialized representations of the African 'other' for fundraising purposes.

Following the 2012 review, revised governance measures were agreed by Dóchas members. These required INGOs to ensure that staff participated in training, to appoint an organisational 'code champion', to ensure board of management discussion of the organisation's code compliance, and management 'sign off' on annual organisational self-assessments in the area. An 'Illustrative Guide to the Code' (Dóchas 2014) was also developed by the Code task group, of which I was a member, and published by Dóchas. It was designed to give practical guidance to those working in INGOs, especially in communications and marketing, on how to ensure that the values outlined in the Code were applied to organisations' communications practice. It also offered updated guidance on communications in the light of social media and other changes to global development and humanitarian practice. While there was some acknowledgement of power relations in INGO communications in it (Dóchas 2007), there was still no reference to coloniality, racism or white supremacy beyond guarding against stereotypes, sensationalism and simplifications in communications and ensuring informed consent.

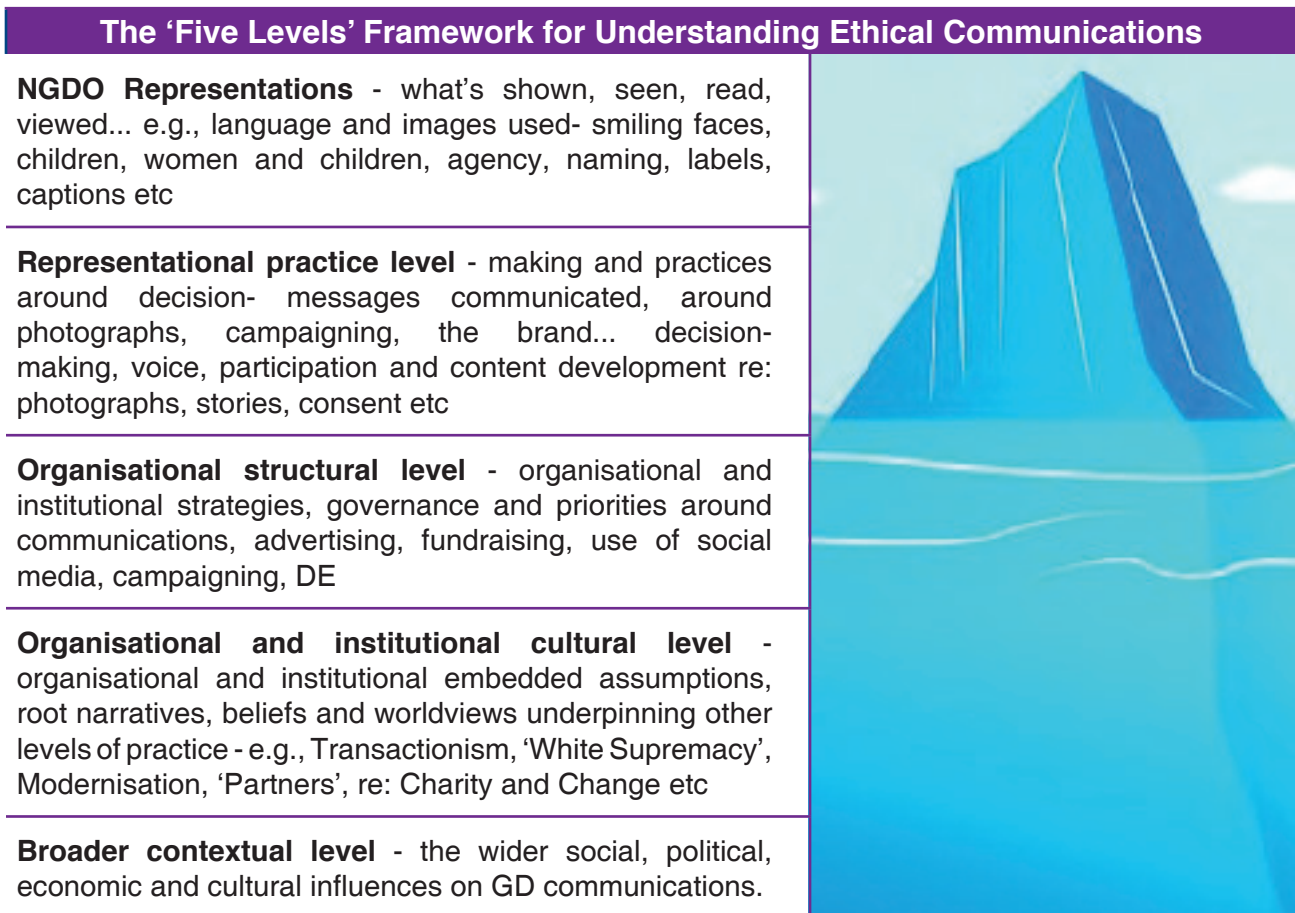
These years were characterised by a high level of awareness of the Code within the Irish international development sector, but, as in the UK in the early 1990s, it was becoming difficult to maintain momentum. This was precipitated by the fact that compliance had become reduced to technical, governance measures, and by the fact that INGOs, who were signatories to the Code, seemed to adopt a piecemeal approach to its implementation. This included some admirable solidarity-driven communications and some appalling stereotypical, simplified and paternalistic practice. With reduced support for this area in Dóchas since 2015, by 2020 it clearly needed an injection of energy and renewed focus.

3.1.2. Shifting the Lens on Ethical Communications – Research (2021)

In response to the relative lack of focus on ethical communications among INGOs at the time, in 2021, I undertook research, in association with Dóchas, which aimed to focus on ‘issues, concerns, challenges and priorities around ethical communications among NGOs in Ireland and, more specifically, on the contemporary relevance of the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages for supporting ethical communications in the sector’ (Dillon 2021: 17). My research was also informed by recent research on communications in the UK and Europe (Warrington and Crombie 2017; Girling 2018; Ademoulu 2021) and on the move towards decolonizing development there and elsewhere (Stein and Andreotti 2016; Peace Direct 2021).

The research (Dillon 2021) highlighted the problems with superficial and tokenistic efforts at ethical communications within INGOs and the lack of systematic implementation of the agreed Code commitments by the early 2020s. It highlighted the concerns among African diaspora in Ireland about the racist effects of NGO communications and the chasm, at the time, between the sense by many in INGOs that the code had improved communications, and the view among others that there were still fundamental problems with GD communications in Ireland. The report argued for the need to decolonize GD communications and to address racism in INGOs and in GD communications through deep, cultural change within INGOs on at least five levels – the representational, representational practice, organisational structure, institutional culture and broader contextual levels (Dillon 2021) (see Diagram 1 below). In short, the research highlighted the ‘need for ‘renewed commitment on the part of NGOs to ethical communications, and for more robust leadership, regulation and learning to support the decolonisation of GD communications’ (Dillon 2021: 8).

Diagram 1: The ‘Five Levels’ Framework for Understanding Ethical Communications



Shifting the Lens – Recommendations for Training and Learning

From a training and learning perspective, the research showed that



‘in order to meaningfully address ethical communications issues, regular and ongoing learning opportunities are required. Technical training centred around reading guidelines and becoming familiar with them cannot be considered sufficient to address the complexities involved in implementing ethical communications’ practice. Any learning or training opportunities need to engage participants in critical exploration of organisational cultures and their own assumptions around development, coloniality, change, agency, the causes of and solutions to global inequality, poverty or injustice etc. This should involve deep critical analysis of and engagement with communications at each of the levels introduced in this report, including of agency and power around decision-making, around content development and the purpose of communications in the first place’ (Dillon, 2021: 129)

Highlighting the complexity of the challenges involved in ethical communications, whether framed in decolonial, anti-racist, human rights, localisation or EDI terms, the report suggested that approaches to ethical communications



‘require significant change for many NGOs in their representations, the processes and practices associated with them and in the underlying assumptions upon which development relationships and practices are constructed. It requires much more critique of accepted notions of development (arguments, assumptions, discourses etc), and active engagement with anti-racism and critical approaches to learning, as well as shifting the frameworks of meaning, organisational practices and cultures that NGOs often rely on’ (Dillon 2021: 135).

In practice, recommendations around training and learning called for Dóchas to support training and learning among INGOs in Ireland in various ways; through peer-learning opportunities around ethical communications, the development of guidelines for INGOs for induction and on-going learning for staff and others, and the provision of training and learning courses. In terms of the latter, the point was made that emphasis should be placed on ensuring that they are appropriate for different cohorts, e.g., Board members, SMT, photographers, partners etc. It was also recommended that Dóchas undertake a review of all training materials available before establishing an online resource hub to resource ethical communications’ training and learning in the sector.

The research showed that a revision of the Code would be an insufficient response to the need for change within ethical communications in the NGO sector in Ireland, with a lot more rigorous implementation accountability processes and much deeper training and learning required to ensure more fundamental change (Dillon 2021).

3.1.3. The Dóchas Guide to Ethical Communications (2023)

Though responses to the research report (Dillon 2021) were mixed, Dóchas subsequently brought together a group to review and revise the Code. This was published as a revised ‘Guide to Ethical Communications’ (hereafter ‘the Guide’) in 2023. To support engagement with members around the new Guide, Dóchas has arranged webinars of signatories, including one on racism (November 2023). The Guide is an updated version of the Dóchas (2007) Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, and is similarly framed around principles and commitments. It reaffirms the values of respect for dignity, equality of all, and promoting solidarity, fairness and justice. It calls on INGOs to critically reflect on their communications, conscious of power dynamics and, ‘recognising the need to shift

focus away from INGOs and place greater emphasis on the work of local organisations and partners in development settings, the guidelines also encourage INGOs to diversify voices and perspectives in their communications' (Dóchas 2023: 3). In the case of the Guide, commitments are to authentic representation – 'providing truth and context when portraying the lives of individuals and communities we work with' (Dóchas 2023: 6); 'contributor led stories and locally led content development' (Dóchas 2023: 9); informed consent; and 'upholding standards and doing no harm' – 'conform to the highest standards and international instruments relating to human rights, and commit to the protection of people in vulnerable situations and those with specific needs' (Dóchas 2023: 15).

