

Participatory video for monitoring and evaluation

Experiences with the MSC approach

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Participatory video lends itself well to project monitoring and evaluation. Chris Lunch, director of Insight, describes how communities are using video to capture and interpret stories of significant change.

Participatory video is an iterative process whereby community members use video to document innovations and ideas, or to focus on issues that affect their environment or their village. The participants attend participatory video workshops where they can review what they and others have filmed. The videos are then screened in the village in the evenings, thus ensuring that members of the wider community are involved in the process.

This local viewing of the material as the project progresses lies at the heart of the participatory video process. It achieves several positive outcomes at the same time ? it opens up local communication channels, promotes dialogue and discussion, and sets in motion a dynamic exchange of ideas on ways to solve problems. It can also help to gauge trends, thus contributes to building consensus within the community. It is therefore not surprising that participatory video appears to lend itself so well to participatory M&E. It could be argued that the participatory video methodology itself, which moves progressively from action to analysis, means that M&E is ongoing and integral to the process.

Insight has used participatory video for monitoring and evaluating a number of its own participatory video projects. On the basis of our initial experiences, these interventions fall into three broad categories:

1. Monitoring and evaluating the participatory video process itself. Participatory Video can be used to document any changes experienced by individuals and groups as they use the tools. If the participants are using the video camera every day, it is not difficult sometimes to shift the focus onto the participatory video process itself. In this way we can record feedback that can help us develop and improve the methodology, or which can be shared with future participants, trainees, donors or decision makers.

2. Monitoring and evaluating a project as it progresses. When used as the work progresses, participatory video can help strengthen local control over the direction and evolution of the project. Participatory video has been used to develop a feedback loop ? community members are asked to react to short films made by other villagers, also on video. These reactions are then also screened, eliciting fresh discussions and new perspectives. In one case this process was vital to ensure that the women were fully involved in the development of an Insight renewable energy programme (see box 1).

3. Monitoring and evaluating on completion of a participatory video project. Before any video is distributed the edited version needs to be viewed and approved by the community who made it. Any changes they suggest are made immediately using a laptop. This is usually a special event

for the village and most of the population will turn up, since it is an opportunity for them to discuss in detail how they think the film should be used, who should see it and why, and so on. It is also a chance for us to ask what they think they have achieved, and to gauge their perceptions of the project in general.

As an obvious extension of our work in the community, these same participants are asked to lead the evaluation process. After working out three or four core questions, these individuals go out with a video camera and microphone, and interview groups and individuals around the village to record their responses to the final film and to the project in general. When community members are asked questions by other villagers, neighbours or relatives, with no project staff in sight, in the comfort of their own homes or backyards, their responses are always very frank and relaxed.

The feedback loop



communicating project work.

Communication is an important aspect of evaluation. We have found that the videos produced during such M&E exercises can be used in various ways ? to influence national and regional policy, as a means of communicating with donors and generating project funding, as a way of helping to spread programmes to new areas and villages, or for sharing information with global networks of NGOs and researchers. Videos containing the views, evaluations and descriptions of projects by the participants themselves are always the best and most transparent way of

The portability and accessibility of video as a medium mean that it is possible to show the material outside the community, and obtain useful video feedback from people in neighbouring villages, roadside cafes and markets, or policy makers in their city-based offices. Used in this way, the edited video made by the first community becomes a powerful tool for drawing out more experiences, reactions and evaluations. Ideally, community representatives should present their film to these different groups, in which case they can also help facilitate the video feedback. When played back to the community that made the original film, this feedback can be extremely useful. Seeing that their work has had an impact on other individuals and groups can be a deeply empowering and satisfying experience for these communities, many of which have a strong sense of their own marginalisation. They are given a glimpse into other worlds, and into how others perceive their ideas and achievements (see box 2).

Improving participatory video as a tool for M&E

Our initial experiences with participatory video led us to two important questions. How could we formalise its obvious potential as an M&E tool and develop a more systematic approach? How could we add a quantifiable element in the otherwise very qualitative material that was being generated? Rick Davies' most significant change? (MSC) technique provided a way forward on both these questions.

