

People's Video

Preserving biocultural diversity through participatory video

by Nick Lunch

Insight use video to communicate the real people, stories and actions involved in preserving biocultural diversity. We hand over video cameras and provide a thorough participatory methodology to provide illiterate and disenfranchised people the opportunities to get their voices heard; strengthening themselves and their communities whilst also inspiring others. In the long-term impressive biocultural initiatives and ideas can be documented and evaluated by those directly concerned, cheaply and effectively.

At the 2008 World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Insight will launch the Biocultural Portal, a web based resource for Indigenous Peoples and other stewards of biocultural diversity to share participatory video promoting local solutions to preserve the worlds biocultural diversity. Many indigenous communities have low literacy rates, are isolated and very poor. Yet communities like the Chinantec people of Oaxaca's cloud forests and the Dusun of Borneo hold irreplaceable knowledge on their environments.

Eighty percent of the planet's diversity is now in indigenous areas. The current global debate on protecting the planet's biodiversity is still dominated by scientists, conservationists and politicians. Decisions are mainly being made by Western governments and organisations. The voices and perspectives of local people living in biodiversity hot spots, and particularly the local stewards of biocultural diversity are currently unheard, misrepresented, and marginalised.

Indigenous people worldwide want their voice to be heard, they want to tell their own stories and share knowledge with the 'outside' on their terms. Participatory Video pilots over the past two years in Mexico, Peru, Colombia, South Africa, Namibia, Uganda, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysian Borneo and Indonesia have resulted in startling video messages, filmed and authored entirely by indigenous communities and directly involving men, elders, youth and women.

We believe our work challenges power

inequality but is simultaneously empowering for government officials, UN officers, civil servants, donors, NGOs, activists and communities alike. As a process at grassroots level Participatory Video builds self-esteem, values local knowledge and skills and promotes communication, and it can act as a 'glue' in bonding disparate groups into a coherent and proactive force. At the level of policy making Participatory Video becomes a window to the world, a reality check, a system of ground-truthing.

We are developing toolkits - to illustrate the practical steps required to successfully apply Participatory Video for specific outcomes: 1. Advocacy; 2. Stories of Change; 3. Video proposals; and 4. Community Conservation, as well as a handbook for setting up locally economically sustainable Participatory Video hubs.

A hub is a low-tech media centre run by and for the poor, providing opportunities and out-reach to diverse groups and communities with Internet access, knowledge and skills exchange, video facilitators, music making and other media, and developing new livelihoods for indigenous youth.

In this programme we offer 'trainings for trainers' for indigenous facilitators to spread the tool through their communities. Long-term, donors, scientists and policy-makers will have unprecedented access to indigenous communities and their perspectives on conservation and development. In our current projects indigenous communities are already using video as a research tool to promote their

interest in community conservation. We follow strict protocols on consultation and Free Prior and Informed Consent. Indigenous communities now control their media to voice their truth.



A young girl interviewing her grandmother about community conservation efforts in the Chinantla region, Oaxaca, Mexico. Photograph: Nick Lunch

Through developing hands on methods for learning video and communication skills, Insight is spearheading a movement for autonomous, pro-poor media. Addressing the key threats to humanity and life as a whole demands a shift in consciousness away from Western-based lateral ways of thinking about human development as separate from those life systems that support us; towards a more holistic view that places humans as part of an interconnected web of life. Participatory Video is one way to give voice to that perspective. At the same time Insight is concerned with bridging the gap between all key stakeholders: Indigenous Stewards, Scientists, Institutions, Policy makers, and donors. Communication is key in this process. •

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