

# Voices of the people: How can Christian Aid strengthen grassroots voices in its learning and communications?

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## Introduction

This discussion paper is based on a review of Christian Aid's communications for development (C4D) work. Over the last 2 years, within large donor-funded programmes such as the PPA, Christian Aid has been able to experiment and innovate with approaches to strengthen the voices of affected communities in its research and communications<sup>1</sup>. Now a critical review of this work aims to identify ways to replicate and strengthen the practice, relationships, reputation and funding opportunities in this area.

Based on document review and interviews, this research summarises key characteristics and learning of relevant CA-supported C4D projects, and highlights available evidence to inform discussion of key questions<sup>2</sup>, stated in the terms of reference as:

- *How can C4D contribute towards Christian Aid's stated aim to 'promote the direct voice' of partners and communities 'with more communication direct from the programme'?*; and
- *How can robust, exciting and valuable participatory communications projects and processes be integrated into Christian Aid's work?*

Christian Aid has implemented/ supported a range of C4D projects, with very different aims and approaches, and for different reasons. This research focuses on projects which support communities/individuals to communicate *with Christian Aid and partners* (for reporting, evaluation etc.), as opposed to those which support programme objectives such as local advocacy (the distinction is discussed further below). There are parallels and some crossover between the two types of projects, both of which fit under a 'communications for development' umbrella and share some methodological and ethical characteristics. However, given the scope of this review and the questions of the ToR, it was felt that a focus on Christian Aid learning and communications would be appropriate and enable more focused discussion. A tighter focus has helped to make sense of the learning from the experiences so far, and the implications for future practice. The review suggests that a clearer focus will also help the organisation to promote and strengthen the work in the future.

As much as possible, this paper avoids giving *general conclusions* about the value or relevance of the work, or the best ways to support it going forward, as this depends very much on the *organisational context and priorities* of Christian Aid. Instead it pulls out *evidence* available in existing documentation and highlights emerging *issues and questions* for Christian Aid to consider and discuss in deciding how to take this work forward. In some places, the author has given a personal reflection to highlight an issue, providing space for readers to contribute specific questions or issues on which to frame the ensuing discussion, scheduled to take place in early 2017.

The paper is split into two main sections:

1. **Part I: Christian Aid's experience** – summarises the projects reviewed, the reported outcomes and key aspects of the methodologies used.
2. **Part II: Where from here?** - looks at how and why the organisation might take the work forward, including defining and promoting the methodologies and building capacity to implement them, to using the outputs effectively and ethically.

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<sup>1</sup> Large donor-funded programmes were noted as a key enabler of this work. "The flexibility offered by PPA strategic funding made it possible to change course as we learn, to bring together programming disciplines and to better respond to communities' needs and capacities"

<sup>2</sup> This paper will feed into a discussion by an internal group in January 2017.

## Methodology, scope and rigour:

This review was commissioned by the programme communications team, and co-managed by the co-head of Research, Evidence and Learning. It is based on a desk review and interviews with key Christian Aid staff based in the UK involved in commissioning, developing and implementing the approaches. It was not possible in the time available to speak to partners or country office staff involved in the work, nor hear directly from participants. Some research was done with other development organisations, to get a sense of how others are using these types of approaches.

Of the projects reviewed only one (PhotoVoice) had been evaluated previously, providing feedback (and direct quotes) on the value and outcomes of the approach for participants and other local stakeholders. For the others, the material was a mixture of workshop and project reports, plans and outputs, as well as some articles on the Truth Truck written by Christian Aid staff.

These documents, and the interviews, made it possible to get a good sense of what was done, and the extent to which (Christian Aid's) objectives were met, as well as some learning and recommendations for future practice. All interviewees were positive about the value and outcomes of the approaches, and this is reflected in this report. However, it has not been possible to substantiate these claims and views. Any bias which might exist in the original material has not been counter-balanced.

## Part I: Christian Aid's experience

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Christian Aid have implemented a number of projects since 2014 to strengthen grassroots voices: with outputs directed to Christian Aid and partners for accountability and outcome assessment; and with outputs directed to local service providers, authorities and the public for accountability and advocacy. Fuller case studies of those reviewed in this paper are available as an annex to this report.

**Communications projects with programme objectives:** The Community Correspondents' Network in India and SMS Voices in Sierra Leone and Kenya, work with delegated local people to identify local problems and issues and communicate them to the relevant decision-makers using video and SMS. While both report successes in *resolving local issues* and *strengthening local accountability*, there was no evidence that the outputs have been used for Christian Aid or partners' communications<sup>3</sup> or learning (for example to influence the prioritisation of issues in planning). As such, they are not reviewed in-depth here<sup>4</sup>.

**Participatory photography projects for M&E:** Christian Aid's donor communications team partnered with PhotoVoice, an independent organisation, to run participatory photography projects in Ghana (within the MyPharm project to enable farmers to document their perceptions on key issues) and Ethiopia (to contribute to a baseline for M&E of the BRACED programme). Based on this experience, and drawing on the Most Significant Change methodology, Christian Aid photographer Matt Gonzalez-Noda developed an in-house participatory photography approach called Picture Power. This was piloted in Kenya as part of the annual PPA outcome assessment. Subsequently, the

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<sup>3</sup> Although, as Kathryn Irwin noted, Christian Aid did not have suitable platforms for sharing film footage at that time, and it has since developed the programme, policy and practice website to communicate digitally with programme stakeholders.

<sup>4</sup> The main documentation on these projects was reviewed, and one interviewee spoke about these projects, but no further research was done as the focus of this piece of work was on projects with outputs aimed at or for Christian Aid.

methodology was applied to explore changes in power in the occupied Palestinian territories, and the impact of the ECRP programme in Malawi.

Selected representatives are trained in photographic techniques and supported to identify key issues they wish to document. They take photographs, and write captions for a selection of these images, which are displayed at a community exhibition. This is an opportunity for the wider community to view the images and share their own views on the issues represented. In this way the photographs are an entry point for discussion, which can uncover different perceptions, for example between men and women, and show some of the ripple effects of change.

**Video for capturing feedback and communicating outcomes:** The Truth Truck was a one-off project to produce a short video capturing views of people affected by the Nepal earthquake on the quality and relevance of the aid they received. A specially equipped truck travelled to villages in 2 districts of Nepal, inviting people to step inside and give feedback on the most and least useful aid they had received. The resulting video was used not only to improve future responses, but also to highlight the need to be accountable and listen to affected people. As part of a set of governance impact assessments in 2015, documentary film-makers were hired to create a short video with the input of programme participants in two countries of Central America. Although this was not fully participatory, a lot was learned about the potential and challenges of using video in this way.

## What are other development organisations doing?

The ToR expected this research to *“draw on experiences from other INGOs around their participatory communications work ... what have they been doing that we could learn from; where have we shared similar challenges and approaches; what could we share/promote/claim from our experience.”*

General desk research, and contact with key people in the C4D community directly and through list-serves, uncovered a hotchpotch of projects and initiatives with very different objectives and methods. There was no coherence between the projects identified, no sign of mainstreamed approaches to C4D in any organisation, and very few examples of C4D being applied to organisational learning or communications. A review of case-studies on communicating with disaster affected communities showed a focus on *providing information* to communities, at most enabling them to feed back on the type of information they needed.<sup>5</sup> I found very little on strengthening the voice and communication capacity of affected populations.<sup>6</sup> Those I did find include<sup>7</sup>:

- **World Vision**, which has developed a pilot to explore whether the creation of short films for marketing purposes can be made more participatory. Seamus Anderson, the Programme Effectiveness Advisor, explained: *“... by putting the community in charge of defining the content, and generating the content primarily for their own purposes, the videos are relevant, powerful and have a genuine utility locally. Then, if we're lucky, we get something that is authentic and powerful for our own communications purposes. It's a very difficult thing to do, mainly because of the power dynamics, but also because of the differing standards of local and international audiences.”*

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<sup>5</sup> From the CDAC website: <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/case-studies/>

<sup>6</sup> I was told that ActionAid has used participatory filmmaking in Pakistan to highlight gaps and challenges faced by communities in emergency response, but I was not able to find more information on this.

<sup>7</sup> Most examples of C4D approaches for M&E and communications were from external agencies such as PhotoVoice or Insight Share. This is interesting, given that Picture Power, Christian Aid's in-house participatory photography approach, was designed to be better integrated into the organisation's own systems and processes, to ask questions and develop outputs that fitted more closely with the organisation's needs.

- **Plan** is piloting the use of digital audience response systems (such as [www.ombea.com](http://www.ombea.com)) in the existing community scorecards process, to gather anonymous, real-time feedback on key issues.
- **ILRI** has used participatory photography to strengthen farmer-led learning from veterinary on-farm trials, in a very similar process to PhotoVoice and Picture Power. Farmers took photographs over 4 years to show the changes that occurred, and shared the photographs through local exhibitions. The narratives were recorded on video and analysed to feed back into the veterinary research.
- The **HIV/Aids Alliance** have been managing a global network of citizen journalists (Key Correspondents) to strengthen the voice of affected people in global reporting and debate. Although this is mainly aimed at shifting external reporting and understanding of issues around HIV/Aids, a number of the Alliance's own multi-country programmes incorporate the work of Key Correspondents in their advocacy for political and social change.

In my view, the fact that it is difficult to find projects and approaches promoting genuine two-way communication, or listening to voices from communities, suggests that there are not enough of them, and those that are happening are ad-hoc, one-off or buried within other processes. This could be an opportunity for Christian Aid to spearhead the use of C4D for organisational learning and communications in an integrated and visible way, to collect and promote good practice in listening (and responding) to communities, and strengthening their voice in the development sector.

This prompts the obvious question: *Does Christian Aid want to position itself as a sector-leader in the use of C4D approaches to strengthen community voices in its learning and communications?* Part 2 of this paper summarises some of the ways this might fit into the strategic direction and principles of the organisation.

## What has been the added value of C4D ...

Participatory approaches and methods can help to enable local people to speak more freely and tell their own story, breaking the dynamic where programme participants answer questions framed by the project teams, or tell more powerful people what they think they want to hear. Coupled with tangible communications outputs (C4D) they can be used:

- As a snapshot – to get rich, contextualised data as part of research, assessment or evaluation, or to communicate where we work, with whom, why and with what outcomes;
- For longer-term engagement – to build a communication channel between communities and partners/CA for adaptive programme management, to highlight opportunities for collaboration, or to communicate results, for example .

This section summarises the outcomes as described in project documentation; and as shared in the interviews, in terms of Christian Aid learning and communications, and for participating communities and partners. It should be noted that the outcomes often spread beyond the initial objective of the projects. For example the participatory photography projects were focused on monitoring and assessing change, but also strengthened local capacity to communicate with a range of stakeholders, and take action, and provided Christian Aid and partners with powerful communications materials. The Truth Truck generated important feedback on the quality and relevance of aid, while also producing a video to communicate the importance of accountability in aid.



