



Géraldine Petiteau, Uniterra volunteer, Guatemalan artisans. Photo: Michel Huneault

PHOTOGRAPHY 101 GUIDE

DEVELOP AN EYE FOR GREAT PHOTOS!

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uniterra
A WUSC & CECI PROGRAM



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© Jean-François Lemire



© Kiran Ambwani



INTRODUCTION

Photography is a powerful communication tool. Whether electronic or printed, for social or traditional media, photographs play an important role in our everyday lives. They draw our attention, create an emotional response, and make us think.



Young beneficiary of a community violence prevention project in El Salvador. Photo: Jean-François Lemire

Because of their work in international development, Uniterra volunteers have an important role to play in capturing the complexities of the environments in which they work and sharing their understanding with the Canadian public. Your photographs transmit information and values and are a part of the program's language!

A FEW FACTS¹

- Our brains understand images on average 60,000 times more quickly than they understand text.
- 90% of information sent to the brain is visual.
- People retain 80% of what they see, 20% of what they read and 10% of what they hear!

THIS GUIDE GIVES YOU

Basic tips and tricks for taking dynamic, engaging photographs that are well-executed and respectful of the people being photographed.

¹ Source: "How to Use Visual Content to Drive Massive Social Media Engagement", a presentation by Kim Garst, Social Media Success Summit, October 2014

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BEFORE GETTING STARTED



Young men in job training in Niger. Photo: Véronique Kingsley

1) UNITERRA'S PHOTOGRAPHIC IDENTITY

Photographs are part of Uniterra's language, and it is crucial to follow a few guidelines to create an identity that is in line with the program. Make sure that the photos you select depict women, youth, and professionals in a positive, cooperative work environment.



Guinea. Photo: Michel Huneault

Photograph your subjects in real-life, unstaged situations that show what they do and in what environment they do it.



Nepal. Photo: Kiran Ambwani

Photograph volunteers interacting with the communities in which they work.

AVOID
Too many photos of personal activities. Save your beach photos for your friends!

PRO TIPS
Show a volunteer, partner and working environment in the same picture – the perfect combination!



Vietnam. Photo: Jeff Winch



2) RESPECT AND AUTHORIZATION

When taking photos in a cross-cultural context, show respect and sensitivity towards the people being photographed. Make sure you are aware of the cultural context, briefly explain why you wish to take photos, and ask for permission to the people you want to photograph. Respect their wishes.



Haiti. Photos: Benoit Aquin



Peru. Photo Valérie Paquette



World March of Women. Photo: Sandrine Ricci

Some people would rather not be identifiable in photographs; it is still possible, with their consent, to photograph them while respecting their wish to remain anonymous.

Take special care when photographing vulnerable populations (children, soldiers, victims of sexual violence, etc.). For example, take photos of a crowd to take the emphasis away from a single person. Consider photographing banners or writing to illustrate your subject.

PRO TIPS

In situations of humanitarian crisis, capture the magnitude of the damage while showing compassion and respect for the victims. When you photograph people, focus on humanitarian assistance, reconstruction, and support for local populations.



Haiti. Photos: Benoit Aquin

AVOID

- Stereotypes and negative or condescending images
- Voyeurism and insistence on showing misery
- Taking photos of people who do not wish to be photographed

PHOTOGRAPHY BASICS



Asita Sana parboils rice at the Union de Bama rice parboiling centre in Burkina Faso. Photo: Éric St-Pierre

1) SUBJECT

Defining a subject is the first step to taking a good photo. It is essential to identify the central element of your image. Ask yourself, “What is the subject of my photo?” Choose ONE main subject per photo, and make sure it is the focus of your image. Defining a subject also provides you with an opportunity to identify other contextual elements that you may wish to document and include in your photos. For example, in this photo, we see rice parboilers, a group of women, artisanal food processing, etc.



El Salvador. Photo: Jean-François Lemire

Get close to your subject, be a part of the action, and put people at the heart of your photo.



Nepal. Photo: Dijo Chinnakonda

Find interesting and engaging people!

PRO TIPS

Set objectives and make a list of subjects to photograph.

Set aside special time for taking photos (at least one hour per subject).

AVOID

- Boring photos with no action
- Photos with no context



A schoolgirl looks out the window of her primary school in Tamaka, Niger. Photo: Niall McKenna

2) LIGHT

Photography literally means “drawing with light”! Light is central to any photograph and is often the photographer’s first consideration. Your subject should be in the best lit part of your photograph. Ask yourself the following questions: What is my available light? Where should I be to best capture the light? What time of day will have the best light?



