

# PHOTOVOICE GUIDELINES

SIMPLE STEPS TO INVOLVE CHILDREN IN NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

SUMMARY BRIEF



PHOTOVOICE  
GUIDANCE

10 SIMPLE STEPS TO INVOLVE CHILDREN IN  
NEEDS ASSESSMENTS



Save the Children

The complete photovoice guidelines document containing more details of practical application of the approach in Bangladesh can be accessed at: <http://bit.ly/1sQbRNV>

# Introduction

Children's participation and accountability are part of Save the Children's core values. They refer to children having the opportunity to express a view, influence decision-making and to contribute towards achieving change. Children's participation relates strongly to the HAP (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership) Standard for Accountability and Quality Management, insofar as it involves giving children the power to share their perspectives, which we have an obligation to consider in order to improve the quality and appropriateness of our programmes.

Although the principles of children's participation and accountability are not new, and we are already promoting children's participation and accountability to varying degrees, there continues to be a need to embed innovative and participatory tools into our 'ways of working' throughout the project cycle. This guidance document has been designed to introduce you to one such tool, namely Photovoice, and provides you with 10 simple steps to deliver and facilitate children's participation through Photovoice. This Photovoice Guidance is primarily aimed at country-level Save the Children staff and partners responsible for implementing development or humanitarian programmes. It brings together practical and tested 'how-to' guidance from colleagues in Bangladesh (Save the Children, 2014a, b). It will include key learning points from their experience. This summary brief is a synthesis of the key points and stages of the process. The full report with details of the process in action is available upon request and can be accessed on the Save the Children Bangladesh website [<http://bit.ly/1sQbRNV>].

## What is Photovoice?

Photovoice is a participatory action research methodology that was coined by Caroline Wang in the 1990s. She describes Photovoice as a methodology that enables people to identify, represent and enhance their community and life circumstances through photography. It is a process that "entrusts cameras to the hands of people to enable them to act as recorders, and potential analysts for social action and change, in their own communities. It uses the immediacy of the visual image and accompanying stories to furnish the evidence and to promote an effective, participatory means of sharing expertise to create healthful public policy" (Wang and Buris 1997).

## Why is Photovoice useful?

Research suggests that Photovoice can contribute to the self-development of participants through fostering recognition of the need for change, improved self-awareness of local circumstances, personal worthiness and confidence, as well as awareness of social resources and problem-solving abilities.

