VillageReach Photography Guidance

Introduction
Photography is one of the most powerful tools we use to tell VillageReach’s story. It allows us to show our impact and provide the human context of our organizational mission: save lives and improve health by increasing access to quality health care for the most underserved communities. As part of our Guiding Principles, we believe that visuals and language are an essential part of our brand, and define how others understand and perceive our organization, its credibility and values. The images we use should reflect these organizational values and meet the same expectations of integrity as our programmatic work. In the creation and use of such images, we have an ethical responsibility to ensure that our photographs:

- Respect and preserve the dignity and humanity of the communities and individuals represented;
- Intentionally address misconceptions, stereotypes, biases, and power dynamics in the representation of these communities and individuals; and
- Accurately and equitably represent our work.

This document provides guidelines for anyone photographing the work of VillageReach— including staff, partners, and contracted photographers— to help ensure we are producing high quality images and to help navigate the potential challenges and concerns that may arise when photographing the communities in which we work.

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These guidelines were created by the first External Communications Working Group, established by VillageReach Seattle’s Diversity & Inclusion Group (DIG). DIG was started in Fall 2016 after a discussion between staff member Jodi-Ann Burey and President Evan Simpson about concerns about the racial and cultural diversity among staff in the Seattle headquarters office and the post-colonial power dynamics of US-based organizations working in global health. Anna Shaw and Jodi-Ann Burey led the development of these guidelines, with support from other External Communications Working Group members Matt DeGooyer, Sandy Hawley, and Melissa West.
Photography Basics

High quality images, in terms of both content and aesthetics, are critical to effectively communicating our work and impact. These are a few basic tips for taking a good photo.

**Clear subject:** Good photographs have a clear subject. Avoid pictures where the subject or activity is unclear – these photographs are less effective at telling a good story. Pictures 1 and 2 demonstrate clear subjects that draw you into the picture. The primary subject of Picture 3 is less well defined, so without the caption to explain further, it would not tell a story.

*Picture 1:* A Vidagas worker organizes propane tanks at a storage facility in Mozambique.

*Picture 2:* A health worker holds a bowl of vaccine vials in Mozambique. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown

*Picture 3:* A cholera tent in Kwitanda, Malawi.
**Composition:** Composition refers to how different parts of a photograph are placed within the image. Composition implies intentionality – the photographer makes choices about how a subject is framed within the picture. Picture 4 demonstrates a balanced composition, where all of the subjects of the image look connected and engaged. Picture 5 uses line, color, and depth of field (where the in-focus area of the picture is) to show the connection between everything in the image. Having a range of both horizontal and vertical images also gives options for using photos in publications.

*Picture 4: Mackson, a Health Surveillance Assistant, with a patient in a village clinic, Kwitanda, Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown*

*Picture 5: A mother holds up her health card at a clinic in Mozambique. Photo Credit: Marc Ellison*
Rule of Thirds: Not all images need to have the subject centered in the frame. The Rule of Thirds is a common photography technique that divides a picture into thirds both horizontally and vertically. The intersections are ‘points of interest’ that draw attention to the focal point of an image. Centering the subject or primary action of a photograph on one of these ‘points of interest’ will help draw the viewers’ attention. Many cameras, including smartphones, can provide a grid to help the photographer align the image on the rule of thirds.
**Symmetry:** Another popular composition tool is to create a symmetrical image. Symmetry does not require a perfect mirror image. In Pictures 8 and 9, symmetry is created by balancing each component of the image (roof beams, windows, bins, as well as individuals).

*Picture 8: A family at a village clinic in Kwitanda, Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown*

*Picture 9: Mackson treats a child at a village clinic in Kwitanda, Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown*
**Perspectives**: Taking a photograph from an interesting perspective can help tell a story. However, perspectives, particularly top-down shots, can sometimes reinforce negative power dynamics that positions the viewer to “look down” or have more importance than the subject of the photo. While Photo 10 uses a top-down approach, the effect is of a “bird’s eye view” giving an interesting new angle to this image. Try new perspectives when taking a picture, but be aware of how that perspective might be interpreted.

