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EDITOR'S CHOICE 2010

## THE 12 TOOLS THAT CHANGE THE RULES

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AN A.P. CAMPAIGN RESCUING AMERICA'S TREES

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WORKING WITH NGOs: JOURNALISM OR PR?

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**TINY GIANT**  
The Sony NEX-5  
Photographed by  
Jon Whittle

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NOVEMBER | DECEMBER 2010

**ON THE COVER:** This issue features three different covers depicting three Editor's Choice cameras: the Leica M9, the Nikon D7000 and the Sony NEX-5.

**BELOW, CLOCKWISE:** The Leica M9, one of the year's most notable imaging products; a photo by Bob Hower of the ecologically threatened park system in Louisville, Kentucky; a Chris Farber image of Darfur refugees in Chad; a slit-scan study of Tai Chi motions by artist Jay Mark Johnson.

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# ADVOCACY IN AFRICA

Chris Farber's work is designed to illuminate the experience and perspectives of Sudan's genocide refugees. He works for an NGO. Is this journalism, PR, or something else entirely? **By Aimee Baldrige**

**Right:** A donkey tied to a tree braces itself against a sandstorm blowing into Gaga refugee camp in eastern Chad. **Above, from left:** Bales of straw used to repair roofs in the Goz Amer camp; a sheikha, or female community leader, at the Oure Cassoni camp; a Darfurian man at the Am Nabak camp; a student reading a book in his family's compound in the Iridimi camp; two men playing soccer at the Djabal camp; a medical center behind a stand of trees at the Goz Amer camp; a sheikh, or leader, of the Messeriya Jebel community at the Mile camp; a woman and her baby looking away from an oncoming sandstorm in the Gaga camp.

© CHRIS FARBER (9)

“I tell our children that when we were in Sudan, we were in our homeland,” says a woman speaking directly into the camera’s lens. She is sitting in a refugee camp in eastern Chad; photographer Chris Farber and video editor Justin Madden are viewing the footage in a postproduction studio in Brooklyn. And no setting could be more appropriate, because providing a window into her experience to people a world apart is exactly the purpose of the presentation Farber and Madden are finishing up. Titled *Darfurian Voices*, it’s part of a body of work that Farber created during four months of photographing and conducting video interviews in all 12 of the Chadian camps that have become temporary homes to an estimated quarter million refugees of the seven-year-old crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan.

Perched on an office chair in Madden’s studio, Farber cuts a genteelly athletic figure. A former college swimmer who can not infrequently be found squeezing in an 8 a.m. match on one of New York City’s public tennis courts, he’s a thirtyish man with dark, wavy hair and the casually stylish sartorial taste of someone who has spent most of his adult life as a city dweller. Thick-rimmed black glasses and a touch of gray at the temples give him a mix of nerdiness and gravitas; it’s an impression he reinforces when discussing the often complicated issues surrounding his work.

Farber has devoted a good deal of thought to both the subjects of his images and his role in relation to them; they’re topics he can talk about energetically and at length, filling the occasional pause with an endearingly open smile. He’s just the sort of photographer you could imagine packing a set of scuffed-up Pelican cases and heading out into rough terrain to charm his way into the good graces of the locals and tackle complex subjects. But if your reverie culminates in a photo essay in *Time* or *National Geographic*, that’s where your fantasy and Farber’s reality part ways. He didn’t travel to Chad at the behest of a news outlet or a magazine. Like many Western photographers practicing their craft in the developing world these days, Farber was working for a nongovernmental organization, an NGO.

While the media industry has been contracting, the NGO sector has grown into a \$1.1 trillion industry; if it were a country, it would now constitute one of the largest economies in the world. From large organizations such as Doctors Without Borders to smaller ones like 24 Hours for Darfur, the group that commissioned Farber’s *Darfurian Voices* work, NGOs have become an increasing source of support and exposure for the kinds of extended

photo documentary projects that most newspapers and magazines can no longer assign. The shift has led many photographers—both veteran photojournalists and younger pros who are developing their skills in the new environment—away from getting the story for an editor who’s sworn to uphold the journalistic principle of objectivity and down the path of telling the story for an organization with a specific, and in this case humanitarian, agenda.

