

# CLIMATE RESILIENCE

## FIELD-GUIDE FOR PHOTO VOICE IN CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION ENGAGEMENT

An integral community-based action research project  
Un proyecto integral de investigación basada en la comunidad



“Tell me, I’ll forget. Show me, I’ll remember. Involve me, I’ll understand.”

A Chinese proverb.

# Field Guide for Using Photo Voice in Climate Change Adaptation and Human Development

## Integrating human dimensions into adaptation and resilience

A collaboration between Drishti Centre for integral Action and Centro Bartolomé de las Casas

If we hope to engage people on the issue of climate change, we'll need more effective ways to involve them. Involvement leads to understanding, which leads to empowerment, ownership and action.

Climate Change is an issue that remains something complex to most people. Climate change arises over time spans that exceed what an average adult mind is able to conceptualize. And, it impacts multiple, interrelating systems of our societies and ecosystems in ways that people don't normally conceive of. This is true of scientists working on the issue. Though the global consensus in the scientific community suggests climate change will become the most important and influential issue in our coming decades, many scientists struggle to even believe it is occurring, while other scientists fall into deep depression when it occurs to them what is actually at stake. But, what about local people in rural communities, many of who have not had the opportunity of education and for whom climate science is foreign? How do they make sense of climate change in their local realities and daily lives?

Whether you are working with a group of scientists or a group of local farmers (or any group for that matter!), involving people in creative ways to explore the issue of climate change in their own lives can be very useful. One excellent way to explore complex issues is through participatory photography. Called Photo Voice

or Photo Elicitation, this methodology can help to elicit new meanings on an issue you may only think about in passing. Instead, a person can access the power of his or her own self-inquiry; taking a photo while holding a question in mind can help one see one's situation or an issue in one's life with new eyes. Photo voice has been said to "mine deeper shafts of human consciousness" to find new perspectives and views on a complex issue.

As climate change continues to evade our ability to respond, many people are struggling to find alternative, more effective ways to engage climate action. We have found that climate change remains a technical issue in people's mind, for which they seek a technical response. Yet, climate change is something that relates with all dimensions of life: our economies, lifestyle choices, land use practices, culture and customs, as well as the worldviews and paradigms we hold about our life. The two partner organizations involved in this project, Centro Bartolome de las Casas and Drishti - Centre for Integral Action, are seeking ways to include and integrate the human dimensions of the issue, specifically worldviews, mindsets, and values, to better align climate actions with how local people make meaning of the issue of climate change. Without connecting climate actions with how people make sense of the issue, we see that climate actions do not gain traction, are not

owned by the communities that are most affected, and evade true sustainability. Our question has been: could we evoke greater ownership, traction, and sustainability by better aligning and connecting climate change actions with people's very own perspectives on the issue?

To explore this question, we selected the use of Photo Voice as a central methodology in this IDRC funded integral community-based research project entitled, Exploring Community Resilience and Human Development in the Context of Climate Change Adaptation in El Salvador and Canada. This Guide presents the pedagogy used. Photo voice helped us to include and integrate the human dimensions of the climate change issue more fully into awareness raising and adaptation planning for climate change.

In the following pages, you will find:

- Overview to the project rationale, context and communities.
- Overview about the Photo Voice methodology.
- Detailed descriptions of how to engage local people in photography linked to a question.
- Pedagogical processes for moving from individual photos to a community message.
- Tips and advice on how to create safe space, manage the photos, evoke interpretations from photographers, and share the products with others.

# Integrating Human Dimensions

Culture and consciousness matter for adaptation to climate change.

## Overview of Project Rationale

For the field of climate change studies, the issue of climate change is addressed as something environmental, with a focus on the technical and scientific aspect of the issue. But in the lived realities of Salvadorans (and many others on the planet) this is a matter of life and death, faith and hope, social justice and community resilience. In this project, we have sought to include the ‘human dimensions’ of climate change adaptation by combining methodologies in an integral approach.