### Used well, Photovoice can:

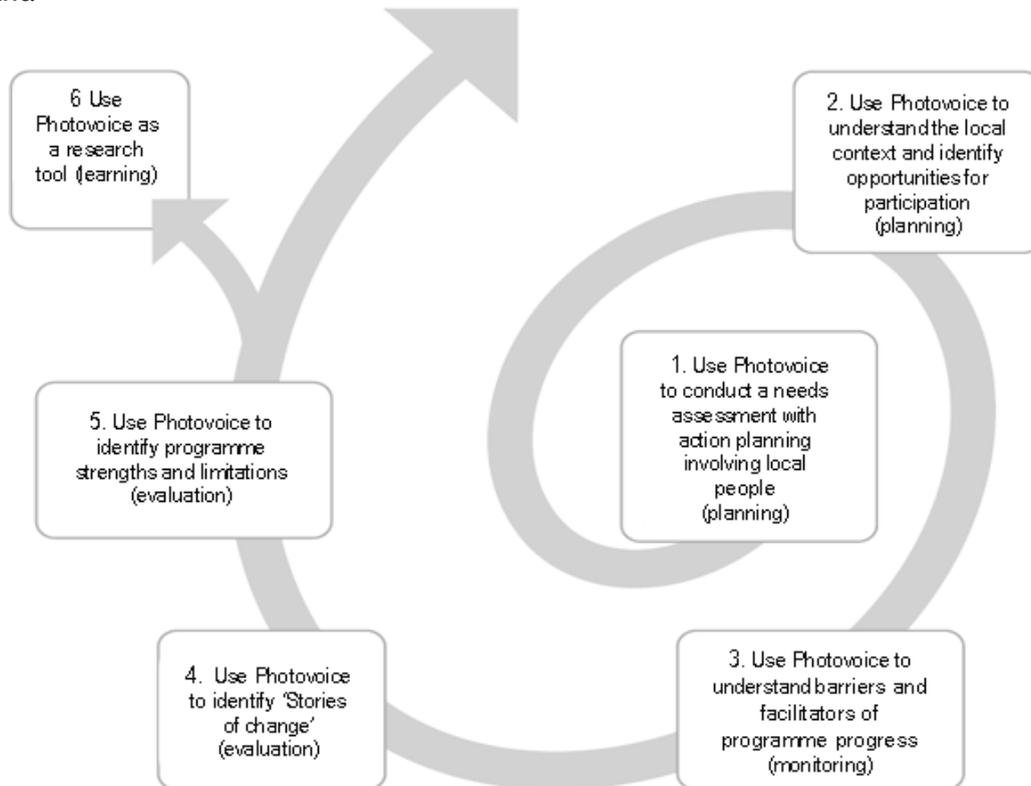
- Provide a perspective of a situation from the point of view of those who are affected but are not in control of resources
- Provide powerful visual descriptions to communicate to stakeholders, including Save the Children.
- Include the most vulnerable/excluded (e.g. illiterate)
- Be used to redefine programme goals
- Capture not only needs but also assets and strengths
- Be used at all stages of the programme cycle
- Improve programme quality and impact, but **only** if we take children's voices seriously and respond accordingly.

## Photovoice in the programme cycle

Photovoice projects can be delivered and facilitated at various stages of the programme cycle. As depicted in Figure 1, this includes at the **planning stage**, where Photovoice can be used as a needs assessment tool and to develop a deeper understanding of the context in which a programme is implemented. In addition to understanding children's needs, this might include an analysis of children's coping strategies, giving us an insight into the innate resources and support structures that we will need to strengthen. Obtaining children's voices at the planning stage can effectively ensure a programme targets the articulated needs of children and resonates with their lived realities. Photovoice can also be used at this stage to re-define what success and impact looks like, transforming monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

During the **implementation stage**, Photovoice can be used to understand barriers and facilitators to programme success and impact. Photovoice can enable children to depict and communicate any potential unintended consequences of a programme, requiring Save the Children to respond and make the necessary changes. Similarly, Photovoice can be used to understand the facilitators of programme success, encouraging Save the Children to do more of ‘what works’.

At the **evaluation stage**, Photovoice can be used to provide children with the opportunity to depict and describe stories of change. These stories can refer to both positive and negative changes as well as those more or less significant.



**Figure 1: Using Photovoice in the programme cycle**

At any point during the programme cycle Photovoice can be used as a **research tool**, advancing our understanding of a particular area. If Photovoice is used at all stages of the programme cycle, it can also serve the purpose of **monitoring progress**.

## Planning and Design

Photovoice is a complex process that requires a variety of different skills, knowledge and resources. To design a Photovoice project that is feasible in a given context, with sufficiently concrete and clear aims and objectives, there is a need to foster team work and discussions between a variety of stakeholders.

### Setting up a team

Depending on the scale and aims of your project, you might consider setting up different teams with specific objectives. These might include (i) a **reference or advisory group**, which can be used to involve key stakeholders, decision-makers and the target population that is the focus of the project (ii) a **project team**, responsible for design and implementation and (iii) a **monitoring and evaluation team** to ensure that the project is accountable to the target population and to donors.

