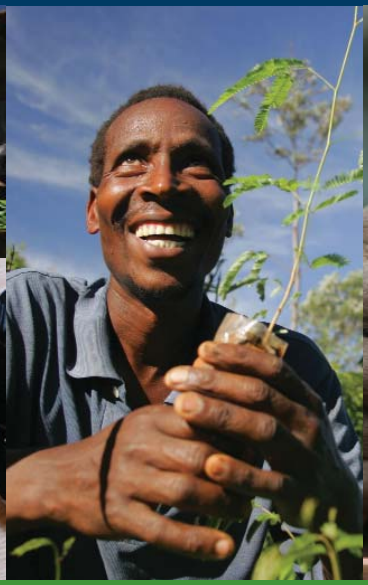





RIU
Research Into Use

THE FIELD GUIDE TO **PHOTOGRAPHY**

Forewords

Research Into Use

This guide was written for researchers, extension workers, project managers and anyone else who works in disseminating research results and on development projects. For us, it's about helping people over one of the key hurdles that they face when developing their own communications materials – a lack of photos.

RIU's overarching aim is to make sure that the tried-and-tested new technologies, practices and processes produced by decades of investment in agricultural and natural resources research in the developing world actually get put into use far and wide. A big part of this is going to involve better communications – and having access to reasonable photographic records can play a big part in improving communications. With the low-cost cameras available today and a bit of imagination, everyone should be able to do their bit by taking better pictures for their project or programme.

Dr Sheelagh O'Reilly
RIU's Impact Evaluation Team Leader

Scriptoria Communications

Lack of photographs to show off research, new products, or new technologies is a problem that we at Scriptoria run into time and time again. We've been designing communications strategies and writing documents for organisations for many years now, and very often the problem we find isn't that there are no photos at all. In fact, there are usually quite a lot of them. The real problem is that most of them can't be used because they are either too blurry or badly composed, or their resolution isn't high enough for printed publications.

That's why we were very pleased to work with RIU to produce this guide. Using the tips and tricks given in this book, you can easily take the photos your project needs to advertise its results to policy makers, donors, and the people who would benefit from the new development options available. So, pick up a camera and spend ten minutes reading this book. And, most importantly, have fun.

Dr Jim Weale
Director, Scriptoria Communications

Table of **Contents**

Why learn to take good photographs?	4
What makes a good photograph?	5
A good camera	5
Remembering what makes a good picture	6
How to take good pictures	7
Part 1: Taking control of the camera	7
Part 2: Composing like a pro	15
Part 3: Beyond the basics	22
Part 4: Shooting responsibly	23

Photo: S. Mann

Why learn to take good photographs?

The old saying is trite but true – one picture really is worth a thousand words. Why? Because of the following:

- A photo speaks all the world's languages
- It communicates even with people who can't read
- It speaks more clearly and less ambiguously than words
- It communicates a message quickly
- It connects on an emotional level
- It lets us share our experience with others
- It has a unique quality of authenticity.

Watch someone when they look at anything that has text and photos – whether it's a magazine, an annual report, a policy brief or a website. What do they do? They scan, their eyes continuously moving until they see an image, at which point they pause to glance at it and read the caption. If they're caught by what they see, then they sit down and start to browse the text. It doesn't work the other way around – very few people read the text before looking at the pictures. And the importance of images has only increased as the burden of information has grown – pictures are a useful cue to help people decide whether a document goes to the 'read' pile or the 'recycle' pile.

Why does this matter to researchers, extension workers and anyone else working in development? In other words, why does it matter to you? Because we need to inform people about our work, and doing so requires good pictures. You may be muttering that you're not a photographer. But when we visit project sites we wear many hats, and one of them should be 'photographer'.

Good photos of our work allow us to show it to clients, potential clients, partners, donors and the public – on the website, in brochures and reports, on posters and banners at meetings, and in the media. Good pictures help in fund raising, as they show donors what we're doing with their money.

Plus taking your own photos saves project resources – a professional photographer is an expensive luxury, and buying pictures from commercial providers usually costs a few hundred pounds per photo.


Photo: S. Mann

This picture is both visually and emotionally satisfying. It gives the feeling of witnessing a quiet loving moment between father and child. It's clear from the healthy child and well-fed cow in the background that this resource-poor farmer is earning a good enough living to support his family – which in turn supports the production techniques he is using around his farm.

With the simple, high-quality digital cameras available today, everyone can become a good-enough photographer. Think of the money you could save your programme and use elsewhere!

What makes a good photograph?

A good camera

To get really good photos, make sure that you have a reasonably good camera. This doesn't mean going out and spending £1000 (about US$2000) or more on a 'professional' camera. You don't need to. But, don't just buy the cheapest camera you can find.

If you want to take really excellent photos, then for as little as £400 (about US$800) you can buy a professional quality digital SLR camera which has all the professional settings, but also a full range of automated settings for beginners.