In brief summary, an Integral Approach to climate change adaptation is one that includes both objective dimensions of adaptation and subjective dimensions of adaptation. Objective dimensions of adaptation include for example, resilient economies, robust ecosystems, and nimble policies or institutions to navigate change. Subjective dimensions of adaptation include effective interpersonal competencies for collaboration in situations of multiple stressors, interior or psychological resilience to recover quickly and learn from setbacks, community spirit to strive for an adaptation that works for all, and the development of new norms of behaviour in a culture impacted by climate change. Often it is the subjective dimension to adaptation—the strength of character, the inherent leadership qualities and personal capabilities, relationships, and the values of individuals and communities—which actually

“We are exploring how balanced attention to the experiential, cultural, behavioural and systemic dimensions of disaster risk and climate change adaptation can promote more relevant policies and much deeper forms of resilience.”

Karen O’Brien, project advisor, University of Oslo

foster lasting adaptation. However, all too often, efforts for adaptation remain focused on technological, ecological or economic interventions, which are fine and necessary, but do not represent the whole picture. The Integral Approach to climate adaptation brings these subjective dimensions to the foreground in research and practice, integrating them with all other climate resilience efforts.

In light of this, we began using **photo voice** with communities, in which local people used photography to explore the meaning of climate change in their lives in practical, real ways. This supports local people to draw on their own meaning-making about the issue, and thus evokes a greater sense of empowerment and resilience. The photo voice was accompanied with community meetings, creation of community committees, and will lead to adaptation planning.

### Photo Voice

integrating the human dimensions of climate change through using *photo voice* as a methodology for understanding the complexity of the issue in the contexts of local people’s daily lives. On left, sorting photos into the ‘community message,’ and on the right, presenting the photos to Canadians universities and organizations.



# Context and Communities

Communities Arcatao and Los Pozos at the headwaters of the Lempa River.

Vulnerability to climate change must be understood within the wider context of political, economic, social, and psychological changes, which often create multiple stressors for households and communities. The country of El Salvador is characterized by great economic inequality: the poorest 10% of the population account for only 0.7% of the income, while the richest 20% account for 55.9% of the income. With a history of civil war in the 1980s, the country has suffered certain setbacks for sustainable development with pervasive civil violence ('delinquency'), continued economic inequity, and a heavily deforested and polluted landscape. Since 1997, El Salvador has experienced an increase in incidences of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, and worsening outbreaks of dengue and cholera.

At the same time, the Salvadoran population has also been extraordinarily resilient to the many extreme social, political and natural events in its recent history. The strength of the collective to stand up to injustice and to call for greater economic

and political equity, as well as for the population to process the trauma and violence experienced during the war exhibits a tangible and inspiring human resilience in the face of hardship and change. The two participating communities of Arcatao and Los Pozos were particularly resilient during the war and post-war period. Our research team was interested in exploring how this could translate into adaptive capacity and community resilience when facing multiple stressors in the context of climate change.

Arcatao and los Pozos are situated in the isolated northern department of Chalatenango, in the still undefined border with Honduras, forming part of the municipalities of Arcatao (population 4,500) and Nueva



Trinidad (population 2,300). The two municipalities are situated in the dry tropical zone of Central America, and its population lives primarily from subsistence agriculture, with high levels of immigration of youth to the United States. The population has a strong connection with the Catholic Church and its Christian grassroots communities, and the majority of the community has been organized by the left-wing political party (the former guerrilla movement), Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional, FMLN.

## The Value of Perspective

The perspective one brings to an issue literally discloses its meaning. What one person may see and the meaning they hold will greatly differ from another person holding a different perspective. Even when we say the same word, such as "family", that will *mean* different things to each person, depending on their perspective.

This is all the more true with complex global issues, such as climate change, where one's background, culture, education, economic status, religion, values, and worldview (and so forth) will all influence what *perspective* one brings to the issue. As a result, climate change means different things to different people.

For the majority of scientists, it is the most important and influential issue of our time. For some economists, it is something that's been hyped up and isn't in fact true. For some politicians, especially those who already witness their populations suffering from unpredictable weather events and increased frequency of natural disaster, it is critically important to address immediately. For other politicians, particularly those whose nations are benefitting economically from fossil fuel-based industrial development, it isn't an important enough issue to warrant their attention.