3.1.4. Shifting Language and Addressing Power Relations in INGO Communications

Aside from the Guide itself, in recent years development and humanitarian NGOs in Ireland are increasingly embracing a range of terms and approaches to address power relations. These include policies around localisation; equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); safeguarding and anti-racism. Some of these also refer to INGO commitments to improve communications.

Among these newer policy frameworks, the language of racism and anti-racism has started to appear. As with the Dóchas-wide guide, so far, for many it is still largely hidden within other agendas, e.g., as part of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), localisation or safeguarding policies or strategies. Where addressing racism is mentioned, it is usually within a much broader policy on organisational culture, governance or human resources. Rarely are white supremacy, racism or colonial legacies mentioned directly as a problem within development, INGOs or GD communications. Despite this, the language is changing. For example, Concern Worldwide includes a mention of applying an anti-racism lens to communications in its 'Global Communications Strategy' (Concern Worldwide 2022), and there are three references to racism in Trócaire's Partnership and Localisation strategy. Trócaire also includes it in its definition of localisation: 'Localisation challenges the root causes of unequal global to local power dynamics, structures, and systems, including the legacies of racism and colonialism' (Trócaire 2021: 5). While there are no references to racism in Self Help Africa's latest strategy, which focuses on equality, localisation and a community-led approach, it states its commitment to anti-racism on its website and has a committee to advance EDI and anti-racism within its organisation. This is similar to some other organisations, e.g., UNICEF and GOAL. Others, such as Comhlámh, advance proactive anti-racism statements on social media and websites, and Oxfam Ireland aims, in its recent strategic plan (Oxfam Ireland 2023), to adhere to anti-racist principles. 'This means we acknowledge and seek to dismantle historical and ongoing systems of oppression such as racism, colonialism, white supremacy, xenophobia, ageism, ableism and other forms of injustice and discrimination', it states.

As evident with these few examples, the shift in language recognition of the need to address racism among INGOs is piecemeal, slow, largely hidden and rarely at the level of framing when it comes to ethical communications or power relations within development and humanitarian institutions. Where racism is mentioned, there is little recognition of the effects of INGO communications as part of systematic racism within GD or to their effects on diaspora communities in Ireland. Similarly, most references to racism in INGO policies remain colour blind with few references to Black communities or experiences beyond some recognition of the influence of the Black Lives Matter movement, and few references to the dominance of white supremacy in INGOs.

INGOs need to guard against adopting the latest trendy framing for improved development communications' practice, whether that's localisation, EDI, decoloniality or anti-racism, like a cloak that is worn by the organisation without changing it, or as if this new framing will easily, or in some universal way, address all communications' challenges and implications. At the same time, some of these new strategies and endeavours can bring real and lasting change, if they are framed critically and applied across organisations in a deeply transformative manner, whether framed as anti-racism or not. The danger with these kinds of language shifts is that they are often applied partially or at surface level, often serving as superficial acknowledgements of much deeper rooted and complex

challenges. Similarly, they are often so ‘slippery’, with so many different possible meanings, that they can obscure the difficult realities involved in change and distract attention from ongoing problems with practice (Cornwall 2007; Eyben 2013). In that context they can represent tokenistic responses which do little to change or serve to perpetuate current communications, relationships and practices.

As such, shifting discursive constructions are hugely insufficient unless they are matched by deeper education and training, and organisation-wide governance measures and shifts in cultures. To this end, for example, serious questions remain over how anti-racism aspirations (in GD communications and across organisations) are implemented, monitored, evaluated, reviewed, governed and resourced, and what happens when they are not implemented? Deep questions also arise over how organisations hope to affect the level of institutional change required in order to realise any aspirations they have around shifting power relations in development communications. What deep training and learning opportunities need to be created for staff across organisations, and what changes need to be made, at all levels, to ensure that the language of anti-racism, localisation or EDI doesn’t become reduced to the latest trend where little changes in development organisations?

3.1.5. INGO Challenges re: Implementation of Ethical Communications

INGOs are also challenged in this area by the range of different and competing institutional and professional policy and work priorities coming their way, e.g., safeguarding, child protection, data protection, governance, accountability, partnerships etc., along with the growing complexity and immensity of global challenges and polycrises they face through their work. Given the complexities they have to deal with in their work and the funding and global media contexts within which they operate, many are under pressure to reach fundraising targets, for example. On the one hand, they seek to play a key role in poverty alleviation, gender equality, justice, climate justice, anti-racism, solidarity or human rights, many are also compromised by the culture of communications they and audiences are familiar with and which they seem to respond to. This, in addition to the emphasis on technical solutions associated with the influence of new managerialism on professionalized civil society practices, leaves many INGOs inadequately prepared to address the deep-rooted institutional practices, power relationships and assumptions which underpin unethical communication practices.

How then, can INGOs comprehensively implement measures and enact their own commitments to communicate ethically when fundraising pressures, pressures for quick-fix-solutions and easy sound bites, along with decades of embedded practices and assumptions often seem to stand in their way? What kinds of training and learning can meaningfully support organisations to critically engage with these challenges and with the commitments they have made, to critically reflect on their own practices and assumptions in a safe and meaningful way, and to start to put in place the multiple arrangements needed to implement ethical communications at all levels? What approaches to training and learning are needed; what spaces need to be created and supported and how can organisations be supported and resourced in this work?

These are some of the questions that lie at the heart of this research.

3.2. Approaches to Training and Learning on Ethical Communications in INGOs

As outlined above, the need for training and learning on ethical communications is well accepted within INGOs in Ireland (Dóchas 2023), at least as far as aspirations go. My previous research has outlined the differences between training and learning:



‘Learning, in this case, is understood as broad, deep and ongoing. It can involve many and multiple different learning opportunities and it has an open-ended emphasis, i.e., it is not designed to show people how to do specific things or to think in pre-determined ways. Training, on the other hand, is usually associated with short-term, specific-focused training to enable participants to behave in particular ways or to implement particular policies’ (Dillon 2021: 120).

Meaningful learning that shapes practice across organisations requires an ‘organisational approach’ to learning that is not focused on the individual, or driven by individual skills-development needs, but by ‘organisational learning’ needs. This includes training and learning around the range and depth of practices, structures, power relations and cultural assumptions which shape organisational representations and GD communications more broadly (Dillon 2021).

3.2.1. The Need for an Organisational Approach to Learning

The need for an organisational approach to learning and what this involves was highlighted by Roper, Pettit and Eade (2003). It is worth reminding us of what this involves, as outlined in Dillon (2021: 121):



‘an organisational learning approach encourages organisations to “go beyond ‘single-loop learning’ which often focuses on finding efficiencies and dealing with first order problems (symptoms), to double- and even triple-loop learning. In double-loop learning, organisations consistently test assumptions, identify the roots of problems, and are open to fundamental rethinking of strategy. Organisations practising double-loop learning are open to examining how organisational practice diverges from ‘espoused theory’ and addressing these inconsistencies (for example, an organisation that espouses gender equality would be willing to examine the extent to which it lives its own values and make the necessary changes). In triple-loop learning, the highest form of organisational self-examination, people are open to questioning the very *raison d’être* of the organisation.” (Roper, Pettit and Eade 2003: 3) This brings learning in organisations beyond individual-oriented learning, deep into analysis of power, culture and change. In discussions around ‘the learning organisation’, Roper, Pettit and Eade argue that “individuals as well as the organisation are engaged in an ongoing quest for knowledge, their struggle to ‘unlearn’ dysfunctional behaviours is continuous, and because change is a constant, they must constantly change” (2003: 3). A central part of realising change in organisations then, centres around processes of learning, questioning values, practices and cultures and unlearning. Thus, the approaches taken, who is involved and how they are shaped are important considerations for change’ (Dillon, 2021: 121).

3.3.2. Different Pedagogies or Approaches to Learning

Alongside considerations around the importance of organisational learning and the differences between training and learning, are important insights about different pedagogies or approaches to training and learning. Within organisations, a range of approaches are applied that are relevant to ethical communications. These range from those which reflect the training and learning dimensions of EDI, to those influenced by critical pedagogy and GCE approaches, cultural competency training, and human rights, antiracism and decolonial approaches to learning and unlearning. I address just a few of these here.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Approaches

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) or diversity training is becoming more common among different types of organisations. It is generally designed to support interculturalism and to reduce discrimination against people from minority or marginalized groups within the workplace. Alheiji et al. (2016) highlight that there are many different approaches to diversity training but that often business case approaches are applied rather than ones based on ‘procedural fairness, equity, equal opportunity, compliance with legal regulations and enhanced individual and organizational learning’ (2016: 96). Despite its potential benefits, especially in advancing inclusion within organisational cultures and around decision-making, Rybnikova and Weigel (2024: 1261) highlight the many criticisms of diversity training in the literature. These include: criticism ‘for their underlying organizational aims’ as ‘companies tend to resort to diversity training as a quick fix for reputation management following discrimination scandals,

questioning the potential for genuine stereotype elimination in brief sessions of diversity training'. They also point to the potential of 'unintended outcomes of diversity training that can undermine diversity management, such as backfire effects, spillover, and false progress' (2024: 1261). In summary, they highlight the importance of organisational context for the effectiveness of diversity training, showing that 'that the effectiveness of diversity training, as perceived by providers, hinges on several key factors: the organisational environment (including the widespread recognition of diversity issues and the presence of an organisational diversity framework), the attributes of diversity trainers (notably their personal familiarity with diversity) and the setting and design of the training (such as venue, duration and a blend of instructional approaches). A notable barrier to achieving effective training outcomes is the lack of supportive conditions within client companies, exemplified by limited training budgets, which impedes the accurate assessment of training effectiveness' (Rybnikova and Weigel 2024: 1259).