### Selecting participants and a setting

Participants can be selected in many different ways but it is important that the criteria match the target group as set out in the project aims and objectives. Strategies to recruit participants might include (i) **random sampling** where you

randomly select a group of participants from a population (ii) **purposeful sampling** where you purposefully select a group of participants either because you can do so in a way that is convenient, or because you want to learn something that requires you to purposefully select participants based on their background and (iii) **stratified sampling** is good for projects that want to compare and contrast the responses of different target groups. You may for example want to compare the voices of boys or girls, or between children from different communities. It can help to work with local partner organisations in the recruitment of participants. Their knowledge of the local setting and of Save the Children can ensure there is a good fit between the participants and Save the Children. You can also recruit through educational establishments, sports associations, community-based and faith-based organisations to mention a few.

## Ethical considerations

Due to the public nature of photography, it is important that a number of ethical considerations be made when using Photovoice. These include not intruding into one's private space, not disclosing embarrassing facts about individuals, not giving participants a false impression and being aware of how local people will react. These ethical considerations can be ensured by:

- Making sure participants are adequately trained and sensitised
- Draw pictures where photos might reflect badly on an individual, infringe on their privacy or disclose something embarrassing about them
- Sensitise local communities on the Photovoice project, including aims and objectives
- Increase transparency about the project and the role of Photovoice participants
- Provide prints of the photographs to participants and those who appear in the photos
- Conduct a risk assessment to map potential risks in the project

Ethical considerations can be strengthened by using formal consent forms such as:

- **Informed content** involves full disclosure of the aim, objectives and potential risks/benefits to the Photovoice participants (the photographers) as well as reassuring that they have the right to withdraw at any point in the project.
- **'Model' consent** is an agreement between the Photovoice participant (the photographer) and the persons who appear in the photo (the 'models'). It seeks permission from the 'model' to i) take their picture and ii) to use it for a particular and declared purpose.
- **Photo release consent** is primarily used to give permission to the project to make available any, or some, photographs.

## Workshop facilitation

The ultimate aim of a Photovoice facilitator is to empower participants to identify, represent and enhance their community through photography. In order to do this, facilitators need to perform various roles, which include the planning of participatory workshops, the promotion of equal participation in the workshops, the building of trust and an open environment for sharing. These roles require particular skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours such as:

- **Knowledge of various Participatory, Learning and Action (PLA) tools** and how to use them. PLA tools help local people participate in the planning, action, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes
- Having good **knowledge of Photovoice**, its aim and objectives as well as being aware of other Photovoice manuals
- Ability to **work as part of a team**
- Experience and skills in **facilitating group discussions** that enable everyone to participate, including children
- Being able to **ask questions effectively** in a way that brings forward local perspectives
- Being able to **listen actively**, for example through using body language and facial expressions that show your interest and understanding of the issues being discussed

