PhotoVoice

Statement of Ethical Practice

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1   Introduction

Ethical issues arise as an everyday part of participatory work with vulnerable groups, especially when the resulting images are used publicly. PhotoVoice sees a range of issues arising repeatedly across different projects. If these issues are not given due consideration, prior to as well as during a project, there is the potential for the project to do more harm than good. The purpose of this document is to:

- highlight the full range of potential issues that might arise in a project
- make others, particularly funders, facilitators and partner organisations, aware of the typical ethical issues that arise
- demonstrate the standards that PhotoVoice regards as responsible practice
- create a framework for discussing and agreeing procedures for managing ethical issues.

- PhotoVoice believes that being open and alert to these issues and allowing time for discussion and reflection is the best starting point for good practice. PhotoVoice incorporates ethical considerations into its initial assessment of a project.

This document outlines five broad core principles of good practice which span all PhotoVoice's work. It then sets out seven further areas of concern, detailing related guiding standards of practice that we use within our own projects. This document is not prescriptive as there are few one-size-fits-all ethical standards, just as there are no one-size-fits-all projects. Ethical decisions need to take into account the particulars of the individual or group involved, as well as the immediate and broader context.

2   Background to PhotoVoice and participatory Photography

PhotoVoice works with a wide variety of marginalised groups around the world. We have ten years' experience and expertise in designing and delivering tailor-made participatory photography projects to provide a voice to hard-to-reach groups.

Terminology - PhotoVoice is committed to working with groups who are excluded from mainstream provision, policies and opportunities. We use the terms vulnerable and marginalised as a planning concept rather than as a means to engage participants. We acknowledge that these terms are politically charged, and that it's important to understand the wider causes of vulnerability as well as the individual symptoms. Equally important, we recognise that no group is homogenous in its needs.

Representation - In our projects we aim to allow group members to define and represent themselves and to frame the issues that affect them. We always acknowledge and support individual voices, and recognise that a person's situation will affect the nature of their participation. Therefore, we work flexibly and adapt project design and methodology on a project-by project basis in order to suit the needs of participants and the project context. The guiding ethos of our work is to use photography to build skills and confidence, and to act as a platform for participants to represent themselves and document their views and ideas to others.

We recognise that participation in projects can have contradictory effects. Like most social interventions, PhotoVoice projects use social categories of need to define the groups we work with. This helps us to identify and reach communities and to adapt our methodology appropriately. However, for the participant this can bring an unwanted social label. It is often the very label that groups look to challenge through their photography. PhotoVoice projects aim to support groups to challenge traditional/negative representations and put forward alternatives

The project process - The participatory photography process centres around taking photographs, but also incorporates a broad range of elements beyond 'pressing the shutter'. It involves learning to express opinions, to interpret and discuss images, to work as part of a group, to listen to others, to develop ideas and a voice, to edit and caption images, to identify and define audience and messages – deciding what pictures to take and for whom. All these elements are an equally important part of the process and the route to self-expression and advocacy.

PhotoVoice's projects begin by building participation and photography skills, allowing the group to develop and participants to gain confidence. This part of a project focuses on workshops, with the taking and sharing of images

typically restricted to the group, project staff and immediate family or community. Advocacy-based projects go on to develop a public communications dimension, in which photographs are taken for and viewed by a wider, public audience in order to influence attitudes or policies. This may be in the form of an exhibition, display, slideshow, book, and website or through the media. The relationship between the relatively private and more public aspects of a project is a dynamic and delicate one, which requires careful balancing.

3 Core Principles

3.1 CHOICE
PhotoVoice always provides participants with clear choices about the content of their work including the right to withdraw from part or all of project activities, at all times.

3.2 CREATIVITY
PhotoVoice believes that creativity is the lifeblood of participatory photography projects. The creative space needs to be protected and respected for projects to flourish.

3.3 PARTNERSHIP
PhotoVoice always works in partnership with a local organisation that is engaged in long-term development work with the participant group; that understands its needs; can provide ongoing support to participants throughout the project; and that is committed to the participatory process.

3.4 SUSTAINABILITY
PhotoVoice aims to build projects that are sustainable and have long-term impact beyond our direct involvement. This is achieved by training and building the capacity of locally based staff and facilitators, building localised project networks and supporters, ensuring equipment continues to be available, and building sustainability measures into project design and activities. PhotoVoice has established an archive and bursary scheme to create long-term support and income generation opportunities for projects.