That training and learning requires considerable resourcing, support and time, as well as competent facilitators and a supportive organisational culture is an important insight from Rybnikova and Weigel's work, which can be applied to the INGO context.

Critical and Post-Critical GCE Approaches

Critical pedagogy influences from Paulo Freire and others highlight, among other things, that all education is political – it either involves learning which supports the status quo, or which helps people to understand and transform it. Critical pedagogy approaches underpin many GCE and human rights approaches to training and learning in INGOs. As such, they involve participatory and experiential learning approaches which support critical reflection on and engagement with the causes of inequality and injustice, or in this case with the reasons behind poor ethical communications practice, in an effort to challenge assumptions and existing power relations and transform practice. The emphasis is on congruence between organisational structures, policies, relationships and practices. Such a 'reflection-action-reflection' or 'praxis' approach (Freire 1970) suggests the need for deep learning processes which meaningfully engage with existing practice and their causes, with the structures (economic, social, political and cultural) which support them, the power relationships which shape them, and with their effects on people, communities and relationships (Bourn 2012; McCloskey 2014).

Building on post-colonial critique, with its emphasis on 'unlearning' (Spivak, 1988; Andreotti 2006), and 'critical literacy' (questioning values, assumptions and one's own reality), decolonial approaches to GCE have introduced the importance of learning which supports critical reflexivity – being able to critically reflect on one's own practice, on the assumptions which underpin it, and on the potential negative implications of well-intentioned practice. Vanessa Andreotti's (2012) HEADSUP checklist provides a useful set of critical questions for analysis in this regard (see Dillon 2021), as does the work of the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective (2024). The e-Tick course on ethical communications which focuses on development and volunteering, but which has wider application for INGOs, builds on this critical literacy approach. It supports very accessible, engaging and creative learning experiences, in enabling learners to challenge preconceived ideas about and representations of GD. It could provide a useful steppingstone to more organisation-level training and learning in this area (2020).

At the same time, it is important to be mindful of the challenges involved in addressing ethical communications training and learning from these critical perspectives so that they are not advocated as ideal without being matched by the support they need. Cotter reminds us of the challenges of making the rhetoric of these types of approaches a reality in organisational settings. In her experience of working within a higher education institution, with a group of educators keen to apply these approaches in their teaching, she says that 'one contributor made this comment: 'We are situated within an environment where our work has pivoted from being about education to being a business. So much so our heads are falling off.' While INGOs are not the same as higher education institutions and not all of them are driven by business concerns and agendas, many of them increasingly are.

In that context, there is a tendency for INGOs to resort to quick-fix training ‘solutions’ rather than deeper, more time-consuming but ultimately more critical and transformative approaches to training and learning.

Anti-racism Training and Learning Approaches

As with the other approaches to critical training and learning, there are many that put racism at their centre. These aim to develop understandings of the processes which reproduce racism and discrimination, including the much mentioned ‘stereotyping’ and to challenge racialized representations of the (usually Black but also brown) ‘other’. Significant among these are those influenced by critical race theory. These approaches emphasise systematic and hidden structural – economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of racism including powerful ideologies and discourses. At the heart of the relevance of anti-racism for INGO ethical GD communications is the link, as yet not fully acknowledged within INGOs, between development and systemic racism both in terms of its colonial origins and ongoing influences. Peace Direct (2021: 1) for example, highlight that



‘Following the Black Lives Matter protests that evolved into a global movement in the summer of 2020, those working in the aid sector have been forced to confront the reality that their own work is steeped in structural racism, something which has been barely discussed or acknowledged until very recently. Decolonising development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding – the movement to address and dismantle racist and discriminatory structures and norms that are hidden in plain sight in the aid system – is emerging as an urgent, vital and long overdue discussion which adds greater weight to the existing calls to transform the system. If policymakers, donors, practitioners, academics and activists do not begin to address structural racism and what it means to decolonise aid, the system may never be able to transform itself in ways that truly shift power and resources to local actors.’

Gondwe Harris (2024: no page) argues that INGOs, ‘who have a long history of (re)producing harmful images of racialised peoples, fear the adoption of critical race methodologies (CRM)’. Arguing for the need for approaches to anti-racism which challenge white dominance, she is critical of many attempts to integrate anti-racism into research (including for our purposes, training and learning) methodologies. She argues that ‘(I)NGOs must also unlearn methodological Whiteness in order to become ‘epistemically disobedient’ (Mignolo 2017), where they de-link themselves from the dominant White knowledge systems to help change ‘the terms of the conversation’ (Mignolo 2011, p. 50)’ (Gondwe Harris 2024: no page).

This suggests the important value, but also many of the challenges, in applying critical anti-racism approaches to training and learning around ethical GD communications within INGOs. At the very least, they demand, with critical GCE approaches, an emphasis on decoloniality and ‘unlearning’ current assumptions and practices and the need to address systemic racism and hierarchies within development relationships and INGOs (Stein and Andreotti 2015; Peace Direct 2021).

In summary, there are many different approaches to participatory, experiential applied training and critical learning in the area of ethical GD communications. When addressing issues around representations, communications, coloniality, racism, equality, diversity and inclusion, it is important to ensure that whatever approaches are applied are up to the task. The challenges of the task involved suggest the need for even more emphasis on a range of organisational supports to provide for this critical training and learning work. This includes organisation-wide training plans and policies on ethical communications which are sufficiently resourced; provision of induction and continued professional development (CPD) training and learning for all groups working within and with INGOs; time and resources allocated to staff and others to enable their engagement in mutual learning conversations and peer sharing workshops; as well as formal mechanisms for feedback, monitoring and evaluation of the training and learning opportunities provided.



Section 4
Research Findings
on Ethical GD
Communications'
Training and
Learning

4. Research Findings on Ethical GD Communications’ Training and Learning

4.1. Brief Documentary Analysis of the Guide to Ethical Communications (Dóchas 2023)

Because of its current importance to the promotion of ethical communications among INGOs in Ireland, as part of this research I undertook a brief documentary analysis of the Guide to Ethical Communications (Dóchas 2023). I focused on its statements around training and learning with a view to identifying the commitments INGOs are required to uphold and any opportunities or insights it gives for improved practice in the area.

4.1.1. Training, Learning and the Guide

The analysis found that the commitments to training within the Guide are clear but not specific, and there are no reporting, monitoring, evaluation or resourcing requirements specified. The Guide outlines the training commitments (commitment 6) as follows: ‘Take part in annual training / information sessions on ethical communications, the guide and accompanying resources, organised by Dóchas. These sessions will be for staff, management, volunteers and partners or third-party providers involved in the communications process’ (Dóchas 2023: 19). The Guide goes on to say that



‘as part of the minimum criteria outlined above, it is the responsibility of each organisation to ensure that staff are adequately trained and understand: the four commitments and guidelines; the values that underpin them; how they affect their day-to-day work. As a signatory organization, it is important to ensure that the commitments and guidelines are internalized by the whole organization. While buy-in at senior management level is important, the commitments to ethical communications will only be successful if everyone is involved in their implementation. It is also important to note that this Guide should be implemented in all the organisation’s activities, and this should be reflected in the content of the training’ (2023: 20).

4.1.2. The Guide to Ethical Communications and addressing Racism

In order to examine its treatment of training and learning, I explored the use of terms associated with GCE or decolonial approaches to training and learning as well as any reference to racism or critical race theory in the Guide. Though there is one reference to GCE, it is to GCE personnel rather than approaches to learning and there is no reference to decoloniality in the Guide. There are two questions about how communications may portray ‘matters of race’ in relation to the last commitment outlined in the Guide. Notably, though, there is no reference to racism in the Guide.

Overall, while the Guide does focus on power relations, human rights and diversifying the construction of communications and on those whose voices are heard, there is paltry coverage of, or acknowledgement of, racism and coloniality within INGOs and in their communication practices and their effects, and it remains colour-blind. The Guide remains largely values-driven and apolitical, in that it gives little attention to the political, economic or cultural assumptions underpinning communications, to the causes of stereotyping, sensationalism, ‘othering’, paternalism, hierarchical or charity framing in development communications, or to their effects. When tackling racism is subsumed and hidden under broader principles of equality, human rights, justice and solidarity, the question must be asked why it is not named specifically alongside other acknowledged issues such as disability, gender and the rights of vulnerable groups such as LGBTQI+, many of which are often also obscured under generalized euphemistic policy aspirations.

4.2. Survey Findings

The survey (available at the following link: <https://forms.office.com/e/MwrG7bcM2x>) was constructed using MSForms. Consisting of 27 mixed format questions, it asks respondents about their perceptions and experience of current training and learning practice in GD ethical communications – what is given priority, working well or not in INGOs; about priorities in training and learning in this area in the future and about supports needed for training and learning from within INGOs and in Dóchas. Of the 60 or so directly invited to complete the survey, 25 responses were received. Of these, when describing their organisation, 56% indicate ‘development organisation’; 16%, ‘large humanitarian organisation’; and 16%, ‘development education or global citizenship education (GCE) organisation’ (see Table 1). Respondents also work at different levels – 24% at senior management, 36% at project or section management, and 32% at project officer level. Of these, 56% have some role in training, with 25% having a background in communications, 17% in PR / fundraising, 28% in arts and social sciences generally and 10% in development studies.