What about local people in developing countries? What is their perspective and how can it be more fully involved in climate action and adaptation?



Photo voice mines deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews.

A picture tells a thousand words.



## Photo Voice

### Gathering community perspectives on climate change

To further gather information on the potential for human resilience in climate change adaptation, the project will use action research in two Salvadoran communities at the headwaters of the Rio Lempa watershed. Using “photo voice” methodology, we asked local people what they actually face, how they are affected by climate change and where they feel most resilient, and what adaptation would look like for them. Photo voice enabled us to gather and include local people’s perspectives on resilience and adaptation.

This involved giving cameras to local people and orienting them to take photos towards three questions: *What is climate change to me? What are the impacts of climate change for me and my community? How am I already adapting?*

Our hope was that the process would provide a way for local people to explore the situation of climate change in their own lives and through their own perspectives. As well as to discover the ways that they are already adapting and being resilient to these changes. We hoped that through the process, participants would discover the potential ways the community could further adapt and that they would become the proponents and leaders of this adaptation planning.

This methodology included community meetings in which participants explained the meaning to their photos. This culminated in the photographers selecting 30 photos out of hundreds to create a ‘community message’ about climate change and has led to the formation of environmental committees in both communities.

# Overview of Using Photo Voice in Climate Change Engagement

## 1. Develop and define

This is the stage at which the core purpose of a project is defined and established. With all the key parties (such as partner organizations and community leaders) inputting to identifying clear aims and objectives the project activities are developed in line with resources and timeframe. This phase of project design involves working with communities and partners to establish the needs, priorities, dynamics and expectations and then devising and agreeing on a project plan that will best use photo voice methods to meet the identified needs and objectives.

## 2. Plan and prepare

Once project funds are secured and partnerships formalized, planning and preparation for the main project activities gets underway. This might involve building project networks, securing equipment and space, recruiting participants, devising project activities in more detail, developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks, recruiting project staff and volunteers, training project staff, planning content and timetabling workshops, running preliminary workshops etc.

## 3. Workshops

This is the creative core of the project where participants work with facilitators over a series of workshops to learn about the cameras, learn photographic techniques (and sometimes digital media techniques), build skills and confidence, initiate photography projects and find, and explore their 'photographic voice'. The content, length and frequency of workshops varies in each project, depending on what the project involves and what content will be covered.

## 4. Photography Linked to a Question

An important workshop in this section is about how to do photography linked to a question. Photography is photography. But, photography linked to a question becomes quite a different inquiry. When you intentionally seek to 'see' a situation with a question in mind, the process becomes much more than just taking pictures. It becomes about knowing your

### Why Photography?

The power of your own self-inquiry that is evoked through photography—it can help you see your situation or an issue in your life with new eyes.

The social significance and iconic power of the still image; the fun and magic of photography

The power of the still image to communicate and leave a lasting impression

The power of photography to shed light on and raise awareness of important social and global issues

The power of photography to galvanise a call for action and act as a catalyst for change

The low cost nature and accessibility of photography to all ages, cultures and skill sets

