Participatory video in Myanmar: Capacity building for local facilitators

By Gareth Benest[1]

Background and programme objectives

In 2013, representatives from communities in the Ayeyarwady Delta region of Myanmar (Burma) were trained in facilitating participatory video processes. The ground-breaking capacity-building programme was the first of its kind in Myanmar, and is one of only two[2] examples of participatory video known to have ever taken place in the country. The programme was initiated and funded by the Church of Sweden and implemented by InsightShare in collaboration with the Lutheran World Federation in Myanmar (LWF Myanmar). LWF Myanmar is a key partner of the Church of Sweden, with a long-term presence in the country and deep-rooted relationships with communities across the delta since the devastating Cyclone Nargis in May 2008.

LWF Myanmar's programmes assist communities with learning new skills and advocating for improved social and economic services and livelihoods. They integrate participatory processes to address the basic needs of vulnerable communities and provide practical support. This work includes training and supporting a network of Community Facilitators (CFs) in 51 villages across the delta. The CFs live and work within their assigned villages, helping to establish Village Development Committees and Community Based Organisations, and to encourage the community's participation in rights-based empowerment and sustainable development processes.

The Church of Sweden (CoS) is one of the 127 churches and organisations in the ACT Alliance network - a coalition of more than 140 churches and affiliated organisations working together to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people. Along with its various partners, CoS works on a long-term basis to address economic justice, peace, democracy and human rights etc. InsightShare is a UK-based social enterprise specialising in delivering participatory video programmes with marginalised and disadvantaged communities around the world. CoS approached InsightShare in 2012 to explore the possibility of implementing participatory video projects in Myanmar. As the programme developed, two staff members from CoS and LWF Myanmar were enrolled on InsightShare's regular facilitator training courses in Oxford in order to further strengthen the facilitation and training capacity in-country prior to the programme launch in 2013.

The objectives of the programme, established by CoS in dialogue with InsightShare and LWF Myanmar, were to train facilitation teams across the delta region in participatory video as a community development and empowerment tool. More specifically, the focus was placed on initiating processes to enable horizontal sharing between communities, create spaces for participatory decision-making, and provide communication tools for local advocacy within a rights-based framework.

Community and trainee selection

Four villages from across the region were identified by LWF Myanmar for inclusion in the capacity building programme - Ah Si KaLay (Pyapon Township), Paw Taw Mu (Bogalay Township), Sar Oh Chaung (Dedaye Township) and Shwe Hlay Chaung (Twantay Township) - based upon a range of criteria including geographic spread, programming foci, and their current stage within wider community empowerment and development pathways as assessed by CoS and LWF Myanmar.

Community Facilitators from each location were invited to attend the capacity building programme, joined by one or two volunteers from each community. In total ten village representatives joined the training: four CFs and six volunteers. Of the volunteers, all were engaged in farming, gardening or managing households. There were four women and six men. None had any previous experience of video production, and few had had any prior contact with, or knowledge of, personal computers or similar technology. The Communications and Gender Advisor, two Assistant Project Officers and one Team Facilitator (acting as translator for the InsightShare trainers) from the LWF Myanmar staff also joined the training.

Developing the programme

In the months leading up to the start of the training itself, we worked closely with senior staff at LWF Myanmar to design a programme of activities that would suit the communities and individuals involved, whilst complimenting and enhancing the broader plan of action that was being implemented by LWF Myanmar, within which participatory video was to be integrated. Furthermore, the unique social and political environment of Myanmar had to be carefully considered. Significant effort was made to ensure that the planned activities would not present risks to the people and organisations involved, and that they would be allowed to proceed in the first place. Examples of the decisions taken and adaptations made to our regular capacity-building model in this regard include:

•   Not referring to any previous participatory video projects or approaches, including not screening videos from other similar or dissimilar communities with which we have worked. Significant concern was expressed during the planning stage that showcasing, or even describing, projects by which communities had advocated for change (locally, nationally or internationally) or where they had taken direct control of their circumstances as part of a participatory video process, could be perceived as political agitation and thereby create problems for the partners and/or communities involved.
•   Conducting each stage of the training in Pyapon (a medium-sized town in the delta region) and the four villages, rather than in the capital Yangon (Rangoon) as had been previously proposed. It was feared that conducting trainings in Yangon might have been perceived by the authorities as a deliberate attempt to disguise or hide the training activities within a busy metropolis. Instead, it was decided to convene the training in Pyapon (including a five-day workshop within a government compound), where the presence of foreign trainers handing over video cameras would be highly visible, and therefore (hopefully) reassuringly overt rather than covert.