# Delivering and Facilitating Photovoice

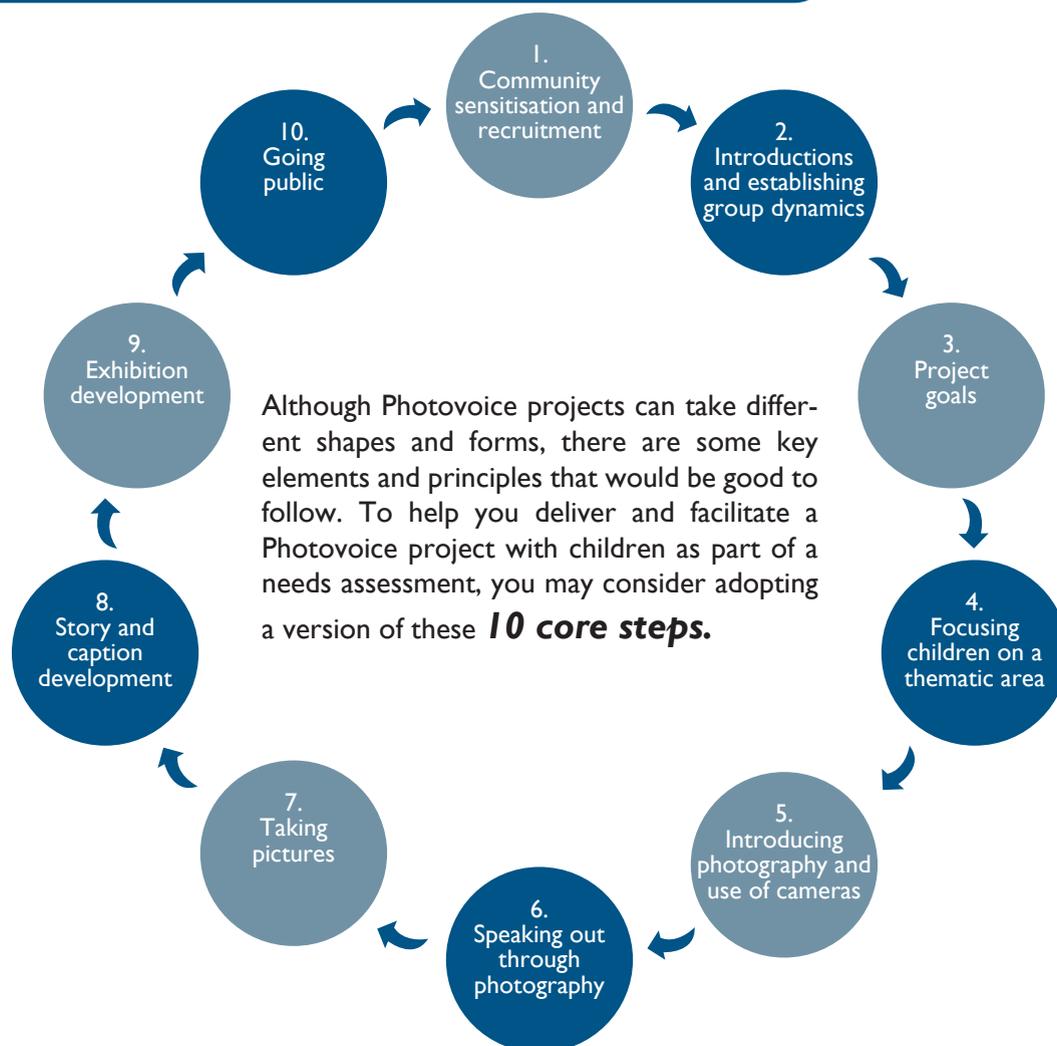


Figure 2: 10 core steps of Photovoice

## Step 1: Community sensitisation and recruitment

It is important to be accountable to the communities in which your Photovoice project will take place. You will need to provide local community members with timely, relevant and clear information about the Photovoice project. You may not be able to gather the entire community, nor may this be necessary. A good starting point may be to reach out to local government representatives and community influentials to get their permission to facilitate Photovoice and follow their lead on who to invite to a community meeting about Photovoice.

## Step 2: Introductions and establishing group dynamics

At the first workshop, participants and facilitators will get introduced to each other. This is a vital step as the success of a Photovoice project depends partly on the group dynamics and rapport that exist amongst the Photovoice participants. When establishing your facilitator team, it is useful to ensure that the main facilitator is someone with prior experience of working with children, or is someone who has got strong interpersonal skills. A good way to establish group dynamics and prepare participants for the Photovoice project is through games. Most children enjoy games. They are not only fun, they can also foster a feeling of togetherness, both between children and between facilitators and children and establish rapport if working through groups.



Icebreakers

Photo: Julie Newton

### Step 3: Focusing children on a thematic area

Once a safe and open environment has been created, you can start the process of helping the children to think about issues that might be worth exploring using Photovoice. This is best done using **PLA** tools, which are interactive and, as their name suggest, enable participatory learning. Although there may be occasions where you can let children and youth fully decide what overarching theme to study, as a development practitioner you may find yourself working within confines of the interests, values and mandate of Save the Children and its programme. You may be guided by a grant proposal or a programme within your thematic area, leaving the purpose and scope of the Photovoice project explicit. Participants can still play an important role in refining the project goals (see Step 4). Moreover, the process of focusing children on a thematic area, and with a particular purpose, can be carefully facilitated in such a way that participants feel a sense of ownership and involvement in setting the agenda.

