Photovoice

Photos and stories, that is the essence of the Photovoice method. The word itself is a combination of two different words „photo" and „voice" – as in speaking through images.

Photovoice means that a small group of people is taking pictures on a particular theme. They meet regularly and present to each other their photos, discuss about them, share their opinions and they develop their message as a group. Next to each picture appears a message of the author. Then, the group makes a selection of the photos and they present them to the public and the authorities, in order to send a strong message that can sustain their cause.

How does it happen?

First you build the aim of the Photovoice process - most of the times you do this with the group. What do you want? To show the problems of you community? Or to show the difficulties faced by a young HIV positive person. Or...?

The group varies in size, about 10 to 30 people. Each one receives (or has) a camera. They are working with deadlines. The group meets and discusses photos by using facilitators (one, preferably two) and assistants (who takes the minute of the meetings and then helps participants to write down the story pictures - caption). The duration of this step may vary from 2-3 weeks to several months.

Then the Photovoice results are presented to the public and public authorities through exhibitions and media events that depict images and their meanings. Photos and messages that appear in the exhibition are selected by participants as one of the "rules" of Photovoice. The final decision belongs to the participants.

Why doing Photovoice?

The goals that you can achieve through photovoice are:

- To enable people to seek and to think about the strengths of their community and their common concerns;
- To promote the exchange of information and dialogue on critical issues that aim the personal and community life in general through group discussions;
- To reach the community, the public, the public decision makers (public administration, elected, experts, etc.)

In more concrete terms:

- Participants can build a message to the general public or authorities - and clarify what is most important or what is the solution they want
- Participants, as individuals, gain confidence and develop their communication skills and team work (and, of course, photographic technical skills – in case you include a small training on this matter)
- Policy makers and the general public may be exposed to a message more powerful than a petition or a simple photo exhibition and thus can be sensitized or persuaded to adopt a certain conduct or a particular decision

Using photography is easier for categories of people that would have difficulty expressing themselves in writing, or sustains their views in a speech (in public or in a group) or who wish to remain anonymous. Categories may include different types of people: illiterate people with disabilities, Roma, people with HIV, affected by prostitution, human trafficking and drug abuse. Such cases gain much more using this method, than the average. But the method is suitable for groups who have special needs or are part of a risk area.

The Photo Exhibition is the most common result of a photovoice, but in fact, these pictures accompanied by stories can be the support forr many more events. Here are some examples:

- You can make postcards to send to the public authorities you want to convince to take a decision
- You can make films or electronic media exhibitions
- The exhibition itself can pin around town or country - in schools, bars, halls of public institutions in fairs
- You can make bookmarks
- The opening can be accompanied by many other events - a round table, a performance, a fundraiser
- You can invest in participants - photography courses, trips, exchanges and other courses to develop their communication skills, advocacy etc.

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