• Purchasing the majority of video production and post-production equipment within the country. Four complete production kits plus solar panels and projectors were to be supplied to each of the villages involved, much of which would ordinarily have been purchased, checked and prepared by the trainers before leaving the UK. Concerns were raised (on all sides) about the trainers' entry into Myanmar being delayed, obstructed or even denied had they arrived laden with suitcases full of audio-visual equipment. It was decided to pursue the far more complicated, lengthy and expensive alternative of purchasing large quantities of equipment from the small shops and bazaars in Yangon.

• Maintaining detailed and open dialogue between the local partner (LWF Myanmar) and the relevant government bodies, including detailed explanations of the project scope, process and intentions. The trainers had to apply for the relevant business visas, a process that took several months, and painstaking administration in both Myanmar and the UK.

• Leaving the project sites (villages) at the end of each day, before sundown. Government regulations controlling the access, travel and accommodation options for visitors to Myanmar meant we were unable to stay in the communities overnight. This is in stark contrast to our usual patterns of working, wherein we would typically expect to ground all the project activities (including the training workshops themselves) within one or more of the 'beneficiary communities', staying there for the duration of the project, and, in so doing, seek to develop a deeper understanding of the local circumstances and build close relationships with the wider communities.

In most other ways, the programme we designed and implemented followed a familiar pattern and structure, according to our regular capacity-building model. It is a format that has been developed over many years of training partner's staff and community members around the world, and has proven to be highly successful in developing long-term capacity in facilitating participatory video. InsightShare has undertaken similar programmes of facilitator training, mentoring and support with such diverse organisations as Oxfam Canada, CAFOD, IUCN Netherlands, Practical Action, UNDP, Transparency International, IIED, Oxfam UK and many others.

The training and mentoring programme is typically divided in three key stages, which are: facilitator training, post-training assignments, and peer review and action-planning.

Stage One: facilitator training
This is a workshop-based intensive training in facilitating participatory video projects, which includes learning basic video production skills, core games and exercises, collaborative planning tools, complimentary PLA approaches etc. Facilitation skills are deepened and consolidated through short field-based exercises, during which trainees deliver short participatory video processes (2-3 days) within target communities or groups. Concludes with action-planning and visioning to devise and plan post-training assignments for Stage Two. The approximate duration is 14 days

Stage Two: post-training assignments
Trainees practise facilitation skills by undertaking complete participatory video projects, with remote support and mentoring from an InsightShare trainer throughout. Post-training assignments take place in the interval between Stages One and Three, typically between 2-6 months. The approximate duration is 14 days.

<u>Stage Three: peer review and action-planning</u>
A final workshop brings trainees together to 'peer review' the post-training assignments, accompanied by an InsightShare trainer. Experiences, challenges and outcomes are presented and scrutinised by fellow trainees and advanced training sessions (covering areas such as online/offline dissemination) are provided. The approximate duration is 7 days.

Training culture and pedagogy

The approach to training facilitators closely mirrors the experiential nature of the participatory video methodology itself. Each process, game or exercise is first *experienced* by trainees, who take on the role of 'participants' guided by the trainers who play the role of 'facilitators'. After each video-based exercise, the 'participants' review the footage created and the overall experience. They are invited to share their feelings, reactions, observations and recommendations, just as they would during the course of a genuine participatory video process.

