

Developing International Agricultural Communications: A Photo Elicitation of International Agricultural Development Implementors

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Changes in stakeholders in international agricultural development create new needs for communication channels to facilitate knowledge transfer. It is crucial to address this gap between program needs and program success for development programs to thrive. As communication is measured, visually communications need to be addressed specifically. Visual communication is needed to bridge the gap between local communities and implementing programmers. Using photo elicitation, researchers purposively sampled individuals who were program directors, agricultural development practitioners, and program implementors in Farmer-to-Farmer programs in Bangladesh, Nepal, Egypt and Lebanon. Findings were grouped to identify four main elements desired by program practitioners and beneficiaries to help communicate about international agricultural development. These included contextual, compositional, humanizing, and engaging elements. The four elements discovered should be considered factors in a model of international agricultural development communication and implemented to align practitioners' views of programs with other stakeholders in the system.

Keywords: photo elicitation, development communication, visual literacy

Introduction

Knowledge transfer is the key to successful agricultural development. An important component of knowledge transfer is communication. Pathak et al. (2023) state “communication plays a critical role in agricultural development by serving as a catalyst for knowledge sharing, innovation adoption, and behavior change among various stakeholders involved in the agricultural sector” (p. 40). Understanding how knowledge moves between people, and whether the form of communication fits the audience is imperative. Farmers, donors, NGOs, and governments may prefer, or be more in tune with, different message delivery options. For producers, agricultural communication practices have been used to communicate research-based findings with success (Cash, 2001; Masambuka-Kanchewa et al., 2020). However, those communicating the research might not be as skilled as necessary. For example, Holt et al. (2019) found Extension agents in Georgia were not confident in their ability to create visual communication like videos or visually appealing marketing materials.

Exacerbating this problem is the sheer size of international agricultural development as a system. Prior to 2025, international agricultural development relied heavily on the influence, reach, and programming of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (McCabe, 2025). Even with the dissolution of USAID (McCabe, 2025; USAID, 2025), the system of international agricultural development is continuing with stakeholders including non-government and private organizations and in-country support (FundsforNGOs, 2025; International Food Policy Research Institute, 2025). With this shift, it is more crucial than ever for development programs to communicate efficiently with farmers as well as laterally with these agencies, funders, and implementers.

One method of communication seen to improve agricultural development programs is visual communication (Ojo, 2024; Rodriguez, 2018; Tsebee, 2021). In development communication, visuals play a critical role in training and public outreach, frequently making a deeper impression on audiences than written text (Servaes, 2007). While impactful, gaps in research continue to exist for visual communication strategies and their implementation in agricultural development programs. This study addresses the need for high quality visual communication in the field to address needs and effectively support field programs through visual representation. By understanding agricultural development program implementors’ perceptions of images, this research aids in highlighting where communication training and modifications should occur when implementing visuals into development programs.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers used visual literacy theory as the frame for this study. Researchers broadly define visual literacy according to their field of operation. (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2011; Kędra, 2018; Lazard et al., 2020; Messaris, 1994). Ausburn and Ausburn (1978) define it as “a group of skills which enable an individual to understand and use visuals for intentionally communicating with others” (p. 291). For this study, visual literacy was focused on the “intended communication” via visuals. Humans develop a visual vocabulary before a verbal vocabulary; thus, trust is put into visual images, “even if a discrepancy occurs between related visual and verbal messages” (Ausburn & Ausburn, 1978, p. 293). International development organizations bring together people of different cultures and languages; this trust in visual images acts as a bridge between individuals facing language barriers.

Chai (2019) describes photographs as “visual data coded with rich information” (p. 121). Chai (2019) examined both the efficacy of photographs as a medium of communication for international agricultural development, as well as focusing on how people interpret and assign meaning to visual images. This decision was reinforced by the statement, “the use and interpretation of images is a specific language in the sense images are used to communicate messages that must be decoded in order to have meaning” (Stokes, 2002, p. 12). Stokes (2002) further supports the idea of specific language by stating individuals need to be aware of visual messages or seeing images in the “language of the messages” (p. 12).

