



Tanzanian village images

International team of educators takes Adobe® Photoshop® to Tanzania to help Maasai villagers preserve their culture



Just when you think you've heard of all things Adobe Photoshop, something new crops up. This time Adobe Photoshop has made its way deep into the heart of East Africa, where remote Tanzanian villagers are taking pictures of their lives.

This amazing digital imaging implementation—with Adobe Photoshop as a key component—is about a group of educators who introduced digital photography into the daily lives of the Maasai people to help them visually capture the essence of their culture and enable them to tell the stories about what matters to them. A team of eight Canadian and one Australian educator recently journeyed to the district of Mondulia in Tanzania, a two-hour drive from Mt. Kilimanjaro, with the purpose of teaching digital photography to elders, teachers, and children alike.

Using Hewlett Packard PhotoSmart Cameras and Adobe Photoshop, educators introduced digital photography to the Maasai people to help them visually capture the essence of their culture and enable them to tell the stories about what matters to them in their daily lives. Maasai elders and teachers regarded the digital photography project as a way to balance the use of technology with their ancient practice of storytelling.



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Jeff Young,
executive director,
Village Galleries

With initial funding from Research in Motion and Merit Travel and support of more than 300 family and friends, the project was spearheaded by Village Galleries, a Canadian non-profit group, in collaboration with the Monduli Pastoralist Development Initiative (MPDI), a not-for-profit organization working in Tanzania that is dedicated to effectively improving the standard of living of the Maasai in the Monduli District, while preserving their rich, ancient culture.

“The trip was a huge success,” says Jeff Young, executive director of Village Galleries and a veteran educator. Young explains that the project had an immediate positive impact on nearly 500 Maasai villagers who took more than 5,000 pictures during the 10-day adventure.

Young is an active member of the Adobe Education Leaders program—educators who use their unique abilities to promote excellence in education through the use of Adobe solutions. The Tanzanian journey led by Young is a prime example of a program that highlights the successful, innovative use of

Adobe Photoshop to promote creativity and enhance the educational process. Through the Adobe Education Leaders program, Young is part of a global network of outstanding educators and administrators who inspire each other, share ideas, and connect and collaborate with peers in the education community.

Lasting impact on a smart and proud people

Adobe technology played an important part in sparking the imagination of the participants. Upper level teachers from the local school system were trained to use Adobe Photoshop with the goal of passing on the knowledge and managing image libraries for future use on websites and for other publishing projects. “The African teachers picked up Photoshop in about a second,” says Young.

The Maasai are a strong, warm, smart, and proud people who are committed to progress only if it keeps them connected to their cultural roots. In all, the team left behind 48 cameras and printers, four laptops, plenty of ink and paper, and hundreds of smiling faces. At the end of the trip, the African organizers set up a check-out system for villagers to borrow and return the equipment on an ongoing basis. “Our ultimate goal is to go back and establish an arts school. We want it to have a photography room and an Adobe room,” says Young.



Adobe Photoshop was chosen as the digital imaging tool for this educational project because the software is powerful and the learning curve is rapid. With the photos the Maasai took intact, the team used Adobe Photoshop only to add brilliance in terms of color and sharpness.

“We chose Adobe Photoshop as our digital imaging tool because the software is so powerful and the learning curve is so rapid,” says Young. With truthful documentation as the main objective, the team used Adobe Photoshop only to add brilliance in terms of color and sharpness. Young adds that Adobe Photoshop will “go a long way” in terms of prepping images for the web.

Photos for social impact

Rather than be recorded, the educators empowered the Maasai with the advantage of technology to document their own experiences. “The Maasai have no written language,” says Young. Given technology that would allow them to record—not to be recorded—the Maasai became totally immersed in telling their stories. “We wanted photos to take a natural place in their oral culture—and it worked.”

A typical day would involve driving off-road to a small village and setting up the battery-driven equipment on a hot, dusty hillside. “With the assistance of our Maasai interpreters and local teaching staff, we’d teach basic photographic skills, and tell the villagers to go take images of things that were important to them. In a matter of minutes, the villagers were off snapping pictures of cattle, each other, and often, us,” says Young.

When handed their digital prints, the villagers would stand and talk about their pictures, which they believed to be precious, magical possessions. One young man took a picture of a community toilette, a large partially covered hole. As he passionately waved the digital print, he spoke with equal passion about how he was going to show it to all the villagers and encourage them to use the toilette to prevent the spread of disease.

A young female teacher showed a picture of a young student and explained her intent to photograph every student. If an underage girl got claimed for marriage and dropped out of school, the teacher would take the picture to the local authorities to help the girl exercise her right to complete her education.

