



PARTICIPATORY VIDEO HUBS

Building global media networks with a difference

Nick Lunch



InsightShare, a UK-based social enterprise, works with participatory video as a methodology to enable and include everyone to share knowledge and stories. Its methodology is based on collective action, learning from doing and gaining the ability to shape a common future. Usual "side effects" include having fun and building solidarity.

InsightShare's experience in the field shows us that when it comes to ideas for community development, local people are often the real experts. Unfortunately, although they know many of the solutions to their problems, they are rarely listened to, or empowered to act for themselves. We think there has been quite enough talk on this issue, but what can be done to change it?

InsightShare understands Participatory Video (PV) as a simple methodology designed to enable and include everyone to share knowledge and stories from the heart, needless of any literacy ability. At the heart of InsightShare's PV methodology are collective action, learning from doing, and gaining the ability to shape our future. Common "side effects" include having fun and building solidarity. InsightShare, a UK-based social enterprise, has grown to a team of 10 senior trainers from and based in UK, Canada, Peru, Philippines and South Africa, with a much larger and growing group of local facilitators operating out of a network of community-based hubs. Since 2003, the InsightShare team has worked on local capacity building across more than 25 countries with horizontal and vertical sharing at the centre of the process.

Examples of horizontal communication are farmer to farmer sharing local innovation, indigenous custodians of sacred landscapes building solidarity and exchanging techniques for community-based conservation, and township youth developing life skills and inspiring others to engage in community activism. It is about promoting local governance.

Vertical communication is principally about trying to influence decision-

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making, be it with government, donors, or institutions. It is about amplifying excluded voices and bridging the divides in human society by promoting a “bottom-up” decision-making process.

To maximise the potential of participatory video as a tool for social change, InsightShare is currently developing a global network of social media hubs for “glocal” exchange and nurturing local community resilience. A hub is a space where video and audio equipment is stored and editing can take place. It is usually based in an indigenous community, a village or an urban neighbourhood (such as a township) where the capacity building takes place. At its heart are a passionate team of local PV facilitators, often working as volunteers, or paid small stipends. The selection of these “activators” in the community takes place in a number of different ways, but is usually guided by local elders in the community; an agreement between the core group of trainees, the local partner NGO (where this exists) and InsightShare trainers who follow internal recruitment guidelines. The hub becomes a focal point for communications, empowerment, and acts as a catalyst for solving local issues with local solutions. Cultural resilience is of particular importance to our indigenous partners who utilise PV to strengthen oral transmission, to promote inter-generational dialogue and to archive traditional knowledge.

Most importantly a PV hub is governed by community representatives -it is seeded by InsightShare alongside strategic partners but over a two to three year process should develop autonomy and local self-sufficiency.

Across the network, our hub partners are responsible for local dissemination, screenings and production. Any PV produced is made available to all under a copyleft license that allows users to copy videos freely as long as they are not altered, and which demands that the community authors are credited.

HOW DOES INSIGHTSHARE WORK?

We believe that everyone is an expert. We encourage people to value and trust their unique perspective to make the world a better place. For us, sharing knowledge, skills and understanding is the starting point for creating change.

We believe that even a small shift in perspective can release hidden energies and have a big impact on shaping our own futures. The process encourages experiential learning and reflection as the key ingredients for transformation and growth in self-confidence.

Our work is guided by our **Core Charter**, which includes a set of non-negotiable values that prospective partners are requested to agree on before advancing in the pv capacity building process, and by our Core Values:

Make Mistakes: We believe in experiential learning and reflection as the key ingredient for transformation and growth in self-confidence. That's why we say: mistakes are great!

Lose Control: We encourage our trainees and practitioners to value and trust the target groups' unique perspectives and their inherent ability to self-organise and make their own positive changes. We believe that everyone is an expert.

Have Fun: We approach Participatory Video as a process that is not just about working together, expressing yourself, listening, arguing and protesting but also about passion, creativity and enjoying yourself.

Pass It On: We believe sharing knowledge, skills and understanding is the starting point for creating change: Each One Teach One!

Celebrate: We use Participatory Video to celebrate the local. Community screenings are moments of reflection but also inspiration and celebration. Development work needs to focus more on this important aspect of change.

Come Together: Through our work, we develop networks and opportunities for people, communities, practitioners and those engaging with the work to meet one another and build platforms for realising our shared and unique goals, aspirations and dreams.