Visual literacy theory is also appropriate for international development work, as visual literacy functions as a 'cultural-specific' language much like spoken and written literacy (Stokes, 2002). Tsebee (2021) employed visual literacy theory in their study to reinforce Extension workers use of visuals to communicate and “induce change” in Nigeria. Building on this point, Dogra (2007) classifies NGOs “as 'socio-cultural institutions of representation' and suggests they have influence over the discourses and ideologies conveyed through organizational imagery” (p. 168). More specifically, Dogra (2007) explains “the way NGOs use images is especially important in their counter-hegemonic role of educating the public and advocating "right" development practices vis-à-vis media power” (p. 169). We applied these understandings of visual literacy throughout this study by anchoring participants' responses to ‘cultural-specific language’ used when interpreting how they viewed images and observing how each individual viewed and interpreted agricultural images through their own cultural and prior experiences

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to identify desired traits of photographs expressed by practitioners and address potential knowledge gaps between practitioners and stakeholders that impact communication of international agricultural development projects and success. The following research question guided this study: What collective themes exist among perceptions of the visual representation of international agricultural development programs?

Methods

Research Design

Researchers used a photo elicitation research method for this study. In this approach, various photographs are shown during interviews to encourage participants to describe what they perceive, and to share their experiences brought to the fore by the visual stimuli, and explain how they interpret the messages (Harper, 2002). Photographs for interviews can be chosen either by researchers or by participants (Van Auken et al., 2010). In this study, the researcher selected the photographs. Ten images were taken from the USAID Flickr account in a previous study completed by Roberts et al. (2020). Images used can be seen in Figure 1.

Researchers use photo elicitation interviews because photographs often help people explain their thoughts more clearly than words alone. They can also create a prompt for deeper reflection, as well as reducing confusion in interview questions. Pictures also help bridge language or cultural differences that often make interviews difficult (Harper, 2002). Researchers completed this study in countries where English was not the first language, thus the photographs provided a shared reference point and lowered the risk of misinterpretation during interviews.

Participants

To gain a clear understanding how visual communication works in practice, this study focused on the people involved in planning and carrying out agricultural development projects. Researchers purposively sampled program directors, development practitioners, and Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) implementors.

Figure 1

Stimuli Used in Photo Elicitation Interviews



Bielecki, C. (2013)



Mahoney, E. (2013)



Mahoney, E. (2013b)



Wingard, M. (2011)



Cemius, J. (2014)



Weyandt, R. (2013)



Fintrac Inc. (2013)



Jordan, M. (2008)



Ramji, Z. (2006)



Mahoney, E. (2013c)

Note. Full image citations are listed in the manuscript references.

The Farmer-to-Farmer programs were chosen because they offered access to each of these groups during an available two-week data collection window in each country sampled.

To gain a clearer understand how visual communication works in practice, the study focused on the people involved in planning and carrying out agricultural development projects. Researchers purposively sampled program directors, development practitioners, and Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) implementors. The Farmer-to-Farmer programs were chosen because they offered access to each of these groups during an available two-week data collection window in each country sampled. An additional selection criterion was to focus on countries that had fewer photographs in USAID's public media collections. Previous research was done to determine public facing images and the countries represented (Roberts et al., 2020). This led to the selection of Bangladesh, Nepal, Egypt, and Lebanon for this study. This choice gave the study fresh perspectives from places that are often underrepresented.

Participants with minimum English language abilities were sampled, and Farmer-to-Farmer staff served as translators when needed to explain uncommon or unfamiliar language and terminology. A total of 21 participants were interviewed. In qualitative research, saturation is reached when new interviews no longer generate new ideas (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By the 21st interview, no new themes were emerging. Although time and travel were limitations, the data collected in the interviews became consistent; therefore, the sample was considered sufficient.

The sample in this study provided a look into how three different points of view collectively perceive international agricultural development programs and the current visualizations used to communicate such programs. Participation included both genders, a range of ages, and at least one individual representing Farmer-to-Farmer staff, beneficiaries, and volunteers from each country. Of the 21 participants, four were female and 17 were male. Researchers interviewed seven participants from Bangladesh, five participants from Nepal, five participants from Egypt, and four participants from Lebanon.