Basically, by setting the camera to its correct automatic setting using the dial on top (see the paragraph on *specialty modes* on page 7) and taking a little care composing your picture, you'll end up with photos that any organisation would be glad to have on the front cover of their annual report.

Of course you don't have to buy a digital SLR. If you follow the guidelines given in this handbook you'll be able to take some really good pictures just with the simple type of 'point-and-shoot' digital camera that most people have (most of which also have a dial with specialty settings). But, the point is don't be put off by thinking a professional quality camera would be too complex or difficult to use – because that just isn't true.

Photos: Scriptoria

At around £400 (US$800), a low-end, fairly cheap, and very easy-to-use digital SLR like this one is a key investment for any project. Using the dial on top of the camera you can set the camera to shoot in a range of situations, including fast-moving action (the picture of the runner), portraits (the head), and landscape (the mountains).

Remembering what makes a good picture

For a picture to do its work, it has to be a good picture – it has to communicate. In particular, a good photo:

- Gives important information
- Tells a story/gives a coherent message
- Creates emotion and a response
- Is inviting, and captures attention and attracts the reader
- Is in focus
- Is not too dark or too light
- Has a clearly visible subject
- Has no extraneous information to confuse or distract the viewer
- Has a pleasing composition.

Many a photo of a great subject has had to be binned because it was too blurry (out of focus), or over-exposed (too bright), or under-exposed (too dark), or had a resolution too low for reproduction (when printed the photo is blurry even though on the computer screen it looks fine), or had too much 'noise' (the pattern of coloured speckles you sometimes get on photos). And many a photo with perfect 'technicals' has had to be binned because its message wasn't clear, or the subject was too distant to be seen clearly or too close to give context, or simply boring to look at. However, it's easy to take pictures with both good 'technicals' and good subject matter if you follow a few key principles.

Photo: S. Mann

It's very clear what we're supposed to take from this well composed picture of a farmer and extension worker examining a crop. The balance in the picture avoids any intimation that the farmer is being lectured. Both are learning from each other. Plus placing the main subject in the right-hand third of the frame is more interesting than centering him (see *Composing like a Pro*, page 15).

Note that the photographer has got down at the same level as the subjects. If he or she were standing over them, this would be a much less interesting picture.

This photo doesn't do its job because the people are too far away to be seen. It's also washed out and not in focus, and it doesn't tell a story. If this picture is meant to illustrate the lives of fishers, it should show them fishing; if it's meant to show producers taking their goods to market it should show them loading their boat or paddling with the goods around them.

TIP: Checking for focus

Check periodically, and always on one-of-a-kind shots, that your pictures are in sharp focus: while in review mode with the photo on the LCD screen, keep pressing the zoom-in button till it won't go further, which blows up a small detail of the photo. If it's not sharply focused, you can be sure it will look even fuzzier when downloaded.

How to take good pictures

Part 1: **Taking control of the camera**

Before going to the field, spend an hour learning the basic functions of your camera. Digital cameras have two menus: one for the shooting/camera functions and one for reviewing/recording functions.

Take some time to scroll through the functions to learn what the camera can do and how to access its functions. The great thing about a digital camera is that you can see the photo as soon as you take it – no waiting to see how changing a setting changes the image.

Pay special attention to the camera's *specialty modes*. While many cameras don't let you set the shutter speed or aperture size, most have pre-programmed settings that do it for you. These settings can help you take better pictures of tricky shots. The *portrait* mode, for instance, sets a large aperture, which blurs out everything except what you're focused on, making it the centre of attention. The *action* or *children* mode sets a fast shutter speed to stop action which makes it easy to take great photos of people moving or in action. The camera manual will give details about the various modes.

With a low-cost digital SLR set to 'portrait' mode, even a complete beginner can very easily take a photograph like this. This mode means that the background is soft and out-of-focus, making the person really stand out.

(1) Keep the camera at a high-resolution setting

A digital image is a collection of pixels (or dots). The resolution of a photo is the density of pixels per inch. A high-resolution photograph has more total pixels, which translates into a larger file size (see table for details). The higher the resolution, the more information is recorded in the image and the sharper the image, allowing it to be reproduced at larger sizes. The most brilliant photo is worthless if its resolution is too low for reproduction. ***As soon as you take the camera out of the box, set it on a high-resolution setting and never change it.***

"Set your camera to take the best quality pictures possible"

To print clearly, a photo always needs to be at 300 dpi (dots per inch). Pictures taken on anything less than a high-resolution setting on your camera will be nearer to 96 dpi. So, they may look great on your computer screen, but they just won't print. You may be thinking that a camera set at a high resolution won't be able to hold many pictures.
That's not true, however.

