

# Participatory video for M&E: supporting bottom-up learning

In development work, it is not always easy to gauge and communicate what significance a programme has had in the lives of beneficiaries. Those best positioned to explore and convey messages about changes that have resulted from an intervention are the beneficiaries themselves – they speak first-hand about impacts and outcomes.

Participatory Video offers a way of strengthening participatory monitoring and evaluation processes and project delivery, through a set of facilitated techniques involving a group or community in creating and shaping their own video. The method values local knowledge, and aims to build bridges between communities and decision-makers, and enable people to develop greater control over the decisions affecting their lives. By adding to other M&E tools through the provision of rich qualitative information and opportunities for community mobilisation and advocacy, Participatory Video yields considerable return on investment.

In a recent end-of-programme evaluation, we supported Mercy Corps in Kenya in using Participatory Video combined with the Most Significant Change technique to engage community participants and other stakeholders in a conversation about their research programme on financial literacy, which aspired to build saving, borrowing, spending and investment skills of randomly selected youth groups.

The participatory video evaluation took place over 16 days and involved approximately 200 programme participants, staff, government officials and community-based organisations in screenings, filming and storytelling. The combined use of Participatory Video and Most Significant Change produced qualitative data that could be communicated in an accessible way to stakeholders, funders and partners. Participatory Video has the ability to communicate and empower, while Most Significant Change added a structured

selection process to extract qualitative data in the form of stories, which in combination yielded rich findings, and amplified the learning around financial literacy's impact in young people's lives.

We trained ten local facilitators – a mix of staff and young beneficiaries – to lead the fieldwork and analysis activities. People then told their stories of change in relation to the project in a 'story circle'. The changes were recorded by facilitators, who collected 74 written stories. Groups then selected the story of the Most Significant Change which was videoed and thereby turned into an easy-to-share format. By telling personal stories in a trusted environment and retaining control of the final video process, participants made stories come to life in new ways.

Different programme stakeholders were then invited to watch the videoed stories of change in two separate screening events, providing an accessible way to engage with the opinions and values of the initial storyteller groups. The audience worked in smaller groups to set criteria for selection, then selected the story of Most Significant Change, and documented their reasons for selection. The groups then fed back their decisions to the larger group.

At a final stage of the process, the trainees conducted a participatory analysis to aggregate the key issues, enablers and blockers of change that emerged from the stories and presented the evaluation process and results in a video report.

A key challenge to consider is how to ensure equal chances of participation in the telling and selection of stories, working towards a sample of facilitators and storytellers that is representative, for instance by ensuring that both men and women groups get to share, record and select their stories. The choice of facilitator for each activity also impacts on the stories shared and the ways in which participants are able to overcome

power dynamics. We deal with this challenge by recommending a mixed group of trainees consisting of project beneficiaries and staff. This way, project beneficiaries lead facilitation in the story circle and the staff is able to support on technical and logistics roles.

Following stringent informed consent procedures, these stories can be used to communicate lessons about financial literacy training with other groups, organisations and decision makers. An in-depth informed consent process is critical: ensuring that participants fully understand the implications of sharing their voices in video, and that they decide on content, the shape of the final product, and who may watch the video. This is part of the terms of engagement our partners adhere to at the planning stage, allowing us to ensure that participants' rights are respected.

The participatory video evaluation brought stakeholders together, and created a space for reflection and learning by all involved, harvesting findings on changes that young people had experienced and understanding the process of change. Participatory Video as an evaluation tool adds value to other M&E tools in multiple ways: it provides rich qualitative data on how change happens which can be triangulated with collected quantitative data; and supports the ripple effects of programming by enabling reflection and horizontal learning among stakeholder groups, as well as by increasing beneficiary mobilisation around programmatic issues and placing their voices at the centre of programming.

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