

‘There is a Story behind Every Picture’: Photovoice Training and Data Collection amidst COVID-19

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The wake of the decade started with a pandemic that has changed the entire world and how we all do things. This has affected every aspect of human endeavor especially the health system and Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) programs. Our health workers now deal with additional challenges as a result of these changes. This led to our Rapid Research study where we decided to capture the perspectives of frontline facility health staffs (FLHFs) and community directed distributors (CDDs) who are in the forefront of dealing with COVID-19 and NTD programs during the pandemic, using photovoice. Photovoice is a creative method in qualitative participatory research which involves individual participants taking photographic images to document and reflect on issues significant to them.

Our research team includes researchers from Kaduna, Kwara and Ogun States. Dupe Yahemba, Adekunle David, Stephen Haruna and Linda Dubukumah are based in Kaduna and are fluent in Hausa, Temitope Olorunfemi is based in Kwara, and Victor Dalumo and Cynthia Umunnakwe, based in Ogun, are fluent in Yoruba which is native to both States. We are a team of mixed skillsets. However, photovoice as a method was new to many of us. This blog will describe our experience of training and using photovoice while also observing COVID-19 protocols.

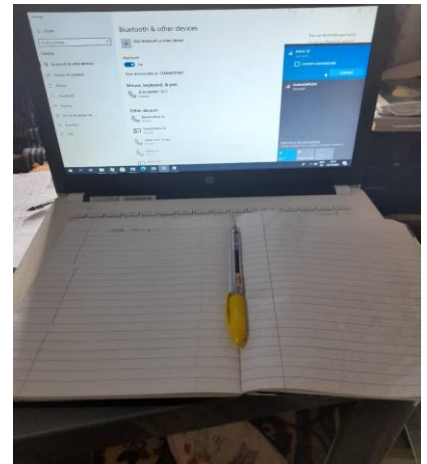
Trainings

The research teams in Ogun, Kaduna and Kwara states in Nigeria were trained virtually with our team member, Shahreen Chowdhury, based at LSTM via WhatsApp. We were trained on the process of photovoice and conducted our own pilot. The method was new to many of us in the research team except for few who currently work on the [Wellbeing study](#). We were excited to go through the process as it was a new experience. Team members were asked to look around their environments to take photos that best represented their feelings around wellbeing, with a caption or voice note explaining the context behind each photo. This was shared within our WhatsApp group as a space for learning as well as reflection. Ideas were shared and this enhanced an understanding of the use of the method. Some of the photos shared are as follows.



The lockdown had huge emotional impact on my wellbeing as I was not able to visit friends and loved ones who are sources of encouragement to me.

The picture is my laptop, workbook and pen. This picture represents my work tools and my access to the world of knowledge. My mental wellbeing is enhanced daily whenever I work on my laptop with unlimited access to the Internet. I feel knowledge is being added to me and I am also giving back to the society through my work as a researcher. I feel great that I am making progress and as well adding value to my world in my little space.



I love my family and I love my job but sometimes it can be a little bit overwhelming having to attend to my job and my baby at the same time. It brings mixed feelings sometimes but when I am overwhelmed, it is not easy, but I have support of family and friends who encourage me. So, this picture represents how sometimes my emotional wellbeing is affected with mixed feelings, but it is interesting to know that with support from family and friends, I am overcoming, and I am taking one day at a time.

After the training of the research team, a cascaded face to face training for the research participants (FLHFs and CDDs) was conducted by the team in each state. Participants responded well to the training. Participants were taken through the process of photovoice as a data collection method with relevant examples to help them capture how it can represent experiences and wellbeing.



Training of frontline health workers on photo voice in Kaduna, Kwara and Ogun state Nigeria

Data Collection

Participants showed appreciable level of understanding of the method as they were asked to do a pilot immediately after the training before the commencement of data collection. This was evident in the quality of photos they all sent. Photovoice gave the participants a novel opportunity to express their experiences and the impacts of COVID-19 on their work and lives using an engaging method.

Another interesting aspect was collecting data across states and across team members provided the platform to create relationships, meet new people to share experiences from another perspective and make connections. However, data collection using photovoice via virtual platforms posed some challenges such as difficulties in following up participants to send photos virtually due to their involvement in other engagements or duties. Some photos sent were not always relevant to the research question. However, we worked around this by reiterating the objective of the study activity and using prompts to bring participants back to the essence of the research.

Reflections from Researchers

The method allowed one to give an evidence-based information that is rich and meaningful. The use of photo also helps one to bring to life expressions of emotions and promotes reflective thinking. Thus, photovoice makes use of the adage that **“a picture is worth a thousand words”**.

*The photovoice process is an exciting one as engaging with participants who otherwise would have been at sea on how to communicate their thoughts has opened a floodgate of uninhibited expressions of thought – **Adekunle**.*

‘The method has its challenges. The process is time consuming compared to interviews and focus group discussions as participants sometimes have to be reminded to send photos.’ – Stephen

*‘The photovoice method was very new to me and I found it to be a very interesting way of telling a story of one’s experience. I found the use of photographs to explain situations very visually appealing and captivating which is a true reflection of the saying that **“there is a story behind every picture”**.*

*The process was quite easy for the participants to grasp and they sent across pictures of their experiences which were quite fascinating and unexpected’ - **Cynthia**.*

Despite the challenges around the pandemic, we have reflected on the past months with mixed feelings. We are happy that we could learn this method of data collection particularly for team members for which this method was completely new while for others, this process resulted in building upon existing skills. Therefore, as a team we have moved forward and built capacity. Since completing data collection, we have conducted focus group discussions where we collaboratively discussed and analysed photos with FLHFs and CDDs. Our next steps now are to develop our photovoice findings into a photo booklet, which will be presented in Stakeholder Review Meetings in each state to collaboratively develop recommendations. We look forward to sharing our findings.