Niger. Photo : David Champagne

AVOID

- Using a flash
- Grey skies
- Harsh midday light

Opt for natural light whenever possible. It can vary greatly depending on the time of day, the weather and the position of your subject. The “golden hours” of photography are around sunrise and sunset. When the sun sits on the horizon, the light is warm and direct. It brings out vivid colours, stark contrasts and textures, and adds a little sparkle to your photo. These are the best times of day for photographing landscapes.



El Salvador. Photo : Jean-Francois Lemire

PRO TIPS

Look for unique ways to use light, such as silhouettes (with distinct shapes).



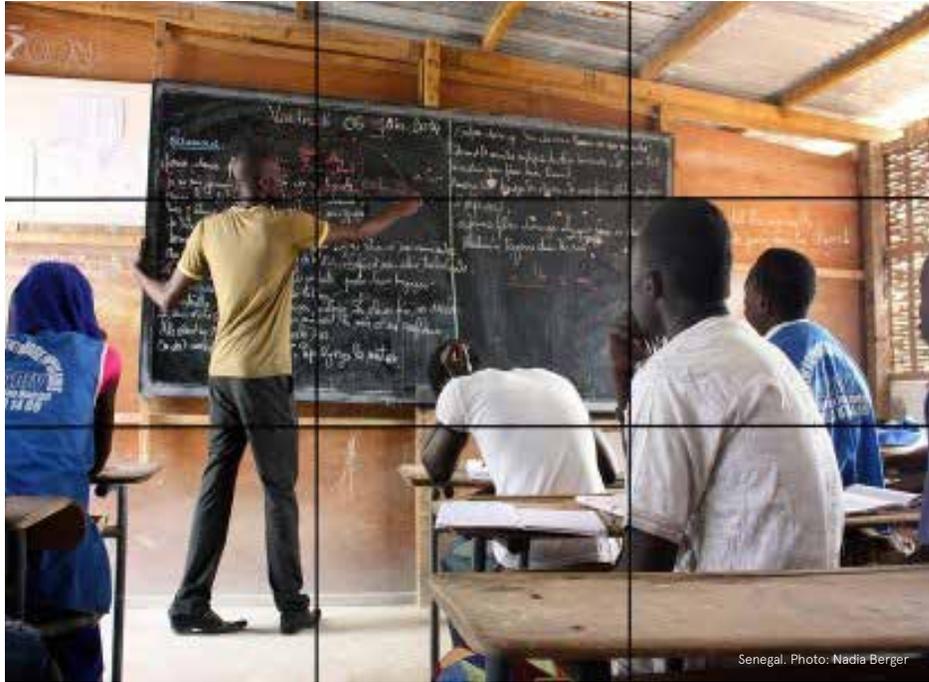
Nepal. Photo : Kiran Ambwani

Open shade (shaded sections that receive indirect light from the sky or the sun) offers soft light that is great for portraits.

3) COMPOSITION

Composition is the art of positioning a subject within a photo. Combining several elements, such as perspective and framing, will make the subject stand out. We can take photos at regular eye level, but using a different point of view by getting down on the ground or moving to a higher vantage point to shoot downwards often produces more interesting, unique results.





Senegal. Photo: Nadia Berger

To frame your subject, the most commonly used guide is the trusty Rule of thirds. Divide your shot into three vertical and horizontal segments, creating four intersecting points where you will position your subject. These points attract the eye and make dynamic images.

AVOID

- Placing the horizon at the centre of a landscape
- Distracting elements behind or in front of your subject
- Cropping out your subject's extremities (fingers, feet, etc.)



Guatemala. Photo: Michel Huneault

PRO TIPS

Do not be afraid to use symmetry and repetition to create a visual effect.