A number of different PLA tools can be used to guide and focus children on a thematic area. These include:

- **Mapping tools** can be used to help participants map out the different impacts and effects of an issue on their community and life circumstances.
- **Time analysis tools** are useful to explore how the effects or impact of an issue change over time. An example of a time analysis tool is a 'daily diagram' or 'daily activity chart', which depicts how people spend their time over the course of a typical day.
- **Linkages and relationship tools** provide participants with the opportunity to explore the causes and effects of an issue. An example of a linkages and relationship tool is the 'problem tree', which, through the drawing of a tree enables participants to depict the problem (the trunk), the causes of the problem (the roots) and the effects of the problem (the branches).
- **Prioritisation and quantification tools** provide Photovoice participants with an opportunity to quantify and rank the significance of an issue.



Photo: Julie Newton

Problems, causes and effects of undernutrition



Photo: Julie Newton

Problem tree

### Step 4: Project goals

After sensitising participants to your thematic area and the overall intention with the Photovoice project (e.g. a needs assessment) you can work with the Photovoice participants to set specific project goals. It is important that Photovoice participants are involved in refining project goals. This will ensure the piece of work reflects the perceived needs of participants and not those of Save the Children. It also helps sustain their interest and participation in the project. After you have agreed on a project goal statement you can define the success criteria by asking the following questions:

- "What does success look like?"
- "How do we know that the Photovoice project has ended?"
- "How do we know we have done a great job?"
- "How will all this be measured?"

## Step 5: Introducing photography and use of cameras

'Photography literacy' differs substantially across contexts and social groups. It is important that you tailor your Photovoice project to the participants, their context and the budget available. Within your team, it is useful to delegate the responsibility for giving a specific session on the use of cameras as part of the facilitator's role. Regardless of what camera type (disposable, digital, regular, phone) will be used in the project, work with the participants to make sure they:

- Understand the different **functions of the camera**. This includes turning the camera on and off or using the flash.
- Know how to **use the camera** and take pictures. They may not know the benefits of looking through the lens or which button to press. Some cameras need winding.
- Know how to **change or charge the battery**.
- Are aware of key elements of **good photography**, such as knowing what needs to be in frame, picture composition, holding the camera still, the role of light etc
- **Practice** using the cameras, both to learn from common mistakes and to explore different ways of taking 'good' pictures.



Photo: Julie Newton

Practicing taking pictures



Photo: Tanvir Ahmed

Mollahat Photovoice project participants wearing their "Photovoice uniform"

## Step 6: Speaking out through photography

Related to goal setting is the process of deciding how best to speak out and capture the issues of importance to Photovoice participants and the goals of the project. It is good practice for Photovoice participants to have some kind of guidance that can keep them focused on the 'issues at heart of the project'. If time and skills are available, facilitate a process where Photovoice participants develop and agree on a set of questions that can guide their photography and story-telling. The general questions are good for capturing a whole array of challenges and contextualising them in children's everyday lives. For more detailed information, specific questions that relate explicitly to your thematic area and project goal may also be asked. A second and more issue-framed approach is to first use PLA tools to map out the spread of issues that affect the participants in relation to the thematic area and second to ask the Photovoice participants to capture these issues through photography.



Photo: Julie Newton

Developing story boards

## Step 7: Taking pictures

Photovoice participants can adopt a variety of strategies to capture stories of interest to the project. They can for example:

- Document their **own experiences** and life circumstances, giving the pictures and captions a personal touch.
- Develop a **photo documentary** of another child (e.g., a peer) or family where the Photovoice participants capture issues relevant to the project as they manifest within a household, through both interview and photography.
- Take the role of a **photojournalist** and walk around the community to capture the issues they find relevant to the project.
- **Stage the scenarios** they want to show through photography. This may be a good option if the topic they want to capture is sensitive and ethically problematic to capture ‘in real life’.
- Adopt a mixture of the above.



