

Photographs

by REFLECT

There are various ways of using cameras to bring the power of the photograph in to the Reflect process.

Why? Photographs have the ability to really grab our attention and get messages across quicker or with more impact than other means.

Newspapers rely heavily on photographs to attract and keep their readers engaged. It is logical then that as part of their analysis of communication and power, Reflect participants should explore the power of photography and, where possible, experiment with using the medium.

When? At any stage

How? Effective work on photographs will include both taking pictures, and analysing their use by others. A set of pictures compiled by the group, or the facilitator, from newspapers, magazines, posters etc, can be used to stimulate critical discussion, in particular questioning the apparent neutrality of photographic images. Looking through the pictures, the group might think about why particular images are used, why they are effective, how the framing might be used to emphasise particular points, and what might be hidden, or out of shot. Is this what our world really looks like?

Provoking analysis through photographs: Powerful work can be done with photos that capture local problems or contradictions. A well-chosen photograph can enable

A powerful photo that makes the point that photos speak louder than words.

Or someone using cameras in a village in a clearly participatory process.

people to see something everyday from a fresh perspective, with fresh eyes. Seeing something from a "distance" can actually be a means to see something more closely than ever before. This holds true even where the photograph has been taken by someone within the group. At first participants describe what they see and they are progressively asked to analyse the picture until they truly confront the issue and its role in their own lives.

Introducing cameras: Cameras can be used in many ways within a Reflect process – and with the availability of cheap, disposable cameras it is now easier than ever. The main costs will probably be in the developing and printing of films, although sharing this information with the group can help people to focus their minds on the careful selection and use of images. As digital cameras become cheaper this process can be much easier to manage.

When first introducing cameras to the Reflect group it can be good to let participants take a range of photos without much direction or guidance. These images can then be subjected to the same critical questions used above, encouraging discussion of

Children in Malawi

The NGO Photo Voice have done remarkable work with Vietnamese street children, giving them cameras and basic guidance in how to use them – and then mounting exhibitions of their work to challenge attitudes and prejudices of others. At first kids took photos of themselves in fantasy settings – posing on parked motorbikes etc. However, they soon moved on, taking images of personal significance which offered a real insight into their world. Each photo is analysed to explore – why was it taken? What do you think other people will see in it and what is its different significance for you? [see *PLA Notes 39*]

subject matter, framing and the qualities of a good photo. Ground rules might be drawn up for future reference about what types of photo work best, the reasons for taking photos and when not to take a photo.

Using cameras for documentary

purposes: Enabling participants to photograph their reality can be very powerful. This could be for the purposes of a local exhibition, which may aim to capture the everyday life of the community or a particular slice of life, for example parts of traditional culture that are being lost, or the world from a particular group's perspective. The group then need to agree the range of photos to be taken and selected for exhibition. Captions may also be added to the photographs, requiring more negotiation.

Using cameras for advocacy:

Photography can also be a useful tool for advocacy work, taking evidence of people's priorities or problems to those in power, to complement oral or written arguments. Posters showing key images, or mobile photography exhibitions can help to reach larger audiences and build mass support or awareness for a campaign. A good photo can also increase the chances of getting an article



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published in a newspaper (and read!).

Examples from Practice:

In Lesotho, Reflect facilitators are given cameras in order to record what is happening in their circle. They claim to have found this very empowering – as it enables them to document what is happening without having to write long reports. It also helps them to reflect on a different media of communication and related issues: what it means to have the power of framing a picture (what do you include and what not?) and the

power of editing (which photos do you show and why?).

Discussion of the photos can give great insight into the perceptions the facilitators have of their own circles and wider environments.

In Malawi Reflect trainers were given cameras to take photos of different literacy events or practices – to help them develop a sensitivity to the diverse ways in which literacy was used locally and the resources in the local environment that could help reinforce the Reflect process.