



TROPICAL HEALTH AND EDUCATION TRUST

Code of Conduct – Ethical Story Telling

THET expects all employees, volunteers and service providers who work with THET to adhere to its Code of Conduct. This Code of Conduct covers: Ethical Story Telling.

THET has a vision of a world where everyone, everywhere has access to quality healthcare. We achieve this by training and educating health workers in Africa and Asia, working in partnership with organisations and volunteers from across the UK. To do this we need to inspire and motivate a huge number of people. Images and stories play a vital role in helping us do this. They help us raise awareness, bring our work to life and form part of training and development. The images and stories we choose to represent our work must provide a true and accurate reflection and align with us our [partnership principle of respect](#).

THET will always uphold contributors' rights to participate and be heard, to experience respect and dignity, to make free and informed decisions, and to be protected from risk and harm. This Code of Conduct sets out THET's way of working in relation to Ethical Story Telling. In all of our content and image gathering work, we will strive to adhere to the following conventions:

- [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#)
- [The Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)
- [The UN Conventon on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#)
- [The UN Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#)

THET will seriously consider and investigate fully any reported contraventions of the Code of Conduct. Where incidents come to light, they will be viewed as serious misconduct and appropriate action will be taken.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Scope	
Date approved	
Approved by	
Date for next review	

CONTENTS

1. Obtaining informed consent	3
Things to consider	4
Consent for online data collection	5
Consent at events	5
2. Representation	6
Use of stock images	7
3. Accuracy	7
4. Safeguarding	8
5. Transfer of images, video footage and content	9
6. Storage and Longevity	9
7. Image Manipulation	10
8. Working with volunteers, celebrities and influencers	10
9. Credits and third parties	12
10. Remuneration	12

GLOSSARY

Assent:	Agreeing to something after thoughtful consideration. This applies to people under the age of 18, whom are able to make informed choices for themselves, but for whom parental consent is still required. This is particularly important, as parents can consent for someone to photograph their child, but the child itself might not agree.
Consent:	Officially agreeing to something after thoughtful consideration. This applies for people aged 18 and above. They agree after consideration and understanding the implications to allow THET to take their photographs, write a case study about them, or use their quotes or other data.
Data Protection:	The process of safeguarding important information from corruption, compromise or loss.
Informed Consent:	Granting permission in the full knowledge of possible consequences.
GDPR:	General Data Protection Regulation introduced in 2018 in Europe. This is the toughest privacy and security law in the world that protects the rights of people whose data is collected, processed, stored and used.
Personal Data:	Any information that relates to an individual who can be directly or indirectly identified.
Personal Sensitive Data:	Data revealing racial, ethnic origin, religious or philosophical beliefs, data concerning health, biometric data or a person's sex life or sexual orientation, political orientation and trade union membership. This should therefore never be disclosed without informed consent.

Representation: The way that aspects, such as gender, age or ethnicity, are presented to audiences through photography and other forms or visual media.

1. OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT

In line with our [Principles of Partnership](#), we must always treat people with respect and dignity. Acquiring informed consent is a crucial step within that relationship. Informed consent means that a person gives THET permission to take and use their image and/or content whilst understanding the full consequences of this. This relates to all images and content gathered by THET or someone operating in THET's name. This also applies to images and information shared on social media by THET staff, supporters, partners and volunteers whether posted on official THET or personal channels.

Informed consent means:

- The process of obtaining informed consent must be clearly distinguishable from any other matters.
- We provide clear and plain information what the image/content will be used for (across print, online, reports etc). Where necessary this is provided in the local language.
- We explain how long the information will be kept.
- That the information will be stored securely.
- That they have the right to not take part without any negative consequences.
- That they have the right to stop halfway without giving any reason.
- That they can change their mind and withdraw their consent at any time.
- Where necessary, request for consent should happen in the local language, ideally through an independent professional translator. For consent to be truly informed, we should ensure that that participants fully understand what they are consenting to and language should not be a barrier.
- Consent must be freely given.
- Consent should be recorded and safely stored. Where people are illiterate, consent can be obtained verbally or voice or film recorded.
- Information should be presented in a way that the participants understand.
- Contact details should be left with the participants in case they have further questions or would like to withdraw their consent.
- For children and young people under the age of 18, informed assent must be sought, as well as informed consent from their parents/guardians.
- The information sheet should include a cut-off date by when people can withdraw their information for use. Explain that if they get in touch before that date their information can be withdrawn and will not have entered the public domain. After that date THET can ensure the information will no longer be used by THET going forward, but that it is not possible to withdraw the information that has been shared in the public domain already.
- Any refusal or withdrawal of consent must be respected and should not have negative consequences.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Discussing and gathering consent is not always clear cut and the following elements should be considered :