*Picture 10: A CCPF hotline worker answers a call in Malawi. Photo Credit: Jodi-Ann Burey*

*Picture 11: A health worker transports vaccines via motorbike in Mozambique. Photo Credit: Naashon Zalk*
**Light:** Light is a critical factor in photography. Try to identify the light source and place it behind you or to your side without casting a shadow on the subject of the photograph. Try to avoid backlit photographs, which can make the subject of the photograph hard to see (Picture 13). Even in low-light settings, light can be used to create a dramatic effect and highlight the subject of an image (Picture 14).

*Picture 13:* Alphonso Sackie, works under flashlight in the pharmacy at the C.H. Rennie Hospital in Kakata, Margibi County in Liberia on March 4, 2015. Photo © Dominic Chavez/World Bank

*Picture 11:* A health worker in Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown

*Picture 12:* A health worker showing the river system in Tshupa province, DRC.

*Picture 13:* Alphonso Sackie, works under flashlight in the pharmacy at the C.H. Rennie Hospital in Kakata, Margibi County in Liberia on March 4, 2015. Photo © Dominic Chavez/World Bank
Color: Bright colors can help draw viewers into the photographs. Color can also help create contrast and emphasize particular parts of an image. A single prominent color (Picture 15) or a contrasting color (Picture 16) can highlight a particular object or subject in an image.

*Picture 14: Bednets hang in a health center in Mozambique. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown*

*Picture 15: A woman holds a health card outside of a clinic in Malawi. Photo Credit: Jodi-Ann Burey*
**Lines:** A strong line in a picture can help draw the viewer to the focal point of the image. In Picture 17, the lines are made from objects in the image, while in Pictures 18 and 19 the lines are more literal. Lines can also help frame a subject, as in Picture 18 where the lines of the window frame the pharmacy assistant.

**Picture 17:** A mother and child in a health center in Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown

**Picture 16:** A pharmacy assistant dispensing medicine at a health center in Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown

**Picture 18:** A woman walks on a path in Malawi.
What should I be photographing?

VillageReach photography is used to provide context to our work and illustrate our impact. VillageReach uses a wide range of photographs that focus on different subjects – the more variety we have in the subjects of our photographs, the more comprehensively we can tell our story. This list is not exhaustive, but provides some ideas of what you might include in your photographs:

**Health workers/logisticians/partners in action:** Showing people in action helps demonstrate the work we are supporting. Showing people in action does not require showing a person’s faces but focuses on conveying what the subject is doing (Picture 20). Examples: health workers administering vaccines, logisticians transporting medical supplies, health workers checking refrigerator functionality, pharmacy assistants being trained, hotline workers answering calls.

*Important to Note: be aware of possibly sensitive information that can be seen in the image (i.e. photographing a person’s name on a health form in either the foreground or background); be aware of people who are recognizable in the image and ensure everyone included gave consent or is blurred out.*

*Picture 19: A pharmacy assistant dispenses medicine to a patient in Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown*

*Picture 20: A Health Surveillance Assistant weighs a child at a village clinic in Kwitanda, Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown*
Communities in context: Showing people in context helps provide a wider understanding of our work. Examples: people walking to a health center, women waiting in a health center.

Important to note: be sure to get consent of everyone pictured and ensure each individual is comfortable being included in the image; be aware of the sensitivity of health services (e.g. people waiting outside of an HIV clinic may not want to be identified/identifiable); avoid images of naked babies in the foreground or background and ensure you have consent from mothers who are breastfeeding.

Picture 21: A father waits at a clinic in Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown

Picture 22: Patuma and her family outside her home in Malawi. Patuma used CCPF to get information about her daughter's Epistaxis. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown
Details: Focusing on specific details or objects can provide an interesting way to represent our work. Examples: vaccine vials, refrigerators, child health cards.