The increasing technical and digital access to photography worldwide

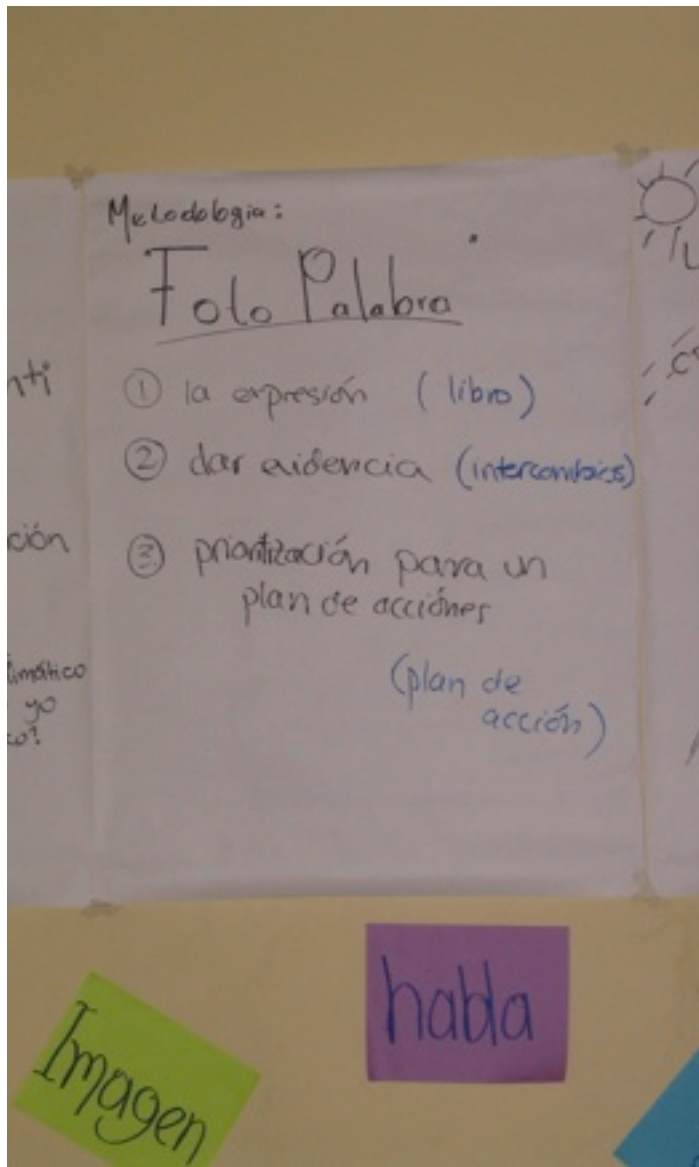
The ability of photography to cross cultural and linguistic barriers

The ease of sharing images and their potential to generate open dialogue and discussion

The vast variety of ways in which photographs can be reproduced and disseminated

The dual nature of photography as a tool to record fact and as a creative art form

The personal significance that photographs play in our lives – as a means to commemorate and communicate who we are.



world more intimately, discovering unique angles and perspectives on something you may not even notice on a daily basis, and shedding insight on a situation from your own personal perspective. This is not about a scientist telling you about climate change (such as in a lecture); it is you discovering how climate change impacts your life and then you bringing your insights into dialogue with others. It may be useful to invite the scientists in at a certain point to give their lectures, but for this issue to be relevant and real, we suggest finding a way to connect it to people's own ways of seeing the world. Below is a suggested Process:

- Have participants go out and take photos, simply take some pictures. When then come back, discuss how it felt for them.
- Describe how when we link photography with a question, the process becomes different. Explain

how participants are not just randomly taking photos that look nice, but rather are honing in on a particular viewpoint with a question in mind. They may notice certain things much more vividly, things that they see every day and normally pass by without a thought!

- Debrief when everyone comes back: How did that feel? How was it different?
- Explain the first question to be explored. Make sure everyone understands the question, and give ample space for questions and answers.

#### 5. Crafting a Community Message

This process entails grouping individuals' photos into a larger community message. It can be on the one hand difficult, but on the other hand incredibly inspiring. Not all projects need to do this. However, when working on the theme of climate change, often the changes and impacts are

similarly felt by others in the group, and by grouping the photos together to find a central, shared message, the community can then use those photos for advocacy, for further awareness-raising, and for stimulating action.

The first step is to have each individual download their photos and select their top three photos. Then, when all participants have their top three photos archived, the facilitator projects them on a screen during a larger community meeting where all participants are present. The group then decides which photos best illustrate the major themes about climate change and adaptation from a community perspective. We did this working with each question at a time, so each question had a series of photos that best represented the community's answer or message to that question. This can be a difficult process, since it requires that photographers let go of attachment to their own particular photos. However, we found that this was also very empowering and supportive, where participants began to think in a more collective way about the issue, moving from their individual attachment to a larger group identity. Slowly, participants will begin to ask which photos best represent the message they want to convey as a community. Facilitators can encourage this by reminding participants that other people from outside the community (perhaps in the capital city, in government, in other organizations, or even other nations) will be seeing these photos and will want to know the community's message about climate change adaptation and human development.