Once each activity is complete, the role-playing is brought to an end and a second discussion is initiated to review the activity. This is an opportunity to identify key characteristics of the methodology, as well as understand each exercise's particular structure, flow and facilitation approach. This rhythm of action-reflection-action underpins both the entire participatory video methodology and so the training process, thereby enabling trainees to simultaneously learn the technical skills (in video production) and the facilitation techniques necessary to implement the process.

The trainers set out to ensure that a supportive and collaborative learning environment is established from the outset and maintained throughout. Central to the training culture is the motto 'mistakes are great' - a ridiculously simple, yet disconcertingly powerful concept. When sincerely established at the heart of the facilitation approach and carefully embedded within patterns of interaction and collaboration between trainees, and between trainers and trainees, it is, in our experience, the key to unlocking untapped potential and abilities in everyone involved.

This uncomplicated concept, expressed in just three words, has the potential to release us from the fear and shame so closely associated with failure and its exposure to those around us. It turns on its head the tyranny of competitive learning and assessment cultures. With this motto, we deliberately set out to celebrate and congratulate anyone making a mistake, no matter how disastrous, knowing that we can all learn from each other's experiences and grow our collective capacity. It is a 'way of seeing' that the majority of trainees and participants appear to encounter for the very first time during our workshops, and is perhaps the single most referred-to and closely cherished principle, value or concept they take away from these processes.

Facilitator training in Pyapon

Two of InsightShare's senior trainers - Gareth Benest and Sara Asadullah - travelled to Myanmar to lead the Stage One training programme in Pyapon, between the 17th and 31st August 2013. The initial workshop was conducted in a small building within a government relief and disaster compound. Activities took place amongst piles of boxes of aid supplies

bearing stamps declaring them to be 'gifts from the people of Japan' amongst others. Rain hammered down on the roof throughout the four days of workshop, creating a humid and occasionally claustrophobic atmosphere, in and amongst the boxes. But it was, for the most-part, a cosy and nurturing environment to be in.

After the formalities of an official welcome (replete with garlanded tables, banners, bottles of mineral water and vases of flowers), plus the mandatory speeches, the workshop began in earnest with the creation of a 'group agreement'. The trainees -4 CFs, 6 volunteers, 3 LWF Myanmar staff- were asked to define how they would like to work together during the course of the programme and what rules (relating to behaviour and attitude) they would like to agree upon. This was followed by various exercises through which we came to know one another, including community mapping and group presentations.

Thereafter the thirteen trainees were guided through a range of participatory video techniques. They learned basic video production skills, which they practised at night with camera kits they took to their hostels. This was the first time that most of the trainees had ever touched, let alone operated a video camera or seen themselves on a television screen. Nevertheless, because of the practical and supportive nature of the learning process, their confidence and skills grew rapidly throughout the course of the first few days.

Facilitation skills for all the key participatory video exercises were taught together with some complimentary PLA (Participatory Learning and Action) tools. A newly-developed exercise for participants to assess the issues identified as subjects for a participatory video was trialled. The exercise supports participants through a process of ranking and elimination, helping groups to determine which subjects or issues would be best addressed through video and which could be tackled using alternative tools and approaches.

By the fourth day, the trainees were ready to begin planning for the field-based exercises that would take place in two of the communities they represented. Splitting into four small facilitation teams, they each planned a highly condensed participatory video process to be undertaken with small groups from each village over just three days. Work plans were developed and schedules of activities drawn-up. Each group determined the resources and equipment they would require and made all the necessary preparations for the fieldwork that would begin the next day.

Field-based exercises

On the fifth day, the groups set out to the two field sites accompanied by one of the trainers. The trainees facilitated many of the processes they had learned during the previous workshop including various games, exercises, collaborative decision-making and planning tools. They worked with each group to plan a simple video on a key local issue, and supported the participants to undertake all the production roles from director to camera-operator, sound recordist to interviewer.

