

Empowering Marginalized Filipinos Through Participatory Video Production

Leticia S. Tojos

This article documents the experiences of the Research and Extension for Development Office, College of Social Work and Community Development (REDO, CSWCD) of the University of the Philippines (UP) in producing videos using participatory approaches. In capturing the events and processes, the construct of participatory video production (PVP) has been enriched and a framework in the context of development work in the Philippine setting has been developed. Moreover, its practicability as an organizing and advocacy tool by low income and marginalized Filipinos has been demonstrated.

Introduction

The communication highway has created a borderless world where people are brought closer together, enabling them to share and exchange knowledge more frequently and efficiently. Ideally, this advance should mean opening the world to a plurality of ideas.

But one is inclined to ask what impact this advance has brought to the world in terms of the general well-being of people and society. Other questions that may come to mind are who the sources and recipients of information are and how data are utilized.

In this globalized arrangement, some economists and political scientists have observed that the economically powerful nations continue to perpetuate a dominant culture and subjugate the less-developed countries. These influential nations are often the source and the less-developed ones the receivers of information. Homogeneity rather than plurality of ideas, perspectives, beliefs, and practices has become the norm. This is what “one world, one voice” actually means.

This normative arrangement has muted the voices of marginalized sectors of society and has excluded their traditions from the mainstream of community life. As a result, they have become more disadvantaged in status and in access and control of resources.

Neville Jayaweera (1987) said that communication technology can bring about social change but only when structural reforms are adopted. Citing the results of a research undertaken between 1973 and 1983 by the University of Leicester in India sponsored by the World Association for Christian Communication, he said, “Social change was a product of a whole range of factors among which mass media were an important, though not a primary element. However, they also found that mass media tended to benefit most those segments of society who were already well – off, and merely to consolidate existing inequalities, rather than erode them” (83). He added that “The new technology tends to be used as a substitute for carrying out long overdue structural reforms. It is in this context that the ‘revolution of rising expectations’ becomes translated into a spiral of rising frustrations” (84).

The University of the Philippines College of Social Work and Community Development (UPCSWCD) is witness to the inequities and inequality suffered by the poor in Philippine society. It is disheartening to note that the situation of farmers, fisherfolk, women, children, and older persons particularly in low-income communities, and the factors that bring about their condition, are usually analyzed from the stand point of the dominant class and not from the point of view of those affected.

Guided by these considerations and the nature of their work with marginalized groups and communities, the UPCSWCD, through its Research and Extension for Development Office (REDO) has used the participatory approach in producing video materials. This undertaking is part of its continuing advocacy program for and with marginalized sectors. Although serendipitous at first, the REDO is in the process of enriching the practice of participatory video production (PVP) together with their partners and other stakeholders.

Now in its third year, REDO has decided to document its experience guided by the following objectives:

- a. To trace the process of enriching the concept of PVP based on its own practice;
- b. To develop a framework for producing videos using participatory approaches in the context of development work in the Philippines; and
- c. To identify strengths and weaknesses in the practice of PVP.

REDO and Its Practice of PVP

REDO is the research, extension and publications arm of the UPUPCSWCD. It operationalizes the vision of the College which is “a transformed socio-economic, political, and cultural structure, through the sustained collective participation of all sectors toward a humane, democratic, and sovereign Filipino society where people are empowered and free to realize their potentials.” Its programs and projects are mainly in partnership with community groups and other stakeholders. In carrying out its functions, the Office is guided by development principles that promote equity and equality:

- a. Clients/partners are human beings who must be regarded not as objects but subjects in the development process.
- b. The participation of the affected sectors, as well as partners and stakeholders, is valuable and should therefore be elicited.
- c. Awareness-building is a necessary component of advocacy work.
- d. The framework for assisting marginalized sectors needs to be holistic.
- e. Networking with government, non-government and people’s organizations at the local and national levels should be done to generate greater support in addressing the issues of these sectors.

As part of an academic unit, REDO recognizes the ever-changing Philippine situation. Thus, in its research and extension programs and projects, REDO provides venues for discussing new constructs or development frames and applies or integrates new ways of looking at development theories or frameworks. A concrete outcome of its efforts is the integration of participatory approaches into the production of video advocacy materials.