Guatemala. Photo: Michel Huneault

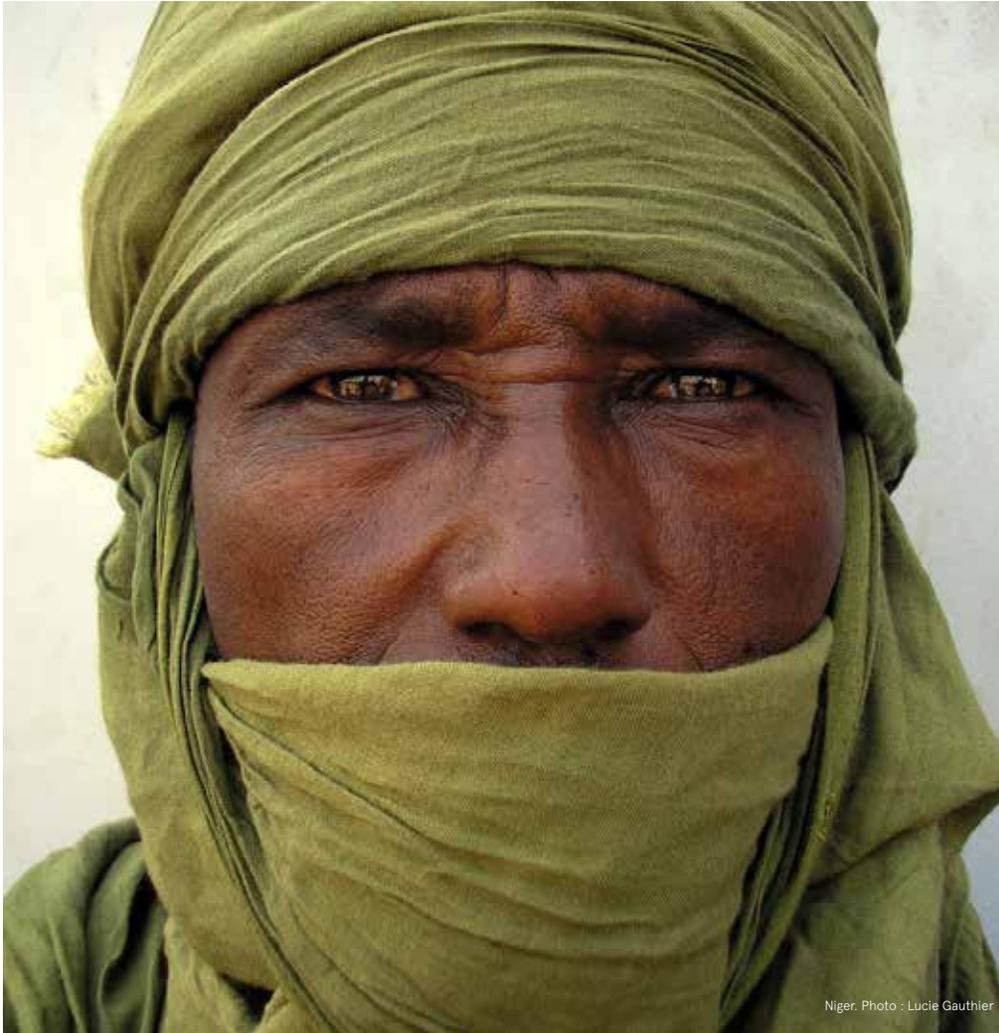
Pay attention to the background or the foreground to avoid distracting elements in your photos. A neutral background will keep your viewers focused on the subject.



Sorting peanuts in Siby, Mali. Photo: Eric St-Pierre

4) THE MAGIC MOMENT

Once everything is in place (subject, light, and composition), the fun can begin! Be patient and pay attention to actions and emotions. Wait for the surprise, the burst of laughter—anything that creates a magic moment!



Niger. Photo : Lucie Gauthier

PRO TIPS

Ask people to make eye contact. A compelling look that is full of emotion can create intensity in your portraits!



Nepal. Photo : Sunisha Neupane

Capture interactions to make your pictures come alive and show the interpersonal bonds at the heart of the volunteer experience.



Bolivia. Photo : Michel Huneault

Humour draws attention, evokes emotion, and sparks immediate interest in your photos, in addition to being a formula for success on social media.

AVOID

- Static subjects without emotion



Népal, photos: Kiran Ambwani



5) PHOTO-ESSAY

Sometimes, a single photo will not suffice and five or more are needed to tell a story. Photo-essays are used to show your subject from various angles. Prepare a list of subjects to identify the key elements you wish to document but, also, be prepared for unexpected shots that show playful angles to round out the more descriptive images. Vary your images—close-ups, landscapes, portraits and action shots—for better coverage.

PRO TIPS

Make a list of main subjects. At the end of the day, write down the subjects you have covered and those you wish to cover the next day.

AVOID

- Setting out without a plan
- An overly detailed plan that leaves no room for unexpected opportunities



Alix Mendoza, a painter, standing in front of one of his murals in San Juan, on Lake Atitlan, Guatemala. Photo: Malik Filah

6) BASIC INFORMATION

While a picture is worth a thousand words, it is important to take notes on each photo so it can be easily used later. Write down the country, the year, people's names, and some contextual information (e.g. project or partner name). Lastly, be sure to include your name (or the photographer's name) so we can credit you.