## ...for organisational learning and accountability

Participatory photography has been used to support monitoring and evaluation, and Picture Power has been a supplementary data source in outcome assessments<sup>8</sup>. M&E driven processes have space to delve into the complexity of the work, test assumptions and expose and learn from failure. As Matt Gonzalez-Noda explained: *“The photographs and discussions can uncover hidden or soft impacts of or around CA interventions that may not be picked up in routine monitoring work... In this sense, participatory photography can give the organisation the opportunity to step back and look at what it is doing from within the project context.”*

### Reporting beyond indicators:

David Clark, who was involved in using Picture Power within the Kenya outcome assessment, explained that it was particularly good to ‘*crack open*’ assumptions behind the theory of change (that x leads to y) by highlighting relevant areas which are not routinely measured or monitored. Dipankar Patnaik, Christian Aid Nepal emergency programme manager, wrote that the Truth Truck had helped to re-evaluate assumptions: *“In the aftermath of a disaster we can make broad assumptions based on ‘how we’ve always done it’. But unless we constantly re-evaluate our methods, how do we know our ideas are still relevant to the emergencies we face now?”*

These methods might help Christian Aid and partners to understand where changes are *not happening* as expected, or are *not experienced* by everybody in the same way (for example where men and women have different views on what is most significant). They can also enable *unintended outcomes* to come to light. For example, in Kenya:

- While the creation of village savings and loan groups was planned and measurable, women explained how one outcome of this was to provide a space for them to get together, gain standing and support as well as capital, and in that way address exclusion.
- A facilitated discussion between two communities involved in Picture Power revealed that in one, sand dams had provided more water for those close to the dams, whereas in the other, community action had led to the water company installing pipes to share the irrigation water more widely. This enabled the communities to learn from each other, and provided critical local information to inform local planning of staff and partners.

### Understanding the context and conditions:

The nature of the outputs, as well as the process, provides rich material for Christian Aid staff and partners to learn about their work in context. The use of photographs can make it easier for people to express less tangible issues that affect their lives, and the narratives created around the photographs give detail about the *context* and conditions which affect how interventions play out.

- In oPt, one woman took pictures from her window to show the relative isolation in which she lived, as a woman from a conservative family. This prompted discussion and local insight on issues of inclusion central to the work of Christian Aid and partners.
- In Central America, local Christian Aid staff involved in the impact assessment video said that they had *“benefitted from the deep dive into a particular programme”* which had *“changed and deepened”* their understanding of the programme (which they would not get from normal monitoring visits).

### Gathering feedback:

Although not evaluated as such, interviewees considered the Truth Truck to be an effective means of gathering feedback after a humanitarian event from a *broad cross-section* of people, across a *lot of*

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<sup>8</sup> Under the PPA, outcome assessments are carried out annually in each country to capture the changes these programmes have achieved and contribute to donor reporting.

villages in an affected area (although only those accessible by road), in a *short period* of time. Although not a participatory process, the set-up of a private space with an automated voice asking the questions changed the power dynamic for feedback, so that people felt freer to express their opinions, positive and negative. This helped to create a valuable data set which could inform future responses.

### ... for communications

Interviewees considered that the outputs of C4D processes convey the reality and complexity of development work, and can make effective, rich and meaningful communications materials for local or global use, especially when this has been an expected and supported outcome. For example,

- Within the ECRP programme, Picture Power was implemented with the donor communications team and generated strong communications outputs for multiple platforms, including printed brochures, a digital story and an exhibition at local DFID offices.
- The Truth Truck output 'Nepal Aftershocks' was shared online and at the World Humanitarian Summit, and was, according to head of the humanitarian division Nick Guttman: "*a simple way to get the views of affected populations across, enabling affected populations to speak freely and be heard.*"

These communications outputs were found to be potentially *less extractive*, and better represent the reality and complexity of the work. For example, they can show the relationship between investments in capacity, advocacy or village savings and loans, and real outcomes in the lives of people. In this way, as Amanda Farrant, said "*they can help people to understand why and how the programmes are implemented as they are.*"

### With supporters and donors:

Interviewees identified various ways in which these kinds of outputs can support communication with donors and supporters at different levels.

- At *national level* country offices can use the outputs, whether videos or exhibitions, to engage donors and help them to understand the grassroots context for the work.
- They can illustrate stories and points made in *donor communications*, as long as they are broadly representative of wider experience. Blogs have been used to supplement donor reporting, highlighting stories which are not directly relevant or fully representative, but give useful context to interventions.
- At *international level*, they have been used to communicate with supporters, for example images from Picture Power projects were used for the Harvest Appeal and an exhibition in London. This exhibition generated a powerful response, people found the pictures/captions more direct and engaging, like '*looking through the eyes of the people*'. Amanda Farrant noted that this "*feels like a less extractive, more honest way of communicating what we do to supporters.*" However, Matt Gonzalez-Noda warned that these images are different in many ways from those commissioned from a professional photographer and, as discussed in part 2 below, need to be presented in ways which reduce the risk of misrepresentation, allowing the meaning ascribed by the author to come through. Exhibitions and videos could be an effective way of *generating debate and discussion* with supporters, churches and schools on the issues raised and Christian Aid's responses to them.

### Within and between communities:

The outputs of participatory photography projects have potential to support local communication, to *share experiences* within and between communities, *generate debate* and *share innovations and good practice*. Amanda Farrant recalled that in Kenya, when neighbouring communities shared and



discussed their pictures *“it generated so much chatter. People were so interested to see what their neighbours were doing and learn from that.”* She also found that local authorities were able to see the bigger picture of transformation which they are usually either too close or too distant to see, helping them to understand what the local partner is doing, which in turn helps to build constructive relationships.

### **... for participating individuals/ communities**

C4D is a ‘social process’, and as such the projects and outputs need to be meaningful and useful for participating communities and individuals. As Amanda Farrant put it: *“These types of communications processes must be done with the involvement of, and for the benefit of, the communities where they are implemented.”*

A review of the project documentation showed evidence that PhotoVoice and Picture Power have been *meaningful and valuable* for participants, in terms of the capacity and confidence built through the process, as well as the output and use of the photographs. The Truth Truck was a much lighter and less facilitated engagement, without any capacity-building component, though it provided an *important channel* for people to give feedback. The communications team recognise that this could be further enhanced through follow-up feedback sessions for communities and groups to watch and comment on the resulting video.

#### **The value of self-representation:**

Participatory photography and C4D approaches aim to enable people to represent themselves and to frame debates in their own realities and context, in itself a form of empowerment. Comments from participants in Picture Power and PhotoVoice projects suggest that this has been an important outcome for them, and a comment from a district governor in Ethiopia echoes this: *“Up until now we have only seen pictures from foreigners, where we are more often the subjects ... Now I see members of the community raising important issues through their images [...] this work has a powerful reach.”*

#### **More critical and constructive engagement in local development:**

According to Picture Power and PhotoVoice reporting, the experience of defining, illustrating and discussing key issues has strengthened local awareness and understanding of programmes, and built confidence of local people to constructively engage. For example in Northern Kenya, Picture Power participants highlighted the issue of exclusion of people with disabilities in their feedback on a health programme. This prompted Christian Aid to further research the issue and adapt their programming, and raised awareness of the issue with the government.

Furthermore, the feedback from PhotoVoice in Ethiopia showed that the experience strengthened participants’ capacity and confidence to engage in and influence local development. One participant stated that *“the training enhanced our community’s awareness about the impact of climate change and we are now engaged to consider the measures that should be taken to reduce its impact.”* A district official noted that the participants *“... have become analytical and critical in their description of the images and their captions, using them to propose solutions and promote behaviour change.”* Adding that *“This gives us hope as administrators that with support, the community has the capacity and potential to be involved and direct positive change.”* One participant stated: *“We have been given responsibility back.”*



### **Confidence to speak up and out:**

PhotoVoice project evaluations state that participants reported increased confidence in speaking to, and for, their communities. One female participant in Ghana explained that: *“I never had any political voice in my community, and nobody ever discussed any issues with me in our youth meetings, but after I had been doing this project, the people of my community started to value me more because I was always photographing all the issues that were affecting us ... Now an opportunity has arisen in which some people want me to become an assembly lady in my community.”*

In some cases, participation has resulted in greater capacity to organise and prioritise local issues for advocacy. A woman photo-monitor in Ghana has been helping her community group to communicate their priorities to the local education commissioner. *“Through my exposure to photography I was able to let my community come to agree on the issues we wanted to engage our District Commissioner for Education on. We took the photos of the issues we wanted to advocate for and send them to the DCE. He has assured us that he will come and meet with us on how he can help”*

### **Continued use of photographs and photography:**

In many of the photography projects, not just skills but also the cameras were left behind. In oPt, communities continued to use the cameras for local advocacy and awareness raising, and this has been supported by local partners. David Adam found that, when the cameras are used more freely, outside of the project context, *“the pictures are more representative of the real interests and concerns of the photographers.”*

The PhotoVoice evaluations hold lots of examples of participants continuing to use the skills, equipment and capacity that they have developed throughout the process to strengthen local communication and action. The PhotoVoice project in Ghana was the most extensive and open, supporting farmers to document issues important to them over a year. The evaluation reported the continued use of photographs:

- To share good practice and innovations: farmers used photography to share practices learned in training with their peers who could not attend, sharing photos of varieties, techniques and so on. One woman photographed income-generating activities she had seen in another community, shared these with women in her village and helped to set up a local women’s association as a result.
- To improve infrastructure: In one community a photo of a crowded borehole displayed at the chief’s palace drew the attention of the local water board, and a new borehole was drilled, in another a photograph of a broken borehole was shown to an engineer and then used to mobilise the community to secure the necessary parts to fix it.
- To campaign on key issues: a photo-monitor took pictures of poor yields of maize to show how the removal of subsidies for fertiliser affected poor farmers, the partner used these pictures to highlight the issue in a stakeholder forum and a larger NGO took up the issue in their national-level advocacy.
- To communicate problems and seek solutions: A rice-farmers’ association shared photographs of failing crops with the seed provider, who investigated and concluded that the seeds were bad. As a result they were not charged for seeds, saving them from potentially crushing debt. *“If it is not for the pictures, we would never be able to show what was the problem and they would have made us pay.”* In another case, a vet was shown pictures of sick animals and came to cure the animals and stop the spread of the disease. The photographer explained, *“This might sound very normal to you but around here we only*

*have one veterinarian and it's very far away so he would have never come if we didn't show him evidence of what is happening."*

- For public information: one monitor took a picture of people removing a drowned boy from a dam, to warn other children not to play there *"so for me I think my camera helped to save many lives."*
- To promote local products: One photo-monitor uses her camera to bring information on income generating opportunities to local women, and support the local association of weavers to promote their products. *"Thanks to the camera I take pictures of the baskets and send them away to the buyer so we eliminate the middle man and generate more economical power for the women in our communities."*

### ... for partners:

It has not been possible to speak directly to partners for this research, nor read any partner reports. The reports and interviews all highlighted the importance of the local partner in supporting the process, and as an audience for the learning and outputs. Interviewees recognised that the work needs to tie-in with partners' own priorities, and ensure that they receive sufficient support, resources and capacity building. They also pointed to positive outcomes for partners, including:

#### **Stronger communications and research capacity:**

Partners have engaged in the processes in different ways. The Picture Power methodology builds in the capacity building of partners, for photography-based work and for most-significant change. As such, the partners have stronger capacity to support community communications work, and to work with local actors to identify issues and ways forward. In the Ethiopia PhotoVoice evaluation the partner stated that *"[the training] makes us proactive and it is change orientated."* and *"I can see great potential for this practice as a tool to communicate our work and impact change more widely."* However, Matt Gonzalez-Noda commented that these types of outcomes depends very much on the organisational and wider context in which the partner (and local CA staff) operate, with some countries such as Kenya providing a more progressive context for development work.

There was also noted opportunity for scale-up, with one local official stating: *"I see the opportunity to use this work to involve [other localities] in the process, sharing ideas and insights and impacting the development programme through participation of the communities on a much wider scale."* However, the PhotoVoice evaluation noted that partners would require more time and money, and support with logistics, capacity and dissemination, in order to fully take advantage of this potential.

#### **Stronger relationships and visibility:**

The participatory photography processes helped partners to build relationships in the community, participants, their photography and the exhibitions all helped to raise awareness of the work, and the experience strengthened local people's engagement in the programmes. In Ethiopia, participants themselves reported *"Now we are ready and equipped to cooperate with [local partner] HUNDEE and engage in representing our community...We are able to participate."* In this case, the participants engaged with the partner to identify key issues (access to water) and explore potential solutions, building together an action plan.