In Ah Si KaLay village (Pyapon Township) a project was initiated with members of the local youth group, who focussed their attention on the difficult issue of tensions and disunity between the two sides of the small village, east and west. In their video, the young people used drama to describe the problems they experienced as a result. Those issues included an

under-staffed school, pagodas without monks, and failing community infrastructure. The video goes on to dramatically imagine a positive future of collaboration and harmony, the result of which brings improvements and benefits to everyone in the community. The second project undertaken in Ah Si KaLay engaged representatives of the Village Development Committee (VDC), who elected to explore the lack of pre-school care and services within the community. Their video mixed documentary footage, including interviews with parents and the school headmistress, with dramatised fictional sequences wherein the community mobilises themselves around their right to education, and forms groups to advocate for collective action.

In the village of Sar Oh Chaung (Dedaye Township), a group of participants from the VDC also focused their attention on issues relating to educational infrastructure. They used drama to convey the difficulties children face at school due to the lack of space to study comfortably. The drama showed the community advocating for a new school building, first to the school and PTA committee and eventually to the Village Administrator himself. The second project undertaken in Sar Oh Chaung was attended by participants from the local youth group, who focused on the urgent need for a new bridge in the village, and the many difficulties faced by those in the community due to the old and creaking infrastructure.

Post-production

After the three days of intensive fieldwork were completed, the trainees returned to Pyapon to begin the second workshop stage, this time based in LWF Myanmar's own (considerably less crowded) office space. The next two days provided the trainees with an opportunity to learn the rudiments of computer-based video editing. For seven of the trainees this was their first experience ever of using a computer, which presented a significant but not unfamiliar challenge for the trainers.

A laptop was connected to a large flat-screen television around which the trainees gathered to watch one another trying each step in the process, beginning with learning to hold and move the mouse, double-click, select and drag, type a word, and so on. Soon enough the trainees were importing footage from the cameras and taking the first cautious steps towards editing the videos created by participants during the fieldwork. Working in their small groups of three or four they edited the footage together, constantly rotating roles to ensure everyone had equal 'mouse time' and opportunity to learn the software. By the morning of the third day, everyone sat together to watch the finished videos.

Screening in the communities

Community screenings -an essential element in any participatory video process- were organised by the trainees, and plans were set in place for facilitating discussions and recording audience responses. The entire group set out to both communities in turn, the following day, travelling by combinations of boats and minibuses and carrying all the equipment, resources, refreshments and a generator necessary to undertake their planned screenings.

The first screenings took place inside the pagoda on the western side of Ah Si KaLay village, an area strongly associated with the community disputes explored through the youth group's

video. The trainees had offered assurances that the location would not create any barriers to attendance by residents from the eastern side of the community. However, shortly after arriving it became clear that the choice of location would indeed play a limiting role in the numbers of people attending. The timing, at mid-morning, also played a limiting role, since many people within the community were tending their fields or otherwise busy with their day-to-day activities.

Despite much last-minute rushing around, knocking on doors and encouraging people to attend, the screening was largely attended by children and young people on their way to school. It was attended by some adults nevertheless, and those of them that did take part (approximately 25) played very active roles in the subsequent discussions on the issues raised. Everyone had a valuable opportunity to reflect on the two main issues, both of which related strongly to the disunity within the village, and the trainees learned valuable lessons about the need to organise such events around the patterns and sensitivities of their communities, as well as gaining important insights into how to facilitate dialogues on difficult issues.

The second screening in Sar Oh Chaung was very well attended, although the location -the VDC Chairperson's house- limited the number of people that could join the event. Ideally, the screening should have taken place in a more 'neutral' or community-owned space. As was the case with the morning screening, the discussions were lively, and full of recommendations for community-led action on the issues raised.

Action-planning & evaluation

The final day of Stage One included trainee reflections and evaluations (so often squeezed into the last moments), action-planning for the post-training assignments, and drawing up equipment inventories and agreements. Each facilitation team, formed according to the villages they represent, was given complete video production kits (camera, tripod, microphones, headphones etc.), post-production equipment (laptops, hard-drives, software etc.), screening gear (projectors, speakers etc.) and other gadgets to assist their work in remote communities, including portable solar panels and back-up batteries.