Data Collection

Researchers used face-to-face, semi-structured interviews for data collection. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Ten open-ended questions were used to explore their job role, communication efforts, communication methods, visual communication practices, desired communications trainings, and representations of their culture and program. The last two questions focused on the photo elicitation and in-depth information about their visual communication perceptions. During the interviews, images were shown in the same sequential order to every participant regardless of country. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for probing in each interview to gather thick, rich descriptions of each interviewee's perception. Following IRB protocol, no identifying information was collected from interview participants. Participants were assigned a pseudonym prior to the data analysis process to ensure anonymity. The semi-structured format gave room for follow-up to gain more detail.

Data Analysis

Interviews were audio recorded with the participant's knowledge. Notes were also taken during the interviews to capture important statements as well as observations of the participant's reactions and body language. Data collection continued until data saturation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers transcribed interviews and recorded the time of each statement as well as the

image being viewed. Each individual thought was recorded as a statement. The statements were first sorted by country into common categories using elemental coding (Saldaña, 2016) followed by constant comparison method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2016;). Each country had its own set of defining themes based on the statements and words used according to culture. This was done to document how each participant perceived the images by country prior to completing the second round of coding. As coding categories were found in the initial coding process, axial coding (Saldaña, 2016) was employed in a secondary coding sequence to begin synthesizing the codes from the initial coding sequence into identifiable themes reported in the findings.

Trustworthiness and Subjectivity

Since this research is rooted in qualitative methodology, reliability and validity shift to trustworthiness and authenticity (Bryman, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Trustworthiness was established through careful crafting of the image repository and development of literature-centered interview questions to anchor research materials with existing knowledge. Credibility was established using triangulation of interview recordings, researcher's observational journal reviews through prolonged engagement (Spence & Dado, 2025), and related images (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking was also used to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity with special considerations for the differences in language and culture found between the researcher and interviewees. The researchers completed member-checking during the interviews by repeating statements back to participants to confirm understanding by the researchers. We shared the final key points with participants after the interview to complete a final member check to confirm and correct interpretations of statements.

The lead researcher has previous experience in international agricultural development. This background shaped the interest in communication practices, but it could also influence interpretation. To monitor this, reflective notes were kept throughout the study, and the various coding decisions were reviewed by peers. These steps helped reduce and monitor potential bias and support authenticity. These steps were especially important because the study crossed multiple countries and languages, where the meaning of images could shift. Member checks helped confirm themes reflected participants' views rather than the researcher's assumptions.

Findings

Researchers grouped all major themes of countries using inductive analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to answer this study's research question. We identified commonalities between each country's themes and included preferences such as action in images, people as subject matter, positive portrayal of programming experiences, and overall image quality. We formed four major elements to represent the collective themes among all country participants. The following paragraphs name the four elements according to the overall descriptive characteristics. Descriptions and exemplary statements are provided to give an overall view of the four elements participants perceived as necessary and desirable for recognizable, impactful images to be used in international agricultural development programs.

Element One: Contextual

Participants in this study mentioned contextual elements most often. Statements were made by participants from each country and centered around ideas of environment, especially areas of natural or farm landscapes, message clarity, and the importance of details.

The idea of environment was a theme in all four countries. Statements were made in reference to the geographical area represented in the images as well as the characteristics of settings such as meeting places for discussion or a lack of fields containing visible row crops. Participant L4 stated the “maize indicates rural village, probably more related to agriculture” when viewing Image 1. Participant B2 stated the “environment is a good farm site” when viewing the same image. Participant E1 described this image as “ideal to show sustainability of programs.” Participant N1 found this image positive because subjects were “in the field and actually doing stuff.” This representation was described as important for gaining a partial or complete understanding of the visual message. Without the illustrative views of environments, participants often said the image could be for any development program. Lack of environmental information kept participants from associating images with agriculture. Participant L4 stated Image 6 was “maybe a rural area but not associated with agriculture.” Participant L4 also stated how the environment could look “too urban” to be agriculture as in Image 2. Participant E4 said “putting a field in the back would change the story” when viewing Image 5.