Photography as an educational means

While the international team’s experience was different in each of the nine villages they visited, the perceived value of education remained constant everywhere they went. According to Young, they were overwhelmed by the deep need for more education, and were encouraged by knowing this project made a difference.

One teacher had the idea to take pictures of the life cycle of a cornfield—including dead plants—to teach the importance of horticulture. Another planned to teach

Organization

Village Galleries

Unionville, Ontario, Canada
www.villagegalleries.org

Challenges

- Help remote Maasai villagers preserve ancient culture
- Fill need for modern educational practices that fit in with cultural beliefs
- Enable participants to self-record
- Train African teachers to use modern technology in curriculum

Solution

Used Adobe Photoshop as an integral tool in itinerant, educational digital photography workshops in East Africa

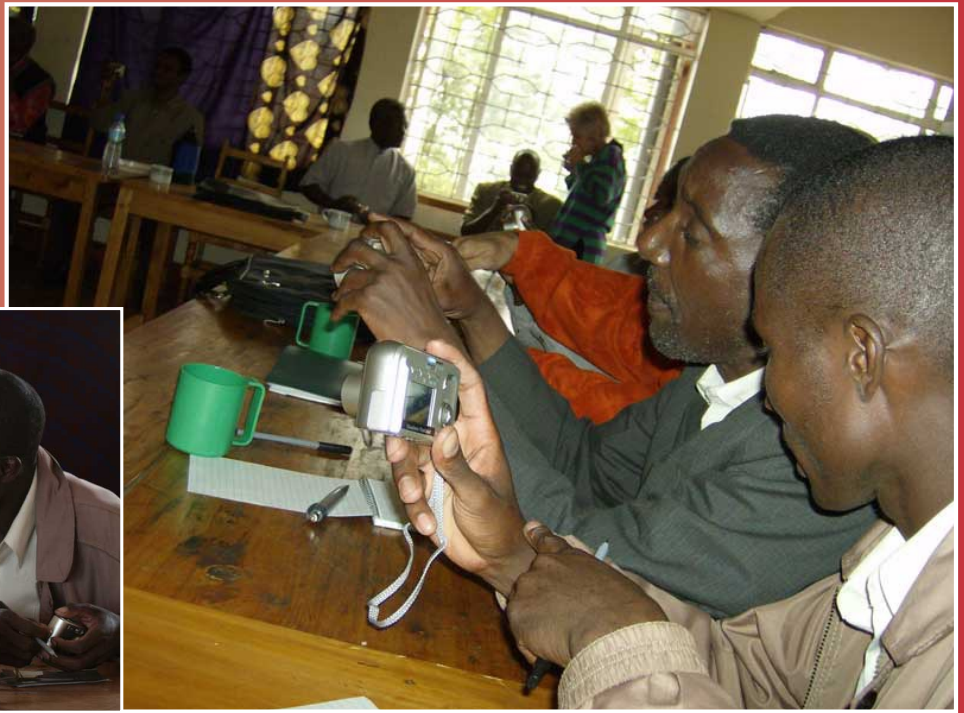
Benefits

- Contributed to deep need for better education
- Left behind technology and knowledge to perpetuate project’s impact
- Integrated digital photography into ancient cultural framework
- Enabled elders to illustrate their stories to preserve culture

Toolkit

- Adobe Photoshop CS2
- IBM® Thinkpads
- Hewlett Packard PhotoSmart Cameras
- Hewlett Packard printers

Local teachers were trained to use Adobe Photoshop with the goal of passing on the knowledge to more Maasai and managing image libraries for future publishing needs. Adobe Photoshop was used to promote creativity and enhance the educational process of the project.



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counting, addition, and subtraction by taking pictures of one, then two, then three donkeys. Previously, math teachers used stones on the ground for basic arithmetic.

To the village elders, education is a matter of passing down experiences—a custom deeply rooted in the Maasai culture. “Clearly the elders understand that modern technology is here to stay but have made the choice not to let it run over their culture,” says Young. Notably, the elders—and especially the teachers—regarded the digital photography project as a way to balance the use of technology with their ancient practice of storytelling.

“Adobe technology and digital imaging has—in whatever small way—effectively improved the standard of living for the Maasai villagers we worked with,” says Young. He hopes that with time youth will gain further knowledge of digital technology while retaining their ethnic pride as they move into positions of influence in government and economic development. Before leaving Canada, Young knew that Africa did not need another sad photo. “In our very first workshop, all the pictures we saw were of a joyful, confident people.”

The nine educators that traveled Tanzania include:

Aaron Bieman
Rob Cook
Chanel Crocker
James Crocker
Dave Morris
Brett Morris
Heather Morrison
Jeff Young
Nathan Young



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