File sizes, pixels and print

File size	Total (approx.) pixel dimension*	For prints of 300 ppi/dpi resolution, good up to:*	For web 72 ppi/dpi resolution, good up to:**
8 MB	**3264 x 2448**	**27 x 20 cm or 8 x 10 in**	**115 x 86 cm or 45 x 34 in**
10 MB	**3872 x 2592**	**32 x 22 cm or 8.5 x 12 in**	**136 x 91 cm or 53 x 36 in**
12 MB	**4000 x 3000**	**33 x 25 cm or 13 x 10 in**	**141 x 105 cm or 55 x 41 in**

* Estimated figures; may vary slightly depending on the camera.
** All these files are large enough for all Internet use; ppi = pixels per inch; dpi = dots per inch.


Photo: S. Mann

A shot like this can never be planned; it's a lucky moment caught by a photographer who had a camera at the ready. So, remember always to have your camera near at hand when visiting a site.

And you also need to remember that a lot of low-resolution photos are just no use. So have your project buy a few 2-gigabyte (GB) memory cards, which you can get for as little as £10 (about US$20) each if you shop around. And each will hold about 200 photos on a camera that records up to 10 MB resolution. These memory cards are about the same size as postage stamps, and weigh almost nothing – so they need no effort to carry.

To set the camera at the highest resolution, you must adjust two features usually found in the shooting/camera menu:

- **Image file size (picture size):** Set it to the highest number of megapixels (MP)
- **Image file format (picture quality):** This lets you set the compression of the image, and it should be set to the least compression. Every camera has a different name for this feature, but it will be something like: superfine/fine/normal (choose superfine), or possibly number of dots (the more dots the better). Also found here might be the type of file you want to record. Most cameras only record .jpeg/.jpg images. Another format option is RAW, but it is not recommended since it needs extra handling as a file after it is recorded and is very large.

Photo: S. Mann

TIP: Preserving battery life

There's nothing like trekking out to the bush to photograph a village's livestock project only to find your camera battery has no power. Prevent this problem by never leaving home without a spare battery, a charger and plug adapters so you can at least charge up regularly in a hotel or office (or at a pinch, in a restaurant or other public place).

If you're in a situation where you know you won't be able to charge the battery every day, preserve the charge by (1) turning off the LCD screen as well as all beeps and noises, and (2) using the camera's 'sleep' or 'auto-off' mode instead of constantly turning it on and off during a shooting session.

You can also now buy small fold-away solar panels very cheaply which you can use to recharge your camera (and your mobile phone etc.) while you're in the field. You can easily buy these over the internet.

TIP: Always remember to turn off the date stamp feature.

Taken with a point-and-shoot camera, this otherwise very useful picture of men and women at a training course or meeting is damaged by the date stamp, which the photographer has forgotten to turn off. Cropping the date out will damage the composition of this picture. What a waste.

(2) Hold the camera steady

Logic suggests that it should be easier to hold a light object steady than a heavy one. Strangely, the opposite is actually true. The newest digital cameras are so small and light that they fit in your pocket – an advantage for visiting field projects, but a disadvantage for getting good pictures because it's so hard to hold them steady.

'Camera shake', which blurs the photo, is probably responsible for ruining more photos than any other factor. It is a particular problem in low light, when the camera's shutter is open longer. Basically, if you take a photo indoors without a flash and don't use a tripod or rest the camera on a solid surface (like a pile of books), the photo will be blurred – even if it doesn't look blurred on the review screen on the back of the camera. Here's how to avoid camera shake:

- **Hold the camera firmly with both hands.** Grip it firmly but not too tightly. Tuck your elbows into your sides. If you're looking at the scene through the LCD, make sure you don't hold the camera too far away from your face – about 30 cm/12 inches is best.
- **Steady yourself and the camera against a solid object.** When possible rest the camera on a table or pile of books. If this isn't possible, then lean yourself or your elbows and/or the camera against a building or a post or a car. Keep your feet shoulder width apart to make yourself as steady as possible.
- **Hold your breath.** Just before you press the shutter, take in a deep breath and hold it till you've finished shooting the picture. This helps keep your body still.
- **Use a tripod.** If it's impractical to lug around a full-size tripod, for as little as £15 (about US$30) you can buy a tiny, flexible mini-tripod that will fit in your pocket, with legs that bend and twist to adapt to uneven surfaces. Sometimes called table-top tripods, these are especially useful in low-light situations when the shutter stays open longer.

(3) Work with the light

Shooting outdoors: Most project photography takes place outdoors. You may have little control over when and where you shoot, but keep these points in mind:

- Photos shot in the morning or late afternoon, when light is warmer and shadows are softer, are generally more pleasing than those shot at mid-day, when the light is harder and cooler and shadows are sharper. At dawn and dusk, the natural shadows give depth and form to the subject.
- Avoid shooting directly into the sun, as your subject will be in silhouette. Stand with the sun behind you or to the side. But…
- Avoid having human subjects face the sun, as it will make them squint.
- If you're shooting very early or late in the day when there's little light, camera shake will be more of a problem, so use a tripod or rest the camera on a solid object.
- The weather has an enormous impact on light. Keep in mind that a cloudy day is excellent for portraits because the light is more even and doesn't leave shadows on people's faces or make them squint. A rainy day opens the possibility of nice reflections. A sunny day is better for highlighting dramatic colours. Weather also affects the mood of the photo – the same scene taken on a soft, foggy day and a sunny day with hard light expresses very different feelings.