How is our connection to the lives of people we’ll never meet forged by the images and multimedia projects these photographers create? Farber’s work with Darfur refugees, and with the organization that’s dedicated to amplifying their voice, offers a glimpse at an answer.

### Homeless and Voiceless

In 2003, when a rebel uprising in Darfur challenged the authority of the Sudanese government, the regime of President Omar Hassan al-Bashir responded with a wave of attacks on the region’s civilian population. The violence escalated into what both the International Criminal Court and the Bush administration deemed a genocide against several ethnic groups. More than seven years later, the conflict remains unresolved, and refugees who fled the violence languish in camps run by international aid organizations.

In 2007, a group of Yale University law students launched a campaign called 24 Hours for Darfur to focus public attention on the crisis, soliciting video clips addressing the conflict from contributors around the world. They edited the clips and showed them at a rally where they were screened on a JumboTron outside of the United Nations headquarters in New York City. Gaining momentum, the campaign kept the name and grew into the nonprofit group it is today, an NGO specializing in research and advocacy. The group’s *Darfurian Voices* project is intended to communicate the opinions of those most directly affected by the conflict. As the group’s managing director, Jonathan Loeb, explains, “The purpose of the project is to document and broadcast the views held by Darfurian refugees living in Chad on issues of peace, justice and reconciliation.”

The organization turned to academics to design a survey of about 2,200 refugees, and it hired Chris Farber to create the video and photographic documentation to accompany the survey’s results. “People can read our report and then watch people talking about these same issues,” Loeb says. “It adds a more personal aspect and gives people a better sense of being able to visualize the refugee camps.” The group’s report of the survey



A man takes a break from tending a vegetable garden to drink water from a gourd in the Goz Amer camp, the only refugee camp where Farber saw enough fertile land to plant and grow food. Farber hopes to convey what Darfurian life was like before the refugees fled to the desert. “They were farmers before they got removed from Darfur,” he says.

results is being presented to policymakers around the world and made available to the public online at [darfuriavoices.org](http://darfuriavoices.org); it will be distributed to the refugees themselves in a version translated into Arabic. In addition, the *Darfurian Voices* video has been distributed online and on DVD.

### Developing a Career

For Farber, working in Africa was, in a sense, a return to roots. It was while shooting and editing photographs of a semester in Kenya as a McGill anthropology student that he first realized he wanted to be a photographer. After graduating and spending a year teaching English and shooting on spec for publications in Beijing, Farber

came to the U.S. and learned the ropes of professional photography while working with Philadelphia area portraitist Bill Cramer. As an assistant and then a shooter for Cramer’s studio, he absorbed the technical and business aspects of photography. Cramer also introduced him to pros working in other photographic veins, and the resulting income gave him the freedom to take time off for personal projects. Those experiences led him to a realization that changed the course of his life. “The epiphany I had,” he recalls, “was that the photographer I wanted to be was not the photographer I had learned to be or was. I had a lot more to learn, a lot more to practice.”

His epiphany spurred a move to New

York City, where he expanded his repertoire by exploring different genres, both as a shooter and as an assistant to photographers working at the highest levels of documentary, fashion and editorial image making. He also got in touch with friends from his student days who had gone on to work in international development in Africa. When one of them suggested he travel to Juba, in southern Sudan, to work on a media project that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had expressed tentative interest in supporting, Farber seized the opportunity: “I sold my car, I sublet my apartment, bought a ton of new equipment and Pelican cases to make sure my gear got

there and back, and I just got on a plane.” The leap of faith paid off when he not only completed a project for the UNHCR but also found work with other NGOs in the area.

But this isn’t simply a romantic story of fate rewarding zeal with success. Farber’s efforts succeeded because his contacts in the world of international development had helped him gain an understanding of how NGOs function in the developing world. “You need to speak the language of international development to work with these organizations in these places,” he says. After deciding to go to Sudan to pursue work on the UNHCR project, Farber put his knowledge of NGOs into play. “I e-mailed every other organization doing

work in Juba,” he says, “and basically said, ‘I’m coming to do this project for UNHCR, and if I can help you with your media, let me know.’” He notes that an element of rivalry for attention between organizations can work to the advantage of photographers trying to nail down a project: “They can be very competitive for funding, and when they hear that one is going to do a media campaign, a lot of times they think, ‘Well, we’d better do one, too.’”