*Trainees in Peru learn to facilitate community video projects.
Photo © InsightShare*

By building local capacity in PV, InsightShare aims to reduce project costs massively, so that the many organisations and communities wanting this methodology in the Majority (i.e. “Developing”) World can afford it. We are participating in worldwide participatory communication movement that, so far, has lacked coherence and direction. Through our trainings and offering hands-on workshops for over 10 years in UK, USA, & across the world at major world forums (e.g. IUCN, United Nations conferences, research institutes, etc) we have built up an alumni network of perhaps 1000 participatory communication “champions” from an astounding range of backgrounds. We have become a force to inspire and bring together allies in the movement for a global citizens’ media.

An introduction to participatory video

OUR VISION AND WAYS FORWARD

The planet’s diversity of perspectives and visions, cultures and survival strategies is shrinking at a frightening rate as it is replaced by a homogenous and predatory vision of human society that is ecologically destructive and socially unjust. This unsustainable vision of ever expanding growth is driven by powerful world states that hold most of the planet’s monetary wealth and influence, and promoted by the few owners of the mainstream channels of communication and the global media.

The most vulnerable communities are those that still hold an intricate knowledge of local cultural and biological diversity. Such form of local knowledge (sometimes referred to as Traditional Ecological Knowledge, TEK), vital to the survival of the planet, is disappearing fast. Inspiring stories of self-determination and community-led change are also being lost, or at best translated into inaccessible reports by outsiders for outsiders.

In this context, we understand PV as the missing piece of a growing grassroots global movement for change. In this era of communication – characterized not only by the Internet, but also cheap duplication of DVDs and CDs, and cheaper video cameras, DVD players and video phones- all people can find their voice and have access to information. Development programmes cannot succeed without good communication, and participatory development requires participatory communication processes that really place control in the hands of the “beneficiaries”. Handing over video production equipment and teaching a simple and proven participatory methodology based on experiential learning does allow participants to develop a voice and share their perspectives with the world beyond in their own terms. InsightShare’s PV methods seek to bridge the digital divide.

Developing local communication skills and audio/visual production skills among poor and excluded communities means that the majority world is at last beginning to be heard. Equal access is crucial for information to flow more freely. Using the vast potential of the Internet, with its increasing number of virtual communities and available video portals offering free, uncontrolled and versatile means of exchange, makes our vision both practical and of great present significance. As ideas, local innovations and inspiration are passed on from individual to individual, and from community to community, PV becomes a catalyst, promoting self-belief and action for change.

However, communication at a local level can have the most direct impact on people’s lives. We have learned from our work with local partners that simply making a film and having a “global” voice are not enough -they are not an end, but a means to an end. Without concrete action and measurable impacts, PV alone would soon lose its appeal.

*Maasai
trainees
work
with*



storyboards to plan their video messages.
Photo © InsightShare

So, it's important to help community film makers focus on audience and the desired outcomes. For example, in order to carry through the issues identified in the films all the way to achieving a positive result, it can be helpful to use PV within a broader rights-based strategy (e.g. see case study Tanzania White Ribbon Alliance). Whether the community-authored videos are shown at large community screenings, through local film festivals, broadcast on national television, or aimed at just getting one small group of decision makers to watch a 10 minute clip...in the end what counts is: "has the situation improved?"

We have recently created a series of comic strips (visual case studies) to show how PV escalates positive social change. These are presented using stills from the videos and key quotes to tell the story of the process and impacts of a number of diverse PV projects. Keen to move away from dry text-based resources, we challenge ourselves to produce accessible visual and oral-based resources, and we are currently experimenting with

animations as a way to introduce relatively complex and inaccessible issues to non-literate groups; such as emerging work on climate justice, REDD (The United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries) and the UN Declaration of Rights for Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE EARTH: TOWARDS A GLOBAL INDIGENOUS HUB NETWORK

Conversations with the Earth (CWE), launched in April 2009 at the Indigenous Peoples Global Summit on Climate Change in Anchorage, poses a collective opportunity to build a global movement for an Indigenous-controlled community media network, working at the grassroots to support the Earth's custodians. Eighty percent of the remaining biodiversity on our planet lies in traditional indigenous territories. Yet indigenous peoples are known to be among the most marginalised on Earth. Every 14 days another indigenous language disappears forever taking with it millennia of traditional ecological knowledge. InsightShare's PV process has now led to the seeding of a global network of local media hubs producing participatory videos, and we hope this is creating a legacy for an autonomous, indigenous media movement, whilst acting as a catalyst for locally led social change and self-determination.

