



Photovoice: A creative and effective tool for purposes such as monitoring, participatory research, data collection and capacity building

Photovoice

- Gives a voice to people to express their views within their own communities or to influence decisions that affect their lives
- Builds skills and empowers so people can take control of their lives and become actively engaged in helping themselves
- Gains insights into changes resulting from interventions from the perspectives of a group of stakeholders



Get familiar with Photovoice!

Photovoice methodology finds its roots in both photojournalism and international development. Photovoice projects focus on a specific issue and aim to bring lasting change to participants, empowering them to inform others and to be actively involved in decisions that affect their own lives and their community's development. [1] Photovoice is a participatory group analysis methodology and is commonly used in the fields of community development, public health, and education.

Photovoice gives a voice to people, who usually have limited power due to age, poverty, language barriers, gender, culture or other circumstances. People involved in Photovoice learn to reflect on their own experiences and to eventually capture these experiences in photos accompanied by narratives that explain how the photos highlight a theme. This process gives individuals the opportunity to speak out, to generate data for research, advocacy or communication purposes, which eventually can be used to reach out to stakeholders and spur positive change.

A Photovoice project: Not only about the pictures

A Photovoice project works around one central issue. This issue is represented in a carefully designed research question which exactly defines what to find out, test or evaluate. In Photovoice this question always aims to find something out about the individual; this derives from the view that Photovoice is a tool to give people a voice.

'Young people's involvement in programs relating their own sexual and reproductive health, could easily fade off the agenda of partner organisations in Ethiopia. A Photovoice project in Addis Abeba with 10 youth advocates managed to create attention to the indispensable power of youth involvement. 'How did your involvement benefit the program?' was answered with some striking pictures and personal messages.'

A Photovoice project helps you to:

- Give a voice to people with little or no opportunity to express their views within their own communities or to influence decisions that may affect their lives (such as young people).
- Build skills and empower marginalised or ignored groups so they can take control of their lives and become actively engaged in helping themselves.
- Gain insights into the (unintended or unexpected) changes resulting from interventions, from the perspectives of a selected group of stakeholders.



*'I am a peer educator. With my strong entertainment skills I can interact with people in a fun manner. This way I build trust for them to be more open for receiving SRHR- messages I want to share with them. Creating this youth-friendly vibe comforts them to also ask questions'.
Photovoice Ethiopia*



'Many girls that get unplanned pregnancies go to traditional healers. Often the boyfriends offer the girls herbs to terminate the pregnancy. The girl in the picture refuses these herbs believing it's unsafe. She learnt this from peer educators.'

Photovoice Malawi

Structure of a Photovoice project

Rutgers' Photovoice projects work according to a deliberate order of sessions: First participants learn to understand the basics of photography and photos (visual literacy) by watching, discussing and using the camera. Second, they start identifying the link between the Photovoice methodology and the research question through individual reflection. Third, they answer the research question by taking pictures, starting the individual selection process and making narratives. The for last session includes categorizing the pictures, making the group's final selection, and finalise the narratives. Last but certainly not least, the participants get the opportunity to create awareness with the results by organizing an exhibition for stakeholders.

When to use Photovoice?

Photovoice can be used for different goals:

- As a monitoring or evaluation tool: To research changes resulting from an intervention
- As a needs assessment or context analysis tool: To get insights into the current situation or to provide input in program/intervention development
- As a research tool: To answer a research question which may or may not be directly linked to a program/intervention
- As an advocacy tool: To provide input for a focussed advocacy topic
- As an awareness and empowerment tool: To have participants gain insight into their own situation and that of their peers, share this with others, and realise their ability to act on this.

Photovoice provides new insights in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

Since pictures provide persuasive and confronting evidence, and give more information than a thousand words, Rutgers piloted the Photovoice methodology in 2014 at a national level (within the 'Meer dan Macho'- campaign) and at an international level (within the UFBR, Unite for Body Rights, and ASK, Access, Services and Knowledge, programs).

Following its pilots, Rutgers adapted the Photovoice methodology to better serve the context of its work and its target groups, while maintaining the core structure of the formal Photovoice methodology.

Rutgers' approach of Photovoice has been applied and tested in urban and rural settings in Africa (Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Uganda and Tanzania) and Asia (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan), with groups of different participants (young people, adults, professionals, volunteers) with various social and educational backgrounds, in both research and advocacy projects in the field of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

Since Photovoice methodology, provided Rutgers with many new insights into the opinions and experiences of the involved groups, Rutgers wants to inspire other NGOs in the development field to use Photovoice as a new, creative and effective way to do participatory research, data collection and organisational or community capacity building. Additionally, the participants find it motivating, insightful and inspiring, a useful tool that many partners integrate into their own program activities.



[1] PhotoVoice.org; The PhotoVoice Manual; A guide to designing and running participatory photography projects, p.9

Want to know more?

Please visit our website for more information or contact us to be your partner in a custom made Photovoice project.

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For sexual and
reproductive health
and rights