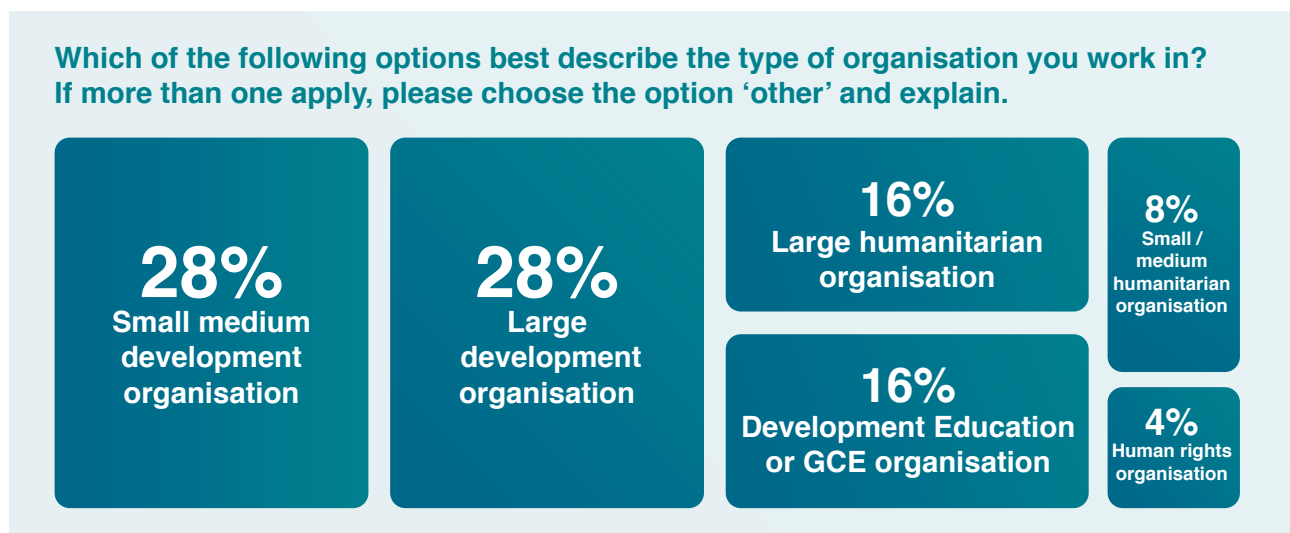


Table 1: Types of Organisations Participants Work in

When asked how familiar they think INGO staff are with the new Guide to Ethical Communications (Q.7) (see Table 2), only 8% think that INGO staff are very familiar, with 56% thinking some are familiar and others are not, and 20% thinking that ‘most are unfamiliar’.



Table 2: Familiarity with the Dóchas Guide to Ethical Communications

4.2.1. How Seriously is Training and Learning Taken by Management? (Q. 8)

When asked how seriously they think training and learning on ethical GD communications is taken by management, findings vary from the simple statement that it is *'taken seriously by management'*, mentioned by four people; some saying that it is taken more seriously in certain departments, e.g., communications and GCE; one saying it is *'mixed'* and others saying that it is *'not taken seriously enough'*. Time constraints seem to be an issue, as is the lack of provision of formal training in-house for one or two organisations, with one person looking for Dóchas to provide more training.

Others highlight the role that management play in ensuring ongoing sharing of information about the Dóchas Code, with one person highlighting the need for training at country level. Another mentions the importance placed on discussing the nuances involved in avoiding stereotypes in their organisation and another that it is *'taken seriously in the sense of ongoing learning – reflective practice around the kinds of images we use and why, and the ethics of these images'*.

According to participants, some organisations' staff participate in Dóchas working groups or have access to outside training and learning support within their broader networks. At the same time, one person suggests that *'in a small organisation, it can be easier to manage ethical communications and ensure management buy-in'*. A contrary point suggests that bigger organisations have the capacity to put in place infrastructure to support training and learning. For example, one person explains:



'I would say that this is taken seriously at a departmental level within fundraising and communications, but less so in other departments. Within fundraising and communications, ethical communications is introduced as a core facet of our work upon induction by all employees, as well as regular (I would estimate about twice a year) training / workshop sessions on such. This can take different formats, but occurs regularly. All staff are pointed in the direction of and encouraged to attend external trainings that often incorporate themes of ethical communications. We also have a Safeguarding focal point, both for the whole organisation and a designated role (myself) within fundraising and communications department. For the other departments (programmes, finance and IT), I would say this is deemed less important. I am not aware of any dedicated resources or trainings that these departments participate in.'

4.2.2. What is Happening in Training and Learning around the Guide and Ethical Communications in Organisations? (Qs. 9 – 12)

It is striking that in response to Question 9, about which people receive copies of the Dóchas Code at induction or more comprehensive induction training, that most people just don't know. Apart from the category 'specific new Ireland based staff', to the best of their knowledge, only a very small number either receive a copy of the guide at induction or participate in more comprehensive induction training. In most cases, the respondents don't know.

In general, among respondents, there is some clarity around the provision of training and learning on ethical communications in relation to communications staff, fundraising / marketing staff, education staff and management, but less so when it comes to partners, contractors and administration staff (see Table 3).

In practice, how often do you think the following groups of people working in or related to your organisation participate in training or learning on ethical communications?

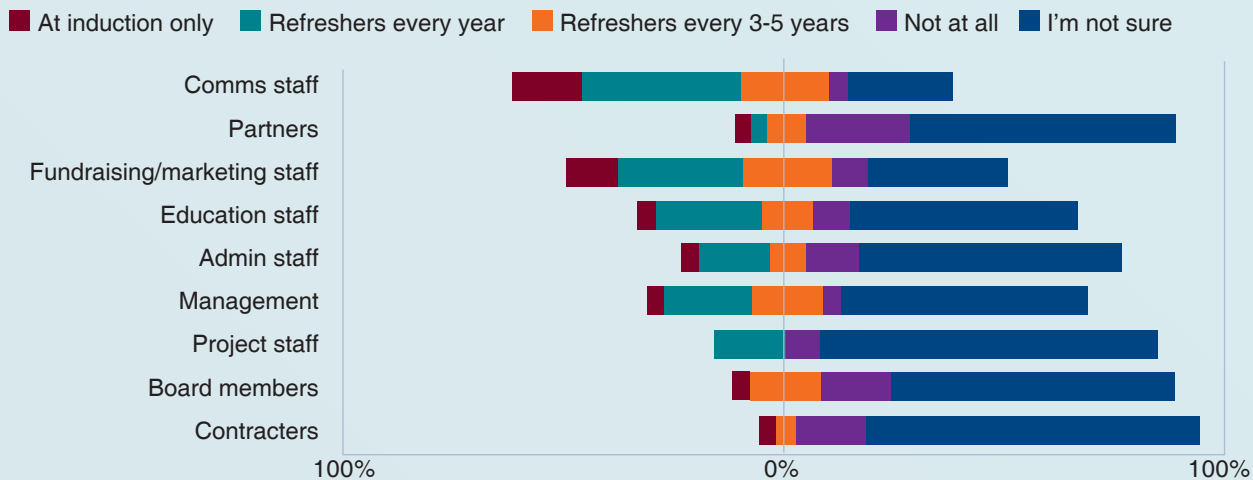


Table 3: Participation in Training by Different Cohorts

When asked how often people participate in training or learning on ethical communications, in the case of communications staff, fundraising staff, education staff and management, there is some sense that they receive training at induction and more frequent training or refreshers every 3 – 5 years. In those cases, the frequency of ‘not at all’ or ‘I’m not sure’ answers when it comes to their receiving training is far fewer than in the case of the following categories; contractors, partners, board members, project staff and administrative staff.

In answer to the question on approaches applied to training and learning on ethical communications, ‘Global Citizenship Education’ and ‘Equality, Diversity and Inclusion or Unconscious Bias Training’ approaches seem the most common, with a small number adopting anti-racism approaches and others unaware of what approaches are applied (see Table 4).

In your view, which of the following approaches comes closest to the approach to training and learning on ethical communications applied in your organisation?

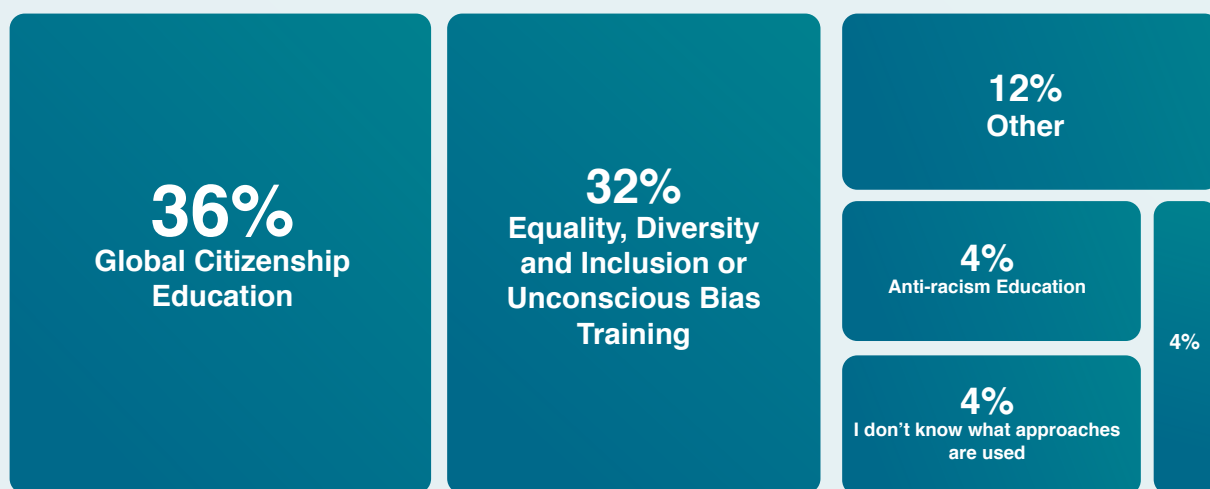


Table 4: Approaches adopted to training and learning on ethical GD communications

Despite some lack of knowledge about training and learning provision within their organisations, most survey respondents feel that it is very or quite important that many of the categories of staff, or those related to organisations, should receive training and learning in ethical communications. Even though this is the case, fewer people feel it is important for contractors, partners and administrative staff than for the other categories, with everyone thinking it is important for communications and fundraising / marketing staff (see Table 5).