Photo: Julie Newton

Children walking around the community taking photos

## Step 8: Story and caption development

If you adopted the first approach to picture taking as detailed in Step 6, which involved taking photos guided by a series of questions, you will need to facilitate a process of selecting the most relevant pictures and stories to the project goal. If you adopted the second approach, where photos were captured to illustrate themes identified using PLA tools, the process of reducing the number of photos could be guided by your interest to showcase photographs that have a good composition and a compelling story. Either way, once participants have chosen the photographs to include in the project, their voices, describing the significance of the photographs, need to be heard. This can be done in a number of different ways. Caroline Wang, the founder of Photovoice, has used the following methods.

An easy and quick way of enabling participants to speak out on issues captured in their photographs is in writing. Reflection and story writing could be prompted by open-ended questions, such as:

- ‘I want to share this photo because...’
- ‘What’s the real story this photo tells?’
- ‘How does this story relate to your life and/or the lives of people in your community?’

If any of your participants have inadequate literacy and writing skills, you can ask them to narrate their answers verbally and write the stories down for them. You can also facilitate group discussions or individual interviews, guided by the SHOWeD method:

- What do you **S**ee here?
- What’s really **H**appening here?
- How does this relate to **O**ur lives?
- **W**hy does this situation, concern, strength exist?
- What can we **D**o about it?



### Photostory example

“Our neighbor has an 8 month old son named Momin. His father is a poor van puller. When we went to photograph Nafisa Aunty’s son, she said that Borhan Uncle had not been able to go to the village markets and they often eat meals of only rice and potatoes. She had not been able to have three meals a day even when she was pregnant. Although Momin is now 8 months old, she is only able to feed him breast milk and a mixture of flour and water. He frequently suffers from flu, fever, diarrhea, dysentery and pneumonia.” (Photo: White Photovoice team/Save the Children)

## Step 9: Exhibition development

Related to step 6 and 'speaking out' are plans for exhibiting and showcasing the photographs and their accompanying reflections. This component is key to Photovoice as it provides the participants with an opportunity to voice their concerns and perspectives. To develop a strategy for showcasing the photographs and their reflections, a number of considerations will have to be made. These include:

- Being clear about who are you trying to reach, your **target audience**.
- Being clear about how your target audience will be able to **access** your exhibition and how will they react to it
- Being clear about what **messages** you want to convey
- Being clear about what **action** you are trying to prompt

A Photovoice project can target a number of different audiences, but their ability to access the exhibition will differ. It is therefore important that you carefully consider what media are best suited for your target audiences. You could for example:

- Develop a set of **PowerPoint slides** where each slide contains a photo and its reflection
- Create a **video** and post it on various social media sites
- Take advantage of the various **social media** tools available for sharing pictures and ideas.
- Create **posters** that each convey a clear 'take-away' message. Photovoice participants can for example glue pictures and their written reflections onto a flipchart paper and exhibit their poster in a local community or religious building
- Create **leaflets** or **booklets** exhibiting the photos and their captions. These resources can be shared on websites and in print
- Circulate a press statement or contact **media outlets** making them aware of your project, asking them if they would be interested in featuring some of the images and their captions in print or in a slideshow on their website
- Develop and share one-page **policy briefs**
- Write an **academic article** giving detail about the Photovoice process and key findings
- Develop **exhibition** boards that clearly depict images and their captions



Children preparing their exhibition posters

## Step 10: Going public

Once the exhibition material has been developed, you can begin to think about how to go public with this material through different forums. Whichever medium you are using, you may wish to consider the following tips and ideas about going public:

- You can **organise a meeting** and invite key stakeholders (your target audience) to come and have a look at the photos and their accompanying reflections.
- You can also **organise a workshop** where participants, made up of both key stakeholders and the Photovoice participants, discuss the images and use the findings of the project as a platform to discuss and develop a plan of action for change.
- Work with **key stakeholders to distribute** your marketing or advocacy material, whether it is leaflets, books, PowerPoint slides, in print or electronically.
- If possible, when you go public try to **pitch and relate** the Photovoice material to other activities. You could for example pitch your project and its messages to an international day (e.g., a day during the Child Rights Week, International Women's Day or World AIDS Day), the publication of a high-level report, or a current and public debate.



Photo: Julie Newton

Exhibition visited by local leaders



Photo: Julie Newton

Speeches by local officials in response to Photovoice exhibition



Photo: Oil Chowdhury

Developing a Code of Conduct

## USEFUL RESOURCES AND WEBSITES

Boyden, J. and Ennew, J. (1997) Children in Focus – a Manual for Participatory Research with Children. Save the Children Sweden.

Feinstein, C. and O’Kane, C. (2008) Ethical Guidelines for ethical, meaningful and inclusive children’s participation in participation practice, Save the Children Norway

International HIV/AIDS Alliance (2006) tools together now! 100 participatory tools to mobilise communities for HIV/AIDS: [http://www.aidsalliance.org/includes/Publication/Tools\\_Together\\_Now\\_2009.pdf](http://www.aidsalliance.org/includes/Publication/Tools_Together_Now_2009.pdf)

Lansdown G (2011) Every Child’s Right to be Heard: A Resource Guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No.12, Save the Children.

Save the Children (2000) Children and Participation: Research, Monitoring and Evaluation with Children and Young People.

Save the Children (2003) So you want to consult with children? A toolkit of good practice.

Save the Children (2013) Practice Standards In Children’s Participation.

Save the Children (2004), So you want to involve children in research? A toolkit supporting children’s meaningful and ethical participation in research relating to violence against children.

Save the Children (2014) Photovoice Guidance: 10 simple steps to involve children in needs assessments.

Save the Children (2014) Photovoice Rampal Impact Assessment: Key Findings [accessible from [subhi.shama@savethechildren.org](mailto:subhi.shama@savethechildren.org)].

Save the Children (2014a) Photovoice Mollahat Needs Assessment: Process document. Save the Children Bangladesh [accessible from [julie.newton@savethechildren.org](mailto:julie.newton@savethechildren.org)].

Save the Children (2014b) Photovoice Mollahat Needs Assessment: Findings. Save the Children Bangladesh [accessible from [julie.newton@savethechildren.org](mailto:julie.newton@savethechildren.org)].

Skovdal, M. (2011) “Picturing the coping strategies of caregiving children in Western Kenya: from images to action.” American Journal of Public Health 101(3): 452-453

Wang C, “Youth Participation in Photovoice as a Strategy for Community Change,” in Checkoway B, Gutiérrez LM, eds, Youth Participation and Community Change (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, Inc, 2006):147–161.

Wang C, Burris M, “Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment,” Health Educ Behav 24 no. 3 (1997):369–387.

Wang CC, Redwood-Jones YA, “Photovoice Ethics: Perspectives From Flint Photovoice,” Health Educ Behav 28 no. 5 (2001):560–572.

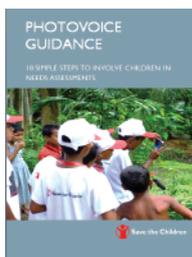
[www.photovoice.org](http://www.photovoice.org)

[www.photovoice.org/PV\\_Manual.pdf](http://www.photovoice.org/PV_Manual.pdf)

[www.photovoicesinternational.org](http://www.photovoicesinternational.org)

[www.photovoice.ca](http://www.photovoice.ca)

<http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se>



Full guide available on request  
Please contact: [julie.newton@savethechildren.org](mailto:julie.newton@savethechildren.org)



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