Shooting indoors: Use natural light whenever possible. Try to take advantage of light coming in a window or door, keeping it to your side, or turn up the available light. Flash creates harsh shadows and blows out details in the foreground; it should be used only if absolutely necessary.

Digital cameras are very good at taking pictures inside without a flash, but you might need to increase your ISO (see *Beyond the Basics*, page 22). The most important thing, however, is to be sure to keep the camera extra steady, since any movement from you or your subject can blur the image. So, when not using a flash indoors always either use a tripod or rest the camera on a steady surface.

You should also always take some photos with a flash when shooting indoors – just to make sure that you have some useable pictures if the ones shot without a flash are too blurred to use. Remember, it's very difficult to tell on the camera's reviewing screen if a picture is blurred. So, don't trust to that alone.

Using a flash: When using a flash, always remember the following:

- Position the subject within the limits of the flash – on most cameras, four to ten feet/120 to 300 cm.
- Avoid red-eye by having as much light in the room as possible (such as by turning up the lights) and asking people to look slightly away from the camera. Most cameras have a red-eye reduction feature. It's useful but tricky to use because it flashes off a light just before the picture is shot. This can confuse people into thinking the picture has been taken, leading them to move just as the picture is actually being shot, so warn people if you're using red-eye reduction.
- Some cameras have a 'fill flash' that throws some light on a specific area to highlight it even in daylight – useful especially for portraits to lighten dark shadows around the eyes.
- Always take the shot both with and without flash – if the non-flash picture works, you won't need the flash version.

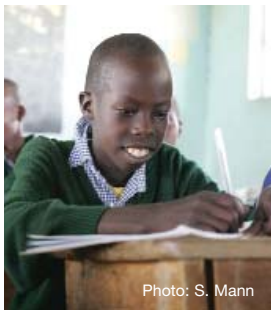
Shooting without a flash lets you take advantage of natural lighting to produce beautiful pictures. But the camera must be resting on something to hold it steady.

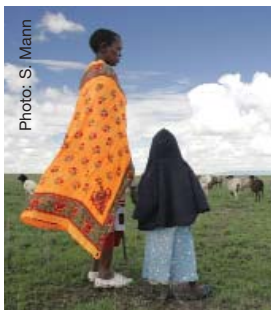
- Even when you're in a dark setting that calls for flash, turn it off under the following circumstances:
  - Where flash is not allowed or would be too disruptive – in which case be sure to rest the camera on something, or at least steady yourself against a wall and anchor your elbows at your side.
  - When you are too far away from your subject for the flash to be effective.
  - When the flash would create annoying reflections from mirrors and other shiny surfaces, such as someone's eyeglasses.
  - At sunset or in other low-light situations where you'd like a foreground subject to be silhouetted.
  - Where the quality of the existing light is beautiful, such as when your subject is in a sunbeam.
  - When in doubt try the shot both with and without flash if it's allowed.

Different types of lighting: Lighting is the single most critical factor in taking photos, and it's important to be aware of its source.

- High front light, which comes from behind the photographer, is generally best and easiest because it lights the scene evenly. But it can be boring because it lacks volume and depth.
- Side light is perfect for showing texture, dimension, shapes or patterns. At a 45-degree angle to the side, it's one of the most flattering ways to light a portrait.
- Back light, which comes from behind the subject, the trickiest to use. It puts the subject in silhouette and adds strong shadows in landscape shots. If you are an amateur photographer, it's often best to avoid taking pictures with the light behind the subject.

This picture is over-exposed, with too much light from the front. As a result, you can't see what is written on the farmer's sign.





(4) Make sure your photos are accessible

Your beautiful photographs will have many uses, and they need to be accessible. That is, people need to be able to find them, access them, and have the information they need to use them. These simple points will help:

- Write down basic caption information. Keep a notebook handy while you're shooting and write down the location and date, specific site and numerical range of shots. For instance: "11/15/07, Anand, Gujurat, cooperative dairy, shots 1-57". Be sure to get the proper spellings of anything that will need to be specified – whenever possible, photograph a sign or building that identifies it.
- If you're shooting people who will be named, have them write their names in the notebook in block letters so they will be spelled properly. Next to the name write an identifying visual detail that appears in a photo ('red sari') to help you identify the person when you're back in the office.
- Download the photos as soon as possible. Put them in a folder named with the date and place visited and your name (so people know who to credit). Burn them onto a DVD right away (other formats can be erased), but if that isn't possible immediately, at least copy them onto a memory stick or another computer to prevent disastrous losses.
- If you must send photos by email, send just one photo per message – high-resolution photos are big files, and sending more than one could exceed an email server's maximum allowable file size. In that case the message won't go through.
- Use an FTP (file transfer protocol) to transfer photographs – it's a quick and easy way to transfer very large files. Your organisation probably has an FTP site, so ask them to send you instructions. Or, you can use one of the free file transfer sites available online.
- Consider using a free, online photo sharing site to share your project pictures. Choose one that allows you to set your account so that only people you allow to join can view your photos. It must also allow you to organise your photos in folders (by country, crop, or type of livestock, for example). There are several such sites available online. This will allow you and your colleagues to easily see what photographic resources are available to the project. If you have a photo that other members of your project want to use in their documents, they can then email you to request it.