Through the CWE partnership, which is led by indigenous foundation Land is Life with the support for The Christensen Fund, InsightShare works with Indigenous communities to identify, train, and equip videographers at the local level in order to enable them to record the impacts of, and responses to, climate change. Sharing their video stories enables Indigenous peoples to present their own perspectives on the catastrophic impacts of climate change on their local ecosystems to inform the global discourse. In addition, it will give them an opportunity to share community-based adaptation strategies to climate change, and build donor support for this important dimension to our collective response to the current ecological and economic crises.

Indigenous videographers in Cameroon, Kenya, Philippines, Arctic, Peru, Panama, Samoa are training people from nearby communities, also helping to create a regional and a global network of Indigenous communities working on these issues. Communities participating in CWE are now creating their own media and linking up through the emerging media hub network.

Irma, a Quechua farmer from Vilccacota in the Central Andes of Peru has travelled to Kuna Yala in Panama to help train the Kuna Indians in PV. Later in 2009, Quechua PV facilitators will work with Aymara Andean communities near Lake Titicaca and also spread the tool to the forest regions. In Cameroon, the Baka have started to document their women's traditional songs, and the PV team took the cameras some 350 km into the forest to work with Baka living more remotely to share cultural transmission. Now our Baka hub partner Okani is developing a funding proposal to build fishponds in the villages as an adaptation to climate change. With support from UNDP and CWE, his tiny indigenous-led NGO is becoming a regional hub for PV capacity building among indigenous forest dwellers across Central Africa. "I am convinced by the words of Djengui (the Great Spirit of the forest) who has predicted a radiant future for Participatory Video: I feel it is in our hands and I am going to work for that", says Messe Venant, Director of Okani, from the Baka Community Association in Eastern Cameroon.

URBAN HUB NETWORK

The London Hub was the first hub of the Insight global network. Active since May 2008, it is located in the Lilian Baylis Old School site, which is run by Sports Action Zone (SAZ). The site is a formerly abandoned school in the heart of Lambeth, South London.

During 2008 and the first half of 2009, the London Hub has run several PV **projects with young local people related to sports and social change**. At the moment, its programmes include regular video clubs for local youth, video projects for 'community elders' in nearby estates, a community cinema and training of local youth to become video coaches.



Recruiting youth for the London Hub. Image © Insight

Another urban hub, Insight Ethekeweni, was born in Durban, South Africa, after a capacity-building training run by InsightShare in 2007 with The Valley Trust a large local NGO. This group of young people living in Inanda Township formed the first of Insightshare's international participatory social media hubs, and has become in just a year almost fully economically self-sufficient. The passion and resourcefulness of the group have inspired us all, and they lead the network in terms of sharing their rich learning process. The trainees are growing skills and earning incomes, and generating positive local change. Follow this link to view some of the videos they have made:

http://www.insightshare.org/SA_vid_index.html

One particularly interesting case is **the water video**. When people living near the small tea estate in Inanda C, Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa, saw water pipes being laid in October 2004, they were overjoyed. Standing pipes would soon be spouting water, they were told; but they waited in vain. Five years later, the Inanda community planned, directed and filmed a short video about this situation, to be used as an advocacy tool. More details in:

<http://www.thevalleytrust.org.za/?page=news&news=detail&id=38>

STEPS FORWARD

In the coming months, InsightShare will bring local hub managers from the Andes in Peru and Inanda Township in South Africa together with the London hub team to reflect upon and assimilate the lessons learned so far, as well as share them with the upcoming indigenous hubs. At the United Nations Climate Change Conference to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009, community representatives of the six indigenous hubs will meet to develop a shared vision for the growing CWE video hub network, run workshops and lead discussions and healing rituals.

To keep updated about InsightShare's work, check www.insightshare.org and www.conversationearth.org

Nick Lunch is co-founder and co-director of Insight. He has worked with participatory video since 1996 in Turkmenistan, India, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Peru, Mexico, Borneo, USA and Europe. Lately he has focused on biocultural diversity projects with indigenous custodians for Conversations with the Earth, a multimedia collaboration to document the impacts of climate change on indigenous communities. nlunch@insightshare.org

SUBMITTED BY: FLORENCIA ENGHEL

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