In Central America the partners involved in the governance impact assessment found that the resulting video was useful to promote their work, for fundraising and sharing with local leaders. They also considered this type of output useful for building relationships and scaling up work, spreading inspiration or insights beyond the programme's immediate reach. According to Emma Wigley, in Nepal too, the Truth Truck had been instrumental in helping people to *"understand who we are and*

*what we do... that we are not just delivering aid, but also asking for feedback in a genuine way.”* This helped to strengthen relationships on the ground between partners and other local actors.

### **Stronger accountability:**

Partners in Opt were able to strengthen their accountability through the process. When photographers showed them that some people were not sure how to participate in or feedback on the project they were able to focus their attention on greater outreach and communication within their programmatic approach.

## **What has been learned about the process?**

The experiences of using the different C4D approaches have generated learning which can be built into any future Christian Aid methodology. Some of the key insights and learning shared:

### **Who sets the agenda?**

The question of how much Christian Aid could or should focus a project to their own communication needs raised quite different views. PhotoVoice believe that a respectful and useful process will keep this as open as possible, saying that while the organisation might frame the engagement in terms of their project themes or coverage, they advise to leave space for participants to give the process direction: *“Don’t ask about the issues that the organisation wants to explore, let people decide for themselves.”*

However, Picture Power was in part born from a frustration at the inconclusive and expansive nature of the PhotoVoice projects which, some felt, were not sufficiently focused to generate outputs which were useful or relevant to the organisation’s information and communication needs and M&E processes. Matt Gonzalez-Noda commented that *“Picture Power aimed to build on the internal knowledge needed to know what questions to ask.”*

Interestingly, the review of PhotoVoice documentation showed that the relatively free and undirected project in Ghana reported a number of significant individual and community level outcomes. This may be because the project was evaluated, or the focus of the reporting, but it is noticeable. On the other hand, there is more evidence that the outputs of the Picture Power projects in Kenya and Malawi were used for communications and donor reporting. It is not possible to know whether any focus on communications outputs limited the experience and outcomes for participants and their local communities, but this is a hypothesis that may be worth exploring further.

**Some pros and cons of video to capture impact and learning:**

The makers of the impact assessment video in Central America highlighted some reflections on the medium:

- Video requires clear and simple messages, and developing these can be a useful process for any programme. However, it also compromises the representation of complexity and nuance; *“The biggest compromises we had to make in both videos were related to the need for a simple narrative line or to keep the videos short.”*
- The filmmakers found that *“Even though there was no ‘promotional video’ agenda, we inevitably went looking for the positive and sought evidence of impact rather than looking for what did not work or exploring the challenges.”*
- Time and resources are needed for participation in the editing process, which is where the story is told and potential for misrepresentation arises.

**The right tool in the right hands:**

Where the objective is more strictly communication, it is important to ensure that the medium is right for the intended audiences, but also crucially that staff and partners have the capacity to manage and organise the data in the format generated. In the participatory photography projects, training for partners included planning to ensure that they could manage (store, archive, share) the outputs. Equally, if the model of the Truth Truck were to be replicated as a feedback mechanism, there would need to be sufficient capacity (and need) to edit, organise and share the video footage.

**Facilitating discussion, analysis and feedback:**

The participatory photography approaches used by CA have at their heart the community discussion and validation of the issues and perspectives raised in the photographs. While this may not be possible in some of the ‘lighter’ approaches, several staff interviews have brought up the importance of feedback loops and mechanisms, to allow communities to review and discuss the resulting outputs. The physical outputs (photographs, footage etc.) are seen as an entry point for discussion to uncover the meanings, implications and differences in perspective or experience. This discussion is valuable for the participants, to build understanding and identify ways forward, and for local partners and Christian Aid in the same way. It also helps to ensure that the meaning of the images is defined by the participants, one element of avoiding misrepresentation and misinterpretation in their later use.

This means that facilitation is a key aspect of the process: the facilitator needs to be able to create a safe space and dynamic, and ask the right questions, to ensure that different views are heard, as Matt Gonzalez-Noda put it *“to get underneath the pictures and understand what they represent, and what this means for Christian Aid and partners, as well as the photographer and their community.”*

This depends, in many ways, on personal (and organizational) aptitude and attitude, as Ricardo Ramirez and co explain in their article in the KM4Dev journal: *“The notion of ‘practical wisdom’ is far from the notion of ‘best practices’ that some bureaucracies cherish. Best practices are akin to recipes, where there is the assumption that many factors are known and predictable to the extent that similar decisions will be warranted... [they] suggest replication, while practical wisdom suggests uniqueness and tailoring to each moment.”*<sup>9</sup> That said, as one interviewee noted, the qualities and behaviours of a good facilitator should be given prominence and be written in to a methodology as far as possible.

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<sup>9</sup> Knowledge Management for Development Journal 11(2): 101-111 <http://journal.km4dev.org/>

### **Triangulation and validation:**

Interviewees who had used Picture Power as part of an outcome assessment noted that it should be understood as one (of several) source of data. In Kenya, this was the case, but in oPt the approach was used on its own. The report concluded that the outputs were useful for exploring themes of power and accountability, *“building a richer picture of changes within the community and what role the project may have played in these”*, yet that *“given the lack of objective data, no firm conclusions about contribution could or should be drawn”*. As with any evidencing process, it is important to be clear about the types of evidence generated, and the extent to which they can be claimed to be representative. Triangulation can provide supporting evidence to assess how representative the stories and experiences. In communications, stories need to be backed up from other sources of information if they are used to show ‘what is happening’, although the less representative stories could be used to show potential etc., but need to be clearly framed that way.

### **Implement in partnership:**

These types of approaches always need to be implemented in partnership, between organisations with local knowledge and relationships, those who can support implementation on the ground, and those who are framing the work or commissioning the outputs<sup>10</sup>. Each partner brings something different and essential to the project and it is important to ensure that they have the capacity, motivation and resources to fulfil that role.

### **Local benefits and outcomes:**

Fundamental to C4D approaches is that they are a social process, transformative for participants and the community. The transformative nature of the process is an objective in itself, bringing valuable skills, confidence, capacity, voice, relationships, awareness etc. You can also maximise local benefits by:

- Supporting participants to continue to use photography for local communication and action, building it into future work, providing platforms for sharing pictures etc.;
- Supporting partners to review and analyse the information, and the implications for their work and action. It may be necessary to develop follow-up protocol which guides partners on what to do about soft or unanticipated issues which are not within the direct remit of the project but are actionable.

### **Inclusive and representative processes:**

Meaningful participation depends not only on facilitation, but also on access and safe-spaces – to share ideas, ask questions and express opinions. This can be created through careful facilitation and participatory tools, or in the case of the Truth Truck, through a private and anonymous space.

Careful selection of participants is necessary to ensure that it is not just the strongest or loudest voices which are heard, and the participation of some people (women, disabled, isolated) may need adjustments to the timing, location or make-up of the sessions. When a representative group cannot be recruited, it is important to be clear who is represented or not, and why.

### **Evaluate and innovate:**

Most of the projects reviewed have not (yet) been evaluated, and the reported learning and outcomes reflect in the main the views and experiences of the trainers and facilitators. The voices of participants and partners are not well documented. It would be good to evaluate some of the

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<sup>10</sup> One interviewee expressed the hope that Christian Aid communications capacity would become more localised so that these types of processes could be owned and managed more locally.

participatory communications work – both with programmatic and organisational objectives – to understand:

- The use and impact of the outputs;
- The impact of the process on participants and partners;
- How representative, inclusive and participatory the process has been;
- The capacity and resources needed to implement the process.

### Reader's Questions:

*Please use this space to note priority questions and issues arising from this section, to help to frame the ensuing discussion. At this stage the most relevant focus is on the overall approach which Christian Aid might take, based on which decisions on the types of tools and implementation mechanisms can flow.*

Reviewer's name	Issue or Question to discuss

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## Part II: Where from here?

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Based on the review of documentation and interviews, some key issues and questions arise about how, and why, Christian Aid might want to take this forward in support of its strategy and principles. In the previous section some questions may be raised as to the nature of the *methodologies* that would support Christian Aid's vision and strategy. In this section, the questions arising are around

- how C4D processes and outputs might fit with Christian Aid's aims and ways of working,
- to what end they might be applied, and
- the practical and ethical implications.

### Why does Christian Aid want to include more 'authentic voices' in its programming?

The ToR for this research states that: *"Projects that amplify authentic voices are increasingly important in a fast-changing development landscape, and in a world where attitudes to aid and the*





*work of INGOs in the Global South are under far greater scrutiny.”* Chris McWilliams, CA’s programme communications lead, explained that the organisation is trying to “*narrow the gap*” between those who support CA’s programmes and those participating in them. Approaches which support people to communicate their own stories in their own way will, it is hoped, generate more accurate, more contextualised and more authentic communications with donors and supporters. “*We are moving away from the broadcast model where we send people out to gather stories, towards more direct communications from partners and communities to our audiences here.*” he explained.

Christian Aid’s strategic document “Responding to a changing world” recognises that the ‘digital age’ is transforming the operating environment for the organisation, and will transform how it works, raises funds, communicates, relates and engages with different stakeholders, including “*how we engage with poor communities and share information with those living in poverty; how we support their voices to be heard ... whether within programming or through our channels to different audiences.*”

Christian Aid’s principles put analysis of power, gender, inclusion and inequality at the heart of its approach. Participatory approaches are integrated into much of CA’s work, such as the PVCA approach in resilience and humanitarian work. This creates an important need to listen, respond and be accountable to communities, ensuring that the voices of less powerful members of communities affected by your work are heard.

The document review found insights into the role of local knowledge in programme quality, to help Christian Aid and partners to:

- understand the context for the work – the local dynamics to build community-owned, relevant and sustainable processes;
- understand the impact of interventions– not just changes identified and anticipated in the project theory of change, but how those ripple out and create further (and unanticipated) changes;
- identify what works in what context and under what conditions, what is replicable, and how to adapt programme design to what is really happening;
- be accountable to communities for interventions in their lives – in order to hear the impact we are having we need to address the power dynamics between CA/ partners and communities.

#### **Author’s reflection:**

*C4D approaches have the potential to (contribute to) transforming relationships between communities and development actors, including Christian Aid and partners. They can support local people to be more active agents in development and change, defining their own priorities and telling their own stories. This could be an important tool in the kit to implement Vision 2020, helping to build new relationships and communication channels to do things differently and hold each other to account. However, this raises important questions about the extent to which Christian Aid is willing or able to respond to and pass on what is being communicated, whether to respond to the learning through adaptive management, or to adapt their communications to the messages emerging through the processes.*



## Reader's Questions:

Please use this space to note priority questions and issues arising from this section, to help to frame the ensuing discussion. In particular, please help to identify elements of Christian Aid's strategy, principles and policies which suggest that C4D may be a good fit, or not, for the organisation.

Reviewer's name	Issue or Question to discuss

### UNICEF C4D principles include:

- Create spaces for plurality of voices and community narratives; Ensure active and meaningful participation of children and women; Reflect principles of inclusion, self-determination and participation by prioritizing marginalized groups;
- Encourage listening, dialogue and debate;
- Link community perspectives and voices with sub-national and national policy-dialogue;
- Build self-esteem and confidence of [participants] as agents of change and primary audience;

## How do we want to define or focus 'participatory communications'?

Perhaps the first question to consider is 'what are we talking about?!' The one definite is that participatory communication projects all have a physical communications output – either text or audio-visual based. These outputs are generated by (or at least include) the voices of people directly or indirectly affected by CA/partner interventions. This means that we are only talking about projects which strengthen communication *with* or *of* communities, not those which aim to deliver information to communities. However, the means, purpose and audience can be different.