Part 2: **Composing like a pro**

Once you've got your camera settings right, done all you can to prevent camera shake and made sure you're well positioned vis-à-vis the light, all you need to do is compose a pleasing and coherent image. If you follow these guidelines, your pictures will be good. They may not be great art, but they will be more than sufficient to tell the story of your project for print and electronic publications.

(1) Frame the picture

One advantage of digital cameras is that pictures are free (you don't have to pay to develop them) and it's easy to delete the images you don't want. So, be sure to take lots and lots of photos. Moving just a bit can make a very different picture, so play around to get different compositions. Try taking several versions of the same subject from different angles. Here are the key elements to composing:

- **Choose a main point of interest.** Eliminate all extraneous information so viewers don't have to guess what they're supposed to look at, which is distracting. (If in doubt review the photograph on the LCD screen of your camera.) Experiment with zooming in and out and changing your shooting angle. Look carefully around the frame to make sure you've seen everything the picture will capture.
  Remember that you see three dimensions but the picture will have only two – that tree in the background behind your subject seems far away when you're shooting, but in the photo it could look like it's growing out of the person's head if you aren't careful. Fill the frame with your subject. But…
  - Don't crop so tightly that you lose context (you can only tell a man in a picture is a farmer, for example, if you can see the farm around him).
  - Also, leave a bit of room around the perimeter of the shot for cropping.
- **Observe the 'rule of thirds'.** Picture a grid on the viewfinder that has two equally spaced vertical lines and two horizontal lines, dividing the screen into nine squares. It seems logical to put the subject in the middle box, but in most cases this makes a boring photo. Instead put the subject at one of the points where the lines intersect, which will make the photo asymmetrical. You should also remember the following…


Photo: S. Mann

This photo breaks the rule of thirds, very successfully.

- **Break the rule too**. Take both a symmetrical shot and an asymmetrical shot of the same scene – it takes a nanosecond to move the camera and get the second shot.

TIP: Overcoming auto-focus

You've chosen your subject, and you want to place it off-centre, according to the rule of thirds. But, auto-focus cameras are pre-set to focus on what's in the middle of the lens, which means that your subject won't be in sharp focus.

Here's how to compensate: Move the camera so your subject is in the middle of the viewfinder and push the shutter halfway down (you may hear a little click). This sets the exposure. Now, keeping the shutter held halfway down, move the camera until the subject is where you want it and push the shutter down the rest of the way.

- **When there's a horizon line, don't place it in the middle of the picture.** A picture cut in half by a horizon line is static and boring (like this photo). Using the same imaginary grid of the rule of thirds, move the camera so the horizon is in the upper or lower third of the frame. Before pressing the shutter, double check to make sure it is perfectly straight – a slanting horizon ruins an otherwise good photo.

- **Adjust your angle of view.** Probably 90 per cent of photos are taken in a horizontal format by a photographer who's standing up and holding the camera five-and-a-half feet above the ground. Take the same picture from different perspectives:
  - Get down on the ground and shoot up. This will make the object look bigger.
  - Stand up on something and shoot down. This will make the object look smaller.
  - Take both horizontal (landscape) and vertical (portrait) pictures. Printed publications in particular need both types of shots.
  - Take shots through objects. Use things like archways, to frame the subject.
  - Get down on the same level as your subjects. Importantly, when you are taking pictures of people at a meeting, make sure you squat down or just sit on a chair and take some pictures from the same level as them. This is what makes meetings look interesting.

By taking a picture from below looking up, the photographer makes the viewer/reader feel that they are actually attending this training course or meeting.

Photo: Scriptoria

TIP: Photographing shy people

Many people, especially in cultures where cameras are not widely used, become self-conscious in front of the camera. If their shyness doesn't make them run from the camera, it's likely to make them pose stiffly. Here are some hints for getting them to loosen up:

- Bring along pictures of your life and show them to the project participants. An added benefit is that, by sharing your life with them instead of just asking them to share theirs with you, you underline your common humanity and help bridge understanding of other cultures.
- Don't start taking pictures the minute you meet people. Let them get used to you first. Then let them see you taking pictures of neutral things such as scenery before you turn the camera on them. Find a few people who are comfortable with the camera and make some quick shots of them. Then show the shots on the screen to everyone.
- Let the shy person take your picture and see it on the screen. (Caution: In a large group this can be problematic as everyone may want to have a chance.)
- Keep the camera out and visible and use it casually and frequently; if you seem uncomfortable with it, or slip it furtively in and out of your pocket, they will be uncomfortable too.
- Never force anyone to have their picture taken (see *Shooting responsibly*, page 23).

