

Hungry child ad sparks race row

An advert aimed at raising awareness about starving children in South Africa has sparked a racial storm.

Advertising agency Ogilvy and Mather Cape Town has apologised for the advert now being investigated by the Advertising Standards Authority of SA.

The Feed a Child SA advert, which was quickly removed from YouTube, shows a black child pretending to be a dog while being fed by a white woman, sitting pretty in bed. The tag line at the end is "The average domestic dog eats better than millions of children".

The ad elicited strong responses on Twitter and other media, with people labelling it "hugely racist" and "in such poor taste".

The ASA manager for dispute resolution, Leon Grobler, said it had received 12 complaints about the ad, and "predominantly, the issue seems to be based on offence along racial lines, and allegations of discrimination".



(Image extracted from YouTube)

Ogilvy said yesterday it was aware of the negative reaction to the ad: "The Feed a Child commercial was created ... with the aim of drawing attention to the extremely important issue of malnutrition in South Africa ...

"It was not our intention to offend in any way and therefore we unreservedly apologise for any offence caused," the agency said.

Feed a Child fights back

But Feed a Child has reloaded the advert - with changes. Now it asks: "Is this racist? Is this controversial? Is this offensive? Or is it about time we all stand together and feed the children of our beautiful country?"

The organisation's founder and spokesman, Alza Rautenbach, now appears, asking: "What if this advert changed a child's life? What if this advert changed 3.5million children's lives? What if this was your child going to bed hungry tonight, and this advert can change that? What if you can be part of the change in South Africa?"

She continues: "I have a deeprooted passion for all children of South Africa. Like a child, I don't see colour, like a child I don't see race or politics. The only thing that is important to me is to make a difference in a child's life and to make sure that a child is fed on a daily basis."

Rautenbach told *The Times* that it was "unfortunate" that the ad had turned into "a racial issue".

The advert was reloaded in response to public questions on why it had been removed, she said.

The spokesman for the SA Human Rights Commission, Isaac Mangena, said the matter did not fall within the jurisdiction of the commission and would be best dealt with by the ASA.

Divided opinions

The Times understands that the advert was scheduled to run until Monday - before the ASA stepped in, sending Feed a Child a letter of complaint and giving it until Friday to respond.

The advert seems to have divided opinions on its objective, too. Some of the reactions on Twitter in the past two days

include:

•@MrSkota: "Feed A Child SA does not respect us. NOT at all ... Oh but what Feed A Child SA was trying to say was that some white people do treat their dogs better than their workers. I'm out."

•@Simply_Dineo: "I'm not understanding the uproar in that Feed A Child ad ... it was pointing out the injustice of starving children ... What am I missing?"

•@AlexanderHampel: "Definitely the wrong way to get a message across. Who approves these ads? Hugely racist. What do you think? feed a child #feedachild."

•@Melfunktion: "I'm not surprised by that Feed A Child ad where the rich white woman feeds the black kid like a dog. Outraged, but not surprised ... "

•@MsLeloB: "People Outraged about the #FeedAChild ad as expected but is it not reality? Use that energy to feed a child not lodge complaints."

•@CurateZAR: "That advert was in such poor taste. Don't think there's a way to go around it. What were [they] trying to achieve? Just wow. #FeedAChild."

•@thejigg: "I really want to see this Feed a Child advert. And I wonder, if they are defending it, then why pull it off YouTube???"

Rautenbach explained: "The child was a character that the agency used. It wasn't chosen for any specific reason - and yes, the idea was to use multiracial people, just as our country is. It doesn't help to have an advert that is not representative.

"I think people would have acted the same if it was, for instance, an Indian child and a white woman. People would have [still] made it racial, unfortunately."

Two years ago the ASA received complaints about a print (prior to that, it was a billboard) advert for the NGO Jam SA that featured a little black girl dressed in a nurse's uniform, wearing heels and a stethoscope around her neck, and hiking up her dress. The wording read "Hungry kids don't play nice" and at the bottom of the ad it read: "Every day in SA children are forced to resort to prostitution in order to feed themselves."

A complainant said the advert was harmful to children and promoted paedophilia. The ASA ordered that it be withdrawn.

Source: *The Times*, via I-Net Bridge

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