### Author's reflection:

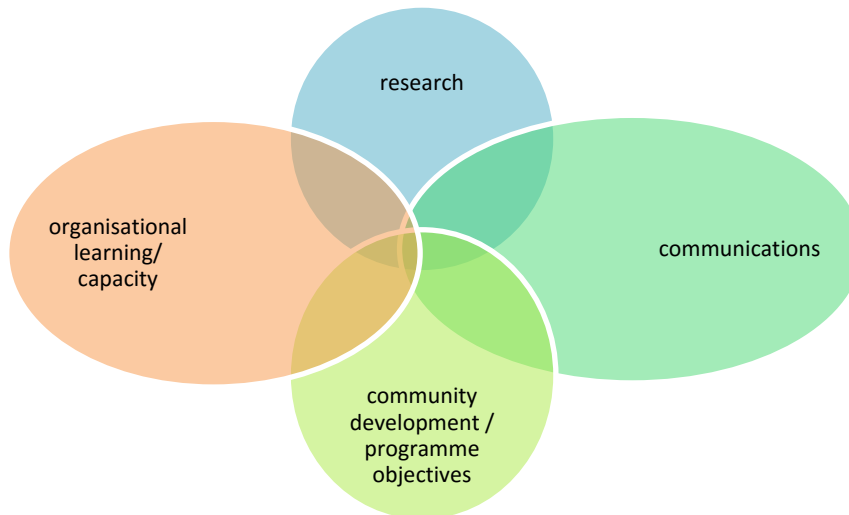
The terms of reference refers to 'Communications for Development' and 'participatory communications', neither of which, in my view, elegantly or adequately define what Christian Aid has been doing in this area. C4D may cover everything, but could be too broad to be meaningful or useful. What's more the use of 'for development' implies (at least to me) that the outputs and

**Communication for Development (C4D)**<sup>1</sup> was defined at the 2006 World Congress on Communication for Development as 'a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It is also about seeking change at different levels including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating and learning for sustained and meaningful change'. It is a term that covers everything that Christian Aid has been doing, both in terms of communication for programmatic objectives such as advocacy and empowerment, and communication for Christian Aid's own learning and communications.

outcomes are focused on local development, rather than the development sector or development practice.

For this research I contacted a lot of C4D specialists asking for examples of what organisations are doing to apply C4D approaches to develop outputs for M&E, learning and programme communications. Most were not able to suggest any concrete examples. This may be because the initiatives are hidden from view, as one-off initiatives in different areas of work, the types of "small, stand-alone forays" into the area of work in Christian Aid. A sharper definition (at least to separate

programmatic and organisational objectives) would not only help to make the work more visible, but also strengthen the opportunities to share good practice or integrate key elements across the organisation. This would create the opportunity for Christian Aid to develop a reputation and provide leadership to the wider sector.



*Participatory communications is a term which seems to more strongly suggest a communications objective, implying that ‘authentic voices’ are included in the agency’s communications. However, while all of the projects reviewed here do enable local people to better communicate their views and priorities, they are not all participatory nor all communications-focused:*

- *Some of the projects are not primarily geared towards communications outputs, but for evaluation or assessment (e.g. Picture Power);*
- *Some of the projects do not employ participatory methods or tools to strengthen voice and agency, just give people the opportunity to step up and say their bit (e.g. Truth Truck).*

## What do we want to use the outputs for?

The way that Christian Aid defines or focuses its C4D work will depend on how the outputs are expected to be used. Apart from work towards programme objectives, such as SMS Voices and the Community Correspondents’ Network. The approaches have been applied to either – or both – donor or supporter communications and assessment of or feedback on programmes.

The principal objectives of the process, and intended uses of the outputs, will have a big influence on the design of the methodology. Are participants free to communicate what is most important to them, or are they working within a clear framework (for content or style) set or negotiated with Christian Aid? If the outputs are intended for supporter communications, there may be different expectations and requirements than processes aimed at facilitating local participation in an outcome assessment, or in partner learning, prioritisation and planning. David Clark conceptualised the objectives of C4D approaches and intended uses of the outputs in a Venn diagram:

While the outputs may end up being used in different ways to those anticipated at the start of the process, this may require changes to the methodology as well as raising issues of informed consent discussed below. Clarity of the expected uses will make it easier to identify any changes (to methodology) which need to be made when designing a piece of work.

As Christian Aid aims to move towards more direct communications from partners and communities to its different audiences this raises important questions about the role and needs of Christian Aid in terms of mediating this flow of information. Chris McWilliams recognised that there will still be a need for Christian Aid to mediate this communication, to keep it within the bounds of the organisation's identity, principles, or brand. This might be more of a 'moderator' than a mediator, but requires some careful thought as to the parameters and principles for any 'direct communication' flowing through the organisation. Chris McWilliams recognised that this change in approach to communications will also require changes to existing structures and capacity, with more capacity in country teams to support meaningful communication from communities, saying that "We are actively looking and talking to partners to see how that is going to work."

### **Author's reflection:**

*These types of approaches could be very important in supporting this work, with investment in the capacity of local staff and partners to support and facilitate communities' communication capacity, to produce local communication outputs of sufficient quality and depth to be useful in different contexts without the risk of misinterpretation or misuse.*

*What's more, the authenticity of the voices, the truthfulness and critical nature of the content and messages, depends very much on the power relations between the people telling the story, and those asking the questions. There may be a different process for producing outputs for communications, to strengthen the quality and clarity of the outputs, and for M&E type processes where complex, messy outputs can be useful for learning, and to generate further discussion. However, attention is always necessary to the quality of the relationship underlying the communications – something that C4D and other participatory approaches can support.*

*One external interviewee suggested some key questions to help define (and maybe name?!) the approach, elaborated here by the author:*

- **Whose voice is being communicated?** *You talk about 'authentic voices', and 'direct communication'. Does this need to be refined, to ensure that 'community' is not treated as a homogeneous entity, and to recognise diversity and unequal power relations? Will you only include projects which purposely work to counter existing communication biases?*
- **For what purpose?** *This paper discusses the implications of developing communications outputs for different purposes, whether organisational learning or capacity building, evaluation and donor reporting or other types of communication. There are also projects which seek to strengthen the voice of communities in local development and policy advocacy. There is a lot of crossover – not only in process, but in many cases also in outcome, as M&E C4D projects have resulted local capacity, advocacy and empowerment outcomes. How focused do you want to be? Is it useful to distinguish between organisational and programmatic objectives? Within that, do you need to separate communications, evaluation or programme learning outputs? Perhaps the Venn diagram could be a basis for discussions to identify how much crossover of objectives is possible, and which are the more important.*
- **How are people engaged?** *Many of the methodologies can be used at different points during a programme cycle, or throughout. They may be used in a one-off 'snapshot' approach, or a more integrated, long-term process where participants have a say in defining not just the messages, but also the issues, and possibly even the means and the audiences. C4D projects will need to be adapted to the types of use and budget. Do you need to set some minimum standards for this type of work?*

## Reader's Questions:

Please use this space to note priority questions and issues arising from this section, to help to frame the ensuing discussion. How focused or open do you need the approaches to be? What might be the implications?

Reviewer's name	Issue or Question to discuss

## How can we support good practice in participatory communications?

This review shows that C4D approaches can add significant value to Christian Aid, partners and communities in terms of communication, relationships, visibility and capacity for appropriate action. C4D seems to link with the strategic direction and principles of the organisation as stated in the materials provided for this research. There is much to build on from the experiences of using these approaches. How that is done depends on the priorities, resources and will of the organisation.

Some basic principles for sharing and promoting good practice would include:

- **Capacity building:** ensuring appropriate capacity and structures throughout the organisation and partners to facilitate C4D approaches and use the outputs effectively and appropriately;
- **Raising awareness and visibility;** letting people know what has been done, the utility and value of the approaches for different objectives;
- **Co-ordinating expertise:** documenting lessons learned and strengthening the community of practice, so that people know where to find advice and tools, nurturing practical wisdom;

There will be more... this section explores some of the organisational and ethical considerations in taking forward this type of work.

## Integrating a C4D approach:

The nature and scale of this will depend on how the organisation wants to take this work forward. So far, the work done has mostly been taking a 'snap-shot' approach, looking at issues and changes at a specific moment in time. These stand-alone projects are useful to generate a strand of data for an assessment or a thought-provoking communications piece, but could ongoing processes have greater potential to meet the needs of the organisation, and be more cost-effective in the long run? In Christian Aid, C4D projects have often been added on once the programme is up and running, not built in at the design stage. This has made it more difficult to fully engage the wider programme



team or integrate the outputs into wider M&E/adaptive programme management or communications processes.<sup>11</sup>

**Author’s reflection:**

*There are arguments for taking a more mainstreamed approach, using the methodologies (particularly participatory photography) throughout the programme cycle to strengthen the capacity of communities to input into Christian Aid and partners’ research, planning/programme management and communications and create permanent feedback loops. In this way, there is more potential for local communities and partners to strengthen their communication skills and capacity, their critical engagement and self-determination; linking not only to Christian Aid’s own learning and communications objectives, but with potential to strengthen local advocacy and accountability. This would require sufficient resources and capacity, as well as sufficient programme flexibility to meaningfully use and respond to what is being communicated , and work to encourage supporters to engage with these kinds of outputs.*

**Reader’s Questions:**

*Please use this space to note priority questions and issues arising from this section, to help to frame the ensuing discussion. To what extent is it practical or desirable to mainstream C4D approaches into Christian Aid’s communication or M&E?*

Reviewer’s name	Issue or Question to discuss

**Building local capacity for C4D - in Christian Aid and partners**

Ultimately communications capacity-building could generate more localised, sustainable and locally owned communications processes. Kathryn Irwin pointed out that, to date, communications projects have tended to be devised and managed by people in a UK team, who help to design the process and bring in the necessary expertise. From her experience, it is important to have local ownership of the project to ensure that the outputs are relevant and well-used and that the outcomes are followed up. This role needs to be properly recognised and resourced.

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<sup>11</sup> PhotoVoice find that most of their work with development agencies are stand-alone projects, and intentionally work within their projects to build the capacity and will of organisations to mainstream and replicate the approach. They recognise that there is often the need for ‘internal lobbying’ to strengthen the organisation’s capacity to listen, respond and adapt to community perspectives on their work.





Interviewees pointed to the fact that several external reviews have shown that Christian Aid and partners genuinely value participatory principles and processes. David Clark explained that in some country programmes this is more naturally integrated into their way of working, whereas at a wider level participatory methods tend to be built into programmes through specific tools, such as the PVCA. He has found that there is genuine will in country programmes for participatory communications approaches to be built in, as it fits with the core accountability concept of giving people voice. This suggests that investment in local capacity to integrate participatory methods, and facilitate meaningful participation and inclusion, would be relevant and worthwhile.

All of the work reviewed here has depended on the local partner for its success. People only accepted and trusted the Truth Truck because of the work the local partner did to promote it and ensure that it was culturally appropriate, based on their legitimacy and trust built in the local area. For the participatory photography work the partners are the key interface, providing local knowledge, access to local communities, as facilitators and as audiences for much of the outputs and learning. Partner capacity is key all of this work, and *“it is important that it fits within their on-going journey with that community, as well as the wider work they are doing”*.

According to CA/evaluations, the outputs of participatory communications work, the photographs and captions, have been useful for partners to communicate and raise awareness of their work. The discussions that are facilitated around these outputs have generated rich learning, ideas and opportunities for partners to take their work forward. The greatest value of this work for learning, therefore, requires capacity not only to manage the process, but to facilitate discussion and analysis, and respond to what is being said and learned. For example, in Ethiopia the local partner for PhotoVoice did not have sufficient staff capacity to organise exhibitions, support captioning and run workshop activities. They did not have the budget for printing, or the internet connection for uploading, or the capacity for translation and transcription. There needs to be budget and country office support not just to train partners in the technical aspects of the work, but also to support them to integrate the process fits into their longer-term community development approach.