MSC involves the collection and systematic, participatory interpretation of stories of significant change. Unlike conventional approaches to monitoring, MSC does not employ quantitative indicators, but is a qualitative approach. We immediately saw the potential for participatory video within this innovative M&E technique. We could see how participatory video, with its ability to convey a rich picture, could help the technique go even further and make the stories more accessible to all kinds of audiences, and to all parts of the communities themselves, including children, the elderly and the illiterate. Video has great potential to enhance indigenous means of communication which, like video, are primarily visual and verbal. Ultimately it can help to link the MSC stories more closely to the localities and to the communities they come from, as well as strengthen the communities' sense of ownership and control over the documentation and diffusion of the MSC stories.

Pens and notepads can create barriers. With minimal training anyone can learn how to use a video camera, allowing people to tell their MSC stories in a familiar context. The process itself is fun and direct, and the results can be played back and reviewed immediately. This also helps to avoid situations where project staff end up having to speak on behalf of communities, using people themselves.



The local screening of MSC stories encourages broader participation and could speed up the process of story collection as more people choose to get involved and contribute their own stories. Communities can be asked to vote on the stories, enabling us to move towards quantifying local consensus, and provide more valuable local evaluation. This process, and the reasons for selecting certain stories as most significant could also be filmed, and the footage added to the end

of the individual stories. This process can occur at all stages in the MSC process, providing the community with accessible and engaging video feedback and a glimpse into the world of decision makers. Our experience has shown that this can contribute to local empowerment, as the people can see where their films/stories have travelled, and the impacts they have had at the different levels.

The fact that MSC stories can be watched rather than read will also appeal to those project managers, administrators and decision makers who feel overburdened by paperwork. When the films are shown outside the community itself, subtitles or audio translations can be added, making the MSC video stories accessible to much wider audiences - local, regional and even global. As with stories, video helps to connect people to the reality on the ground. There is a human connection that comes from seeing someone speak, even if it is on video.

If you can't bring the decision makers to the field, then we can try our best to bring the field to the decision makers!

Lessons learned

During Insight's experiments combining the MSC technique and participatory video, many lessons have been learned:

- MSC and participatory video can be integrated in very exciting and dynamic ways, which need to be developed further in the future.
- MSC stories can be documented by the project communities themselves, requiring little training and skill.
- Participatory video tools can be used effectively to generate video feedback from higher up the decision-making chain.
- Recording MSC stories on video means that the process of sorting and ranking them is much faster and simpler, and the accessibility of video as a medium means that the process can be opened up to far more people.
- The storyboard method developed by Insight, means that even without editing, good short MSC films can be easily produced and reviewed by key stakeholders.

Participatory video could be used to great effect in the MSC evaluation process, with the following advantages:

- It encourages broad participation in the evaluation process.
- MSC stories can be easily shared, opening up new possibilities for wider communication/dissemination.
- Video can be used and understood by anyone, including the illiterate.
- It helps strengthen the participants' control over their stories.
- It has great potential for building broad consensus within a community.

Insight would love to hear from others who have done anything similar, or who can suggest ways to take this idea further.

Links

[Insight](#) is a UK/France based organisation pioneering the use of participatory video as a tool for empowering individuals and communities. For examples of the videos produced by communities around the world, click

[here](#).

Insight organises regular introductory and in-depth courses on participatory video. The next five-day introductory course will take place in Oxford, UK, 16-20 October 2006. For more information visit the

[Insight website](#), or
[email Chris Lunch](#).

Further reading

Nick and Chris Lunch (2006)

[Insights into Participatory Video: A Handbook for the Field](#). Insight.

C. Lunch,

[Combining Participatory Video with the 'Most Significant Change' Approach](#). Case study of an evaluation carried out at a workshop hosted by the Institute of Development Studies, UK, November 2005.

C. Lunch (2006)

[Participatory video as a documentation tool](#), LEISA Magazine, 22(1): 31.

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[Participatory Video: Rural People Document their Knowledge and Innovations](#), IK Notes 71, World Bank.

R. Davies and J. Dart (2005)

[The 'Most Significant Change' \(MSC\) Technique: A Guide to Its Use](#), MandE.

G. Ferreira,

[Pelican Case study: Participatory Video in the Policy Making Process: The Keewaytinook-Okimakanak Case Study](#), University of Guelph, Canada.