Photo credit: Ibrahim Youssouf Kone

PRO TIPS

Quote the person in the photograph.

Write a paragraph to caption the photo.

“Snapshot of a special moment: a ceremony to nominate a new village chief near Sanankoroba. This photo features a hunter who is also a magician. It is said that he can transform branches into snakes and rocks into water. I do not know if the snake being bitten here has been charmed, but one thing is for sure—it is incredibly calm!”

Story by Éléonore Durocher Bergeron, taken from the Volunteer Blog



Laura and Veronique, volunteers on the Women's Health Trek in Jumla, Nepal, distribute safe birthing kits to local women and use role play to discuss women's health issues. Photo: Kiran Ambwani

Field work can often be complex and full of nuance. A short caption can provide key information on the situation and a few highlights. A caption provides another way of interpreting your photo, educates the viewer, and increases their understanding.

AVOID

- Photos with no information

TECHNICAL ASPECTS AND POST-PRODUCTION



Young participants in a technical and professional training program in Sri Lanka. Photo: Lorenzo Moscia

1) BASIC TECHNIQUES

Modern digital cameras and their built-in programs make it simple to automate almost every function of your camera. If you are unsure about a shot, use the automatic functions and 90% of your photos will come out perfectly. To take it a step further, there are a few basic notions you will need to know to understand how your camera works and improve your photos.

LENSES

Lens choice will make a big difference in your photos. With wide-angle lenses (18 to 35 mm), you can take wider shots that include more elements—this is perfect for landscapes. Add a human presence to give perspective and life to your landscapes.



Assita, Burkina Faso. Photo: Éric St-Pierre (Lens: 170mm; Aperture: F2.8; Speed: 1/160 sec; ISO 800)

A 50 mm lens is closest to that of the human eye. Telephoto lenses (100 - 200 mm and larger) compress the image and can be used to separate the subject from the background.

EXPOSURE

Exposure is the effect that light has on your camera's sensor. Good exposure is determined by the right balance of three parameters: ISO sensitivity, shutter speed, and aperture.



Sri Lanka. Photo : Lorenzo Moscia



Nepal. Photo: Kiran Ambwani (Lens: 48mm; Aperture: F5.6; Speed: 1/320 sec; ISO 400)



Senegal. Photo: Katel Le Fustec (Lens 32 mm; Aperture: F8; Speed: 1/160 sec; ISO 200)

ISO sensitivity affects your sensor's ability to receive light. In low light, increase your ISO to take hand-held shots.

ISO 100 to 400: This is the ideal setting.

ISO 800 to 1600: You can compensate for low light with higher sensitivity.

Above ISO 3200: You risk ending up with grainy, lower quality photos.

Aperture is the size of the opening through which light passes through your lens. This opening affects depth of field, which is the part of the photo that is in focus. The larger the aperture, the more light passes through the lens and the more limited is the focus.

F2.8 to F5.6: Limited focus but useful for close-ups.

F8 to F11: This is the ideal setting.

F16 and higher: A wide focus that is ideal for landscapes.

To adjust the aperture, use the Aperture setting as well as the Portrait (limited focus) or Landscape (wide focus) program.

Shutter speed is the speed at which the lens diaphragm or shutter curtain opens and shuts. It is usually calculated in fractions of a second (1/30 sec, 1/250 sec, etc.). Shutter speed allows you to capture a moving subject or take sturdy, hand-held shots.

Less than 1/15 of a second: Use a tripod to avoid taking blurry photos.

1/30 to 1/60 of a second: If your subject is static, you can take a hand-held shot (without a tripod).

1/125 second or faster: Use if your subject is moving.

To set a speed, use the Speed setting, or use the Sport icon for maximum speed.



Photo : Leah Bjornson

RESOLUTION AND COLOUR BALANCE

Resolution affects the final quality of the digital image your camera records. Select the High Definition (HD) setting on your camera for higher-quality images.

Colour balance is used to adjust the camera's sensor to the type of available light. In most cases, you will use the Normal or Sunny settings (Outdoor Light). Colour can also be corrected in post-production.