### Reader’s Questions:

*Please use this space to note priority questions and issues arising from this section, to help to frame the ensuing discussion. What scope is there for strengthening local staff and partner capacity for communications and C4D and how would this fit with the current direction?*

Reviewer’s name	Issue or Question to discuss



## Building capacity to use the outputs of participatory communications ethically and effectively:

The outputs from participatory communications processes are different in several ways from traditional communications material commissioned from professionals. They may be different in quality and content. The meaning may be more rich and layered, more contextualised. In the case of the photography outputs, the image and the caption cannot be understood or used separately. They are owned by the person who created them. As Amanda Farrant noted, “*privacy and usage issues are almost more important with participatory outputs than professional photography, as the pictures are more personal.*”

These outputs have the potential to communicate much more directly and powerfully the context for Christian Aid’s work, the reality, the complexity. But this requires some thinking in how to use them, to show that they come from a different type of process and share their meaning, to ensure that the authors are not misrepresented. This requires more than consent to use an image or story, it demands that the story and voice be respected, with implications for how consent is given, and how the outputs are used and presented.

### ... using the outputs:

The ToR mentions ‘direct communication’ as a goal or direction for Christian Aid. It is true that this ‘digitally enabled’ time provides more channels for this kind of direct communication, and it is important to think about how this type of work might interact with social media in the future. But communications outputs do not necessarily translate directly from one context to another. It is important for Christian Aid communications teams to think through their role and responsibility in facilitating communication between communities and supporters or other stakeholders, minimising the risk of misinterpretation. This includes attention to the motivation of communities to communicate directly with other stakeholders, and whether Christian Aid needs to set parameters for the style and content of the communication which it facilitates, to be coherent and consistent with its own identity and messaging.

### ... securing informed consent:

In approaches like Picture Power, participants take photographs and develop captions in order to communicate, and how they do this will depend on who they are communicating with. There are therefore serious ethical implications to taking these outputs and using them in a different context or relationship. A consent and usage policy will need to be built into any approach or methodology used, which can be based on the existing communications guidelines, but taking into account the specific nature of these outputs. It is difficult for the photographer to know or understand the context in which their images will be interpreted, and the usage policies and protocols will need to be adapted to deal ethically and fairly with that situation.

Interviewees suggested some basic principles of such guidelines, including:

- Photographers/ authors are not asked for consent until the end of the process, to ensure that they are free to capture what is most important and relevant to them;
- Consent is given on an image-by-image basis, and for specific audiences and uses;
- The image, caption and credit must be used together;
- C4D processes must be carried out with the involvement of, and for the benefit of, the communities where they are implemented (and different people within them).
- Authors/ photographers need to understand from the beginning how the outputs are intended to be used, and any changes or additions need to be cleared with them/ agreed representatives. Alternatively, the approach could be conceptualised as an expansive

learning process, where participants decide which stories they want to communicate externally and to whom only at the end.

- Feedback loops should be built in to enable communities/ reporters to view and discuss the material, to ensure that local meanings and implications are explored. *“It is in the discussion of the outputs that the richness is found, it can shift thinking, build relationships, help prioritise issues and action.”*
- The outputs must be clearly accredited/ labelled as taken by communities when used outside that context. *“We need to distinguish that these pictures are not ours”.*
- When used for fundraising/ supporter communications, outputs should be used within a broader communications piece (such as a blog) to make sure the bigger picture is shown/told.

### Reader’s Questions:

*Please use this space to note priority questions and issues arising from this section, to help to frame the ensuing discussion. How can we ensure that the outputs are used ethically and appropriately?*

Reviewer’s name	Issue or Question to discuss

## Annex 1: list of interviewees

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Amanda Farrant	CA Media, PR and Content Lead
Becky Warnock	PhotoVoice
Chris McWilliams	CA Programme Communications Lead
David Adam	CA Senior Programme Officer
David Clark	CA Programme Performance Manager
Emma Wigley	CA Multimedia Communications Manager
Kate Newman	CA Head of Strategy Implementation and Internal Communication
Kate Watson	PhotoVoice
Kathryn Irwin	Former International Donor Communications Lead
Matt Gonzalez-Noda	CA Photographer
Nick Guttman	CA Head of Humanitarian Division
Tom Elkins	PhotoVoice CEO
Zoe Wright	PhotoVoice
On the wider sector	
Linda Raftree	Freelance Consultant
Seamus Anderson	World Vision
Mika Valitalo	Plan Finland
Pete Cranston	Freelance Consultant

## Case studies

### Picture Power

Picture Power is a participatory photography methodology developed by Christian Aid to bring the voices of people participating in programmes into the assessment and understanding of change. Christian Aid is committed to including grassroots voices in its learning, research and communications. For people with low literacy skills, photography offers an opportunity to document and share their stories, providing insight into the context for the work, and any changes experienced. In most M&E processes, this type of process will complement more traditional data collection approaches, providing richer insights and uncovering changes and opportunities which may not surface in interviews or surveys.

After working with Photovoice to implement participatory photography projects in Ghana and Ethiopia (see separate case study), Christian Aid's donor communications team adapted the methodology to fit more closely with the organisation's own M&E processes and systems, using in-house resources and expertise. It was felt that this would not only save money and build internal capacity, but would also bring the necessary organisational knowledge to ensure that the organisation's information and communications needs were met. The methodology was designed to be partner-led, in that they identify sites, participants and themes; and community-owned in that they determine the aspects of change to be documented.

#### **Where Picture Power has been implemented:**

An initial two-week pilot of the Picture Power methodology in Kenya in 2015 was built into a wider PPA evaluation process, to provide an extra strand of data which could be triangulated with that collected through more traditional means. The pilot also allowed Christian Aid to assess whether it had sufficient capacity and skills to apply such methodologies in a more relevant, effective and efficient way than outside providers.

In Makueni, in eastern Kenya, Christian Aid and partner ADS Eastern have been implementing the PPA funded 'Thriving Resilient Livelihoods' programme since 2011. The programme aims to empower communities to identify and address risks, including water and food shortages, climate change, environmental degradation, conflict and lack of income. In 2015, Picture Power was used as part of the annual PPA country assessment process. The methodology was then used to explore changes relating to a health project in Nyanza, Northern Kenya.

In the occupied Palestinian territories, under the PPA, Christian Aid has been working with the YMCA and the Palestinian Agricultural Development Association to support communities to identify, prioritise and address risks and build resilience using participatory vulnerability and capacity assessments. Work is targeted at community level, while recognising that there are complex power relations within communities. Picture Power was used in oPt in 2015 as part of a wider set of impact assessments of governance work, with 14 community reporters across 4 communities. After the pilot in Kenya, this was an opportunity to try Picture Power methodology in a different context, focusing on changes in power relations in four areas: power with, power within, power to, and power over. In particular, the study sought to explore changes in accountability, and communities' power to demand it; and how inclusive and accountable the programme itself was perceived to be.

In Malawi, Christian Aid leads a consortium delivering the Enhancing Community Resilience Programme which reaches more than 355,000 people. Picture Power was implemented with 10 participants in two districts, to gain insight into the daily-lives, relevant issues and general context for the work, and to explore the wider impact of ECRP, including on those not directly involved in the



programme. Through this approach, it was hoped that 'soft' issues would surface, that may not usually be picked up by more traditional M&E approaches.

#### **Process:**

Picture Power is a flexible approach that can be adjusted in terms of time, focus and scope. Selected representatives are trained in photographic techniques and supported to identify key issues they wish to document. They take photographs, and are supported to write captions for a selection of these images, which are displayed at a community exhibition. This is an opportunity for the wider community to view and comment on the photographs, and crucially to share their own views on the issues represented. In this way the photographs are an entry point for discussion, which can uncover different perceptions, for example between men and women, and show some of the ripple effects of change.

#### **Selecting participants**

The selection of participants is one of the defining factors in the success and value of participatory photography. The photographs communicate a personal and subjective view of the community, the relevance of issues and changes experienced. It is important to ensure that less powerful voices are included, that participants are drawn from a cross-section of the community, including women, youth and other marginalised people. The details of this will depend on the project and context. For example,

- In Malawi all participants had been involved in ECRP interventions, whereas in oPt the project explicitly included people not directly involved with the programme. This enabled partners to hear from those who had not been reached.
- In Malawi and Kenya, special efforts were made to enable women to participate, whereas in oPt most participants were women and youth, as adult men were working outside of the community.



**Photo monitor Bennita,  
a farmer and mother of three.**

#### **Training and mentoring**

Photo monitors receive initial training in 'vernacular photography' and the basics of Most Significant Change story methodology. The facilitator should have the technical expertise to give participants the support and advice they need whatever their level of skill, and also be able to generate an open and participatory dynamic.

It is essential that the participants do not feel compelled to reflect well on the partners work. Participatory approaches help to create a space where photo monitors feel confident to express their own views and give direction to the process and choice of issues. Partners and local staff avoid inputting their own opinions or perspectives of the project outcomes, to try not to influence the process or the nature of photographs. In oPt, partners were not involved in the initial training, but were still able to support the process and are still supporting community groups to use photography.

The workshop introduction explains that the aim of the process is for individual participants to reflect on their own experience, without fear of criticising the local partner. The training covers:

#### **How to use a camera and what makes a good picture:**

Participants receive brief instructions and practice in using the cameras. The aim is not to train people to be professional photographers but to teach them to



**Picture Power workshop in Malawi**



communicate visually issues and changes and how these manifest in their day-to-day lives. It should be emphasized that there are no 'right' photographs. The group look critically at photographs to explore aesthetics, framing and different types of image. They discuss how these can be combined to tell stories, how added text can enhance or change the meaning of an image, and ways of representing less tangible changes or concepts. Other issues such as copyright and getting informed consent are also covered. Participants then practice taking different types of photographs, and review each other's work.

#### **Choosing a focus:**

Starting from the personal experience of change, each photo monitor chooses an area of focus. In oPt, one community reporter chose to document changes in how the community worked together for advocacy and action; others looked at the functioning of the protection committee and what it meant to those involved. As well as documenting the changes they felt had occurred during the project, they also photographed elements of their daily life they considered important.

**Identifying key changes and issues to document:** The starting point for this discussion is always the self, the outcomes and impacts which have been most significant for each individual. They are then encouraged to think more laterally about how these changes have affected other people and groups, in different ways, and any further changes that this change may have provoked. In Kenya, participants used different sized piles of seeds to map the stages of progress of the project '*from poor, middle to rich*'.

**One-on-one mentoring:** After the workshop participants are given 'homework' to take pictures to represent the significant changes they have identified at the workshop. A day or so later, the trainers work with individual photo monitors in their home or community to review their initial photographs and troubleshoot technical issues, and to help them to refine their focus, including outcomes manifested in other changes in the lives of individuals, families and the community. This becomes a brief for the individual photo monitor to follow over the next 2 weeks, taking pictures in their household and community. In oPt community reporters took between 100 and 4000 photographs over the 2 week period.

#### **Selecting and captioning the images**

At the end of the time allocated for photography, the trainers worked with the photo monitors to select the photographs they felt most important to tell their story. Participants choose around 20 images representing the most important outcomes and issues, a mixture of those directly relevant to the programme being evaluated, and those which illustrate more general issues and daily life. Captions (stories or descriptions) were developed for the selected photographs or groups of images to provide further qualitative information. The process can be time consuming, and require support of local partners for transcription in local languages.

#### **Images telling stories**

In oPt some of the most interesting insights were revealed from initially uninteresting photographs. In one case, a woman not directly involved with the programme took photographs sitting at her window, to represent the isolation she experiences as a woman in a conservative family. In another case, a photograph of a bare spot on a hillside told the story of a community early-warning group, who monitor spots like this for helicopters from the Israeli army.