The trainees had recorded video diaries throughout the programme, reflecting on their progress and feelings at key stages. This time they recorded diary entries on the 'most significant change' they had observed within themselves over the course of the training. The training concluded with a wonderful farewell ceremony. The trainers returned to the UK from where they continued to follow the trainees' progress and provide remote support.

Post-training assignments

In the six weeks that followed the completion of the Stage One training, each of the four facilitation teams managed to complete their planned project assignments within their communities. The following are brief descriptions of the projects facilitated together with short extracts from the trainees' own video diaries.

Sar Oh Chaung (Dedaye Township)
In Sar Oh Chaung, the community created a video on farming challenges, including insect infestations, irregular seasons, floods, and problems around loan repayment periods and loan

availability. Landless villagers were included in the video process and were able to explain how this situation directly impacted their ability to earn money as daily-wage labourers. The problems relating to loans provided by the Agricultural Bank was a significant issue raised in the video, with farmers explaining how they were required to repay loans immediately following the harvest period, meaning they were forced to sell at the lowest prices. Likewise, landless villagers also had problems with loans, in their cases it was the difficulty of getting a loan and the incredibly high interest rates. The solution they proposed was the establishment of a cooperative credit facility and revolving fund. The film ends with a community meeting discussing these issues and deciding how to submit their requests and to which groups –such as local committees, NGOs, etc.- or government departments they should appeal to for support.

A video diary describes the process as follows: *"We invited all groups such as village administrative staff, teachers, women and youth associations to identify the issue affecting the whole community. We trained participants how to use camera and other equipment. We let them practice step by step with each part of the equipment. Then we encouraged participants to identify the issues of our village and to vote the one issue for shooting. Then we facilitated how to prepare the story board and how to record and edit the voices and images"*

Ah Si KaLay (Pyapon Township)
In Ah Si KaLay the community tackled the subject of youth migration, and revealed the multiple causes and impacts around this increasing phenomenon. The youth in the film compare their earning potential in the village with that in the city, and the very seasonal nature of work in the villages. Through many different voices from the community, the video explains how youth migration is impacting on the village; youth are not around, so they are not involved in the village's development activities or decision-making processes; the elderly often find themselves alone and without family to support them; there is a lack of labour for the key moments in the farming cycle. The film highlights the difficult choices facing the youth and families in the village, the risks that accompany these youth as they leave the villages and the worries their families live with day-to-day.

A video diary noted: *"We conducted a mass meeting with 30 people and identified the main issues by a prioritisation system"*

Paw Taw Mu (Bogalay Township)
In Paw Taw Mu, the community members made a video about the poor condition of their roads and paths. They used a mixture of role-play and documentary to illustrate the problem from different angles. The climax was a role-play illustrating what would happen if someone tripped and broke a leg - they can't reach the township hospital by road, so they try by boat… only to discover the water level is too low, so what happens then? They show how they organise themselves to collect a contribution per household and mobilise villagers to carry out collective work to patch up the worst parts of the path. They hold a meeting and identify the duty-bearers that they will contact and lobby for assistance. A decision is made to continue to mobilise the community but also to contact the village tract administrator with a full and detailed proposal.

According to a video diary, *"The problems that they (the community) mentioned were: inefficient healthcare, library needs, road issues for children and old people, lack of*

participation in meetings, lack of telephone, the reduced water in the creek, water shortage for paddy fields. They realised that many of the issues linked back to being cut off due to the terrible roads and lanes in the village. So they decided to make a video about their main problem – the terrible roads and lanes in the village".

Shwe Hlay Chaung (Twantay Township)
In Shwe Hlay Chaung the team were unsure what to focus the participatory video project on, until the rain started falling and falling and falling. In the end, it was the issue that chose them. During the period of their post-training assignment, a dramatic flood swept through their village, threatening households close to the river and even the village's ancient pagoda. The villagers describe the history of their village and how a stone flood barrier had protected them in the past, but had now fallen down. The river bank was being gradually eroded, and village houses were falling into the river. Interviews with different members of the community, including marginalised landless families, explore the different perspectives in the village and the impact of the flood. They end with a community meeting where the different people concerned share their needs and ideas and a plan of action is agreed upon.

