

Principled Photography

- 1. Photographs can have a powerful effect, for good or for bad.**
 - Photography is not a morally neutral activity. Each photograph has ethical importance. For example, your photographs can perpetuate stereotypes or undo them; they can build trust or undermine it.
 - Behaviors without cameras are perceived differently than behaviors that include cameras. Cameras usually create a personal distance between the photographer and the person photographed.
 - Your photography behaviors reflect on every visitor with you and after you.
 - Rely on local hosts to guide you in decisions of what to photograph and under what conditions.
- 2. Photography is a privilege, not a right.**
 - Ancient people who thought that a photograph took part of a person's soul were partially right. A person's image is a precious thing that is not yours to use as you wish.
 - With privilege comes responsibility. Your responsibility is first of all to the person being photographed and only secondarily to those to whom you want to show the photograph.
- 3. Some things are best left un-photographed.**
 - Seek to be personally transformed by your experiences, not just to record them.
 - The absence of a camera may enhance the chances of a genuine interpersonal interaction.
- 4. Your photograph is one of thousands just like it.**
 - Original photography is very rare; unoriginal photography is very common. Chances are the photo opportunity you see has been seen and photographed by many people before you.
 - Being photographed by visitor after visitor has a cumulative negative effect on the people photographed.
 - Stereotypes are created by patterns of images. You can add to the pattern or break it. Africa is often portrayed as a child in need. You can work against that stereotype with photos of children who are happy, or Africans helping or teaching Westerners.
 - Consider using pre-existing photos when they are available (for example post cards, stock photos, or a photo taken by a friend).
- 5. Treat the person you are photographing as a *partner* in telling the story.**
 - Treat the people you are photographing with the respect you would give to a friend, not as an object without a life history.
 - When one or a few faces are the focal point of the photo, ask the people's permission first. You may need to use an interpreter. Do not assume that a response you don't fully understand (because of language or cultural differences) is an approval.
 - When appropriate, get the first name of the person photographed and use it with the photo to humanize the subject.
 - Honor the wishes of the person you want to photograph. If they don't feel appropriately dressed, for example, don't tell them it doesn't matter and then take the photo anyway.
 - People are nearly always honored when given a copy of a photo of themselves. In poor communities, even a black and white photo of oneself on regular paper is a rare thing to have. With a digital camera, it is thoughtful to show the photo taken to the person(s) in the photo.
 - Assume that the people you photograph will see every image of them you produce in every format and setting. In each circumstance, consider how they would feel about their image being used.



These principles were developed by **africanising** - building relationships with effective grassroots African organizations. www.africanising.org