Important to note: be aware of possibly sensitive information that can be seen in the image (i.e. photographing a person’s name on a health form in either the foreground or background).

Picture 23: Women waiting at a health center in Malawi holding a phone and a health card. Photo Credit: Jodi-Ann Burey

Picture 24: Vidagas propane canisters waiting for distribution in Mozambique.
Environment: Focusing on the widest view – the environment in which we work – can be a powerful of providing context to our work without focusing on specific individuals. Examples: last mile roads, landscapes, health center buildings.

Important to note: try to include a range of environmental images- not everywhere in “Africa” is downtrodden and broken down.
Diversity and inclusion in photography

Along with representing our work, photography has the ability to represent our organizational values and challenge long-standing stereotypes and power dynamics within global health. An image is an incomplete representation of a given moment, and the photographer’s decisions about how to depict the subject of a photograph directly affects the viewers’ perceptions. Maintaining awareness of stereotypes, romanticism, and personal biases is essential to producing high quality, respectful, and accurate imagery of our work. We should never distort the true context of an image – respect for communities and individuals should be the primary motivation behind our photography.

Below are some questions and considerations when taking or selecting photographs and some tips for avoiding common pitfalls in global health photography:

- **Motive:** *What is the purpose in taking this picture? Why is this person(s), scene or action compelling to you? What story or stories are you trying to portray?* Visual representations of poverty should not be the reason an image is compelling. Representing the context of our work is accomplished by showing the complex, multi-layered reality of the communities with which we work.

- **Substitution:** *Would I consent to this photograph if it was a picture of me, my child or loved one? Would I want my community or neighborhood depicted in this way?* Examine the photo for both obvious and subtle elements that would make you question the photograph if it were of you, your family, or your community. Picture 30 is compositionally interesting, but ask, would you want an image of your child drooling? Asking these questions can help eliminate the pitfall of treating the subject of the photograph as an object or “othering” the subject – viewing or treating a person or group of people as intrinsically different from or alien to yourself.

*Picture 29: A WHO staff member vaccinates a baby during a Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa medical civil action. Photo Credit: US Navy Photo by Mass Communications Specialist 2nd Class Jesse B. Awalt*
Position: Does the composition of this photograph disempower or marginalize the subject of the photograph? Photographs taken from a high angle (from above) can make the subject of the photograph appear more vulnerable and powerless, and give the viewer a sense of power or ownership over the subject. Photographs taken from a low angle (looking up at the subject) are generally more effective at giving the subject of the photograph agency and power. Low-angle photographs are also more effective at creating a purposeful, positive tone to the image. Photographs taken from low-angle or mid-point (taken straight on, not from an angle) are more consistent with capturing dignity and respect of a subject. Body position where the subject is directly facing the camera with direct eye contact is the most empowering position.

Despite being taken from a lower angle, the subject’s body language and gaze in Picture 31 could be interpreted as deferential, which is disempowering. In addition, this image does not provide context about the subject’s identity, motivation, or wider engagement with the overall story. The body position in Photo 32 likewise demonstrate a power dynamic – in this case between an instructor and a student. Because she is positioned lower in the frame and is taking notes, the power relationship between the two is clear in the image. Photo 33 demonstrates how camera angle can be used to change the perspective of the viewer by lowering the camera angle. The viewer does not feel like they are looking down on them, but can instead feel more connected to them. As the viewer, you feel as if you are sitting with next to the people.
Context: How does the context or the environment give meaning to the subject of the photograph? What does this expanded meaning communicate to the viewer? Meaning in an image does not come only from the primary subject, but also from the environment in which they are presented. Think about the environment of the photograph and what may be communicated. For example, images of children (not wearing school uniforms) without an adult present could be interpreted as abandoned, uncared for, or in need of support. Likewise, images of people (or parts of their face/body) isolated from any context can be an ineffective, potentially problematic storytelling device. A photograph of a baby’s crying eyes may emotionally compelling but provides no details about our work or its context. A photograph of a mother, holding a crying baby who is receiving a vaccination shot tells a more empowering story about our work. Picture 34 shows a mother and child walking down a path. The larger context provided in Picture 35 reveals that they are walking away from a clinic. This additional context adds to the story and makes the image more meaningful.
• **Power:** *Who is the doer in the image? How does the subject dis/empower vulnerable groups?*