A video diary stated: *"We organised a meeting with all villagers including the village administrator. In that meeting, we explained about our participatory video training and a lot of people were interested to join our project. We had to select participants for the project together with Administrator of Village Development Committee because so many people were interested in taking part"*

Peer review & skills consolidation

Between the 14th and 21st October 2013, InsightShare's co-founder Chris Lunch joined the trainees in Pyapon for the final stage in the capacity-building programme. This seven-day workshop was devised as a forum for the trainees to 'peer review' one another's projects (post-training assignments). It also provided an important opportunity for the trainers to share additional technical and facilitation skills, as necessary.

The trainees used a range of visual techniques to illustrate and share key moments in their experiences during their post-training assignments. They shared the highs and the lows, the challenges and successes; illustrated as a flowing river complete with twists and turns, rapids and calm waters. They watched each other's videos and celebrated the achievements each represented, for the project participants and the trainee facilitators equally. Together they examined the processes undertaken and probed each group with searching questions around participant control, target audiences, potential to promote meaningful change, shifts (positive or negative) for those involved, outcomes and impacts.

The trainees identified the challenges they faced in facilitating participatory video within their communities. Each specific challenge was recorded on a card and stuck to the wall, creating a wall of bricks (issues) to be broken down. Over the course of the workshop, the trainer would periodically focus on one brick and the group would exchange ideas on how to overcome the issue. More than fifteen 'bricks' were dealt with in this way until they had all been removed and the trainees felt able to move ahead in their practice with new tools, strategies and confidence in their abilities to help each other and overcome challenges collectively.

The final community screening

A final community screening was organised to take place in Ah Si KaLay village, where they had previously faced challenges in attracting an audience at the pagoda. The idea was to demonstrate that, if community meetings fail to attract the attendance necessary, there are alternative approaches. The trainees were divided into three teams and worked together to determine the aims and intentions for the screenings; the different roles each team member would perform; and a list of questions to guide the post-screening dialogues.

As in the first screening, details of the screening activities were communicated to various people in the village in advance and, through them, invitations were extended to everyone in the community to attend a large screening. Consideration and care was taken to ensure the day and time would suit the community as a whole, in response to the previous experience. Nevertheless, the trainees were prepared for the large community-wide screening they had planned to result in a low turnout, which it did.

Only 35 people came to the screening, this time held at the centrally-located village school. As before, around half were school-age children. In response, two 'guerrilla screening' teams were dispatched, each with a fully charged laptop and set of speakers; one group went to the east side of the village, the other to the west. Each team located householders who were interested to watch the videos and were willing to open their house to their neighbours to join the screening. Each team managed to screen to around 35 adults followed by very stimulating and relaxed discussions.

The entire programme concluded with a workshop for senior LWF Myanmar staff in Yangon to devise a strategy for extending the participatory video activities beyond the four villages involved in the capacity-building itself. LWF Myanmar staff members are currently reporting back on their activities since the completion of the final training in October 2013, and everyone is looking forward to seeing the impacts of their participatory video work.

Outcomes

The long-term impacts brought about by the introduction of participatory video into the villages and local programmes will take time to identify and document. However, immediate outcomes were visible to the trainers and partner staff during the capacity-building training itself, including:

• Four highly trained and fully equipped participatory video facilitator teams, capable of engaging groups on a range of issues, located villages across the delta region.
• Participatory video was established as a new programming area for LWF Myanmar, as part of the organisation's transition from disaster relief and direct service provision towards focussing on local advocacy and rights-based approaches to community development.
• Increased awareness of key issues at village level and gradual shift towards locally-led advocacy and change; moving away from paternalistic relationship with donors developed in post-disaster context.