- Where possible, local staff should go to the area of data collection prior to this taking place to inform the participants of the forthcoming data collection. They should bring the information sheets written in a clear and understandable way, where necessary in the local language. Explain carefully the intentions of the upcoming data collection and where possible bring examples of what publications or the use of the image/content might look like.
- Ideally, when gathering images, subjects should be active participants in the process and discussion around representation. Images should reflect the way that a person, a health centre, and THET as an organisation would like to be represented in a particular image or write-up. For example, this image should convey partnership and reciprocity, and not patriarchy.
- People may agree to an interview or their image being taken without fully understanding what they have agreed to. If you feel that is the case, return to the information sheet and talk people through it and where possible show examples so that people can visually see what you mean. If doubt remains, do not proceed.
- There might be a power-inequity between the data collector and participant and they might feel unable to refuse the request for an image or information. Don't proceed if you feel people do not want to take part.
- Local hierarchies and cultural sensitivities should be respected.
- Completed consent forms should be stored alongside the image and the content in a safe and secure way.

WRITTEN VERSUS VERBAL CONSENT

Obtaining written consent is preferable and important to THET, but we recognise that this is not always possible. The consent forms allow for this and have a box to be completed by the data collector to explain why verbal consent was collected instead of written consent. For example, if a person is illiterate, they might prefer to give verbal consent through a recording than leave a thumb print. Or there might be instances where it is not in the participant's best interest to obtain written consent, for example in areas of conflict or authoritarian governments. There could also be cultural connotations about signing documents. As these are all contextual it is up to the judgement of the data collector to collect verbal or written consent of which the most important element is that the consent is truly informed and the participants understand what they are agreeing to. If ever in doubt, please contact THET's communication team: comms@thet.org.

There are different consent forms available for different people and settings, please note that for children assent is sought, as well as parental/guardian consent. If either the child or the parents/guardian do not agree to take part, the image and content collection should not take place.

CONSENT AND INFORMATION SHEET TEMPLATES ARE AVAILABLE HERE:

- [Adult Information and Consent Form](#)

- [Young Person aged 15-18 Information and Assent Form](#)
- [Children aged 8-14 Information and Assent Form](#)
- [Parents/Guardians Information and Consent Form](#)
- [Hospital/Health Facility Consent Form](#)

If a THET employee, partner, volunteer, contract worker or participant feel that the data collector is working in an inappropriate way, or that inappropriate questions are being asked, they must immediately raise their concerns with the country programme staff and contact: safeguarding@thet.org.

CONSENT FOR ONLINE DATA COLLECTION

When collecting personal data online, informed consent should also be gathered and the same principles applied. This could happen prior to the data collection point, by emailing the information sheet (or the information from the sheet) or by talking the participant through the data collection and its implications at the start of the online meeting. Even if a participant has consented via email, it is good practice to reconfirm consent at the beginning of the meeting.

CONSENT AT EVENTS

There will be occasions where content and images will be collected at events. Like with any other personal data gathering, informed consent will be required. The way in which consent should be gathered can vary depending on the the type of event, however there are general guidelines:

Public events:

Participants who have signed up to take part should accept the following terms and conditions or be asked to make themselves known to the photographer if they do not wish to be included.

I give my consent for images/video footage and data collected as part of this event to be used by THET. The data will be stored securely and could be used in printed materials, as well as online, including on social media. THET abides by an Ethical Storytelling Code of Conduct and will ensure that all information is used accurately, honestly, with dignity and in context.

Closed events:

- Invitations should include a notification that image and content gathering is taking place and to let people know who they should speak to if they do not want to have their image taken.
- The meeting convener or chair should let the audience know that image and content collection is taking place.
- Signs should be placed in prominent positions saying that image and content collection is taking place and to give people the option to be excluded from this (e.g. by sitting in certain rows or on one side of the room).