There are racial, cultural and gender imbalances between portrayals of “givers” and “receivers” of international aid and development services. Often women, people of color, and nationals of the countries where we work are portrayed solely as beneficiaries and not as doers, creators or innovators of activities in their own communities. Whenever possible, truthfully and accurately portray the people we work with as both doers and receivers of an action. In Picture 36, the action is being carried out by a community health worker who appears confident and authoritative. In Picture 37, the community member is not involved in the interaction – the conversation represented is occurring between two development workers (indicated by ethnicity and by identification badges). Picture 37 reinforces the traditional stereotypes of “givers” and “receivers.” When we choose to show our staff in our images, the composition and publication should be judicious, especially when racial, cultural and gender dynamics are at play. These images are not wrong but may not always be the most effective storytelling mechanism.

*Picture 35: A health worker consults with a patient in Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown*

*Picture 36: A Charity:Water project in Cambodia. Photo Credit: Charity:Water*
**Tone:** Does the emotional tone and message of the image elicit equitable emotions such as empathy, compassion, understanding, or shared humanity? Or does the image rely on “top-down” emotions such as pity, guilt or sympathy? Even subtle facial expressions can play a significant role in the viewers’ conscious and unconscious reading of an image. Taking multiple shots of a subject provides the chance for different subtle facial expressions. Pictures 39, 40, and 41 all have the same subject matter and were taken in quick succession. However, the expression and focus of the subject’s gaze significantly alter the overall tone of the image and tells a different story.

*Picture 39: A boy with his bicycle in Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown*

*Picture 40: A boy with his bicycle in Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown*

*Picture 37: A boy and his bicycle in Malawi. Photo Credit: Paul Joseph Brown*
Selecting appropriate photographs

The ethical considerations for photography do not end once an image is captured. Understanding how the context of a publication can influence viewers’ perceptions is an important component to representing our organizational values.

- **Avoid misrepresentation:** Do not use a photo from one country to represent another. Do not suggest an individual is affected by something when there is no evidence to support this (i.e. “This mother cannot get vaccines in her village”). Do not use a photo of another organization’s work to represent VillageReach.

- **Use captions:** Captions should always be used to contextualize a photograph. These captions should include the who, what, where, when, and why of a photograph. When a caption is inappropriate in the layout of a publication, consider including the caption along with the photography credits at the end of the document. Captions should be as specific as possible while respecting issues of privacy and protection (i.e. do not use the name of an individual if they request it, or the specific location of an image if it may endanger the individual). Captions should always include the country and where possible the city, town, or locality.

- **Be conservative when editing photos:** Editing photographs should be kept to a minimum to avoid misrepresentation.

- **Consider the purpose of the publication:** Consider the purpose and audience of your publication – these two considerations can significantly affect the perception of an image. Images used for advocacy, public relations, promotion, and fundraising can all be interpreted differently, and different audiences will have biases and preconceptions that should be accounted for.

- **Consider the implications of layout:** The text and other elements around an image can change the viewers’ perception. If proximity to text will create misconceptions or misrepresentation, consider changing the image, the position, or the text, or otherwise provide clarifying text to ensure the reader is not misled.

- **Provide the proper credits:** Providing credit to the photographer in the appropriate way is essential. In the VillageReach photo archive, photographers who have requested credit have their name including in the file name for their photographs. Credit should be included as close to the photograph as appropriate for the publication. Some photographers only require photo credit when their images are used outside of VillageReach branded collateral.
Informed Consent

Informed consent is the active permission of a photography subject, acknowledging and accepting the potential consequences of their participation. Informed consent includes an understanding of how and where these photographs will be used. Every individual has a right to clearly understand what their consent entails and to refuse to be photographed. You must respect this right. If you sense any reluctance or confusion, refrain from taking the photo. No payments or other forms of compensation should be given in exchange for photography consent.