- **Avoid busy, distracting backgrounds and keep your compositions simple.** Especially if you're shooting a portrait, you don't want the background to draw attention away from your subject. Simple compositions are best – if you get too creative it distracts from the message you're trying to communicate.
- **Make pictures do double duty.** When photographing a group of people doing an activity, think about possibilities for close-ups. Take the group shot, then zoom in and shoot some individual faces or other details, such as arms holding objects or hands working.
  - Think about how pictures can be cropped (cut and resized by a designer). Remember that a close-up can be made out of a larger shot by cropping if the resolution is high enough to enlarge the detail sufficiently.
  - Remember to give yourself options. When you're shooting a meeting where people are working in groups, be sure to get some shots of every group. Then, if someone asks not to have their picture used, you still have other group shots to use. Also be sure to get some pictures from the front and back of the room to show all the groups interacting.
- **Look for repeating shapes.** A row of bins, a line of trees or fence posts, and a pile of potatoes can all be visually pleasing.
- **Include objects in the foreground.** Especially when shooting a landscape scene such as a crop field, include an object in the foreground (such as the trees in the photo opposite), which adds a

This photo is confusing because of the slant that's been introduced. Viewers don't know what they're supposed to focus on.

The repeating curvilinear lines of terracing make this an aesthetically pleasing photo. The trees in the foreground help us judge the size of these fields – without them the picture would be boring.

This picture of a young farmer pausing for a drink would be rather boring if it weren't for the bright red cup which draws attention to her smile and catches your attention – making it a very good picture.

Photo: S. Mann

Even a complete beginner can take an action picture like this using a low-cost digital SLR (your project may already have one). Just set the camera to the action or sport mode and make sure that it's set for 'continuous shooting' on its menu.
The camera will then take around 3 shots per second for as long as you hold the button down. So just shoot 10 or 15 pictures of a scene like this (i.e. hold the button down for 5 seconds). You can then just delete the ones you don't want.

sense of depth to the picture. A person in the foreground helps establish a sense of scale. Sometimes you can use foreground elements to frame the main subject. Overhanging tree branches, shrubbery to the side, a doorway or an arch can give a picture depth.

- **Look for shots of bright colour** and play with the contrast of shadows and sun (for example light streaming through the window of a barn).
- **Vary the distance from the subject.** Get different types of shots from different vantage points so that if you want your photos to tell a story, you're not stuck with all landscape shots and no details, or all close-ups and no context. Here are the four different types of shots you need to remember to take:
  - **Wide landscape shots:** Get photos of the entire scene for context.
  - **Medium distance shots with details:** Take medium-range pictures that show details of the different stages of the activity.
  - **Environmental portraits:** Get shots of an individual working (it's OK to ask them to hold their movement while you take the shot) or in their environment – a fisher mending a net, an extension agent helping a farmer plant seed. If you've got even a low-cost digital SLR you should be able to get striking shots of people at work and in action without having to ask them to stop and pose.
  - **Close-ups:** Take close-ups of people's and animals' faces and also of inanimate objects.

A close-up like a hand holding grain is a simple but effective way to show the essence of agriculture.

(2) Tell a story

Think of projects as stories with a beginning, middle and end, and don't forget to look for drama and humour. Our work is about people, so the vast majority of shots should include people. Use photos to make them come to life.

Let's say you're visiting a project that supported a women's cooperative to buy a fish smoker. The group has the smoker, and during your visit the women are going to smoke fish and sell them in the market. Get as many of these shots as possible:

- Wide landscape shots of the river or beach, the boats bringing in the catch, the cleaning and smoking area, the market.
- Medium-distance shots of the fish being unloaded, as well as the women cleaning the fish, putting them in the smoker and removing them, preparing them for market, the fish laid out at the market, shoppers buying them, the group cleaning up and chatting at the end of the day.
- Environmental portraits of individuals unloading the catch, working on the fish and selling in the market.
- Close-ups of some faces, as well as of the fish, the smoker, boats, hands at work.

Try to avoid too many static shots:

- At meetings, minimise the number of 'grip and grin' pictures you take of people shaking hands. Instead try to get candid shots of people interacting in workshops. If there's a bit of blur because someone is excitedly waving their arm as they make a point, all the better – it highlights the dynamism of the meeting.
- If you need a shot of one person, try to catch them while they're talking to someone instead of having them simply pose staring at the camera.
- When you want a shot of a small group working together, set up the shot from behind them. When you're all ready to shoot and your finger is on the shutter, call out to them so they turn their heads and look at you over their shoulders, and immediately shoot the picture. This helps

preserve the spontaneity of their expressions, and it's a much more natural look than having everyone lined up facing the camera.