Message clarity was often mentioned by participants in statements claiming a lack of clarity in images. This lack of clarity was the result of smaller views of larger scenarios. Participant N3 stated “[they] might be demonstrating, but [I] can’t see an audience” when viewing the Image 4. When viewing this same image, Participant E1 stated his dislike for the image after describing the environment and stated the image was “just for show” but the environment “could be attractive for pests or rodents.”

Some participants spent time expressing their view of the environment early, while ideas of message clarity surfaced after longer examinations of images. Statements of message clarity were also expressed with insight about what should be added or changed in the image for increased clarity. Participant B2 suggested Image 5 should “show what the facilitator is talking about. [This picture] doesn’t tell much as a whole.” Participant E2 said Image 4 should “show more product, or the area of the storage.”

Statements concerning details were found woven among the various themes that make up the idea of contextual elements. Participant B6 described the subject in Image 6 as “dressed in local culture” indicating the importance of clothes worn by people. Participant E2 noted how “clothes are poor” when describing people in Image 3. This same participant also commented the subject in Image 4 was “not a farmer because of his clothes.” Participant B4 described Image 6 as a representation of “sharing food and water” based on items held or found near the subjects of focus. Participant L4 took many cues from details in images to describe geographical locations in the background or environment by stating how the “clothes and setup suggest Africa” for Image 8. Images containing more details about the scenario depicted were desired. Participants wanted to see products held by people, village or building structures, or informational components from computers or papers in the image. Participant E4 said “it really depends on what they are looking at. Is it relatable?” when viewing Image 9. When viewing Image 4, Participant B2 said “[they are] showing a product, but it is not clear. People can’t understand what it is.” While details were important, some participants expressed concerns about images containing too much information or too many details to process. Participant L1 said “[I’m] not sure which direction to look” when viewing Image 9. Participant B6 said “everyone is squished” when viewing Image 8, and Participant E4 said “[it is] more distracting with all the detail” when viewing Image 5.

For an impactful image, contextual information must be considered and must be present. The environment should add information to allow viewers to place the scenario in a context deemed appropriate. From the findings of participants, images containing environments like African landscapes were familiar. An effective and representative image must have contextual elements that are stereotypically associated with agriculture such as rows of crops in a field or farming livestock. Participant E2 said “changing the location to a field shows development” when viewing Image 6. Without these elements, participants resisted connecting stimuli with international agricultural development. For countries not easily recognized, adding in cultural elements like clothes or colors could help with more immediate connections between the country and the program being represented. For example, Participant N5 said the “typical dress adds a lot of value” when viewing Image 7.

Element Two: Compositional

Following contextual elements, composition supports the need for environment and details by providing structure to the stimuli. Participants from each country stated perceptions and desires centered around compositional rules found in photography and fundamental practices such as identifying the image purpose and image quality. Nepal contributed the most to this conversation due to prior experience in photography held by participants.

Compositional elements in photography are general ideas of how to style images based on a scenario presented and a desired result. While not all participants had photography knowledge or experience, statements on the busy, complicated features or the blurring of the background were shared. When viewing Image 7, Participant L1 said, “Don’t blur the background. Allows [me] to match field to the product.” When viewing the same image, other participants enjoyed the compositional makeup and photography techniques. Participant B7 stated it was a “good aid photo” and they could “see the focus of the aid project.” Participant N1 described the image as a “cool pic with depth of field” and the image had “really good colors.”

For Image 2, Participant B2 said, “the image should be big to see the detail.” Participant B2 also stated “if the product or object is what is important, the blur is okay” when viewing Image 5. Participant N5 said, “get an angle more focused on the face” when viewing Image 8. Without technical knowledge, participants did not make the verbal connection between the “busyness” of an image and the compositional element of simplicity, nor the connection of the “blur” being “bokeh.” Even without the terminology, participants identified elements of photo creation and composition are often used by professional photographers and discussed desired options of changing the image style or composition. Participant N5 said to “crop to show part of the crowd” when viewing Image 5. Participant E3 wished to “change the quality by taking a wider view” when viewing Image 9 ... a sentiment shared by other participants when viewing this same image. Participant B7 stated they “didn’t like this [image] at all” and it “actually puts me off” because of the structure of the image.