Table 5: The Importance of Training and Learning on Ethical Communications for Different Cohorts

4.2.3. Effective Training and Learning on Ethical Communications (Q. 13)

When asked what people see as most important for effective training and learning on ethical communications within NGOs, most people express the need for practical, interactive, applied workshops, involving induction training and regular refreshers.

On the practical nature of training, one person, for example, says: *‘it has to be a practical type training – giving examples of how to apply the code – not theoretical. Allow for discussions as well.’* Another agrees: *‘interactive training, including group workshoping of a broad range of practical scenarios’* and another says *‘interactive, discussion, participatory methods, varied resources’*. In terms of the approach, one also calls for *‘critical literacy training; also task based learning over a period of time (reviewing and assessing comms of the organisation or others – to get a sense of real world practice)’*. For one other person, the facilitation style is important:

“it would be great to put people in situations that call for high ethical standards for them to know how they should react in the real world. Sometimes, we interact with people from different cultural contexts without even realizing that our actions could be considered unethical from their perspectives, initiating a more inclusive facilitation style where, for example, different sessions could be done in conjunction with staff from different country teams, who have a better understanding of the cultural context of their region. This will help to infuse more cultural knowledge into [X organisation’s] staff, and I believe this would help them in better understanding and applying Dóchas code of standards in their everyday work interactions’.

While some mention the need for regular training every few months or ‘regular refreshers’, one person explains this as follows: *‘the area of ethical communications is always developing with current contexts, new learnings and research, new case studies that are applicable etc. I don’t believe a standard ethical communications training upon induction is enough to sustain a long-term post in an organisation. Continual engagement and education on the ever diversifying sphere should be implemented’*. A contrary view to this is put forward by one person who feels that *‘it isn’t that complicated that it needs loads of training. Reading the document should provide sufficient information and understanding. If any training was needed it would be to go through the guide and its principles without making a meal of it’*. This view is very different to most others who share the view of this person that it needs: *‘practical hands-on workshops, training on guides in place, consistent webinars’*.

A few specific issues are also raised. One person feels that it should be framed as best practice not ethical communications *‘having an easy checklist would also be useful and more likely to be remembered’*. Another feels that *‘most important is keeping the focus on delivering ethical communications which is of high enough standard for effective media, supporter and fundraising communications’*. Another talks about the importance of *‘drawing attention to the plight of oppressed groups in a way that’s sensitive to their dignity and cognizant of placing their voices in a manner that facilitates solidarity over charity’*. One person highlights the importance of it being *‘easily accessible and not too time consuming’*.

4.2.4. Training Provision on Ethical Communications within Organisations

Respondents were asked a range of questions about the themes they see as important in training and learning on ethical GD communications (Qs. 14 – 16). While some highlight the importance of child protection, human rights, addressing stereotyping and racism, solidarity, and *‘ensuring communications are led by local people’*, others answer that training and learning should not be theme-driven and that all the themes listed are important (see Table 6).



Table 6: Themes Mentioned as Most Prominent in Training and Learning

On the practice of training and learning among INGOs (Q.17), approx. 60% of respondents say that training is mostly facilitated in-house. Approx. 40% of respondents develop their own training materials and 40% state that training is designed around the Dóchas Guide. Only 30% indicate that training is evaluated and only approx. 20% of respondents state that their organisation has a training and learning plan for ethical communications. In most cases respondents don’t know whether or not partners and / or local staff contribute to training content development (see Table 7).

In practice, how often do you think the following groups of people working in or related to your organisation participate in training or learning on ethical communications?

True False Sometimes I'm not sure

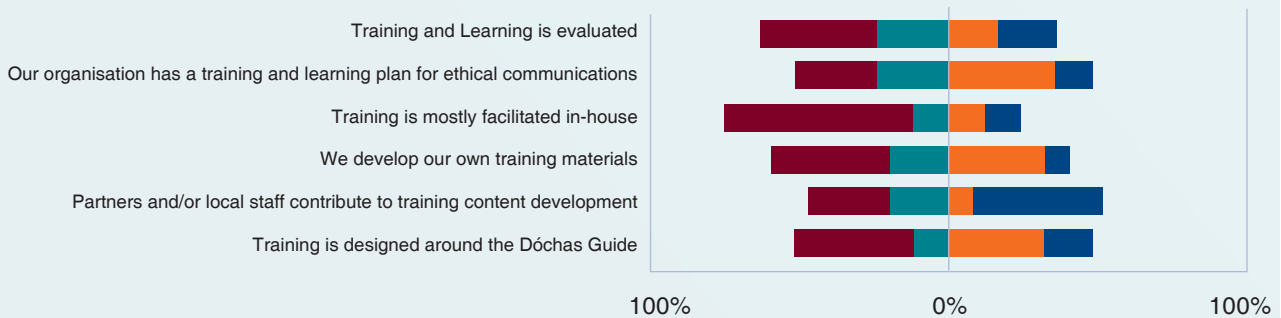


Table 7: Practices related to Training and Learning

4.2.5. What Respondents Feel Organisations Do Well and What Needs to Change (Qs. 18, 19)

When asked what organisations do well, respondents highlight issues with regard to the approach adopted; the supporting materials used and links with the Dóchas Code / Guide; and the time allocated and those who participate in the training.

In relation to the approach adopted, one person values *‘the critical literacy based training’* with another suggesting that *‘visual literacy is woven through our GCE content as part of our 3 programme days for volunteers including ... intercultural awareness work on single stories / images and messages’*. Another refers to the importance of discussing stereotypes in training with another highlighting the opportunity training gives *‘for subject matter experts internally to contribute’*. One person points to their strengths around child safeguarding while saying that one of the strengths of their organisations’ training is that *‘we are quite clear on the type of images and language that should be used in a fundraising context and the kind of images we can use’*. This contrasts to the more questioning approach of others who highlight the importance of critical literacy, visual literacy and discussing stereotypes.

The importance of linking training to the Dóchas Code / Guide and supporting materials for training are among the strengths highlighted by some in relation to their organisations’ training around ethical communications. One person, for example, explains that their organisation has *‘its own guide to compliment the Dóchas guide’*. Another explains that they *‘have good examples on ethical communications and I think the involvement of local staff in Kenya is key to this’*. Others highlight the value of providing the Dóchas Guide to newcomers and attending Dóchas events with another highlighting their work in *‘raising awareness of the importance of the Code’*.

Strengths are also highlighted by some in terms of the time allocated to training and those who are involved in it. One person says that their organisation takes *‘these matters seriously. There’s time allocated to discussing and addressing things if and when they arise’*. Another highlights their *‘thorough training and reflection / refresher in Global Citizenship Department and induction in communications’*. Another mentions that *‘the trainings are always inclusive, and I appreciate that because there’s a concerted effort to not leave anyone behind’*. While a few people mention the importance of communications staff accessing training and learning in their organisation, one person highlights the strength that *‘we are open to learning and growing. The concern is where it should be focused on the person whose story we are telling and not on will it lead to more funds’*.

On the topic of what they would change in relation to ethical communications in their organisations, many respondents call for more structured and more regular training and more training across all departments within organisations. Respondents highlight the need for training that is *'more formalized and company wide'*. Others emphasize the need for more regular refreshers, with one person mentioning the need for *'a more regular structured plan and wider scope of delivery'*. One person, on the other hand, calls for less training, with another saying that they *'would make training and learning around ethical communications a mandatory training for all staff, included in the induction/onboarding of new staff and rolled out to existing staff, as all staff should be aware of how to ethically communicate about the organisation's work and communities we work with, not just those working in external relations'*.

On the Dóchas guide, one person calls for *'some sort of a forum where peer-to-peer learning could occur'*, with another suggesting the need to *'attend more Dóchas events'*. One person calls for more staff training on the Guide and another suggests that *'we should all be very familiar with the Dóchas Code, not just people in the comms team and we should have regular refreshers the way we do with GDPR and security training. It needs to be done in a more formal way'*.

On the content and approach to the training and learning opportunities provided, one person suggests the need to *'further embed curriculum around social media which is moving at such a pace'*, with two others identifying the need for more resources. One of them suggests that *'there is a huge amount of literature and resources which are frequently updated – we could potentially benefit from a more streamlined resource with updates made in one central location and communicated widely as they arise'*. Another highlights the need for *'more of a focus on anti-racism'* with another suggesting that training *'has to focus on guidance that works in reality'*. A fuller exploration of ethical communications is suggested by one person with another suggesting that they *'would like to see the training and development unit in HR [to] take responsibility for this rather than it being a 'communications request''*.