Becoming part of the development community on the ground was also vital to Farber’s success in working with NGOs—especially when traveling to areas where small staffs had been living and working together over long periods and formed a tight-knit group. You have to “put the cam-

eras down and have some fun and make those connections and get in and become part of the community,” he says. This isn’t just social advice: Being part of the group can bring photographers access to NGO resources such as local transportation and contacts, as well as opportunities to tag along when NGO staff members respond to unfolding events. And being clued in on the internal politics of the NGO sector doesn’t hurt, either. Farber recounts an early misstep when he arrived to meet the local staff of the International Organization for Migration in Juba wearing a UNHCR hat: “It was like showing up to introduce yourself to the Mets wearing a Yankees hat,” he says. “They just took one look at me and they didn’t want anything to do with me.”

### Photographer for Hire

Photographers working with NGOs need to have a strong understanding of their subjects, their audience and the ways in which the organization is trying to connect the two. “If you don’t understand the bigger picture of it,” Farber says, “I think you don’t do enough service to these organizations as clients.” He stresses the importance of being knowledgeable about the political, social and economic factors in play, especially when working with multimedia. “When you move from photography into multimedia,” he says, “you have to be a reporter, to be an interviewer. You have to be ready to not just ask people why they’re sad. You have to understand what the relevance of the issue is, not just the suffering. In a par-

ticular issue, do we understand what the real complexities are? I think that’s why a lot of multimedia photojournalism now all seems sort of similar. It’s compassionate, it’s heartfelt—and it’s not that informed.”

Farber used the month he had in the capital of Chad before the project to hang out with leaders in the Darfurian diaspora and just listen to them talk over the situation. “It was like living inside of a reference manual, living inside of a textbook,” he says.

Jonathan Loeb explains how crucial this kind of preparation was from the perspective of the NGO. “We needed someone who had a really great eye for the photography and also had a great eye for the filming,” he says, “but we were also looking for someone above and beyond that traditional role, who



## CHRIS FARBER’S PACKING LIST

For trips to East and Central Africa, Farber packs his equipment into hard-sided Pelican 1510, 1610 and 1200 cases, then uses them to create a makeshift workstation in the field (above, right).

**BAGS:** Lowepro CompuTrekker Plus AW; Crumpler 6 Million Dollar Home; The North Face duffel bag; Lowepro S&F Light Belt and add-ons; two Domke pouches. And, says Farber, “Ziploc bags are super important to separate everything and keep dust off of things.”

**SLRs:** two Canon EOS 5D bodies; Canon EF 28mm f/1.8 USM, EF 50mm f/1.4 USM, EF 16-35mm f/2.8 II USM, EF 24-70mm f/2.8L USM lenses; 85mm UV filter. Farber also brings sensor-cleaning swabs and gaffer’s tape, which he uses to seal his camera bodies to keep dust out of spaces around buttons, dials and other camera parts.

**CAMCORDERS:** two Panasonic AG-HVX200 camcorders; Canon HV20 (for backup); Century Precision Optics 0.6X Wide Angle Adapter Lens; Petrol Mini Hood; Petrol Rain Cover. Farber also brings neutral density filters for times when it’s so bright out that the camcorders’ internal ND filters aren’t sufficient to prevent overexposure.

**LIGHTING:** two Canon Speedlites 220EX; Litepanels Micro LED panel; two 36-inch Calumet reflector disc with white diffusing and gold/silver zebra reflective surfaces; Impact 42-inch Collapsible Circular Reflector Disc in Soft Gold, White. Generally employed in daylight hours, the lighting Farber uses is usually combined with bright sunlight, often to fill strong shadows.