Participants also mentioned the need for knowing an image’s purpose or the intended use to understand the scenario depicted in the stimuli. This practice of identifying a purpose or planning and preparing for a photo is also used by professional photographers. Images of a more “professional” quality were deemed to have a reasonable purpose of use for international agriculture development such as Image 7 or Image 5. Images without depiction of composition or purpose were often regarded as images simply used for memories. Participant N5 said Image 1 was a “picture for memory more than for showcasing work.” Participant N4 stated “don’t use

this picture for development” when viewing Image 8 and referenced how the image was “not clear” and “confusing.” However, Participant N3 was willing to sacrifice quality for a clear purpose. They stated Image 10 was “not good quality but the message is clear” and expressed positivity toward the image for “serving the community.”

The quality of stimuli shown came under scrutiny from both participants with and without photography experience. Statements concerning quality often involved changes to resolution, editing of images to provide improved focus, or lighting. From statements collected, quality is considered important to implementors. Images taken with additional elements of composition were well received due to the professional appearance. Images of lower resolution did not garner the same positive reaction from participants. Participant N3 said, “Quality is good, but room for improvement” when viewing Image 7. They also mentioned Image 4 was of “poor quality” and they “can’t conclude any good information” from the image. Participant B2 said, “Good resolution and high quality are important” when listing ways to improve Image 10. Participant B2 also noted Image 2 was “not clear with poor resolution,” which limited their ability to “see what he [is] doing” in the image. After resolution concerns, implementors stated ideas for how to alter stimuli to produce an image with higher focus on a specific target. A clear subject must be in focus, especially if a product is the subject instead of a person. Participant N3 said, “If you can see the product, it’s easier to make perceptions” when viewing Image 1. Related to the purpose, implementors described instances where bokeh is appropriate to manipulate the focus on a particular section of an image. Participant L1 stated, “Can focus only on what you want to show” when viewing Image 5.

Lighting was also a concern for participants. Often, expressions of an image being too dark impacted the influence of the image. Participant B5 said, “Lighting makes it difficult to focus on the picture” when viewing Image 4. Participant E4 stated, “Lighting on the product is good, but he needs a little more” when viewing the same image. Participants provided suggestions of what light would be best to highlight the important elements of the image. Lighting was also viewed as an indicator of an image being posed or natural. Participant N5 said, “The light is not appropriate for this” when viewing Image 2. Participant B3 said, a “darker image portrays challenges” when viewing the same image but did note lighting “makes people curious.” Participant B3 also mentioned the “poor lighting in the image” for Image 1 and the effect on “composition.”

Element Three: Humanizing

This humanizing element is built from statements of desire for visible faces, diversity in people, gender and age, and the want for real emotions. Visible audiences are desired. Based on reactions to stimuli, participants sought human subjects over product-focused images. If viewing stimuli without a human subject focus, participants would express desires to see the image with other photos to tell a more complete story. Participant E1 stated Image 5 was “not a stand-alone image. It should be part of a story.” When viewing the same image, Participant L2 stated “if training, [it is] better to see faces because you are training for the people. We invest in people in these programs, so it is good to show faces.” Similarly, Participant B1 stated “more people in [the] image is more impactful” when viewing the same image. Participants described an intense need to see individuals’ faces in images. They crave human connection through seeing the faces of others. In the same respect of seeing faces, implementors desire to see faces of the people or communities benefiting from programmatic actions. By seeing familiar faces, implementors saw

more use for the stimuli as encouragement for fellow producers. Participant N3 said, “They can be role models” when viewing Image 7. Participant E1 said Image 10 could be used “for community to encourage participation.” Participant B6 stated “[I] see myself in this working by myself” when viewing Image 2 demonstrating a connection to the humans in the images viewed.