•   Empowerment of trainees as positive changemakers within their own communities, particularly amongst the volunteers attending the training.
•   Detailed action plans for using participatory video as a tool to mobilise local communities in local advocacy, including screening to and lobbying key decision-makers and duty-bearers with support from LWF Myanmar.
•   Exposure for all trainees to new participatory approaches, facilitation techniques and collaborative decision-making tools; leading to significant shifts in outlook and attitude to community engagement amongst CFs.
•   Eight community-authored videos were produced during the course of the training, of which six have been fully subtitled into English and made available for online dissemination. The un-subtitled videos are being used locally to raise awareness of key issues and promote dialogue, whilst the translated videos are being disseminated online and offline (via DVD) as a means for sharing the outcomes with partner staff and supporters internationally.

Our reflections on working in Myanmar

InsightShare has worked in over 50 countries around the world; engaging with diverse communities on an equally divergent range of issues, in collaboration with international, national and community-based partners. This programme was the organisation's first experience of working in Myanmar and, as far as is known, this is the only time any such capacity-building programme in participatory video has ever been attempted in that country.

We are not experts in the complex situations into which we are thrust during the course of our work. We are specialists in our field of practice - participatory video - and as a team we have experience and expertise in various approaches and applications (e.g. rights-based approaches, advocacy, horizontal sharing, monitoring and evaluation etc.) which we bring to the projects we deliver. We rely on the knowledge, capacity and wisdom of our partners, who invariably have deep-rooted connections and long histories of working within the countries and communities in which we are invited to work. This has never been truer than in the case of Myanmar.

We have observed and mourned the brutalisation of Myanmar's people by the military dictatorship that has gripped the country over so many years. The spaces and opportunities for mobilisation, empowerment, self-determination and representation we have longed to emerge have nevertheless remained stubbornly distant and unfulfilled. It was almost impossible to imagine undertaking participatory video within Myanmar, or Burma as we had maintained.

Participatory video thrives in open spaces. It is a methodology that must be overt to succeed. The role of participants as *representatives* of the 'wider community' is dependent upon establishing a pattern of 'call and response' between the two. This typically takes the form of community screenings and dialogues throughout the process, by which the wider community can take part, observe, comment, disagree, suggest and redirect the actions of the participants. Covert video (of which there are many examples from Myanmar) would not be possible under such circumstances, nor would it lend itself to the positive and constructive dialogues between stakeholders that participatory video typically seeks to bring about.

Therefore, unsurprisingly, some of the most significant challenges we have faced during the fifteen years of practice at InsightShare have been in those countries and communities where

open spaces and opportunities for dialogue have been limited or unreliable. Our recent experiences in Ethiopia, the Philippines, Indonesia and North-East India have given us reasons to be cautious about the circumstances into which we can safely introduce participatory video and mindful of the unintended consequences that might follow.

When we were first approached by CoS to undertake a training programme in Myanmar, the idea appeared at once exciting, challenging, terrifying and ridiculous, given our preconceived notions of the circumstances at the time. Over time their expert teams helped us to understand the shifting situation in Myanmar and gradually the proposed programme appeared increasingly possible, even achievable.

The changes taking places in many parts of Myanmar appear to be as fast-moving as they are unpredictable. Positive developments and improvements in one area appear to be matched (or surpassed) by deteriorating circumstances in others. It is highly unlikely that permission would have been granted for a programme of participatory video processes in many regions and communities across the country, several of which remain entirely closed to outsiders, inaccessible to NGOs, and wracked by instability and violence. However, the simple fact that a programme that involved equipping and training communities in video production for grassroots mobilisation was allowed to proceed at all, is, in itself, a testament to the rapid changes taking place.

We expected that our work in Myanmar would be suspiciously overseen (even impeded) by officials at the local, regional or national level. If it was highly scrutinised, then we were unaware. Certainly there were no impediments to our activities, other than the travel and accommodation restrictions imposed on all foreign visitors. Likewise, we imagined that arriving at the airport with suitcases full of expensive electronic equipment (whatever could not be purchased locally, including mini projectors and solar panels) might have caused concern amongst customs or immigration officials. Again, this caused not so much as a raised eyebrow. We were convinced the participants and trainees would be cautious and self-censoring around local issues or politics. In this we were not so far off the mark - certainly nobody spoke out in strong terms against the status quo or demanded the full realisation of their human rights. But neither were they obviously dissuaded from openly discussing difficult political and social issues, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child was openly mentioned numerous times (including on video), although this is certainly the least controversial of the human rights instruments in Myanmar today.