Don't wait for a candid shot when you need a photo to say something specific. Set up shots to communicate important points. For example:

- If one field was fertilized and an adjacent one was not, and this is visually obvious from the height or fullness of the growing crops, take a picture down the middle, so one side shows the larger plants of the fertilized field and the other the smaller plants of the unfertilized field.
- If use of fertilizer increased crop yield by a factor of three, dramatize the improvement by setting up a picture of a farmer standing between two piles of bags filled with the crop – a pile with nine bags on one side and three bags on the other.

This is a nice attempt at a candid shot of a group at work, but it's washed out by the flash. Also, the group in the background distracts our attention from the five men we're meant to be looking at

A powerful story is told by a picture like this with a caption like 'using the new system, families were able to grow enough rice to fill two sacks, on land that previously only yielded one.'

TIP: Compensating for shutter lag

Auto-focus cameras have an annoying delay between the time when you press the shutter and the time when the shot is taken. Even with the faster response of newer cameras, it's still common to miss the action because whatever was happening when you pressed the shutter is finished by the time the exposure is made. The solution is to pre-focus. Set up the shot and press the shutter halfway down, which sets the focus. Reframe the image, holding the shutter down, and when you see the action you want, press the shutter the rest of the way – it will take the picture without the delay. Practice to get comfortable with how this works.

(3) Relax and have fun

Learn how to take a good photo – but don't be intimidated. Today's digital cameras are very forgiving, and they include many features aimed at helping you look like a 'real' photographer. If you relax, remember the basics and shoot a lot of photos, your pictures will get better and better. And keep in mind the words of Henri Cartier-Bresson, one of the most famous photographers of all time:

"Of course, it's all luck"

Photo: S. Mann

Part 3: **Beyond the basics**

You'll be able to take really good pictures with the automatic settings on your camera. But on most cameras, even point-and-shoots, it's possible to adjust to different lighting situations if you need to.

- **ISO:** This is how sensitive the image sensor is to the amount of light present. The higher the ISO number, the more sensitive the image sensor and therefore the easier it is to take pictures in low light. But the higher the ISO, the lower the image quality and the greater the 'noise' (coloured speckles).
  Find out how to adjust the ISO on your camera. Keep it set at ISO 100, except in low light, when you might want to increase it to ISO 400. Most point-and-shoot cameras do not record well higher than ISO 400.
- **Aperture:** This is the diameter of the lens opening. The larger the aperture, the more light reaches the image sensor, but a larger aperture also decreases the depth of field, meaning less of the image will be in focus. Many point-and-shoot cameras have an aperture priority (AV) feature, which can be used in low light or to make the background out of focus (as in portraits). If in doubt use the automatic feature.
- **Shutter speed:** This is the how fast the shutter opens and closes. The faster the shutter speed, the more you can stop action (for example, take a picture of someone running). Most point-and-shoot cameras will not let you adjust this feature.

Therefore if you want to stop action (such as when people are moving) you can do so by raising the ISO number and lowering the aperture number.

- **Flash:** The flash can be used in low light or as fill-in when outdoors to lighten strong shadows on the subject, especially on faces. Avoid flash when possible since the light can be harsh and unattractive.
- **White balance (WB):** All light has what's sometimes called a 'colour temperature'. Daylight is the whitest (a flash mimics daylight); early morning and afternoon has a slight blue cast; night is blue until completely dark; a regular light bulb has a yellow/orange cast; and tungsten light has a green cast. White balance tells the camera what should be white in the picture. The camera can calculate the difference between the current colour temperature and the correct colour temperature of a white object and then shift all the colours by that difference. Most cameras have a good auto white balance (AWB) feature. Set the camera to AWB (usually found in the camera menu). If picture colour is way off, you can adjust the WB setting to match the light. Take a sample picture and review it on the LCD screen to tell the difference.

Part 4: **Shooting responsibly**

Photographs of our work fall into the category of documentary (as opposed to commercial) photography, meaning that our pictures document real people and real situations. The ethical aspects of photographing development projects are just as important as the technical and compositional aspects.

(1) Respect people's dignity

By definition, the people we are photographing are poor and relatively powerless, which makes it all the more important to treat them with dignity and respect. Images of the poor as passive and beaten-down recipients of aid from benevolent outsiders are pervasive in the media. These images are insulting, and they have reinforced negative and dishonest stereotypes of poor people as lacking the intelligence and ability to improve their situation. Equally insulting is the opposite image – the stereotype of the happy, simple-minded native.