4.2.6. Resources and Guidelines (Qs. 20, 21)

There are only 10 answers to the non-mandatory question about the resources people find particularly helpful for training and learning on ethical communications. Of them, four mention the Dóchas Guide. One person says *'the Dóchas guide provides for a good read. I also find short courses on ethical communications available on Disaster Ready to be helpful as well'*. Other comparable guides are also mentioned as helpful, with specific mention of the IDEA Code, the Oxfam Inclusive Language Guide, *'imagery guidelines, child safeguarding guidelines, ethical communications guidelines'*. A few other specific resources are mentioned: *'Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The Danger of a Single Story'*; *'How do we know it's working? A toolkit for measuring attitudinal change from early years to KS5 (RISC)'* and *'Integral Alliance: Our Storyteller's Guide'*.

Another non-mandatory question asks if respondents perceive any gaps in the training guidelines available on ethical communications in terms of themes, issues or different participant groups. Of the 13 people who respond to this question, five people are unsure, *'not well informed'* or don't know; one suggests there are no gaps in their organisation, and three suggest that there are no gaps more broadly, with one of those suggesting that it shouldn't focus on themes. Of those who highlight gaps, one says *'there is no real formal training here just ad hoc for those in communications'*. Another says that *'it would be great to have a deck breaking down the Dóchas guide for new starters'*. Another highlights that *'there is not enough about racism'* and another suggests that *'there should be more trainings organised than there are at the moment. I also would suggest having diverse groups of people in the trainings to have visibility on different cultural contexts and how they deal with ethics.'*

In short, the following suggestions for guides emerge:

- The need for support to make training more structured and consistent within organisations:
- Guides on developing a training and learning plan (see Appendix 1); on how to organise and facilitate an induction or refresher session; guides on how to design and evaluate training for all staff consistently.

- Something that breaks down the guide for starter workers
- Good practice guides using examples, e.g., drawing on the Illustrative Guide to the Dóchas Code of Conduct
- Guides on how to bring more anti-racism, critical literacy and visual literacy into training

4.2.7. Supporting Training and Learning on Ethical Communications (Q. 22)

When asked how partners or other groups can contribute to improved training and learning, overwhelmingly, respondents highlight the contribution that partners and other groups can make through sharing of examples, resources and best practice experience.

The importance of inclusion of people in peer-to-peer learning processes or mentorship experiences is highlighted. One person, for example suggests that others can help *‘by being honest about the challenges and tensions and using these as a starting point for going deeper’*. For another, *‘sharing examples of ethical communications, opening the conversations and debate around imaging’* is very important. The importance of *‘pooling experience and collaborating on the development of resources and their promotion across the sector’* is made by one person with another arguing that *‘sharing of resources would cut down workload and also ensure good practice across the board’*. One person highlights the need for *‘some kind of forum or peer-to-peer learning events in which practitioners could share knowledge / expertise especially as it pertains to actually existing situations that have been negotiated’*. For another, building on this point, *‘everyone to be included in the conversation, particularly fundraising and comms. Have heard stories where they are not on the same page and not both adhering to same standards, causing friction’*.

Apart from these points about the importance of inclusion, diversity and sharing of practical experience and insights, one person suggests that *‘Dóchas members and large NGOs could stop using poverty porn in their advertising during emergencies and disasters in the global South. They should all subscribe to a Disasters and Emergencies Committee like in England. It is hypocritical of Dóchas to promote ethical communications when its members use poverty porn in their advertising.’*

What Dóchas Can Do (Qs. 23, 24)

When asked what they would find most helpful in order to support training and learning on ethical communications in their organisation, the main emphasis is on training provided by Dóchas and training of trainers (see Table 8 for responses).



Table 8: Support for Training and Learning on Ethical Communications

The view that Dóchas should play a central, co-ordinating role in training and resource sharing on ethical communications is confirmed in answer to the subsequent question asking what role respondents would like to see Dóchas playing, with most answers referring to provision of or support of training, peer learning and sharing of resources.

Training suggestions range from 'implementing training' to *'more training opportunities / forums'* to *'coordinate regular training for the community'* to *'more frequent workshops for peer learning'*, *'training workshops to facilitate shared learning'*, *'training of trainers or facilitator courses on ethical communications'*, *'training of trainers, developing online hub'* and *'more regular communications and refreshers and updates etc to keep the code top of mind'*. One person explains that *'we are a very small organisation so need Dóchas to supply the training'*.

Apart from multiple mentions of the usefulness of training and an online hub of resources, the following suggestions are also made: *'it would be nice to have reps from Dóchas available more often during the trainings'*; *'it would be useful if Dóchas could provide some training materials'*; Dóchas *'to be more visible'* and to provide *'a couple of workshops working out the practical implications of the code. Facilitating hearing from some of the more experienced and bigger players in the sector'*; *'more training for non-comms people... organisation-wide trainings, particularly for fundraising'*; *'taking the lead and setting a precedent for what is good practice in the sector, having this documented and circulated'* and *'do a simple briefer on it that can be watched on YouTube'*.

4.3. Findings from Peer-Sharing Workshop (October 2024)

From among over fifty Dóchas member invitees and others, 10 people participated in a peer-sharing workshop organised to help to develop guidelines for organisations around training and learning on ethical GD communications. Participants work in the following organisations: Comhlámh, Concern Worldwide, Dóchas, Nurture Africa, Oxfam Ireland and UCDVO. Themes discussed included institutional and policy support for GD communications' training and learning; approaches to training and learning; and the types and levels of training and learning provision available and required within INGOs.

4.3.1. Institutional and Policy Support for Ethical GD Communications' Training and Learning

Participants shared information in small groups on the institutional and policy support needed for training and learning on ethical GD communications within their organisations. Most explained that their organisation has some policy around ethical communications but this is not reflected in training for staff. While some have policies which are accompanied by training and learning for staff, they are unaware of any training for board members. One mentioned that their organisation's *'outlook is training outwards as opposed to inward training'*. Another said that *'we have policies, but no accompanying training'* and another that anti-racism is mentioned in their communications policy but *'no training to accompany this is known'*.

In the discussion which followed, suggestions were made for both organisations and Dóchas on how they can better support training and learning on ethical GD communications. One participant highlighted the need for organisations to have a champion of ethical communications to ensure that *'someone is pushing it across the organisation and prompting training and learning'*. Overall, another suggested, *'there needs to be meaningful buy-in from board and management across all organisations'*. In terms of how improved training and learning can be supported institutionally, one person suggested that a *'whole of organisation approach to training and learning and implementation of ethical communications is really important – but how do you get people out of their silos and talking to each other?'*

In response, bringing in the role of Dóchas, one participant argued that *'ethical communications is part of the Dóchas charter so all organisations should be working on it'*, and another that *'Dóchas can learn a lot from the implementation of the Comhlámh Code and from the IDEA code around the kinds of critical reflection, learning and sharing processes involved. Again, it takes time, but it really does help people to own their commitment to improved practice. It is good for helping us to identify what we're not doing – and codes really do help to keep things on the agenda'*. The point was also made that *'the IDEA and Comhlámh codes are now being resourced with more staff. This is something that Dóchas will need to consider if they really want to support organisations in this area'*. A final recommendation for Dóchas was that *'perhaps there could be a Dóchas working group or sub-group for the Guide and for ethical communications as there was in the past'*.

4.3.2. Training and Learning Approaches

Participants reflected in small groups on the different types of approaches to training and learning adopted in their organisations. For example, one indicated their organisation's approach as being to *'use the Guide as a beginning of a conversation, taking the Guide and bringing it sector-wide and even outside the sector'*. Another highlighted their work with volunteers, *'formal training, critical classroom learning and in-country learning'*, with another mentioning *'reflection and discussion'* with volunteers. One organisation applies a *'value based / deliberative enquiry / non-judgement'* approach to learning, along with phrases and words like *'failing is ok as long as we learn'*, *'reflexive, back and forth communications, collaborative (internal and external)'*.

In the discussion which followed, considerable time was spent exploring the type of training and learning approaches needed to engage with ethical communications at a deep and meaningful level across organisations. While recognising the need for provision of training and learning at different levels, one person suggested that it's important to start with the Guide and with short, applied training. They explained that *'training serves a purpose to engage everyone so there needs to be entry-level training as well as deep training and learning spaces'*. Another explored the types of learning spaces needed for addressing the difficult, contentious issues within ethical communications which are based on embedded assumptions and cultural practices which constrain ethical practice: *'The space for learning and conversations has to be one where it is ok to question and to not know. Communities of peers are so precious, as are communities of practice but these take time and organisations need to understand that. These are such generative and supportive, productive spaces, though, so they should be supported as much as possible.'*

The Types and Levels of Training and Learning Provision Available and Required within INGOs

In small groups, most participants highlighted that some induction is provided for new staff. Most receive a copy of the guide with some, especially those considered most relevant, having formal induction training. Most were unsure about whether or not board members receive a copy of the Guide and the point was made that if board members do not understand the need for ethical communications' practice, then it is much harder for management and staff to implement it. In terms of ongoing training, some of it is informal, e.g., *'critical analysis within teams / organisation of particular content / assets; discussions of what language we should use'*. Others, working with volunteers, seem to provide more critical and in-depth training and learning opportunities. One described that their organisation provides *'pre-departure and in-country training and learning' that includes ethical communications. Another talked of 'critical visual literacy for volunteers... in a GE context – GCE overseas – training documents re: baselines on social media and communications'*, with another explaining that their organisation has *'E-Tick Ethical Communications training and discussion with all staff'*. Other resources mentioned included language guides, ethical content guides, peer learning and external expert input, own organisation guides and the Dóchas Guide.

