Guidelines for Photography

With the expanding role of FAO emergency activities and the enhancement of communication technologies, the need for documenting programmes and projects has become increasingly important. This factsheet is to be used as a 'best practice' guideline for people taking photographs on behalf of FAO for emergency projects.

What should I take photos of?

Try to take images of people who are performing different tasks for e.g. someone sowing seeds, tiling land, making use of inputs provided like tools, people in group training sessions or farmers' group meetings. These photos should be natural and not posed.

When taking images of livestock, fisheries or crops, try to take close-ups but also take some wide images to include the surrounding environment, giving an overall impression. Beneficiaries included in these images would be an advantage, as a human element adds interest to the photo.

It is important to get a good balance of men and women engaged in a variety of activities that accurately reflect the development aspect of FAO's mandate.

Photos of FAO staff, government officials or consultants engaged in extension activities can also be useful.

Which camera do I need?

Due to the ease of digital photography, a 4 mega pixel camera or higher is recommended, set to a high resolution (1324 x 1068). There is usually a facility in digital cameras to change the resolution or use the 'superfine' feature. If you take a picture with a high resolution setting, then there are more possibilities for its use – a photo can be reduced in quality from the original taken, but cannot be increased in quality.

The photographer is strongly advised to edit images taken with a digital camera as soon as possible, deleting those that don't come up to standard in order to end up with a few good images that can be easily catalogued.

Important tips for taking photos

Make sure that the person or people you are photographing understand and consent to what you are doing. Be careful to avoid taking compromising images, taking into account cultural differences. Try to make them feel relaxed so that photos are spontaneous. Avoid too many images of children, except in specific contexts, such as at school, eating, helping the family in the fields. Avoid sensationalist photos — focus on an accurate portrayal of the situation and FAO's efforts to address it.

Although we want to give people dignity in our pictures, avoid taking images of them in their best clothes while they are working in the fields or going about their daily business. It is also preferable to avoid "commercial" T- shirts (except where people are wearing the FAO logo), caps or expensive-looking watches, as well as people smoking.

Check lighting when photographing under extreme conditions, as extra lighting may be needed to create a contrast to skin colour of subjects. Also, take care when photographing people wearing sun hats or visors to avoid underexposing their eyes or faces. Be careful with camera angle — for example, photographing down will distort the subject.

Information to be included when submitting photos

For cataloguing purposes factual and relevant information is needed for each photo. Please place this information in a separate Microsoft Word or text file, including:

- name of country
- name of city/town/village
- project code or programme name
- event description (e.g. training of beneficiaries in seed practices or beneficiary watering seeds on farm)
- photographer's name
- date

Sending photos to HQ

Digital photos can now be sent via File Transfer Protocol (FTP) and you should contact your country desk officer at HQ or Olivier Perrais (Information Manager, TCE), who can give you the address and password required for uploading. The FTP address is also accessible from the 'FAO and Emergencies' web site at the following location: http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/photo-library.html.

If you do not have access to internet, the photos should be transferred onto CD Rom and posted to HQ. Please remember to attach the required text file giving all photo information (number the photos so that info is easily associated). Sending high resolution images via email will block servers or take a long time to download, especially if not using a fast network, and is discouraged.

This document has been written in collaboration with the FAO Photo Library (KCI).