We have an obligation to be honest and should never use our photos to whitewash a situation. But given the preponderance of images that exaggerate hopelessness, it is our responsibility to show hope and avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes. To acknowledge both sides of the reality, we need to show the hardship in a respectful, even-handed way that condemns the situation without blaming it on the victims, and to show the efforts for change that


Photo: S. Mann

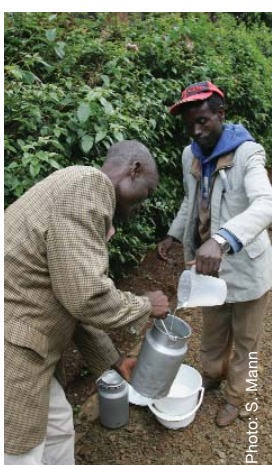


Photo: S. Mann


Photo: S. Mann

reflect the contributions of both those affected and those helping. When setting up shots:

- Look for photos that show people as powerful, involved and active participants in projects.
- Avoid an excess of photos of people wearing torn and dirty clothes and appearing as passive recipients of aid.
- Avoid pictures that perpetuate the stereotype of aid providers as wise outsiders and recipients as ignorant natives.
- Avoid images suggesting that all aid providers are white-skinned and all recipients are brown-skinned.

You may be thinking, "But the people we're helping ARE ragged and beaten down and brown-skinned, and it's dishonest to pretend otherwise." This is not to suggest that we should present false images. But photography involves countless choices, and the choices should always be based on preserving people's dignity, showing respect and presenting a balanced view of a situation.

(2) Respect people's privacy

People who are poor and receiving help from outsiders may not feel they have the autonomy to refuse something requested by a person seen to be in authority – such as the request to take their picture. And if photography is not common to their cultural or social milieu, they may not fully understand what a photo is or how it will be used.

Even if you ask permission to take a photo, in such cases the person's consent may not be fully informed – there is a big difference between a photo for a project document and one that will be used for advertising/Internet pages. Try to learn or understand the culture and customs of the country/site beforehand so you'll know what is and is not acceptable. It is your responsibility to make an ethical decision as to whether taking the photo is legitimate.

- If someone asks you not to photograph them, do not.
- If a photo could embarrass someone, even if they don't ask you not to take the picture, do not. Example: A photo inadvertently reveals a person's underclothes or too much skin.
- If a photo could endanger someone, even if they don't ask you not to take the picture, do not. Example: A picture that identifies someone as having HIV, which could cause them to be ostracized (and also invades their privacy).
- Never take someone's picture stealthily.
- If someone asks for a copy, make sure you get their name and address – and be sure to send the picture as quickly as possible after the event.

Always ask yourself: **"*If that were me or my loved one, would I want this photo taken and distributed?*"**

(3) Protect children

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the best interests of the child must be considered in any action involving children. The Convention also pledges children's right to participate in decisions affecting them, to be protected from exploitation and abuse, and to have their identity respected.

Due to their immaturity, it is almost impossible for children to knowingly give consent to having their photograph taken. This makes it difficult to determine whether a particular depiction respects a child's right to an accurate and dignified portrayal, and the burden is on the photographer to do everything possible to respect that right.

Therefore, as a general rule, avoid photographing children or using children's images unless there is a fully transparent reason for doing so, such as depicting a school lesson or similar event, where children are the primary focus of the activity. When there is a clear justification for using a child's photograph, it must be guided by these rules:

- The depiction must be honest, respectful and protective.
- The photographer (or someone knowledgeable and respected from the community) should explain to the child and the child's parent or legal guardian why the photograph is being taken and how it will be used. If the guardian does not fully understand what he or she is agreeing to, the consent cannot be seen as informed and the photo should not be taken or used.

Always ask yourself: ***If this were my child, would I want this photo taken and distributed?***

(4) Don't 'borrow' other people's photographs (it counts as stealing)

The moment a photo is taken, it is copyrighted. Even if the photographer does not register the photo with the copyright office, it is legally copyrighted and cannot be used without permission/payment. It may seem benign to download an image from the Internet for use in a training handout for a development project, but it is illegal. And it is equivalent to asking someone to work without pay, which is professionally offensive. So, ask permission. And, remember the following:

- Many photographers and organisations will donate one-time use or reduce permission fees for non-profit organisations.
- Whether or not you are required to pay for a photo, be sure to credit the photographer in the publication.
- Check the copyright – for instance a number of people now use 'Creative Commons' software to enable wide but credited free use of photographs.


Photo: S. Mann


Photo: S. Mann

Photo: S. Mann

(5) Avoid manipulating the content on the computer

Digital photography blurs the line between maximizing technical quality and manipulating content. Once a photo is downloaded, it's technically possible to crop or lighten or darken it, and this is fine.

However, it's also technically possible to modify a subject's features, or to move, remove or insert objects – and this is often not legitimate. Documentary photography assumes authenticity. No matter how much it might enhance the visual quality or strengthen the message of a photograph, it's not permissible to do things like:

- Remove or insert (in a way that makes it appear part of the original picture) a logo or slogan or commercial brand
- 'Clean up' someone by removing dirt or whitening teeth (or 'dirty' them to engender more sympathy).

Photo: S. Mann

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