Obtaining informed consent can be challenging, but it is an important step in respecting the communities and individuals with which we work. Here are some tips for obtaining both verbal and written consent:

- **Verbal Consent:**
  - When possible, establish a relationship before you start taking photos. When you approach photo subjects in the field, briefly introduce yourself, be courteous, and explain the purpose of your visit or the reason you want to take photos. In clinical contexts, speak with the clinical director before you begin photographing health workers or clients.
  - If you don’t speak the same language, communicate with your body language. If you sense reluctance, confusion, or disdain, refrain from taking the photo.
  - If you are traveling with someone who speaks the local language, ask him or her to translate your request for verbal consent.
  - Identify an adult who can give you verbal consent on behalf of a child.

- **Written Consent:**
  - Prepare your consent forms ahead of time in the local language of the area you will be visiting.
  - If you unable to prepare written consent forms in the local language, orally translate the consent form to your photo subjects. Use an interpreter if necessary.

Being aware of how hierarchies of power or perceived power can influence consent is important.\(^1\) Individuals may feel compelled to give consent when approached by a representative of an INGO, government official, or a community leader. Be mindful of how you are perceived and how this might influence the process of giving consent.

Every individual included in a photograph should give informed consent. Informed consent can be obtained in either oral or written form, depending on the context of the photograph (see chart below from Photoshare\(^2\)).

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\(^2\) [http://www.photoshare.org/content/informed-consent](http://www.photoshare.org/content/informed-consent)
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consent not Needed</th>
<th>Obtain Verbal Consent</th>
<th>Written Consent Encouraged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-recognizable individuals in public (faces and all other identifying features are obscured).</td>
<td>All individuals in all settings <strong>when possible</strong>.</td>
<td>Recognizable providers and clients in <strong>clinical</strong> settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public figures in public (e.g. celebrities, MOHs at campaign launches).</td>
<td>Parents, guardians, or teachers of children.</td>
<td>Recognizable or non-recognizable individuals in any setting where <strong>personal, private information</strong> is exposed in the photo or documented in the corresponding caption, such as:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Health status</strong> (e.g. HIV-positive persons, persons living with AIDS/STIs, abortion history, TB, diarrheal disease, etc.) <strong>Health behavior</strong> (e.g. sex work, sexual orientation, alcohol and drug use, contraceptive use, female genital cutting, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crowds in public (e.g. an audience at outdoor concert).</td>
<td>Directors/Managers of clinics or other service programs.</td>
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Quick Reference: Do’s and Don’ts

Do

- Consider the context and the power dynamics of the circumstances;
- Consider whether individuals may be put at risk or have sensitive information revealed about them;
- Establish a relationship with an individual. When approaching an individual, introduce yourself, be courteous, explain the purpose of your visit and the reason you wish to take the photo;
- Respect a person’s right not to be photographed;
- Obtain informed consent;
- Be aware of and understand the power dynamics of obtaining consent;
- Pay attention to light, composition, and subject matter;
- Try to find unique perspectives and ways to show our work;
- Take photographs of a range of subject matter, perspectives, and styles;
- Try to capture the context of our work and of the subject of your photographs;
- Consider how body position, facial expression, and composition can convey power dynamics;
- Share your photographs with those you are photographing (even if you simply show them the image on your camera or phone);
- Provide information required for captions and context in publications;
- Share your pictures with the Communications team.

Don’t

- Take pictures of any individual that does not want to be photographed or of any individual who appears uncomfortable or unsure, even if they provided informed consent;
- Take pictures of children without the informed consent of an appropriate adult;
- Misrepresent the situation or individual when taking, editing, or using photographs;
- Reveal sensitive or personal information about an individual;
- Focus your images on gratuitous signifiers of poverty;
- Isolate your subject from their wider context;
- Use high-angle shots.