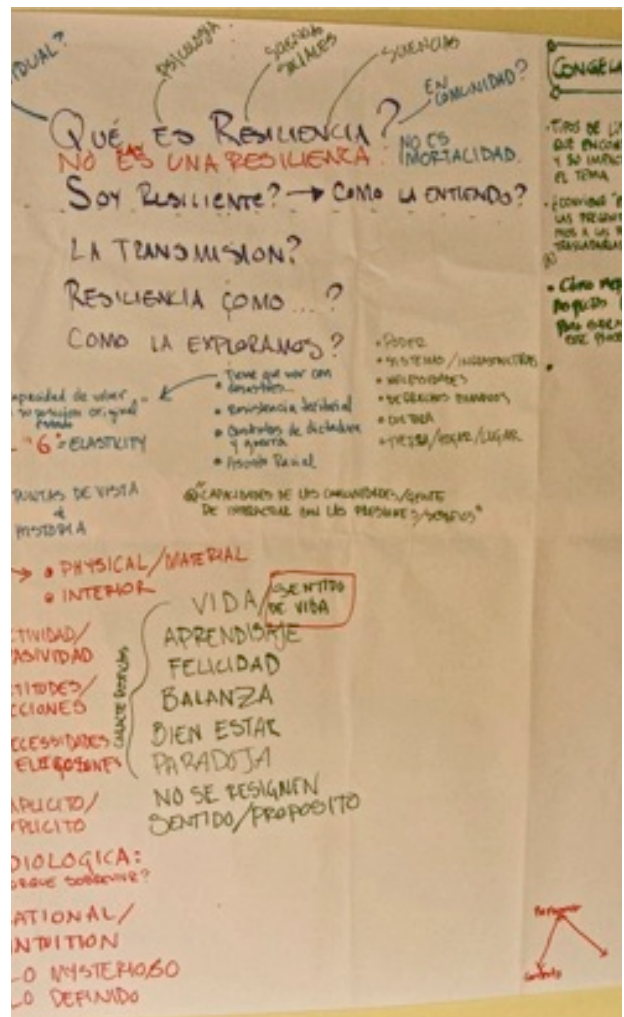
## 6. Going public

This is the culmination of the project process when the images and words created are put together in a curated form and shared with a public audience. This audience may be limited to family and friends or extend to a general public audience or targeted groups such as specific community members (eg. peers, youth, parents, local residents) or individuals and organizations that hold decision-making power, such as politicians or local service providers. This may include organizations and universities, or even people in other nations. In our project, we shared our images with groups in Canada and at a Mesoamerican workshop in Panama, such that dozens of people from several different countries saw the photos and read the interpretations.

Images can be shared publicly in numerous and multiple formats and platforms. For example, we also created a Photo Journal, printed and also in an electronic version for downloading on the internet. This is helpful to publicize the issues and extend the project's audience.

## 7. Review

Some projects may involve secondary phases but as a project comes to an end there is final review period where the project can be evaluated and participants and partners can devise plans for any long-term provision or continuing activities. This may go towards photography (some participants want to take their photography further, others may want to join local photography networks) or it may go towards the issue at hand itself (in this case, climate change adaptation). In the case of our project, the photo voice inspired participants to want to create a community environmental committee for ongoing work on the issue of climate change and resilience. Partner project staff should be prepared to continue project activities on a regular basis.







# Tips for teaching the activities

Activities are designed to last for between 30-60 minutes each, depending on the time available. Ideally all 10 activities would be taught in the order below, as this will provide a well-rounded and holistic experience of the topics explored. However, if time and resources do not allow then this is not absolutely necessary.

Activities have been designed with a wide age group in mind. However, it is the responsibility of the facilitator to decide on the depth into each issue as the group progresses. This will depend on the suitability of the subject, depth of prior knowledge, and the group's ability to understand the issues raised and cope with the resulting thoughts and emotions.