While viewing images, many participants from each country made initial statements about gender representation while seeing each image. Photos with all or a majority of women initiated discussions about the importance of representing women farmers. Participant B6 said, “Anything highlighting women is good. Women are key to [the] impact of [the] picture” when viewing Image 7. They stated this type of image is a “classic image that doesn’t harm to be used.” Participant E5 said, “it is good to empower women” when viewing Image 9. They also stated while viewing Image 7 the “idea is to gather together to do something good despite differences.” The depiction of children was met with opposing ideals. Some participants found children to be key for a truthful image. Without viewing children, participants were unable to relate the image with previous work experiences in the agricultural development field. Participant B2 said, “Children are key for development” when viewing Image 8. Participant L4 stated, “Little kids are farming” when viewing Image 6. This image also prompted them to state development is “not communicating with people in the village if you don’t have kids there.” For others, the presence of children implicated health or nutrition programs rather than agriculture. Children were not the intended target of agriculturally based programs, so there would be no need for children to be present. Participant L1 stated, “if the topic does not involve kids, better to not have them so mother can focus” when viewing Image 3. Participants expressed how ranges of age and gender make images more real. Participant L1 said, “age can make the subject or image unique” when viewing Image 2. They viewed this image as an “old man studying.” When viewing Image 6, Participant L1 stated “agriculture is an appropriate topic around 16 to 18 years old” and they “associated kids with education [programs]”. Participant E2 said, “children are good to show the parents trust foreigners” when viewing the same image. Participant E5 stated it is “important to engage with young people” when viewing Image 1. Similarly, a lack of statements about regional representation highlights a need for representation of other countries. The diversity of individuals and culture is needed to represent more than one region of development. Participant E3 stated “all photos are taken in Africa” when viewing Image 5, and they asked why only a focus was shown for Africa. They stated, “it’s not only Africa that is poor.”

Clear facial expressions create emotional connections. For an image to be impactful, participants expressed interest in not only seeing people’s faces, but also seeing real, emotional expressions. These expressions drew participants in and provided a pathway for connection and understanding of the message portrayed by the image. When seeing faces, participants were able to associate positive or negative thoughts with the image based on “happy” expressions or lack thereof. Participant L2 said, “I look for faces to help deliver the message” when viewing Image 2. Participant N2 said, “Smiles and faces reflect happiness or satisfaction” for Image 7. For the same image, a lack of a smile indicated something different for Participant N5. They said the “unhappy expression gives the feeling that it is not her farm but the other woman’s.” Popular images with human subjects were considered less effective because of contradicting emotions seen in the image. Participant B5 suggested Image 7 be “cut in half” because of the “mixed emotion.” They stated the image should “focus on the happy face.” Of the same image,

Participant E3 said, “no smile hurts the message.” Participant B7 stated Image 6 was a “good photo” because of the “laughing and lots of kids.”

Element Four: Engaging

The final major element focuses on movement seen within a photo. If human subjects are present, participants stated a desire to see some physical motion in the scenario to provide information about the message. Statements focused on broad types of action desired, education and discussion, and cultural exchanges.

Inactive images were seen as “standard” for Participant E4. When viewing Image 1 they said it was “not a good representation of development because they are just sitting and looking.” Participant E4 went on to state “development images have people doing action” and without action the “content doesn’t tell a story.” After other elements were discussed, participants described the need for action in images. One reason is to assist in telling the story, but participants also wanted to see action to show the reality of the work done in the field. Participant L1 said they “prefer picture of women harvesting instead of posing” when viewing Image 7. Participant B1 liked Image 1 because the “trainer is doing something. There is action.” While this action was addressed, it was noted participants associated discussions and education more with agricultural programs. Actions such as distribution were more related to public health in the views of participants. Participant L4 said Image 10 was “public health more than agriculture.” Similarly, Participant N2 stated they “saw some mother and children, instructor might be telling something about nutrition for mother and children” for Image 3. Interestingly, Participant N2 did also connect distribution to food. When viewing Image 8, they stated it “related to agriculture” because someone is “distributing food for children.” They finalized their idea by stating “agriculture activities allow for food distribution.” Other participants viewed Image 8 as health care related because of the “disorganized” and “squished” nature of the subjects as shared by Participant B6.