In each place, the photographs and stories were organised into themes relevant to the project framework. In oPt, the themes were the four areas of power (with, within, to and over), whereas in Kenya and Malawi the components of the Christian Aid resilience framework were used.

### Validation and community exhibitions

The selected photographs show the most significant changes and issues from an explicitly personal and subjective point of view. Once they have been printed and captioned, a pop-up community exhibition allows other community members and stakeholders to view the photographs, collectively assess the extent to which they represent wider opinion and experience, and explore differences. The photographers take people around, explaining the photographs, stories and themes. After this, people are given stickers (different for



**Community exhibition in Malawi**

women and men) to vote for the issues or images they felt most relevant to them. This highlights areas of convergence and difference, provoking rich discussions on different experiences, on the areas had seen most change and priorities for future action. For example, in eastern Kenya it emerged that men prioritised sand dams while women attributed significant change to village savings and loans groups.

The results of the community discussions are noted by the partner or local staff, and compared with the results of other data collection exercises within the outcome assessment. In the case of oPt, other assessment activities were not possible, and triangulation was done using supporting evidence from a previous review and partner records.

### Further uses of the outputs

*'We gave community members the cameras and it was up to them to tell us what resilience means to them ... They have taken pictures of things that we would not ever have thought to take pictures of ... the participants themselves have noticed different things going on – they have an awareness of what is important and interesting. The images are not only a great source of information and learning for us, but they resound with meaning and fresh perspectives'* Sabine Joukes ECRP

The key output from the process in each case has been the information and insights into key issues and changes experienced by community members, to feed into accountability and learning processes of Christian Aid and the partners. Locally, the exhibitions and discussions have had an impact on awareness of the project, strengthening relationships and the confidence of participants. It is important to consider follow-up activities, to enable validation in neighbouring communities, and for local staff and partners to review and analyse the data and identify potential actions emerging.

#### **Responding to feedback**

In oPt, partners were able to strengthen accountability through the process. For example when hearing that some people were not sure how to participate in or feedback on the project they decided to make a renewed effort to engage and reach out to different people.

Communities have been able to use the photographs to communicate the issues and share experiences with others. In oPt, participants and groups continued to use the cameras for local advocacy and awareness raising. For example, posting photos of violations by settlers on social media. This is not something that Christian Aid had promoted, or has followed-up, but has been supported by the local partners.

Beyond this, the photographs, captions and stories are a valuable resource for Christian Aid and partners to communicate the realities and outcomes of their work. The work in Malawi, under ECRP, was part of an integrated international donor communications process, whereby the outputs were shared using multiple platforms including printed brochures, a digital story and an exhibition in DfID.

Some of the outputs of the work in oPt were shared on a blog to support donor communications, highlighting some of the stories, images of daily life and wider social changes. This kind of insight does not emerge from research following the project log-frame and asking about direct outcomes of the project, but provides important context to Christian Aid and partners' work, opportunities, challenges and progress.

The photos from Kalawani, Kenya were also used for supporter communications, as part of the Harvest Appeal to churches. Amanda Farrant, CA's media and PR lead, noted that using these images "*feels like a less extractive, more honest way of communicating what we do to supporters*", giving a fuller picture of the complex nature of development work. However, Matt Gonzalez-Noda pointed out that these are not professional photographs, and cannot be treated as such; partly because of the quality but also because of ownership. Where the process has been aimed at project evaluation, it is more complicated to take the outputs and use them for communication purposes. Amanda Farrant commented that these types of outputs should be used within a broader communications piece, including blogs or other platforms, which show the bigger picture.

## Value of the process

*"Through participatory photo-based evaluations ... our ability to zoom in and focus deeply into the communities' interpretation and view of our PPA resilience interventions has become sharper, more targeted, credible and cost-effective."* – Jimmy Obuya, programme officer, Christian Aid Kenya

## Uncovering ripples and unintended consequences

The photographs and subsequent discussions can uncover hidden or soft impacts of or around interventions. Although the project is based on CA and partners' assessment frameworks and questions, the photographers are free to communicate what is important and relevant to them. Subsequent discussions provide the opportunity to join the dots, pulling out the relevance of these changes and issues to the intervention itself. As the photo-trainer Matt Gonzalez-Noda explained: *"Participatory photography can give the organisation the opportunity to step back and look at what it is doing from within the project context."*

For example, in Kalawani, photographs and discussions in two communities revealed that in one, sand dams had provided more water for those close to the dams, whereas in the other community action had led to the water company installing pipes to enable farmers from a wider area to access the water. Christian Aid and partners can respond to this type of realtime information to encourage sharing and replication of good practice and mitigate for unequal benefits in future programming.

In Kalawani Picture Power was implemented within an M&E process, and this example came to light because the facilitators could ask questions about the relevance of the photographs until they get to the



### Highlighting exclusion in Kenya

In the Kenyan health project, Picture Power photographers highlighted how people with disabilities were benefiting less from health interventions. Based on this evidence, the project left the cameras with the community for two more months, to document health and access issues.

This prompted Christian Aid to commission a study on inclusion with a focus on older people and disability, to inform more inclusive and relevant programming. These issues would not have emerged from the general project monitoring processes. This longer term project had significant impact on Christian Aid policy as well as providing communications outputs, showing the potential of a longer-term, more integrated participatory photography approach.

bottom of what is important or relevant. This requires people with the skills and motivation to facilitate discussions and uncover and use the insights gained.

### **An important strand of data in outcome assessments**

The oPt team found that Picture Power was an effective way to explore power issues within the M&E process, and produced good learning. However, it was not enough to be considered an assessment in itself, but would need to be situated as providing supporting evidence within a wider outcome assessment. The approach is limited unless there is robust triangulation to ensure that the stories given are representative. Given the lack of objective data, no firm conclusions about contribution could or should be drawn. Rather, the process allowed a detailed exploration of themes relating to accountability and power, building a richer picture of changes within the community and what role the project may have played in these.

### **Fitting into adaptive/ responsive management**

The flexibility offered by PPA strategic funding made it possible to change course as we learn, to bring together programming disciplines and to better respond to communities' needs and capacities.

### **Links and references:**

- <http://resilientlivelihoods.christianaid.org.uk/picture-power-understanding-resilience-through-a-community-lens/>
- Understanding resilience through a community lens: 2015 report  
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ypvw7d792u2z0b2/Understanding%20impact%20%20through%20a%20community%20lens.pdf?dl=0>
- <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/ecrp-picture-power/>
- <http://programme.christianaid.org.uk/programme-policy-practice/sites/default/files/2016-06/Kenya%20inclusion%20Case%20Study.pdf>

## Photovoice

PhotoVoice is an independent organisation and a methodology, using participatory photography for social change with partners across the world, across many themes and sectors. PhotoVoice partnered with Christian Aid for two programmes:

- In **Ghana**, with local partner the Youth Harvest Foundation, to record the progress of the MyPharm project which seeks to link farmers to crop price information through mobile phones. Over the course of a year 42 farmers took on the role of community monitors and documented experiences and perceptions around key issues.
- In **Ethiopia**, with local partner HUNDEE, to contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the first year of the BRACED programme, which works with pastoralist communities to build resilience to climate shocks and stresses through strengthening information, communication, policy influence, behaviour change and capacity building. The Photovoice project worked with 11 photo monitors to help to create a baseline, and subsequently monitor changes to, development and climate issues at household and community levels.

### Objectives

Both projects were designed to support the monitoring and evaluation of the programmes, enabling local people to capture the benefits, challenges and successes experienced in relation to the issues being addressed. This enables local people to explore and express their perspectives, feedback to the partners and build a story of change, on the one hand; and provides Christian Aid and partners with valuable information on the impact of their work, and on local issues, capacity, opportunities and challenges to inform future programming.

The projects also had an important communications objective, helping to build awareness of the aims, objectives and progress of the projects in the local area, and more widely amongst development stakeholders and supporters at different levels.

Finally, the methodology has a strong empowerment and capacity building element, strengthening the voice and critical analysis of local people, and providing a means for them to communicate their experiences within the project, and more widely within their communities and with decision makers.

### Process and methodology

The PhotoVoice methodology is flexible, adapting to the specific needs of each context and project. Working closely with the local partner, they provide training, mentoring and support for community photo-monitors to capture images which express their perspective on important and relevant issues. To ensure meaningful participation, the methodology is designed to enable photographers to focus on the issues important to them, rather than being limited to a narrow focus set by the commissioning agency.<sup>12</sup>

They then support the photographers to select, edit and caption their photographs, which are exhibited locally. The photographs then become an entry point for a wider discussion on the importance and relevance of the issues, and any differences in perceptions or experiences, through facilitated discussion of the images. This discussion generates key learning to feed back into the programming of partners and Christian Aid, while also having local value.

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<sup>12</sup> While the programme theme and objectives will inform this focus, the freedom for participants to document issues of relevance to them provides rich insight into the context, and in some cases the unintended consequences, of the programme intervention. For example, in Ethiopia, photographers showed that family planning was a key issue, especially for women. While not a programme priority, this was highly relevant to the programme focus as it enabled women to be more active in the public sphere and productive activities.

Beyond this local exhibition and discussion, the images and captions can be used more widely: locally, by the photographers and their communities, to raise awareness of issues or seek solutions to problems highlighted; for wider communication of the programme context, work or outcomes among other development actors and with donors or supporters for example.<sup>13</sup>

### **Participant recruitment and selection**

The selection of photographers is fundamental to the outcome of the process, ensuring the views of different members of the community, affected in different ways by the issues, are represented. The local knowledge and relationships of the partner is absolutely key at this point, to select engaged and committed participants with good knowledge of the issues, representing a cross section of the community.

In Ghana, relatively few women were recruited (6 out of 35 photographers), partly because the partner had made literacy a criteria for participation. There was also a perception that men's control over women's movement would hamper the effectiveness of female participants. In the subsequent project in Ethiopia, it was made a criterion that at least half of the participants were women, and also at least half had experienced direct impact of climate change on their livelihoods. 6 women were involved, 2 of them petty-traders, 2 women with large families and 2 teenage school girls. It was noted that the provision of per-diems for workshop time enabled participants, particularly women with heavy workloads, to fully engage in the project.

### **Training and supporting the photographers**

Training and mentoring, with hands-on practical work, was provided firstly for the partners and staff who will support the photographers, and then for the photographers themselves. A participatory approach was used to maximise learning opportunities, and ensure that the emerging focus of the work reflected issues and questions relevant to and directly affecting the participants, drawing on their personal experiences, expectations, fears and aspirations<sup>14</sup>. The curriculum remained flexible, responding to the needs and feedback of participants and staff. Participants contributed to the timings and ground-rules for the workshops, to accommodate outside commitments of participants, particularly women.

The partner/ staff training covered the technical basics of how to operate the digital camera and how capture a strong image to communicate a message, and ethical considerations in relation to

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<sup>13</sup> The use of images beyond the local context implies ethical considerations of informed consent, recognising that the outputs of this type of process belong to the photographers, not to Christian Aid and partners. For that reason, and to give the photographers confidence to communicate freely, Photovoice do not seek consent to use the images until the end of the process. Consent is given on an image-by-image basis. Sometimes they may be released for a specific private or organisational use (research report etc.) but not publically. The image, caption and credit are a single package and cannot be used separately.

