Unit 27

**Hand-out:**

**Ethics, editing and the ethics of editing**

**Ethics**

Fieldworkers should be innovative and use their own best judgment, but should also be guided by the principles of ethics of participatory video. It is important to be clear with community members from the outset about what participatory video involves and to emphasize their control over the final product.

**Attitudes and behaviour**

Appropriate behaviour and good attitudes make or break a participatory video project. For some people, the required skills come easily, but for others their education, training or background get in the way. The most important thing to remember is to be humble and respectful. Being friendly is important, but it is not enough. Facilitators should consider themselves lucky to be invited into people's lives and learn more about their ICH element. It is important to show gratitude, to be an active listener, to learn to unlearn, to learn not to criticize and to take time. Rushing to meet targets and deadlines will not create the kind of relaxed atmosphere required for a successful participatory process.

**Hand over control**

Never commence filming until the participants have started using the camera. This gives a clear message that participatory video is different from traditional filming and that facilitators are not the film crew. As work progresses, the divide between facilitator and participant diminishes rapidly and everyone becomes members of the same team. At this stage, it becomes natural for the facilitator also to use the camera occasionally (e.g. short shots of community members using the camera to show the participatory video process in action or cut-away shots). The facilitator’s focus should always be to help develop participants' confidence in using the equipment and, ultimately, their control over the process.

**Be aware of community dynamics**

Recognize and acknowledge community dynamics. Some members of the community may expect to dominate the participatory video process and other members may expect this too. Video interviews can go a long way towards giving voice to people in the community. The footage may or may not be used later, but the exercise serves as useful interview practice. It is, however, always important to get influential people on board and to let them have their say.

As a facilitator, it is important to use subtle techniques to actively include those people who are on the margins of a community in the participatory video process. By doing so and by enabling them to appear on film and share their perspectives with the wider community, facilitators may be able to help to share rich sources that may have previously been ignored.

**Ownership**

Where are the tapes going to be stored? Who is responsible for them? The community members will have their own ideas about how to use the film or may just want to keep it for their own records. Make sure they have enough copies.

**Editing**

Three levels of skills

The way participatory video exercises and games are structured encourages ‘in-camera editing’ (i.e. preparing between shots rather than recording freestyle, which can result in hours of unnecessary footage). This approach encourages participants to work together to plan and think about what they want to film before they film it. Participants confidently use the camera, conduct interviews and make short films about ICH elements. The unedited footage should be good enough for others to watch, however, it is still worth using microphones and tripods because this equipment does not detract from the immediacy of the process and adds greater value to the participants' work. In fact, having a microphone means that there is something for another participant to do, so it draws more people into the process and keeps those filming and presenting more focused. It also makes the finished product more watchable and potentially useable for more discerning target groups.

**Showing rough footage**

Showing rough footage that the participants and facilitation team have selected from different tapes requires rewinding and forward winding to locate particular scenes. This takes time and requires an engaged and patient audience. If this kind of screening is likely to be repeated with a number of different groups, it may be preferable to opt for a slightly more advanced option.

**Basic editing**

It is relatively easy to learn how to edit films using two video cameras (which produces a good quality and fairly precise film) or from a video camera to an ordinary VHS video player/recorder (which produces an acceptable film that is, however, less precise and of rougher quality). This technique is simple and allows film-makers to cut out bits of the film that are useless or less relevant. Selecting the best interviews or the most significant storyboards and placing them in an order that makes sense helps to develop a basic narrative structure and helps audiences to focus. This method does not require great technical skill or too much time and makes for a much more palatable, focused and shorter film screening.

**Professional editing**

If participants and facilitators wish to show the filmed material to other kinds of audiences, such as stakeholders or other NGOs, they may choose to work with local professional editors. Choosing local editors who are sensitive to the process and aims of participatory video is essential. Ensure that they understand and respect the ethics of participatory video (see the section on ethics).

Alternatively, facilitators can learn some basic editing methods and either train or guide the participants to use these methods or edit the film themselves – either in the community or with frequent visits to ensure that everyone is happy with the direction being taken. Today, editing is no longer the domain of professionals; most modern computers can immediately become editing studios and the right editing software is relatively easy to use (i.e. no more difficult than learning how to use Microsoft PowerPoint). Even the smallest manipulation of filmed material, such as putting titles at the start and end, and adding some local music as background to some of the shots, can make a very professional-looking product.

The ability to edit films means that villagers can produce short, snappy participatory videos that are easily accessible, and therefore offer greater potential for collecting and presenting their ICH in a systematic fashion.

When choosing editing software, participants and facilitators should begin with something simple and only adopt more sophisticated programs when they are ready or when they feel the need. Most simple programs will enable film-makers to create simple films quite quickly and will be easier to teach to community members who are beginners.

Most PCs now include Windows Movie Maker, a free piece of software that can do basic editing. On an Apple Macintosh, users can experiment with iMovie. When users feel that these programs are no longer able to do the things they want to do, they could try using Adobe Premiere (for PC and Mac) or Apple Final Cut Express or Final Cut Pro (for Macintosh). These programs are more sophisticated and can achieve professional results. However, their complexity makes them inappropriate for total beginners because they can undermine confidence and slow the completion of simple edits.

**Ethics of editing**

Editing is the weakest link in the participatory chain. It is possible to learn enough about a camera in a few days to make a film, but it takes much longer to be confident when editing on a computer. To combat this try:

* *Training community members.* This is the ideal, but it takes time and facilities. Younger participants will probably be most willing to be trained, but this is not exclusively so.
* *Paper editing*. After screening back the rough footage, facilitators can write or draw scenes on cards and have the community organize them to determine the order of the story. The facilitators can then edit the film for them following the chosen order.
* *Editing the footage in the community*. Members can drop in and see how things are going and offer feedback. This approach can help to demystify the technical process.
* *Regular screenings.* This approach helps to keep people in the loop and give them opportunities to offer feedback and advice on the progress of the film.

Participatory video is far from perfect in communicating reality. Images are still selected for filming by participants, who choose what and who to show. Editing is a conscious manipulation of sound and images. Even writing a report involves interpreting and manipulating observations and statements.

When the video editing process occurs away from the participants, there is a danger that the final video may differ from that intended by the film-makers. This is also a danger when bringing in professional editors or film-makers, who often cannot help imposing their sense of aesthetics and their professional training onto the work of amateurs.

Participatory video is at its best as a collective exercise. Through an ongoing cycle of filming and reviewing as a group, the participants make all decisions together about what is included and what is left out. Through forming consensus, a truer, more balanced picture emerges. While many people may be unable to read a written report, local people can verify or alter their video messages.

Try to ensure that some participants get hands-on experience capturing shots onto the computer, cutting them and building a film on the timeline. The aim is to demystify the process as much as possible. Then draw storyboards with the group to help more community members manipulate the images into a storyline that suits them.

Seek consensus from everyone – not just the older males, who often dominate. If even one person is not happy with how she or he has been represented, then the film is not finished.

The draft version of the video should always be shown to the community or group for its approval. This is an important time to review agreements made at the start of the project around ownership and who gets to see the final product. It may only be at this point that some participants will realize the true power of what they have created. It is useful to discuss with them again who they think should see the final product.

Seek consent. This is essential; do not forget that film is not the property of the facilitators or facilitating agency. It is the community’s film – you are just the facilitator. This is not just a formality at the end of the process; it is an essential part of participatory video. Consent should be fully informed and this means holding an in-depth discussion on the matter with all participants.