Discussion activities were considered action because they showed an exchange of knowledge. Participant L4 said Image 3 demonstrated the “interaction of applying agriculture and knowledge.” Participant E1 stated the same image “illustrates exchange of knowledge, has local speaker and flip chart.” Participants agreed depictions of discussion groups can show learning and knowledge transfer as action. However, these images should have more details and written elements to give context to the image. Participant B2 desired for Image 6 to “show learning materials or something to show activity during gathering.” They also stated Image 3 should “show what [the] facilitator is talking about. It doesn’t tell [a story] as a whole.” Participant L2 said Image 1 “would be great to have a banner. At least have [the] title [of training], this could be a social gathering.”

If images showed less physical motion or activity, participants made comments about adding elements or details to make the image more engaging for viewers. Participant B5 stated “engagement makes it more realistic” for Image 10. Participant N5 said “green makes this photo look bright and appealing” when viewing Image 2. Participants with more photography experience discussed how photography techniques can make an image “artsy” and appealing. Participant N1 said the “depth of field and soft background makes this kinda cool” for Image 5. Participant N1 also said, “artsy pictures have a place in development” after viewing Image 9. Participant B1 said Image 5 was a “non-traditional image that attracts people.”

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

From synthesis of all countries, elements of contextual, compositional, humanizing, and engagement nature were found to be the desired features of an impactful and effective image. These four elements come together to create an image supported by both visual design theories proven to attract people (Davis & Hunt, 2017) and theories of visual literacy (Ausburn & Ausburn, 1978). Contextual elements are needed for individuals to gain a better understanding of the message intended by international agricultural development photographs. Since visual literacy is a “cultural specific” language, this context should be considered and adapted depending on the intended viewing audience. The audience’s culture will guide the perceptions of shared images and influence the “intended message” of an image. This is exemplified by Rodriguez’s (2018) findings of Nepal’s “highly visual culture” indicating a potential for more detailed visuals when compared to other countries who might prefer less busy images.

This research extends Rodriguez’s (2018) sentiments to provide some distinct areas of how to ascertain and improve the value of images. Well-captured composition provides people with enough space and freedom to process their observations of an image. Principles of photography (Webb, 2020) support the need for images to be composed well to support the best message transmission. Humanistic elements provide meaningful connections for individuals and reflect the current paradigm of participatory development, where humans resonate best with humans (Davis et al., 2018; Leeuwis, 2013; Servaes, 2007;). For participants in this study, the sincerest responses came while viewing images of people’s faces with emotions or expressions. Engaging elements help to ensure viewing audiences choose to interact with the image for a certain amount of time. Increased time allowed for more memorable impressions from images.

Participants insisted elements of exchange or interaction are desired when using images to represent agricultural development programs. Ausburn and Ausburn (1978) express these impressions are important and will influence future decisions made by the individual.

Researchers saw confirmation of visual literacy in the participants through their use of personal experiences to frame the images viewed and their described interpretations of each image. Visual literacy continued to be a “culturally specific experience” (Stokes, 2002). Because of this, development communicators must consider the culture they are documenting, ensure the culture is accurately represented, and consider how it is interpreted by image viewers.

Continued research is recommended to confirm findings and compare perceptions with other countries involved in international agricultural development. By understanding more about perceptions and the desires for the four elements, researchers can better map out and identify communication gaps held between stakeholders of development. Better training programs aimed at training communicators to use these components when building visual messages could be beneficial, especially within Extension where practitioners might not feel as comfortable with these concepts (Holt et al., 2019). A second study could be produced with images deemed to have all four desired qualities described in the findings. Uses of such images can reveal contrasts in opinion between country practitioners. As images are collected, ensure the four elements are achieved to produce the most impactful image possible.

To take the first step in improving the communication process in international development, researchers should work toward a more defined model of international agricultural development communication. This model should highlight the various stakeholders in the

communication system as well as consider the roles of multiple communication types, including visual communication with the four elements found in this study. This study focused on the implementors' side of the model, but research should be conducted along multiple pathways of communication in the greater system of international agricultural development. In addition, this model should consider an implementation of the platform theory introduced by Adhikari and Baral (2025) to further expand the reach and impact of international agricultural development communications by considering the multitude of stakeholders and the "dynamic interplay" (p. 9) of their networks and availability of communication channels.

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