We strive to represent images and content in a dignified, truthful way, where people have agency and that represents THET's approach to equality and discrimination. We should consider how we can avoid harmful stereotypes, respect people's privacy and be mindful of cultural sensitivities. THET adheres to:

Non-discrimination: THET will not discriminate in its employment, programmes or services on the grounds of religion, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, language, sexual orientation, HIV/AIDS status, marital status, disability, age, or political conviction. Our images should represent this and we therefore must consider who we are taking images of and that everyone is shown in a dignified way. This is particularly important when taking images of people who might face discrimination, victimisation, or might be put at risk of legal prosecution. We must ensure that they are depicted in an integral way and as part of the society and not be singled out. For example, a person with a disability should not be sitting separately in a room away from others, but form part of the group.

Avoid stereotypes: We do not want to perpetuate the stereotypes of people living in low-and middle-income countries, but instead want to reflect the reality of their situation. It is never about showing people as helpless objects of pity or simply smiling recipients of aid. Images of victimhood must be avoided and we should instead gather a range of images that show the need but also depict a wider reflection of the person and their everyday lives. THET operates through a model of partnership in which relationships are respectful and reciprocal. This approach must be applied to content gathering and story-telling.

Avoid positioning the participant: We never use images that make people look more vulnerable or powerless than they are. We avoid images where the camera looks down on people. We also never ask people to say something on video in a language they do not usually speak. Neither will we ask participants to hold up signs, such as 'thank you'.

Perspective: images should ideally be taken at the same level or looking up at the participant. The photographer should be aware that images can easily re-inforce public perceptions and this should be considered in the way we take and use images. For example: in the way we show a visiting doctor interacting with the hospital staff or patients.

Nudity: We should never use images that could in any way reduce people to objects of desire or show them in a degrading way. We must also ensure that we respect people's privacy. We will not reproduce images that show nudity where this exposure exceeds cultural norms in either the location where the image was taken or the location where it will be seen.

Cultural sensitivity: We must be mindful that there are certain practices that may be acceptable in the country or community in which the image collection takes place, but are unsuitable to be shown in another culture and visa-versa. We must show care and sensitivity when taking or using photographs that depict taboo practices or stigmatised populations. If in doubt, seek advice from local staff and partners.

Privacy and respect:

Distance: Showing someone in emotional or physical distress very close up could violate his or her privacy. Care should be taken to give the participant space.

- Disclosure: We must never use images or information that has any chance of resulting in discrimination of the person (for example by disclosing someone's HIV status when they wish to keep this information

private). We must always ask and respect the wishes of those who wish to remain anonymous or do not wish to disclose certain personal information.

- Social media: We need to be mindful of the increasing use of social media in the countries in which we are gathering content and images. The same rules apply to social media as to any other forms of publishing.
- Details attached to images and included in stories must ensure that individuals cannot be traced to his or her home or community.
- Distinctive buildings, street signs or landmarks should not be included in an image if they identify where an individual lives or works, other than the THET/Partner project location that is subject of the story.
- Geotagging of images should be disabled when taking photographs.

USE OF STOCK IMAGES

Stock images are generally not used in THET, but might be acceptable if we start work in a new location and the images we have do not accurately reflect the local context. In these instances, stock images can be obtained, but are only to be used until THET is able to collect sufficient images and content to replace the stock images. All stock images must be signed off by THET's communication team. Please contact: comms@thet.org.

The information accompanying the stock images will only include information that we know is true about the image. All stock images should adhere to the representation set out above.

3. ACCURACY

When images and content are collected and used this should always be done with respect and in an accurate way. It should ensure informed consent, avoid wrongful attributions, misleading juxtapositions and inaccuracy in depicting the work. For example, when photographing the conditions in the hospital this should not take part in the worst equipped area of the hospital, but should be an accurate reflection of the situation. Neither should images be framed or posed with activities that people do not usually undertake.

Accuracy also means being accurate in the description and coding of the image.

This should entail accuracy in **images**:

- Date
- Name of person in image
- Name of content collector and if they want to be credited
- Location
- Health theme this relates to (i.e. maternal health, mental health etc.)
- Project

- In the exceptional circumstances of using stock images, we only include information that is true
- On video, where possible a professional translator should be used to transcribe footage

This should entail accuracy in **content**:

- Date
- Name of person in story
- Name of content collector
- Location
- Quotes are attributed correctly
- Only include facts and not assumed information
- Report truthfully (e.g. we will not say we will help a certain person, if that is not true)
- Translations are accurate and honest. Where possible use professional translators.