3.5 CULTURAL SENSITIVITY
PhotoVoice aims to ensure that all its projects are culturally sensitive and appropriate. We aim to work with and train local photographer facilitators where possible; use locally-relevant images; use culturally sensitive codes of behaviour and language in workshops; and be sensitive to local customs around image content and image taking.

4 Key Areas of Ethical Concern

4.1 PROTECTION
The protection of participants' best interests is of paramount importance throughout all phases of a project.

4.1.1 **Risk** - Participation in a project can entail a level of risk for participants. The risk varies depending on individuals and circumstances, and can be emotional, psychological, political, economic, cultural, social or physical. PhotoVoice aims to provide a workshop space which is sensitive to these factors, and which can be enjoyed as a safe space by participants.

4.1.2 **Ground Rules & Stakeholder Mapping** - All PhotoVoice workshops begin by setting project ground rules. These rules reflect expectations and standards from all sides around behaviour and participation. This process involves PhotoVoice, the partner, facilitators, support workers and participants. PhotoVoice will undertake analysis of the relevant local, national and other key stakeholders to ensure that the project context is well understood, and that the outcomes of the project reflect and contribute to the wider context in which it operates.

4.1.3 **Choices -** PhotoVoice workshops, based on consultation with the partner organisation and project participants, usually follow broad themes. The themes act as a framework for participants to explore ideas and develop a personal creative voice. In the case of advocacy based projects, the themes are often issue-based. PhotoVoice supports participants to express their feelings, ideas, opinions and experiences in relation to these issues. No participant ever experiences pressure to produce particular content or reveal material that they would prefer to remain private and no participant is ever required or obliged to create work based on events in their lives. Choices over content are regularly reviewed and discussed.

4.1.4 **Caution** - When working with individuals who have experienced trauma or mental illness, caution is exercised to ensure participants are emotionally protected, particularly if they are producing work based on personal experiences. There should be a trained support worker available at all times, to provide participants with professional guidance if needed.

4.1.5 **Confidentiality** - All projects should be undertaken in the spirit of confidentiality with the understanding that anything discussed in the workshop is private to the group. It should be noted that in practice it is not realistic to guarantee confidentiality to participants.

4.1.6 **Anonymity** - Some participants want their identity in the project to remain anonymous. PhotoVoice offers participants a range of options to protect their identities. However, it isn't possible to guarantee anonymity as other participants can disclose participant identities.

4.1.7 **Child Protection** - Full child protection policies and procedures should be in place and followed at all times. All photographers and facilitators on the project will have received a full CRB check, and training in protection procedures.

4.2 **WELL-BEING**
The promotion of participants' well-being is the principal concern of all projects.

4.2.1 **Managing Expectations** - It is important that a project doesn't unrealistically raise participants' expectations. From the outset participants need to know the timetable, the end point, and what the project is likely to mean for them in concrete terms. They should never to be led to believe that their circumstances will be dramatically or immediately changed by being involved..

4.2.2 **Closure** - It is important to provide a sense of closure to a project. Group bonds can become strong and the sense of group identity important. Projects should provide activities that are specifically geared towards preparing participants for the end of the project.

4.2.3 **Exit Strategies** - There should be planned exit strategies for all participants who are interested in continuing their photography, and opportunities for them to participate in any appropriate/ available support networks.

4.2.4 **Equal Opportunities** - Projects can contribute to uneven access to resources at a community level. This can create tensions, when some people have access to project benefits and others don't. While such problems can't necessarily be avoided, it is important that they are not over-looked.

4.3 **CONTROL AND DECISION-MAKING**

Participatory projects are a meeting point for multiple agendas including those of participants, facilitators, funders and partner organisations. It is important that key project decisions are discussed, that decision-making is transparent, and that the interests of participants are prioritised at all times.

4.3.1 **Exit Strategies** - There should be planned exit strategies for all participants who are interested in continuing their photography, and opportunities for them to participate in any appropriate/ available support networks.

4.3.2 **Information** - Participants should be provided with clear and regular information about the project, its purpose, key activities and about image use. Any pre-agreed objectives should be communicated simply and clearly to participants from the outset.

4.3.3 **Ownership** - Many projects culminate in a public or targeted exhibition of participants' work. This is an exciting time in a project, when participants feel a sense of pride and validation. But it can also bring tensions and pressure. There are natural anxieties about public exposure; detailed decisions around editing and image use; protection considerations; and wider issues about communications and public messages. It is important that participants remain informed, engaged in the decision making process, and retain a sense of ownership over their work.