<sup>14</sup> Exercises included

- Village Tour' to identify focuses issues. Participants led facilitators on a tour of the community, taking photographs and describing local problems and opportunities, capacity, structures and local knowledge for determining potential solutions. During the follow-up workshop the tour was repeated to provide insight into what has changed or how ideas and opportunities had evolved.
- Photo Dialogue using photographs to enable participants to reflect on HOW an image communicates and WHAT it communicates (the themes, attitudes, content and perspectives). A 'Roles & Responsibility' photo dialogue matched community and external actors (e.g. elders, women, NGO workers, scientists, children, journalists, etc.), with different responsibilities within the community (e.g. decision-making, weather forecasting, planning, water collection, telling stories, resource management, etc.). The subsequent discussion provided valuable insights into how development initiatives can be implemented and managed, and allowed participants to challenge assumptions about community structures and roles.



participation, control and inclusion indecision making<sup>15</sup>. Partners were then supported to create context-specific plans to guide the work, including relevant issues and areas of work to be explored, activities to promote collection of meaningful and rich data, roles and responsibilities and logistical considerations. In particular, partners were encouraged to consider the quantity or level of data that they had the capacity to use and manage, including key practical considerations such as support for captioning and translation, organising and archiving the outputs, as well as using the data.

The photo-monitor training was in 2 parts: training in tools and techniques for photography followed by one-on-one mentoring and support. The training aimed to ensure that participants:

- understand the aims of the project and their role within it;
- can operate the cameras independently and take successful photos;
- understand how to use photos and captions to tell a story;
- identify focus issues to address through their photos and captions;
- understand consent and how to obtain it.

After the photo-monitors returned to their homes and communities and started taking pictures, the trainers visited them to review their focus and images and ensure that they felt confident in their role, and to share techniques for editing and captioning the images. Once the photographs had all been taken, support was given to select and caption the images for exhibition and sharing<sup>16</sup>. Given the low levels of literacy, a lot of support was needed from the local partners to transcribe and translate captions.

### **Sharing and discussing the photographs**

Initially, the selected photographs were printed in A4 with captions in local languages, and shared through local exhibitions, to which key community members and leaders, and other development stakeholders were invited. The images were split into four main categories: sanitation, weather forecasting, women's empowerment and family planning.

The exhibition events create a powerful opportunity to inform the wider community about the aims and objectives of the programme, and for discussion of key issues raised. The exhibitions also featured a series of 'project at work' photos, which described the workshop and photography processes. The exhibition materials were left with the local partner for reference and future use in community and programme activities.

These exhibitions and peer-reviews played a crucial role in developing a critical analysis of the issues represented from a wider, community perspective, and establishing a creative dialogue towards community-generated solutions. The evaluation of the PhotoVoice project in Ethiopia noted that *"The exhibition exceeded the expectations of participants, partners and PhotoVoice in terms of the community engagement it generated and the constructive, solutions-based dialogue on the issues that was established."*

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<sup>15</sup> The PhotoVoice ethical practice statement was used as a basis to discuss risk management and partner staff applied local insights to create an action plan to mitigate potential risks and create a safe working environment for ongoing support.

<sup>16</sup> To help the photographers develop their captions, the mentors asked:

- Why did you select this picture?
- What is the implication of this picture on the farmers/project?
- What action was taken by the project because of this picture?
- What is the expectation of the farmer?

The opportunity for wider sharing and discussion also created a sense of ownership and transparency in the programme, alleviating concerns about the potential political content of the work.



### *Community exhibitions in Ethiopia*

The outputs were also shared on an online (Flickr) platform, and through an exhibition in London where a series of images were shown to the public and a panel discussion took place with speakers Tom Elkins, CEO of PhotoVoice, and Libby Powell, CEO of On the Radar.

### **Evaluation and follow-up**

Follow up field work in Ethiopia included workshops for photo-monitors and partners to top up skills training and collect evaluation data. This captured their experiences of participation in the photography project and provided insight into the impact of PhotoVoice in Christian Aid's ongoing participatory monitoring and evaluation the BRACED programme. One evaluation activity allowed participants to use images of personal, community and future change to demonstrate their own feelings on the PhotoVoice project and their role as community photographers. In addition, one-on-one interviews were held to review the work and get feedback on the process.

### **Issues raised**

In Ethiopia, the process provided valuable insight into the direct impacts of severe weather on livelihoods and contributing factors which can limit or expand capacity to cope with climate change. It also highlighted local knowledge on opportunities to build resilience and minimise community vulnerability to these impacts.

In Ghana, the process highlighted issues around:

- Quality of land: showing a landscape is strewn with rocks, limiting useful farming land.
- Water issues: showing too few working boreholes for the population, the use of community labour to construct wells and the role of the canal to allow dry season farming.
- Alternatives to farming: showing alternative sources of income for dry season, such as basket weaving, rock-breaking, weaving and pito brewing.
- Farming techniques, harvest and sale: including varieties farmed, storage of crops and use of pesticides.

### **Outcomes**

The participatory process, capacity building and the outputs (photographs and captions) led to outcomes in a number of areas.

## Communications and learning

The photographs and captions themselves provided a clear picture of the issues facing the communities in question, and the context for Christian Aid and partners' interventions. This is valuable in itself for local communities, as a district governor in Ethiopia commented: *"Up until now we have only seen pictures from foreigners, where we are more often the subjects ... Now I see members of the community raising important issues through their images [...] this work has a powerful reach."* Amanda Farrant, Media and PR lead for Christian Aid, noted *"The result is a compelling set of images that portray a powerful message directly from the farmers."* This helps people to understand why and how the programmes are implemented as they are, i.e. for communication with donors, other development actors and supporters.

The images also provide valuable insight into the ways in which Christian Aid and partners can work with the local communities for sustainable change (i.e. for programme learning). Participants expressed that they had a better understanding of the programmes, and felt more confident to engage on behalf of their communities. In Ethiopia, greater awareness of the issues has enabled more constructive engagement with the project. *"The training has enhanced our community's awareness about the impact of climate change and we are now engaged to consider the measures that should be taken to reduce its impact."* The work provides valuable local insight into existing risk management and traditional community development strategies, structures and social attitudes, to link into existing responsibilities for the implementation and management of development initiatives.

### Using photography to engage with project planning

In Ethiopia, participants reported that lack of clean water sources was a key challenge to livelihood development, disproportionately affecting women. To feed into the partner's plans to create a new water source, the participants used photography to explore the and pros and cons of different water sources and water harvesting structures existing in the surrounding area; to document and discuss potential locations for the water source; and to provide a discussion point for exploring the community's capacity to support the implementation of such initiatives, in terms of money, labour and management.

## Influencing policy and practice

Outside of the scope of the project itself, the photographers in both countries continued to use the photographs, and cameras, to influence decision-making and behaviour both in relation to issues related to the programme and other priorities. One district official in Ethiopia noted that the photo-monitors *"... have become analytical and critical in their description of the images and their captions, using them to propose solutions and promote behaviour change. This gives us hope as administrators that with support, the community has the capacity and potential to be involved and direct positive change."*

There are many examples of participants using the images and continuing to create new photographs, to communicate issues and elicit responses:

- To share information on good practice, for example in Ethiopia farmers who had received land management training through the programme used photography to share livelihood adaptation and resource management practices. In Ghana, a farmer who travelled for training was able to take photographs of what he learned about different categories of rice seeds and explain the identification and transplanting process to fellow farmers who had not been able to travel. Another woman shares information about income-generating activities and helped set up a local women's association as a result.
- To improve infrastructure, for example a photo monitor in Ghana hung his photo of community members crowded around a borehole in the Chief's palace, where it came to the attention of staff from the water and sanitation unit. As a result a new borehole was drilled,

and this is being followed up by the MyPharm project team. In another similar case, the community were asked to contribute to buy the parts to fix a broken borehole, after a photograph was shown to an engineer.

- To campaign on key issues, for example in Ghana a photo-monitor took pictures of poor yields of maize to show how the removal of subsidies for fertiliser affects poor farmers. The project used the pictures to present the issue of the fertilizer subsidy in a stakeholder forum and a larger advocacy-focused NGO (Send Ghana) was influenced to take up the issue and advocated for the restoration of the subsidy. In another case, photographs of a closed dam used during a national farmers' day event influenced the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation to run a number of stories on the need for dams for dry season farming.
- To communicate problems and seek solutions: A rice-farmers' association in Ghana shared photographs of failing crops with the seed company, who investigated and concluded that the seeds were bad. As a result they were not charged for seeds that did not produce, saving them from potentially crushing debt. *"If is not for the pictures, we would never be able to show what was the problem and they would have made us pay."* In another case, a monitor took pictures of sick animals to show to the vet, who came to the village to cure the animals and stop the spread of the disease. *"This might sound very normal to you but around here we only have a veterinarian and it's very far away so he would have never come if we didn't show him evidence of what is happening."*
- To engage and influence decision-makers: A woman photo-monitor in Ghana has been facilitating her community group to prioritise issues to communicate to the local education commissioner. *"Through my exposure to photography I was able to let my community come to agree on the issues we wanted to engage our DCE on. We took the photos of the issues we wanted to advocate for and send them to the DCE. He has assured us that he will come and meet with us on how he can help"*
- For public information: in Ghana one monitor took a picture of people removing a drowned boy from a dam, to warn other children not to play there *"so for me I think my camera helped to save many lives."*
- To promote local products: A photo-monitor from Ghana uses her camera to bring information on income generating opportunities to local women, and support the local association of weavers to promote their products. *"Thanks to the camera I take pictures of the baskets and send them away to the buyer so we eliminate the middle man and generate more economical power for the women in our communities."*

### Capacity and confidence

The training and experience of analysing and expressing issues of personal and local importance has had an impact on the capacity of participants to engage in local development dialogue, debate and decision-making, and to be a voice for their communities. Participants reported increased confidence in speaking to their communities, and demonstrated increased ability to facilitate community consensus and voice. One female monitor in Ghana explained that: *"I never had any political voice in my community, and nobody ever discussed any issues with me in our youth meetings, but after I had been doing this project, the people of my community started to value me more because I was always photographing all the issues that were affecting us ... Now an opportunity has arisen in which some people want me to become an assembly lady in my community."*

In Ethiopia, partner staff noted a strong shift in the willingness of participants to share their views, and an increase in their analytical skills and ability to offer a critical perspective on development initiatives. Participants themselves reported increased agency in identifying and communicating priority areas for development and climate change adaptation, explaining, *"We can use these skills to*

*explore and communicate issues- property, drought and resource management. Now we are ready and equipped to cooperate with HUNDEE and engage in representing our community...We are able to participate.” and, “We have been given responsibility back.”*

### **Partner capacity**

The process also strengthened the capacity of partner organisations and their staff to facilitate and plan participatory project activities, as well as to incorporate participatory photography into their M&E. *“The training has helped me understand participatory projects...I was interested in the way the training was delivered as it was a really participatory.”* Local partners considered the methodology an extremely useful monitoring and evaluation tool. In the case of Ethiopia, the partner had a strong visual baseline from which to measure impact, and understand community change resulting from the programme. The Ethiopia evaluation noted that, as a small team with limited capacity, this was a valuable exercise for the partner. *“[The training] makes us proactive and it is change orientated.”*

Partners also saw potential for advocacy and communications applications, saying *“beyond the evaluation of the BRACED programme, I can see great potential for this practice as a tool to communicate our work and impact change more widely.”* There was also noted opportunity for scale-up, with one local official stating: *“I see the opportunity to use this work to involve [other localities] in the process, sharing ideas and insights and impacting the development programme through participation of the communities on a much wider scale.”* However, the evaluation also noted that partners would require further support with logistics, capacity and dissemination in order to fully take advantage of this potential.

### **What works**

The methodology is flexible and can be used at various points throughout the programme cycle, as a starting point for engagement in project design, for better integration between communities and project partners, or for establishing a baseline and ongoing M&E. Participatory photography can be used in a ‘snapshot’ approach to explore perspectives at a specific time/ issue, for example as part of ex-post evaluation, but is very valuable for ongoing communication and feedback with communities. This opens up an important channel of communication or feedback loop between communities, partners and Christian Aid, enriching the programme quality while also strengthening the capacity and opportunities for participants to influence more widely.