**COMPUTERS:** two Apple PowerBook G4s; 17-inch MacBook Pro; Antec Notebook Cooler

**AUDIO GEAR:** Marantz Professional PMD660 recorder; Sony MDR-7506 headphones; Beyerdynamic M58 mic; RØDE NTG-2 shotgun mic; Audio-Technica AT899 lavalier mic; 6-foot XLR cable; Sennheiser circumaural headphones; two Sennheiser ew1000 G2 receivers; two ew1000 G2 transmitters; two Sennheiser MKE2-5 lavalier mics; two CL 100 1/8-inch male mini jack to XLR cables

**SUPPORTS:** Manfrotto 681B Monopod; Manfrotto 488RC4 Ball Head; Manfrotto 3021BPRO tripod; Manfrotto 501 Pro Video Fluid Head; Manfrotto 555B Leveling Center Column; two Manfrotto 5001B Light Stands; Davis & Sanford Pro Steady Stick

**POWER:** “Three-way outlet splitters are very important,” says Farber, “because a lot of times you need to recharge your batteries in shared NGO compounds where you’re only going to get one outlet because you’re sharing a power strip.” In addition to plenty of batteries, Farber packs these power devices: Anton Bauer ElipZ 10K; two Apple Portable Power Adapters 65W; Apple 85W MagSafe Power Adapter; General Brand ST-3000 Voltage Converter; three Enercell 150W Power Inverters; Brunton Solo personal power plant.

**STORAGE:** Farber carries multiple high-speed memory cards and a Lexar FireWire card reader to download and make three backups of his image files every night. His backup devices: two SmartDisk FireLite 80GB hard drives; two FirmTek SeriTek/2EN2 eSATA dual-bay enclosures with a terabyte drive in each drawer. Plus plenty of video cassettes: “We were always sending the tapes back to a secure location in the capital. Someone would keep copies in their backpack so that if we had to just get on a helicopter and leave, one guy had all our tapes.”

Kids play with kites they’ve made from plastic bags in the Goz Amer camp. The children were babies and toddlers when they left Darfur; some were born here. Their community has spent seven years in the limbo of refugee status. “It’s a major issue to have an entire generation growing up in these camps,” says Farber.



THIS SPREAD: FROM LEFT: © CHRIS FARBER; © MATTHEW BOWLBY; © CHRIS FARBER

## THE NGO CRIB SHEET

Considering work with an NGO in the developing world? Here's Farber's checklist of things that ought to be on your radar.

**FITNESS** Working in the developing world can be physically demanding, so in addition to consulting a doctor about immunizations and other preventive measures, you need to be in good health. In places like refugee camps, Farber explains, "you lose a lot of weight, simply from not eating and working a lot and getting sick. So you have to be in shape going into it." There's a mental health aspect too. Farber points to exhaustion, lack of privacy, uncomfortable working conditions, cultural differences and being with the same people for a long time as sources of stress to be ready for.

**SECURITY PROTOCOLS** While most places where NGOs work are pretty safe, some are not. In areas that are unstable or where there's a military presence, it's important to know and follow U.N. and NGO security protocols and stay abreast of dangerous conditions or developments. A good starting point is the U.N. guide "Basic Security in the Field—Staff Safety, Health and Welfare," available at [dss.un.org/BSITF](http://dss.un.org/BSITF).

**GO BAGS** If you're working in a potentially unstable region, have a "go bag" ready in case you need to make a quick exit. In addition to personal items and travel documents, keep backups of your work in it. Farber points out that if a crisis arises and you end up being airlifted out of the region, you may never get back there again. Which brings us to...

### INSURANCE AND CUSTOMS

Insure your gear for international travel (Farber uses Taylor & Taylor). Some professional organizations offer equipment insurance discounts. You'll also need international health insurance that covers medical evacuation—ask the NGO you're working with to put you on their plan. Before heading to the airport, Farber calls U.S. Customs to let them know he's coming in with a large amount of gear. He arrives with a detailed inventory, including serial numbers and dollar values, and makes sure he gets the appropriate stamps on all relevant documents. Getting the right documentation on your way out can prevent both hassles in foreign airports and import charges when you come home.

**RIGHT TO PRIVACY** The U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts a right to privacy, which NGOs uphold. Talk to the organization you're planning to work with about how this may limit the circumstances in which you can take photographs, especially if your subjects are children. Rules about photographing them are usually more restrictive.

**GOVERNMENT PERMITS** Photography isn't legal everywhere. You may need special permission from government authorities. Consult your NGO about the requirements in the region and whether it can obtain the appropriate documents for you.