4.3.4 **Informed consent** - Participants are required to give their informed consent around image use. PhotoVoice views consent as a process rather than a one-off decision or paper exercise and acknowledge that a notion of 'informed' consent is complex. We discuss image use and purpose and offer choices through out the project. One-to-one sessions with participants are a key part of this process.

4.3.5 **Copyright** - Copyright is owned exclusively by the participants. All PhotoVoice project participants are asked to sign a consent agreement, which states in simple language the different options for consent around image use. Participants will be given guidance in their choices by the partner organisation, and where appropriate by an external party with relevant expertise, to ensure that due consideration is given to protection issues. Consent is also sought from parents / guardians for participants under the age of 18. There will be cases in which individuals are not able to give appropriately informed consent. In these cases their images will not be shown publicly. Participants have the right to withdraw their usage permissions and their images from the PhotoVoice archive at any point.

4.3.6 **Income -** Clear guidelines for income generated through the sales of participant's images and the procedure for remittance of income must be established at the onset of a project. PhotoVoice's practice is to remit 50% of all income made from image and prints sales to the individual photographers within three years of project completion. Where this is not possible or appropriate, the funds are put towards the continuation of project activities that will directly benefit the community. PhotoVoice cover all production costs out of their 50% income.

4.4 **PUBLIC EXPOSURE**

Projects which have a public element to them bring rewards as well as risks. It is the responsibility of PhotoVoice and the partner to put participants' well-being and safety first.

4.4.1 **Protection -** It is vital that participants are given an understanding of the public environment in which their work will be displayed, as well as the potential consequences and impact – positive and negative – of their work being seen in public. All participants need to be provided with clear choices about whether and how their work is seen in public. There are cases where public exposure can jeopardise a person's safety, well-being, or entitlement to privacy. PhotoVoice offers participants a range of options and methods of protection. We always work closely with the partner organisation in advising participants in their decisions.

4.4.2 **Media** - A project with a public dimension often attracts media attention. The media may have its own agenda and ideas about how to represent a project and the participants. Engaging with the media requires a very careful and sensitive approach. It is important to allow time to discuss media work with participants, and to explore the risks and benefits. Participants should never experience pressure to do media work or interviews. A participant who is interviewed by the media in any format (online, in print, broadcast or other) needs to always be appropriately prepared and supported.

4.4.3 **Support** - Public exposure can be a thrilling experience for participants. Once it is all over, there can be a sense of disappointment and frustration if nothing material has changed. It is important that the participants are well supported thorough the process.

4.5 **FACILITATION**

A facilitator is many things: educator, motivator, negotiator, guide, artist, role mode and mentor. They are often the lynchpin of a project, acting as the interface between the project management and the participants.

4.5.1 **Professional** - A facilitator is skilled in the methodologies of participatory photography, and may have limited knowledge of the issues that affect the participants. A good facilitator will be open, flexible and supportive towards participants, and will always maintain clear professional boundaries. A facilitator should be aware of their professional limits and not adopt the role of a therapist or social worker to participants.

4.5.2 **Skills -** The participatory process requires constant nurturing and support from facilitators. As far as possible, PhotoVoice uses at least two facilitators per workshop – one of who may be from the partner organisation – so that they can provide support to each other and to the group. PhotoVoice always employs a lead facilitator with proven experience of using participatory photography techniques with vulnerable groups.

4.5.3 **Training -** A professional facilitator will be unbiased in their relationships with the group, sensitive to group dynamics, and aware of his/her own feelings towards the group. PhotoVoice is committed to supporting facilitators throughout the project. We provide pre-project training, which includes techniques for responsible, self-aware practice. We also provide ongoing opportunities for facilitators to reflect on their practice, and discuss any emotional or personal issues arising out of the project.

4.6 **PROJECT PARTNERS**
A strong, open partnership between PhotoVoice and its partner organisation is the foundation for a successful project. PhotoVoice always works with partners that are committed to the participatory ethos and process and that can provide support to project participants throughout the project and beyond.

4.6.1 **Support -** Participation needs support from not just from facilitators but from a project worker who knows the group and whom the group can trust. The partner organisation should designate a member of staff as responsible for the project and there should be a support worker available for workshops and meetings with participants.

4.6.2 **Participants** - Facilitators treat participants first and foremost as creative individuals. Facilitators do not generally need to know personal details about participants, but it is useful if they have a broad understanding of the group's needs. The project partner should provide PhotoVoice with background information about the group before the project begins.

4.6.3 **Follow up -** Participation in a project can give rise to a range of new feelings and aspirations. The partner organisation will often lead on planning for any follow-up support needed as a result of participation during the project, including identifying potential suitable support networks.