It is important to stay responsive to what the community and participants most need, and what would most highlight their involvement. For example, it became clear in our project that working in family groups would be more supportive to everyone's involvement. We found it was important in working with family groups that the facilitator stresses the need for everyone to participate and for them to feel free to use the camera as needed (rather than having one person, usually the man of the household, to be the one who holds onto the camera for fear of it becoming damaged).

As some of the issues involved are emotionally challenging and may be upsetting to some, it is important that the facilitator is able to constantly monitor the reactions of the group and encourages openness and honesty, ensuring that safe support mechanisms are in place if participants need to discuss any of the issues further. One way we did this in our

project was to meet with families to dialogue about the topic and what was coming up for them as they took the photos. Each two week period, while one set of families used the cameras, the other set of families would participate in these dialogues with project facilitators.

To encourage full participation of the group, open-ended questions are advisable, with support prompts to responses where necessary. These have been outlined in the activity sheets.

Statistics regarding climate change could be useful to the process, and the facilitator may like to include up-to-date statistics surrounding the activities to help give a larger context to the issue. We decided not to do this, and rather to encourage participants to explore their own perspectives on the issue first. At a later point in the process, perhaps statistics would be useful and important to include.

Where possible, the photography work produced by the group as well as the flip charts on the process should be displayed on the walls of the room used for the activities. By the end of the project, depending on the number of activities undertaken, there will be a wall full of images, thoughts and ideas. This will be available to be viewed and reviewed by the group, enhancing a group sense of achievement and ownership and contributing to a feeling of completion of the project. Wall displays also allow for external review and peer-led education surrounding the group's work. Please note that public display and the use any work should only be done with full agreement from the group participants.

## Resources required:

- Suitable room with enough tables and chairs for the whole group and a clear area to display the images
- Cameras - simple point and shoot is fine. Number of cameras depends on resources available, group size.
- PC / Laptop with storage space and ability to upload images (via cable or card readers)
- Projector and viewing space to view images created
- Standard colour printer to print the participant's images
- Stationary: tape, pens, flipchart paper, pins
- Blank boards or tripods for mounting the photos

# Research Team

These two nonprofit organizations have partnered since 2004 on exploring the practice of more holistic and integral ways of engaging in social change. This research project was a product of this collaborative visioning and discussions. Funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and with additional support from other sources (both in-kind and monetary), the project included 10 months of field research, a two-week learning exchange for four Salvadorans in Canada, and two months of writing up the research results. The research involved over 30 people in the project.

The field research team was made up of two field-based researchers, Monica Flores and Roberto Caceres, supported by those in the office in San Salvador, Héctor Guillermo Núñez, Larry José Madrigal, Walberto Tejeda, and Rutilio Delgado. The Canadian research team included Project Coordinator, Gail Hochachka and Research Assistant, Lauren Tenney, as well as in-kind support from Julian Gonzalez, Sandra Thomson and Robin Hood. Karen O'Brien, at the University of Oslo, was a project advisor and her graduate student Hanna Kvamsås spent four months working on the project in the field.

Perhaps most importantly, the community researchers from Los Pozos and Acratao included: Ana Gloria Ayala de Córdova, María Elena (Elsy) Orellana Ramírez, Rutilio Orellana López, Rufina Romero Amaya, José Osmaro Otero Rivera, Cástulo Ramírez, Teófilo Córdova Delgado, Helia María Rivera Castillo, Jorge Armando Pineda Hernández, Edith Monge, Agustín Córdova Orellana, José Eduardo Córdova Delgado, Elvira (Lita) Córdova de Córdova, Roberto Romero Amaya, y Sofía Orellana.

Hochachka, Madrigal, Flores, Cáceres, Tenney, Núñez, Tejeda and Delgado. 2012. *Climate Resilience: A Field-Guide for Photo Voice in Climate Change Adaptation Engagement*. A shared publication of Drishti and Centro Bartolomé de Las Casas.

For more information:

Drishti Centre for Integral Action, <http://www.drishti.ca>

Photo Voice: Participatory Photography for Social Change, <http://photovoice.org/>

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