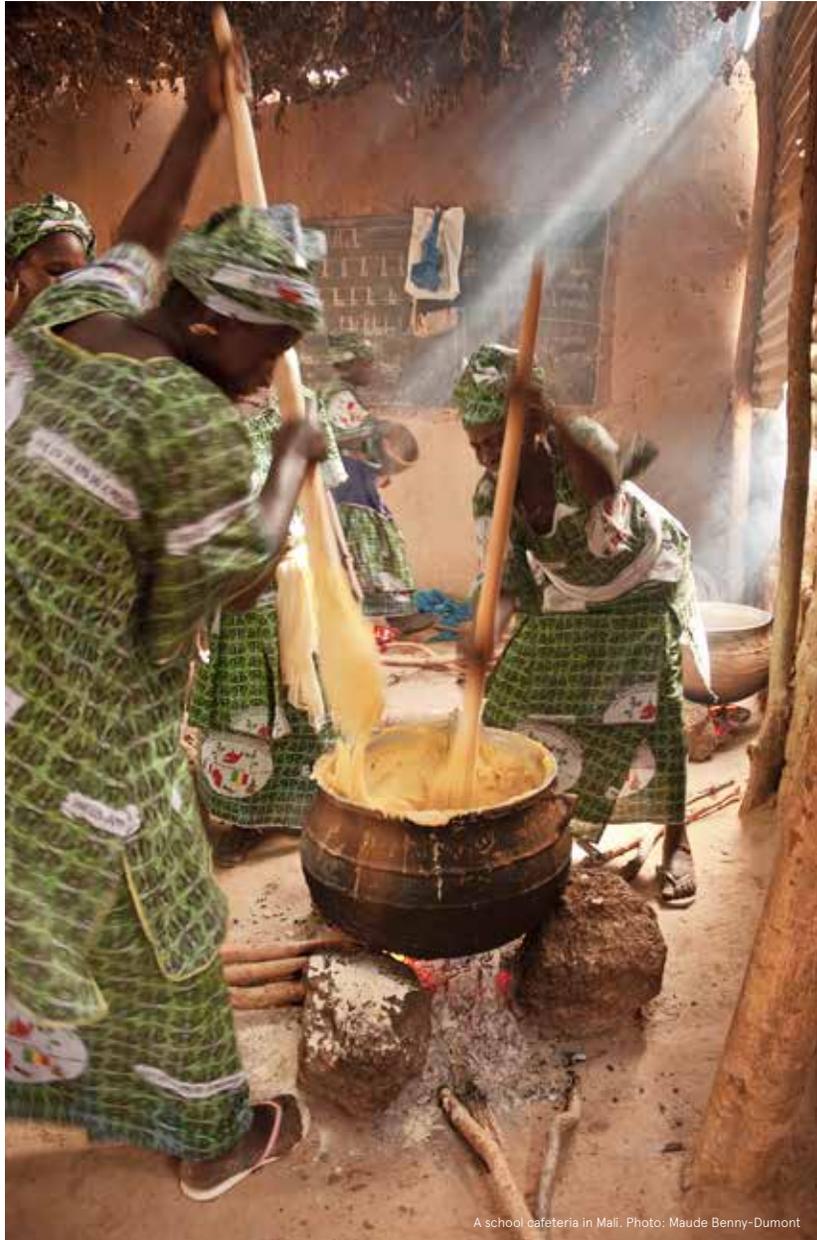
PRO TIPS

Use your camera's manual mode and explore the possibilities.

Use a tripod as often as possible to refine your technique.

AVOID

- Slow speeds for hand-held shots



A school cafeteria in Mali. Photo: Maude Benny-Dumont

2) POST-PRODUCTION

Digital photography allows us to take large quantities of photos, often far more than we actually need. Be selective of your shots. Less is more! To cut down on post-production time, try these simple techniques:

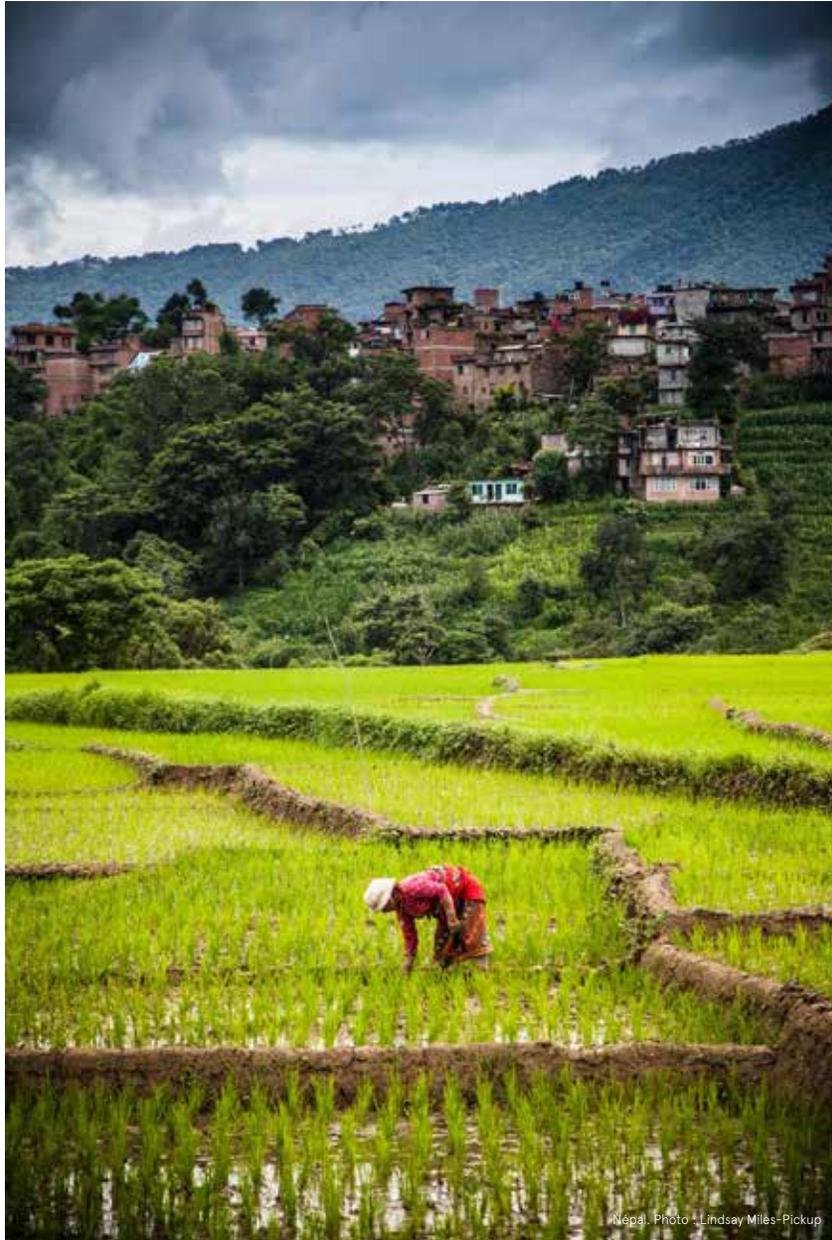
SELECTION

When looking through your photos, take the time to select the best ones—those that are technically and visually strong and that best portray your subject. Sort them and keep no more than 10% of your photos. It is better to have 10 good photos than 1,00 that look the same and/or have varying quality.

CALIBRATION

You can calibrate your photos using a basic photo retouching program. Adjust contrast and brightness for an accurate, attractive final product.

However, be cautious and realistic in your retouching. Try not to go overboard so that your photos are no longer natural.



SAVING

Basic information: after editing, add relevant information (see pages 20-21) in the “information” field (“i” or “Info”) using a photo retouching or photo viewing program on your computer.

Title : Rename your images using the following model:

Country_Year_Photographer Name_Subject_#

Nepal_2012_LindsayMilesPickup_Rice Farms_001

Format : To finish, save your photos in JPEG format (.jpg), one of the most commonly used modes of compression. Make sure your file is high resolution (3000x4000 pixels).



PHOTOGRAPHY CHECKLIST

- ❑ Show respect for your subject and be aware of sensitive issues.
- ❑ Define your subject and put he/she/it into context.
- ❑ Use the right settings on your camera and turn on high definition (HD).
- ❑ Pay attention to the light, time of day, and place where the photos are taken.
- ❑ Frame your subject to make it stand out.
- ❑ Capture spontaneous moments of action or emotion.
- ❑ Add basic information to your photos.
- ❑ Select your best photos to reduce the number of images to process.
- ❑ Lightly edit your photos to adjust the contrast and light.
- ❑ Save your photos as JPEGs (.jpg) under a detailed title containing basic information.

NOW YOU ARE READY TO SEND YOUR PHOTOS TO CECI AND WUSC AND HELP THE UNITERRA PROGRAM SHINE!

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A WUSC & CECI PROGRAM



Canada

The Uniterra program receives funding from the Government of Canada, provided through Global Affairs Canada.