In fact we entered the country without issue (albeit with hard-won visas in our passports), travelled freely, associated widely, discussed issues openly, and generally undertook the training in a relaxed and interference-free environment. Chris Lunch even spent time with Aung San Suu Kyi during his visit and volunteered several days to deliver a short participatory workshop with the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation she founded in 2010.

There were many challenges. There always are. Possibly the greatest challenge to the programme was the tendency towards paternalistic relationships between the local partner and the communities that it is working to support, where the communities may expect the local partner to provide for them instead of taking action to try to secure those needs by making claims to the appropriate governance structures and by taking direct action. The occurrence of such paternalistic relationships is likely to be the legacy of working patterns established

during the response to one of the deadliest cyclones ever recorded - Cyclone Nargis- and is clearly a situation which the various parties are aware of, and seeking to address and overcome. But processes are always complex and ambivalent, and in this context several of the participatory video processes were used by pre-existing groups (e.g. Village Development Committees) essentially to make video-based funding proposals to the NGO.

Rather than participatory video being used as a community-led advocacy tool (creating videos directed at duty-bearers such as government representatives) or as a means for devising and implementing local solutions for local issues (e.g. collectively repairing a footpath), in several cases it became a means for presenting the issue and appealing for external help. This was particularly the case during the field-based exercises in Stage One, before the trainees had seen the pattern (of videos sharing 'wants' rather than articulating 'needs') emerging. It was significantly reduced during the post-training assignments in Stage Two, but is likely to remain a challenge as LWF Myanmar take the process forward and continue their work to empower the groups they support through rights-based frameworks.

Training facilitators without being able to reference previous projects as examples of how the process can be implemented and its areas of maximum impact was a significant challenge. As mentioned previously, this was the recommendation of the partners involved, which feared that describing community empowerment processes (particularly involving advocacy) might be perceived as agitation and cause problems for the training and those involved. It's unclear whether these concerns were well founded, though in such a fast-shifting climate it's hard to be accurate and easier to be cautious. It did make the overall training much slower, as the trainees gradually came to realise the various applications, scope, scale and potential impacts of the participatory video method.

Communicating with our counterparts in Myanmar was as difficult as we have ever experienced. Telephones were an absolute non-starter, whether mobile or landline. This was particularly challenging during the programme development phase, when good communications are essential. We managed one actual call (over Skype) during the entire period, which had to be meticulously organised to happen when the clocks, networks, connections and heavenly bodies were in correct alignment. Email was mercifully always reliable and instant messaging filled the gaps where quick dialogue was essential to moving processed forward. Oh, and the weather during Stage One was horrible. It was the end of the rainy season and (predictably) it rained constantly.

The entire experience was a world apart from how we imagined working in Myanmar when the programme was first discussed. Its implementation and achievements are testament to the careful and painstaking work of the partners involved, through their teams of committed, passionate and mindful staff from the head offices to the field. We look forward to the next opportunity to work in Myanmar.

Links & resources

Capacity Building in Participatory Video - Myanmar
http://bit.ly/pvmyanmar

Photostory (Stage One)
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6E8qyXVGYKKSnhJYnJjZ3RtNTg/edit?usp=sharing
Selection of videos from Stage One and Two
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUtvIa4Yp5ymIXZ7IxdXTXoaHMaSeZV0_
Insights into Participatory Video
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pShTqFF-beU
Church of Sweden
www.svenskakyrkan.se/english

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[2] The Australian Red Cross recently undertook a participatory video project in Myanmar as part of its
community-based Health and Resilience project. A video about it can be viewed here:
http://vimeo.com/album/2586800/video/61562414