



BLACKSMITH INSTITUTE
PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDE

June 2012

When Blacksmith Institute staff travel to sites where cleanup, monitoring, assessment and other activities are taking place, we should all try to bring back photos that capture the spirit as well as the details of the work.

Here are some standard, practical guidelines used by photojournalists:

1-- Almost always include a person in the photo to help give an idea of the scale of things. If there is a scene you want but no people, you may have to wait until someone passes by.

2-- Show local people at work or play in their traditional environment, housing, or surroundings. Don't have people posed, staring at the camera – try to capture them going about their activities as if they are unaware of the photo being taken. It's ok to get some portraits in which people do look directly at the camera.

3-- Take many photos and expect that maybe one in 100 will be a great picture. Overshoot – take four or five photos of every person/scene because many will be spoiled by blinking, motion, etc.

4-- Smile at people in the hope they will smile back at you. People intent on their jobs need not be smiling. But we do not want many photos of unhappy, scowling, miserable people.

5-- Photos should show local people working with the tools, resources, etc. provided by Blacksmith. Thus it may show poverty but also show resilience and hope. Some photos can show the problem prior to remediation and can show Western advisors helping out. But mainly we want local people either with or without the Westerners.

6-- Names not required but try to get full names of people you photograph as well as occupation and age. Using only first names is demeaning, unless they are children.

7-- Try to create a photo that tells a story or paints a picture of life as it is lived. Relax and enjoy the moment of taking photos. So long as people do not object to your taking pictures, assume it is ok to go ahead and shoot. You can often ask permission with a gesture.

8-- Photos that include tools, housing, boats, plants, animals, commerce, production, cleaning and other aspects of life which are clearly, visually unique to that country and region add a lot to the photo.

9-- Cropping photos helps reduce “noise” and confusion, zooming in on one subject. Keep copies of the original and create a new file for the cropped version – which I usually label by adding XX to the original file name or number.



10--When shooting in bright sun, try to keep the sun behind you. If you know how, use the flash when shooting dark faces in shadows, a common problem in tropical countries.

11--When deciding whether to carry the camera, almost always decide to carry it.

12--Carry two batteries and always have a fully charged battery in the camera plus a fully charged spare in the camera bag.

13--Download photos to a laptop computer daily and clean the memory in the camera – unless you have only taken a few photos and have a giant memory chip such as 4 Gigabytes.

I hope these few suggestions will help you to bring back photos that help tell the story of how polluted sites are damaging to health and the environment and how they are being cleaned up with Blacksmith's assistance.

Ben Barber

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