How we publish images and stories should not only be accurate, but also in line with THET's [Safeguarding Policy](#) and General Data Protection Regulations Policy. This entails:

- Children and young people under the age of 18 should not be identifiable and only first names should be used.
- Where anonymity has been ensured (for example in interviews) quotes will be attributed to an unnamed person and research code. For example, Male Participant 34 years from Uganda 114.
- Please be aware that Personal Sensitive Data within the GDPR legislation is defined as: Data revealing racial, ethnic origin, religious or philosophical beliefs, data concerning health, biometric data or a person's sex life or sexual orientation, political orientation and trade union membership. This should therefore never be disclosed without informed consent.

4. SAFEGUARDING

Fulfilling THET's commitment to protecting contributors from risk and harm requires that all staff and personnel associated with the organisation working or volunteering must complete a recognised safeguarding training course before coming into contact with image or content contributors.

Staff, partners, contractors and volunteers associated with THET must provide written acknowledgement of having read, understood, and agreed to abide by the organisation's [Safeguarding Policy](#) before any and all engagement with patients.

For the protection of both parties, no THET representative should be left alone with the image/content contributors in the location where image and content collection are taking place. Where sensitive and confidential topics will be discussed, a location where people can see but not overhear the discussion should be chosen.

Photography and filming schedules should include suitable breaks that include customary mealtimes, comfort breaks, and cultural/religious routines such as prayer. Neither medical treatment, nor school lessons should be interrupted or delayed for the purposes of collecting images or content. Collection should happen with and around contributors.

Particular care should be taken when interacting with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Where possible, THET would like to work with local photographers, film crew and data collectors. Please ensure the photographer/data collector/journalist/translator you have employed has been properly vetted and references checked and that safeguarding, data protection, anti-bribery and ethical storytelling are part of their contract with THET.

5. TRANSFER OF IMAGES, VIDEO FOOTAGE AND CONTENT

Transfers between THET Offices

In order for THET to carry out its operations effectively across its various offices, there may be occasions when it is necessary to transfer Personal Data from one THET office/department to another, or to allow access to the Personal Data from an overseas location. Should this occur, the THET office sending the Personal Data remains responsible for ensuring protection for that Personal Data.

Transfers to Third Parties

Each department in THET will only transfer Personal Data to, or allow access by, Third Parties when it is assured that the information will be processed legitimately and protected appropriately by the recipient.

6. STORAGE AND LONGEVITY

The storage of images (still and moving) and content must be stored in compliance with THET's General Data Protection Regulation policy, which states that each department of THET will adopt physical, technical, and organisational measures to ensure the security of Personal Data. This includes the prevention of loss or damage, unauthorised alteration, access or processing, and other risks to which it may be exposed by virtue of human action or the physical or natural environment.

Personal Data shall be kept in a form which permits identification of Data Subjects for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which the Personal Data is processed. This means THET must, wherever possible, store Personal Data in a way that limits or prevents identification of the Data Subject (i.e. the participant).

To ensure fair processing, Personal Data will not be retained by THET for longer than necessary in relation to the purposes for which it was originally collected, or for which it was further processed. The length of time for which THET entities need to retain personal data is set out in THET'S 'Personal Data Retention and Disposal Schedule'. This takes into account the legal and contractual requirements, both minimum and maximum, that influence the retention periods set forth in the schedule. All personal data should be deleted or destroyed as soon as possible where it has been confirmed that there is no longer a need to retain it.

As still and moving images of people are considered Personal Data, they may only be kept indefinitely for:

- archiving purposes in the public interest;
- scientific or historical research purposes; or
- statistical purposes.

If participants withdraw their consent, the use of their personal data (i.e. image/content) must cease immediately and their opt-out decision must be noted in the withdrawal list. If they request for their image to be removed this should be respected, but as part of the consent process they should also have been notified that when an image/information has been shared on the internet it might not always be possible to withdraw all of these.