In the discussion which followed, in addition to the points made about training and learning approaches, one person pointed out that *'everyone in an organisation should have to do training and learning on ethical communications to ensure that organisations are communicating in an ethical way – all levels from the board down'*. As well as the need for *'regular training, about twice a year'*, one person highlighted the need for *'more regular meetings of smaller like-minded / relevant groups. These are like working groups for communications, or peer support working groups. There could also be like a clinic for discussing and sharing'*. In order to encourage organisations to take this training and learning seriously, one person suggested that *'one idea is that there could be certified training and learning. This might act as an incentive to people to sign up to it. Another idea around certification is that organisations could be certified as an organisation that is committed to continually wrestling with ethical communications and committed to ensuring ongoing training and learning opportunities are provided within organisations to people at all levels – give credit for trying and for organisations who provide the space for conversations around these issues.'* In short, one person suggested, *'it's important not just to think in terms of training and learning but also much more comprehensive supports for organisations to implement all aspects of the guide and more.'*

The background is a green-tinted photograph of a cave entrance. The cave walls are rough and textured, and the light from the opening creates a bright, hazy glow. A white rectangular frame is superimposed over the center of the image, containing the text.

Section 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research points to some strong training and learning practice among some organisations around ethical communications but there are inconsistencies among Dóchas members in this. As such, provision is patchy at best. Survey findings show that there is also a lack of knowledge about what is actually provided, especially in some areas of practice. In short, findings show the need to put critical learning at the heart of GD communications among INGOs in Ireland. Whether framed around critical or decolonial GCE, anti-racism and decoloniality or diversity, it needs to be critical, deep, relevant and challenging.

5.1. Putting Critical Learning at the Heart of Ethical Global Development Communications

While some participants make the case for short, guidelines-based, online training around the application of the commitments in the Dóchas Guide, overwhelmingly participants believe that training is not enough. Instead, as indicated in the literature and confirmed by many participants in this research, there is a need for more, more regular, deeper, participatory, and practical opportunities for critical learning at organisational level and across the GD field. In the context of the challenging, contentious and important area of GD communications, simple training-based solutions, which don't allow the time and space for critical engagement with the complexities of the challenges involved, are clearly not enough. While training can help people to act differently in the short term, without deeper understanding of the reasons why ethical communications requires change and the challenges involved in doing so, change is often superficial and unlikely to be sustainable.

Commitment to critical learning also requires significant engagement with the type of learning spaces created and available to staff. 'Business case' training or learning scenarios look for quick fix solutions to identified problems and are usually directed at current and future problems (Alhejji et al. 2016). These types of contexts rarely allow for people to make mistakes and they are often about learning 'the right' way to act and behave. More open learning spaces, like those explored in the discussion of critical and decolonial GCE, which support deep understanding of why things are the way they are, which support people to engage with deeply-held assumptions and cultural practices and their effects, are much more likely to yield deeper, more long-lasting commitment to solidarity, justice, respect for dignity, diversity and non-hierarchical relations in INGOs. Similarly, it is important to create learning spaces where critical reflection and difficult conversations can be facilitated around issues such as racism, ethnocentrism, power relations, gender, othering and white supremacy in INGOs and in INGO communications. Difficult conversations also need to be supported around the tensions and constraints on ethical communications practice within INGOs (Dillon 2021).

The need to move beyond training to critical learning is also recognized in the Dóchas Guide (2023), which outlines the need for training, as well as for people to 'understand' the commitments set out in the guide, and for these to be 'internalized' within organisations. The shift from a training mindset to one of critical organisational learning is a challenging one for managers in INGOs, especially when, as outlined here, it needs to address development communications at all levels of its practice in organisations (Dillon 2021), and apply to all those involved – managers, new staff, specific cohorts of staff such as communications and field office staff, partners, contractors, board members and volunteers. This requires a serious level of commitment on the part of organisational management in terms of training and learning resources and time for staff engagement with learning processes. As suggested here, though, any approaches which are driven by individual staff needs are also unlikely to lead to systemic and sustainable change within organisations. Without a learning organisation approach (Roper, Pettit and Eade 2003), where the organisation itself is open to critical reflection and change, along with the individuals participating in learning opportunities, ethical communications' practice is likely to be surface deep at best.

At the same time as critical learning should be at the heart of ethical GD communications, it would be a mistake to think that it is enough. As identified in research over the past 20 years, and reiterated in Dillon (2021), organisations also need to be supported to implement ethical GD communications practice through robust sector-wide governance mechanisms where organisations are supported to enact good practice and held to account when they don't. While implementing deep learning opportunities can support good practice in the long term, without these governance and accountability mechanisms, it is likely to be 'business as usual' for the foreseeable future.

5.2. Critical Learning for Ethical GD Communications in Practice

This research reiterates the findings of earlier research (Dillon 2021) on a number of issues, while advancing insight into the training and learning dimensions of ethical GD practice among INGOs. Despite some in-depth and critical practice, it highlights the general weakness of measures undertaken on training and learning around ethical communications among INGOs to date – the lack of awareness of what's being provided; the lack of systemic training and learning plans; the tendency for organisations to rely on induction training or training of communications staff, as well as on dissemination of the Guide as a substitute for training. It is clear from this report that Dóchas did not take on board the broader and deeper recommendations outlined in previous research (Dillon 2021) with regard to instigating stronger implementation and accountability mechanisms to support ethical GD communications. Instead, and perhaps as a starting point, Dóchas revised the Code. While the commitments therein offer potential, in terms of the requirements around training as well as broader governance measures, they lack detail or any indication of measures to be put in place if organisations fail to live up to the ethical communications standards they have agreed to.

In practice, as outlined in this research, critical learning for ethical GD practice requires the provision of a range of induction, in-service and ongoing training and learning opportunities on ethical GD communications, decoloniality and anti-racism. As indicated above, these opportunities need to be for all involved in and working with INGOs and to address all levels of communication practice, including the institutional structural and cultural level and the underlying assumptions and power relations which shape communication practice in the first place. This also means that providing copies of the Guide is not enough.

5.2.1. Development of Critical Learning Strategies for Ethical GD Communications within INGOs

For organisations, it also requires the development and implementation of a critical learning strategy, including training and learning plans for ethical GD communications and the merging of these plans with existing policy frameworks. These training and learning plans should include clarity on the approaches to training and learning to be adopted, and for whom, within the organisation as well as how, when and how often training and learning is to be facilitated and undertaken; the themes to be addressed and learning processes to be facilitated; how it is to be resourced; who will facilitate it and what support they will need; how it will be monitored and evaluated so that it is a meaningful process which further supports critical learning; and how the learning of individuals are to be harnessed for changes in ethical communications' policies and practices within the organisation.

Rybnikova and Weigel (2016), with reference to diversity training, remind us of the importance of organisational context, resources, facilitators and learning settings for success. Consideration, too, of how participants are to be supported within this learning, as well as how they can support each other, e.g., through peer learning and informal conversations, is important. One suggestion offered in the workshop is the appointment of organisational 'code champions', a practice which was prevalent in the 2000s. Another is the suggestion to pursue certification for training and learning in this area, with many emphasizing the importance of management 'buy-in' for any plans around training provision in this area. The potential to learn from the IDEA and Comhlámh codes of good practice in terms of how to develop a training and learning strategy is also significant here. Specific consideration should

also be given to how emerging policies around localisation, decoloniality, anti-racism and equality, diversity and inclusion should or will affect the approaches to learning adopted.

The challenges involved in supporting this kind of learning within INGOs is likely to require considerable support from outside the organisation itself. INGOs may need to bring in GCE, anti-racism and / or EDI learning specialists who can support them in their planning and implementation of a critical learning for ethical GD communications strategy.

5.2.2. Resources

In addition to getting support from critical learning specialists, organisations also need to access a range of resources which can help them on their learning journey in this area. The new resource hub established by Dóchas can help in this regard. It will be important for these resources to be regularly advertised and / or disseminated among INGO personnel and for the Dóchas site to be regularly updated. Significant among these resources is the freely available E-Tick e-learning course on ethical communications, which has been updated in 2024. For more information and to sign up see - <https://ethicalcommunication.org/>

5.2.3. Dóchas

As well as support for critical learning at organisational level, the report highlights the need for a range of supports from Dóchas. This includes the need to ensure more widespread awareness of and understanding of the principles and commitments in the Guide to Ethical Communications (Dóchas 2023). As part of this work, Dóchas currently undertakes bi-annual peer-sharing online meetings among some of its working group members. These opportunities for peer sharing and learning are highly valued among contributors to this research, with some suggesting the need for more in-person, informal learning opportunities where people from different organisations can get together to explore the challenges and realities involved, and where they can share their practice on ethical GD communications. The suggestion of re-establishing a Dóchas working group to support this work is worth considering, but all of this work needs to be properly resourced within Dóchas, perhaps again following the IDEA and Comhlámh models in ensuring more than part-time employee support for the promotion of the Guide and its training and learning dimensions.

Further to these peer-sharing opportunities and to the resource hub established on the Dóchas website, there have been calls for Dóchas to provide some training and learning opportunities for INGOs. If doing so, Dóchas needs to be mindful of the need for critical and organisational approaches to learning and of the importance of supporting organisations in the development of critical learning strategies in this area. If what Dóchas provides was reduced to short trainings on the guide, as evident in this research, this is likely to be counter-productive and largely a waste of time and resources. Involving critical GCE, EDI and anti-racism educators, perhaps in association with relevant networks and organisations such as IDEA, the Irish Network Against Racism, Akidwa or Comhlámh, in the design and facilitation of any training or learning opportunities to be offered by Dóchas could help to ensure critical, relevant and transformative learning in this area in the future.

5.3. Recommendations

INGOs need to provide training and learning opportunities for all staff, management, board members, partners, volunteers and contractors. This includes induction as well as in-service / and ongoing training and learning refreshers. It should be integrated into a broader strategy on training and learning in ethical GD communications, and include appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes.