**CASH** Where you're going, there's probably no ATM, and traveler's checks may not be accepted, either. Bring cash, and make sure you're prepared for the way financial matters are handled at your destination.

**IN-KIND PAYMENTS** If you're working on a personal project in the developing world and are not employed by an NGO, you may still be able to do a little work for organizations in exchange for resources such as local transportation, accommodations and food. Photographers who have good relationships with NGOs can ask to be put on the manifests for U.N. flights.

**CAPACITY BUILDING** One way that NGOs contribute to beneficiary communities is by helping people in the community acquire new skills. If you work with translators or assistants, show them how to handle a camera or audio equipment, or teach them computer abilities. That experience can lead to temporary but lucrative jobs for them if international media organizations show up later.

**COPYRIGHT AND USE** Most NGOs expect to have unlimited rights to use the work photographers do for them. On the other hand, many do not ask for the copyright to the images, leaving photographers free to use the work in book projects, exhibitions or Web sites. It's considered unethical to present yourself as a photojournalist when interviewing subjects for work that will be part of an NGO project.



could act as a director as well. And it had to be someone who very much understood the objective of the project specifically and had an understanding of the conflict in general."

While photojournalists working with a media organization often rely on editors and writers to help give their work direction and put it in the context of other relevant reporting, NGOs tend to provide much less editorial support or oversight, relying on the photographer's knowledge of the subject matter and ability to create a narrative about it. "When you work for an NGO," Farber says, "you basically have to create a media campaign for them." Although very large organizations have in-house media staff, the more numerous small groups "are not going to have a media person, a dedicated person who's going to look at your work, who's going to go over it and find what you're missing and what you need to go back and revisit topically or aesthetically to make sure that they have all their needs met," he says. "You become the media expert for an organization. It's not enough to just create the content in the field."

That's not the only distinction Farber sees between photojournalism and NGO work. "The photo industry has started to use the idea of being a photojournalist and shooting for NGOs interchangeably," he says. "The truth is that they're not interchangeable." Working for an NGO, he says, "you're a photographer for hire by what is essentially a company. You're not there as an independent journalist."

In some ways, the networking that's necessary to get the work and to do it well also contributes to this lack of independence. Farber compares it to the experience of covering a conflict while embedded with the military: "You're just in a place where everything you know and understand about the situation is being told from your interaction with that development community."

But if NGO media work isn't traditional photojournalism, Farber emphasizes that it's not PR either. "The work still should be true and it should have integrity," he says. "It shouldn't just be to make an organization look good or make a group of people who are suffering look desperate and needy."

### Forging the Connection

Ultimately, in any genre, it's the quality of the photographer's communication with his subjects that proves most vital. When the team from 24 Hours for Darfur showed up at each camp, its first step was to sit down with community leaders to explain the purpose of the organization's work and ask for their blessing. "There was really a sense of reverence for the way that we were approaching making a connection," Farber says, "that we were coming in and asking permission."

Farber also discovered that shooting video became a key part of the process of connecting with his subjects. On his earlier African projects, he recalls, "I was shooting video and trying to shoot photographs, put one set of cameras down and shoot with the other, and it proved to be impossible." By the time he started work on Darfurian Voices, he had realized that the process of conducting video interviews could serve as an icebreaker as well as a way of expanding his knowledge of the subjects before he picked up his SLR. "Everything in this project began with the video, and that ended up being a real asset when it came to the photography," he

**Above:** Community leaders convene in Touloum camp. **Opposite, from top:** Students dig up earth to make bricks for a school addition in Gaga camp; a man repairs his roof in Kounoungou camp; a 13-year-old girl in Goz Amer talks to Farber about the violence she suffered as a 6-year-old in Darfur.

explains. "There's just so much more give and take in the interview process than there can be in the photography process. The video created so much context to what was going on in those camps through the interviews that it was like doing four days of intensive research on a neighborhood before you go and photograph it—it really helped."

When communication is handled well, Farber says, "a lot of people really get—even when they have acute needs—what you're doing there, and they become part of the process. They invite you into their homes and their lives, and you need to connect with that person, really just person to person. That is the point where the separation between photojournalism versus PR versus working for NGOs just disappears, because you're just there as someone who is creating photographs, creating a connection to people." AP