7. IMAGE MANIPULATION

We understand there might be different interpretations of what constitutes image manipulation. However, as a general guide, the following must be adhered to:

- **Authenticity is key:** a viewer should be able to rely on the image as reliable evidence.
- **Changing colour:** no changes should be made that alter the reality of the image. Images should not be made duller or using sepia tones to make a situation look worse than it in reality is. All changes in colour should be done by a professional with a calibrated screen.
- **Cropping** should always be done with great care and should not alter the meaning of an image or change context. Also, please refer to the user rights, as professional photographers might state that their images must not be cropped.
- **Enhancement:** care must be taken to ensure that enhancements do not alter the image of context or the reality of a picture.
- **Editing:** video footage should not be changed in a way that changes what was filmed, for example, by slowing footage down to make a situation look more dramatic or by leaving out information that will change the story told. Edited footage should always accurately represent a person's story.
- **Flipping:** images should not be reversed, as it does not accurately portray the situation.
- **Staged scenarios:** we will not create staged compositions for images and we will never ask participants to hold any props, branding and 'thank you' signs.
- **Composite images:** we will not create composite images, except in the instance outlined below.
- **Set-up or super imposed images** for publicity stunts are only allowed if it is made clear that these are 'set up' and were never intended to represent reality.

8. WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS, CELEBRITIES AND INFLUENCERS

Sharing stories and images about THET's work is important for fundraising, reporting and awareness raising. However, the needs and wishes of donors and supporters should never be placed above the dignity and respect of the people we work with.

Everyone collecting, storing and sharing images and content for THET is required to have read and signed this Code of Conduct, THET's safeguarding policy and anti-bribery and corruption policy.

If volunteers, influencers or celebrities were to collect and publish images and content at location, they should be reminded of the Code and Conduct and that publishing images and content is not allowed without having obtained informed consent. They should also be reminded of the type of images THET would like to represent and what should be avoided at all costs, as set out in section 2.

9. COLLECTING IMAGES AND CONTENT FROM VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN

When collecting images and content from vulnerable people extra care and attention should be taken to ensure their wellbeing and safety. THET's Safeguarding Policy states:

A child: means a person below the age of eighteen years, as defined by the UN Convention of the Rights of a Child.

A vulnerable/ at risk adult: means a person aged 18 years or more who either: Identify themselves as unable to take care of themselves or protect themselves from harm or exploitation or, due to their gender, age or frailty, mental health problems, learning or physical disabilities as well as disasters and conflicts, may be unable or unwilling to identify themselves as vulnerable or subject to abuse, but are deemed to be at risk.

For example, refugees might have experienced particular trauma and collecting content might cause emotional distress. This means that there will be times that even if a person has given consent to share their story, it will be better not to proceed if for example, the appropriate (mental) support is not available at that time, the image could pose a risk to their safety or the data collection causes too much distress. Always question whether you need a particular story and think if another approach might work that does not involve vulnerable adults.

For children assent is sought (e.g. a child agreeing to take part), as well as parental/guardian consent. There are separate consent/assent form templates available [insert hyperlink]. If either the child or the parents/guardian do not agree to take part, the image and content collection should not take place. This should always be respected and no adult should pressure a child into taking part if they made it clear they don't want to.

Please remember that a person's wellbeing and safety should always take priority over the need of a story or an image.

10. CREDITS AND THIRD PARTIES

Whenever a third party is involved in image and content collection, a clear terms of reference and contract should be in place and THET's safeguarding policy, anti-bribery and corruption policy and Ethical Storytelling Code of Conduct must be signed. Third parties can include, but are not limited to:

- Translators
- Professional photographers
- Contracted Consultants
- Researchers

The contract should cover, but is not limited to:

- Number of days work
- Fees
- Insurance
- Type of image required (incl pixels, size and colour) or the shooting brief
- Number of images/footage/interviews
- Adherence to THET's ethical story telling Code of conduct
- Adhere to THET's safeguarding policy

THET will credit all photographs taken by freelance photographers in the following way:
THET/Photographer's name.

11. REMUNERATION

It is not THET's practice to remunerate people for being photographed or interviewed. However, there are certain exceptions:

- If participants are asked to take part in a video that takes them away from their work, a fee in line with their loss of earnings, can be agreed.
- If participants are asked to travel to a location for data collection their travel costs can be remunerated and appropriate refreshments should be provided.

Care should be taken to handle these issues transparently and without conflict of interest. If in doubt, please ask the local Country Director for advice.

Please note that it is THET's policy not to provide any gifts.

For any questions about this Code of Conduct or any questions in relation to ethical image and content gathering, please get in touch with: comms@thet.org