Training and learning in ethical GD communications should apply deep, critical pedagogical (facilitation and learning) and analytical approaches which go beyond surface level short-term training. These include anti-racism and critical global citizenship education (GCE) approaches which emphasise decoloniality, unlearning current assumptions and practices, and which address systemic racism and hierarchies within development relationships and INGOs.

INGOs need to ensure that training and learning opportunities and spaces, whether online or in-person, and facilitation styles used:

Are participatory, engaged, practical and relevant;

Are conducive to open and critical engagement with the challenges and complexities of the issues involved. This includes supporting participants to reflect on and question their own and their organisation's practice, culture and power relations;

Support peer sharing and learning;

Are given sufficient time to enable participants to address the multi-dimensional nature and the many challenging aspects of ethical GD communications.

INGO Management need to:

Provide adequate resources to ethical GD communications' training and learning to ensure that it is organisation-wide, deep, critical and meaningful;

Lead a process for developing a training and learning strategy plan (see Appendix 1). In doing so, they need to ensure that it is developed with meaningful input from and participation by staff, partners, Black and minority ethnic (BAME) members of the community as well as GCE, anti-racism and / or equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) learning specialists;

Implement a process where training and learning experience, monitoring and evaluation feeds into policy development of ethical GD communications and ethical GD practice more broadly;

Consider how emerging policies around localisation, decolonisation, anti-racism and EDI should or will affect approaches to learning adopted.

Dóchas needs to comprehensively support ethical GD communications among members more broadly. As part of this Dóchas should:

Initiate a process which supports INGOs to develop strategic plans in the area and to design different training and learning opportunities for their organisational cohorts (see Appendix 1);

Ensure sufficient staff to support ethical GD practice and communications, including around the implementation of policies on EDI, localisation, decoloniality and antiracism, as well as the training and learning aspects of these, and ensure adequate support for this work through accessing funding and broader institutional support from Irish Aid and other funders;

Support organisations with the provision of online and more in-person informal peer-to-peer learning, as well as some formal training and learning opportunities where appropriate. These need to be designed bearing in mind the need for deep, critical organisation-wide training and learning opportunities that cannot be realised in short, one-off workshop-style training courses;

Further engage with IDEA and Comhlámh on the training and learning aspects of their code implementation;

Support organisations through the development of more specific guides for ethical GD communications training and learning;

Ensure the Dóchas resource hub, developed in association with this research, is advertised and kept up-dated with appropriate resources, and encourage use of these resources by members, e.g., participation in the E-Tick ethical communications online course;

Consider re-establishing a working group to promote ethical communications among Dóchas members.

Involving critical GCE, EDI and anti-racism educators, perhaps in association with relevant networks and organisations such as IDEA, the Irish Network Against Racism, Akidwa or Comhlámh, in the design and facilitation of any training or learning opportunities to be offered by Dóchas could help to ensure critical, relevant and transformative learning in this area in the future.

The image features a warm, golden-brown color palette. It depicts a cave interior with a large, irregularly shaped opening in the rock wall. Through this opening, a bright, hazy landscape is visible, suggesting a transition from a dark, enclosed space to an open, sunlit area. The word "Bibliography" is written in a clean, white, sans-serif font, centered horizontally and partially overlapping the cave's opening. The overall composition is simple and evocative, using natural textures and light to create a sense of depth and discovery.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Principles for and Guidelines on Developing a Critical Learning Strategy for Ethical Global Development Communications in INGOs

Principles of Effective Training and Learning for Ethical GD Communications

These principles are suggested with the aim of assisting INGOs in the development of critical learning strategies. They are not designed to be exhaustive but to prompt critical reflection, further engagement and the identification of other important principles for effective training and learning for ethical GD communications' practice.

Effective training and learning for ethical GD communications applies an organisational learning approach rather than one focused on individual skills deficits or development. This requires that INGOs (individually or through Dóchas) offer many different opportunities for training and learning for all those working in and with INGOs, including all staff, management, volunteers, partners, board members and contractors. This requires that processes are implemented which links this training and learning with wider organisational policy and practice.

In addressing communications at all levels of practice, relationships and culture within and across INGOs, approaches should ensure that training and learning support deep, critical, applied learning for ethical GD communications' practice among participants. Because of the challenges and complexities involved in ensuring ethical GD communications' practice, this training and learning needs to address the many power relations which underlie communications' practices at different levels. These include the representational practice, organisational structural and cultural levels as well as deeply held assumptions around development, humanitarianism etc. The deeper the training goes, the more understanding it enables among participants. This leads to stronger commitment to ethical communications, ownership and sustainability of ethical communications practice within INGOs, but it is also more challenging for organisations.

Learning spaces and facilitation styles which support deep, critical training and learning on ethical GD communications are participatory, engaged, practical and relevant. They are conducive to open and critical engagement with the challenges and complexities of the issues involved. This includes supporting participants to reflect on and question their own and their organisational practice, culture and power relations. Peer sharing and learning support is of vital importance, as is giving sufficient time to training and learning to enable participants to address the multi-dimensional nature and the many challenging aspects of ethical GD communications.

Effective INGO training and learning on ethical communications, which is organisation-wide and meaningful, is well-resourced, supported and dynamic. For INGOs, working with partners, Dóchas, other groups and critical training and learning specialists can be very helpful. At the same time training and learning plans and strategies must be crafted at local level for organisational ownership. But it is important for INGOs to learn from others including through peer sharing and learning. All of this work also needs to be dynamic and responsive as it relates to shifting contexts and organisational needs.

Training and learning for ethical GD communications is difficult, challenging and time-consuming work and it is likely to meet considerable resistance. Ensuring ethical GD communications is not easy, and there are no quick-fix training solutions. INGOs need to be aware of the structural and attitudinal barriers to it within and across INGOs. These are to be expected, as people can feel threatened by it and, if it is done critically and deeply, it is likely to challenge other aspects of an organisation's approach or practice. Some within INGOs will resist change, others are likely to feel that it's all unnecessary, while others will wonder why tried and tested training strategies are not considered enough. At the same time, within INGOs there are those who tend to argue that any emphasis on ethical GD communications is too internally-focused, 'PC' or unrealistic budget-wise. Anyone developing a critical learning strategy, therefore, needs to prepare themselves for resistance and develop strategies for encouraging understanding, support and ownership, e.g., involving partners and allies in the work through establishing an advisory group or supporting code champions at each level.

Guidelines for Developing a Critical Learning Strategy

The following are some suggested steps that organisations may wish to take when developing a critical learning strategy. Steps 1 and 2 provide a series of questions for reflection in order to support the development of the strategy. Undertaking this process through research and critical reflection on each of these questions can help to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of current practice and what is needed for the future. This participatory process also helps to deepen understanding of and engagement with the importance of critical training and learning for ethical GD communications' practice. As all INGOs are different, some of the questions suggested here may be more relevant for some organisations more than others. Similarly, additional questions may be appropriate that are not mentioned here. As indicated above, in addition to working with staff, management and partners on the development of a critical learning strategy, it is helpful for INGOs to work with other stakeholders and people with specialist understandings or experience (e.g., advisory groups, other organisations implementing codes of good practice or anti-racism groups) in this.

Step 1: Undertake an Audit of Current Practice

What training and learning opportunities are currently provided for different cohorts, when and how often? What are their aims and / or proposed learning outcomes?

What approaches are used - short term training or deeper learning? Within that what kinds of tools and processes are involved? How are they influenced by GCE, EDI, decolonial or anti-racism approaches to training and learning or not?

What levels of communications' practice are addressed and to what extent are they focused on causes of poor ethical communications' practices, on power relations and on the deeper organisational cultures or assumptions which affect ethical GD communications?

What kinds of learning spaces – physically and in terms of the facilitation styles – are being used and how conducive to deep, critical learning are they? Who undertakes facilitation and what approaches do they use? What would they like to become more familiar with in relation to this area, i.e., what 'training of training' courses might they like or need to participate in?

What resources are currently being used, why and how? How much is the Guide being used and how?

Step 2: Identify Current Needs

What needs to be done to support the principles of effective training and learning for ethical GD communications in training and learning across the organisation in terms of:

The various training and learning opportunities provided;

Approaches used;

Levels of practice addressed;

Learning spaces and facilitation provided; and

Resources available

What processes need to be put in place to ensure that training and learning can support congruent organisational ethical GD communications policy and practice?

What barriers to critical training and learning for ethical GD communications exist and how can these be addressed?

Step 3a: Identify Priorities

Based on an exploration of Steps 1 and 2 (above), the strategy should identify priorities for training and learning provision for different cohorts over a 1, 2, 3 and 5 year period. This would be most effective if it was built into a broader strategic planning process but if that process is not happening in the foreseeable future, an interim strategy should be developed. As with the other stages of the process, ideally it would be undertaken in association with relevant stakeholders and advice. It also needs to be carried out in light of existing and potential resources and policy directions. As such requirements and opportunities for additional resources need to be identified. These include funding, personnel, online or in-person training and learning spaces; time, facilitation resources etc.

Step 4: Documenting the Strategy Plan

Once any research, reflection and consultation steps have been undertaken, the plan needs to be formally documented and shared, in draft form first and then as a working document. Reflecting on each of the steps above, it should include, among other things, clear goals, aims and objectives as well as proposed outcomes; the resources to be allocated to them; the personnel responsible; the training and learning opportunities to be held and for whom, when and how; how the training and learning will feed into wider organisational policies and plans; and how the strategy will be monitored and evaluated.

Step 5: Implementation

The different phases of implementation will follow the development of the strategy plan and integrate various phases of monitoring and evaluation to support plan revision on an ongoing basis over the life of the plan.