Key to the success of the process is partnership. Each partner brings something important to the project, and the logistical support, engagement and commitment of the local partner, as well as their knowledge of and access to the local community, played a crucial role in the project success. This needs to be adequately resourced and recognised. In Ethiopia, the local partner met obstacles to implementation and especially sharing/ dissemination due to lack of staff capacity and resources to organise exhibitions, support captioning process and run workshop activities; lack of budget for printing, unreliable internet connection for uploading; and inaccessibility of some project areas. Furthermore, the need for them to provide translation during training and captioning limited their ability to fully involve themselves in the facilitation. Longer term engagement requires capacity and resources to manage and facilitate the capacity building and communication processes, which requires support from the country office team.

Support for participants to continue to use their photography for local communication and action could be built into future projects, including platforms for sharing pictures. Wider use may have ethical implications. The outputs belong to the creators, and any use of them needs to be agreed and understood by them. A change in the use can lead to misrepresentation of the community or misinterpretation of the image.







## Truth Truck

Christian Aid produced 'Nepal Aftershocks', a three-minute video highlighting affected people's views and experiences of aid in the follow-up to the Nepal earthquake. The video shows affected people describing the more and less useful aid they had received. It was created to generate feedback on humanitarian aid, but also to highlight the importance of accountability in humanitarian responses.

The Truth Truck was a lorry kitted out with recording equipment, providing a private space for people to comment on the aid they had received. Once inside, an automated voice asked them what had been the most and least useful aid items they had received, and what they would need to help them survive such a disaster in the future. The resulting video shows a variety of responses, and highlighting the importance of relevant aid, and also the importance of listening to people about what they want and need.

### The aims of Truth Truck:

Truth Truck was initiated as a communication piece, to highlight the importance of accountability in humanitarian aid. As this is a difficult concept to illustrate simply and visually, the Truth Truck was set up as a tangible event which could serve the dual purpose of enabling feedback for learning, and communicating accountability.

- The feedback enables Christian Aid and partners to re-evaluate their assumptions on effective aid and adjust future responses accordingly. Dipankar Patnaik, senior emergency programme manager, Nepal wrote: *"In the aftermath of a disaster we can make broad assumptions based on 'how we've always done it'. But unless we constantly re-evaluate our methods, how do we know our ideas are still relevant to the emergencies we face now?"*
- The communications highlights Christian Aid's commitment to work with local people and organisations to deliver effective and relevant aid and raises awareness of the complexity of aid. The aim was also to portray aid recipients as ordinary people, not victims.

### The process

The Truth Truck was a collaboration between Christian Aid, local partners and a Nepalese production company. The production company kitted out the truck with the necessary equipment to ask the questions and record the responses, and worked with local partners to promote the truck. Over two weeks, in two districts, the truck was driven from village to village to invite people to give feedback. Local partners helped to promote the truck and build trust, through local media and leaflets, and the production agency hired a Nepalese soap star to raise interest and attention.

The resulting content was analysed and the data and footage used to create the short film and a bespoke webpage 'Nepal Aftershocks: the people's truth about aid'. The video was disseminated through the website, and at the world humanitarian summit.

The total cost was 13,000 GBP, which included hiring the truck, the production company, gathering the feedback and producing the film and website.

### The outcomes

*"The film is a simple way to get the views of affected populations across, enabling affected populations to speak freely and be heard."* Nick Guttman

Although not yet evaluated as such, the Truth Truck does seem to be an effective means of gathering feedback after a humanitarian event from a broad cross-section of people, across a lot of villages in an affected area (although only those accessible by road), in a short period of time. Although not a participatory process, the set-up of a private space with an automated voice asking the questions





changed the power dynamic for feedback. People felt freer to express their opinions, positive and negative, and this created a valuable data set.

The data collected showed that shelter materials and safe housing were most important for most people. Some items were considered luxuries, such as washing powder or razors. This type of information is useful for programme learning and follow-up, as highlighted by Dipankar Patnaik: *“I am proud to be part of an organisation that’s not afraid to be honest about aid and is committed to adapting its methods to ensure a better, much more effective response in the future.”*

It is also useful for advocacy as evidence of why it is important to listen to people about what they want and need, and for communications to report to governments on the effectiveness of their aid alongside more formal mechanisms, as pointed out by The Head of Christian Aid’s humanitarian division, Nick Guttman.

The Truth Truck has created a lot of interest and positive feedback from others in the sector, as well as partners and people taking part. People were very surprised but impressed that an NGO would produce a film that was self-critical.

At the local level, Emma Wigley, the communications lead on the work, explained that the process helped people to *“understand who we are and what we do... that we are not just delivering aid, but also asking for feedback in a genuine way.”* This helped to strengthen relationships on the ground between partners and other local actors/communities.

## Learning

**Active promotion in villages:** Initially, people in the villages were wary of the truck, but once they began to understand what it was about they were enthusiastic to participate. It is important to work with local partners to build trust and help people understand what you are doing and what is required of them, using their local contacts to promote the event in advance and on the day. People in the villages were not used to aid agencies asking them for their opinion and were suspicious. But after one or two people stepped inside and word began to spread, people started queuing up to take part.

**Making it easy to participate:** The truck is a good way of reaching people in a number of villages, and getting feedback from a wide cross-section of villagers. The space needs to be easy to access and use, with simple technology, and the space inside needs to be private and unthreatening. The promotion materials and the questions asked need to be culturally appropriate, so it is important to do some testing first.

**Make sure that the footage generated can be used:** The Truth Truck was in part a communications project, and investment was made into the production of a short film to be shared on social media platforms. If being rolled out for programme learning and accountability purposes, would need to look at whether there is capacity and need to use this type of video footage. However, Nick Guttman considers that this dual objective is also valuable, for broader communication around the value of accountability to push the standards and accountability agenda, and provide evidence of the value of listening to aid recipients.



## Governance Impact Assessment

As part of Christian Aid's 2015 impact assessment on governance programming a series of assessments were carried out in different locations (Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Bangladesh and Sierra Leone). For two of these (Sierra Leone and Central America) video was used to engage and represent some of the local people affected by the governance work.

### Sierra Leone

As part of the assessment of the Women in Governance project in Sierra Leone, a team of participatory communications consultants worked with a group of 45 people (33 of whom women), including local staff and women's group members to jointly conduct the research. Participatory workshops enabled women participants to generate insights on the key issues, while all participants conducted interviews with the wider community.

#### The project:

With local partner SEND, Christian Aid had been supporting a network of women's groups, and encouraged members of these groups to stand for elected office in the 2012 elections. The 2015 impact assessment aimed to look beyond the numbers of women elected, to understand how increases in women's participation in politics had affected those involved in the project and the wider community. As well as documenting personal perceptions and experiences of women's involvement in politics, the research sought to understand the development impacts and changes that had been perceived or evidenced.

#### The process:

After initial training of local and partner staff, the consultants held women-only workshops with the research participants to look at technical aspects of interviewing (recording, questioning, transcribing and gaining consent), and to generate insights into the issues using visual, theatre and video tools. During the workshop time, the male researchers conducted interviews outside, and the women later conducted small group interviews with other local women. At the end of the data collection process, the consultant facilitated a rapid analysis session focusing on the research questions, and discrepancies were discussed.

The participatory methodology was designed to ground the research in the realities of the participants' lives. The consultants explain: "*While the 'project' may determine the thematic framework for the research (in this case women and politics), discussion avoids taking a project-centric perspective in order to understand the wider context of participants' lives.*" The consultants worked with a small group of co-researchers, training them in key techniques and concepts, to enable them to meaningfully influence the research agenda, generate and analyse data using a range of techniques, and determine how they and their communities are represented.

#### The outcome:

This collaboration in research helped to ensure that data collection methods and questions were more appropriate to the context, generated greater inclusion and engagement in the research, while also building the skills and confidence of the participants. It generates a rich, but messy, set of data on a variety of formats, requiring time and careful facilitation to organise it into a clear and relevant research report without compromising local ownership.

### Central America

To show the reality of, and context for, Christian Aid's governance programming in El Salvador and Guatemala, a documentary maker and a communications consultant were hired to produce a short video documentary. The video set out to show how individual participants perceive the



programmes, and how the programmes responded to/ were shaped by the political contexts of each country.

### **The aim of using video:**

Though not an exercise in participatory video, the aim was to build the narrative from the experiences and voices of programme participants, featuring footage shot by participants, and involving local staff and participants in editorial decisions. It was not a traditional documentary approach, where the filmmakers decide what the story is about, nor a promotional video where the client chooses what aspects of the work to feature. By involving the programme team in the production (and a partner communications staff accompanied the whole process), the work also aimed to build capacity for using video.

While video is a great medium for creating impact and showing action, it is not so well-suited to explaining complex issues quickly, the filmmakers explained: *“screen time runs fast so narrative needs to be simple and clear, which real life is often not.”* For example, while prevention of violence was central to the programme rationale in Guatemala, there was not a clear message to capture and share on this issue: *“Everyone we spoke to had a different understanding of this issue, and even of what constituted ‘violence’ – was it physical, or was it institutional repression, or a societal sense of insecurity. We were not able to explore the subtlety of this theme in the video.”*

### **The process:**

The filmmakers did an initial review of the project documentation and conducted skype interviews to try to get sufficient understanding of the programmes and impact to design a draft shooting script. However, they found that this was not possible. *“It wasn’t until we arrived in the country that we were able to grasp how the programme worked... the kind of understanding needed for making a video (the basic mechanics of a programme and what it is possible to actually see) didn’t match the kind of explanations that people close to the programmes were able to make.”*

An initial workshop for local staff and programme participants selected by the partners covered how to use smartphones to capture quality video footage and the mechanics of documentary-making, and was also an opportunity to discuss the key issues and narrative to include in the video. Although women and men had been selected to participate, only the men attended the workshop. Over the days of filming much more footage was shot than would normally be the case, and the filmmakers continually discussed with local staff the direction and emerging narrative. During wrap up workshops in both locations the material was reviewed and themes developed, though the filmmakers controlled the actual editing process.

### **The output and outcome:**

The resulting videos were considered useful by the partners involved, for promoting their work, fundraising, and to share with the community leaders. They found that this type of video could be useful for building relationships and scaling up work, spreading inspiration or insights beyond the programme’s immediate reach.

In both countries, the local Christian Aid teams said they had learnt from the process. The Guatemala country officer said she had benefitted from the deep dive into a particular programme, something that was not ordinarily possible. Her understanding of the programme had changed and deepened. In El Salvador, Guadalupe Cortes Vega said: *“Normally, my workload means that I cannot immerse myself to such an extent during monitoring visits, so the video allowed me to get a better understanding of ISD’s work in Morazán”*



Making a video capturing learning, a process which requires developing clear and simple messages, can be a useful process for any programme. However, even with participatory video there are compromises to be made. The filmmakers found that *“Even though there was no ‘promotional video’ agenda, we inevitably went looking for the positive and sought evidence of impact rather than looking for what did not work or exploring the challenges.”* Time and resources limited the amount of participation possible in the editing process, which is where the story gets told and the potential for misrepresentation arises. *“The biggest compromises we had to make in both videos were related to the need for a simple narrative line or due the need to keep the videos short.”* In practical terms, the filmmakers suggest that videos should be scheduled to be shot around events and activities which are already taking place, or could be integrated with an existing evaluation visit. A preparation visit would enable better understanding of the context and programmes and enable greater participation to be built in to the process, through the co-development of a ‘shooting script’ and a list of things to film, and by training participants so that they can collect quality footage before the video production begins.

#### **Smart phone video basic guidance**

- Hold the phone horizontally rather than vertically
- Hold it as steady as you can, pan as smoothly as possible
- Plan out what you want to capture, video in short sequences
- Sound is very important - put the phone close to any person you are interviewing.