All these productions analyze issues that affect low-income Filipinos, particularly women in the urban poor setting, rural and urban informal workers, company workers, and older persons. REDO has produced six video documentaries, two of which — *Babay-Babayan* and *Kwentong Bubay ng mga Manggagawang Impormal* — have been shown on television.

The documentaries are:

- a. *Basura* (Trash). The first output of REDO, this two-minute video production tells the story of a young woman who is in the habit of littering only to find out later the ill-effects of her actions. The video focuses on the problem of waste disposal.
- b. *Tanaw* (Perspective or Standpoint) and *Panahon* (Time). Inspired by a study on older persons that was being conducted at that time, these highlight the manifestations of ageism and gerontophobia in Philippine society and deconstruct the myths that disempower older persons. The videos enhance regard for older persons by family members in particular and Filipinos in general.
- c. *Babay-Babayan* (Playing House). Co-produced by the Samahan ng Maralitang Kababaihan sa Kalunsuran (SAMAKANA), this video production analyzes the situation of families in a government housing project in Vitas, Tondo.
- d. *Ikaw Ba'y Manggagawa?* (Are You A Worker?). Co-produced by Ilaw at Buklod ng Manggagawa (IBM), it documents the experiences of workers and their struggles through a union fighting for their welfare in a multinational corporation.
- e. *Kwentong Buhay ng mga Manggagawang Impormal* (Life stories of Informal Workers). This analyzes the daily toil of informal workers, the majority of whom are women, in five areas.

The beginning involvement of REDO in VP... and then in PVP

REDO became involved in video production after the Japanese corporation Sony approved a proposal submitted by the Office requesting for a complete set of video equipment. The proposal aimed to enable the REDO staff to document the experiences of fieldwork students in

the three departments. This tie-up between REDO and the UPUPCSWCD academic programs would enrich the collection of indigenous teaching, training, and advocacy materials of UPUPCSWCD. In July 2003, the equipment arrived as a loan to UPUPCSWCD. An employee of Sony trained the members of REDO on video production for two weeks in January 2004. The first production, an output of the trainees, came out within that year.



The CD cover of *Bahay-Bahayan*, one of the REDO documentaries shown on television.

At the same time that the video project was being conceptualized, REDO was moving towards being a Center for Participatory Development. The team was then consciously integrating participatory approaches and strategies into its programs and projects. Making video production participatory was floated by a member of the team whose educational background was Communication. There was skepticism at the start because some experienced team members knew the implications of using participatory approaches in community work.

The approach being new to the team, various concerns surfaced, the first being access. Are funding agencies open to assisting groups who are interested in setting up their own production facility, considering the high cost of equipment and maintenance? The second was utilization because the whole process of undertaking a video production is highly technical. Considering their limitation in reading and writing, can members of community groups be trained to make their own production? Can the whole undertaking be sustainable?

Although the production of video materials continued, there was no serious discussion about this until late 2004 when the documentary on informal workers was being produced. More informal discussions about the topic occurred, initiated by a member or two in the group until most of them became interested in it. A review of literature was also conducted and other community advocates were consulted about it. The review showed that there were groups from other countries that used PVP.



The REDO participatory video team in action.

REDO ensured that the videos are useful as teaching, training, and advocacy materials. The video productions were made accessible to the faculty, students, partners, and other development practitioners. A complete set was given to the library and the list of materials uploaded to the UPUPCSWCD website. Screenings were conducted to enable more people to see the videos and get feedback from them.

The exchange of experiences, sharing of learning, opinions, and insights broadened the knowledge and perspective of the participants on PVP in the focus group discussions held in April 2006 at the UP UPUPCSWCD with the various sectors assisted by REDO, stakeholders, and members of the academe.

Constructing the concept of PVP

The review of literature revealed that the PVP concept exists and the range of its coverage is wide. The experiences these have documented, mainly those of women, were in the context of transformation and empowerment of the self and the group, very similar to REDO's development frame.

Shirley A. White (2003), in her article *Participatory Video: A Process that Transforms the Self and the Other*, defines the concept as a “tool for self – definition and empowerment” (66) and “for education and training” (67). According to her, appearing in a production enhances a person’s self-esteem and recognizes the value of an individual’s contribution. The experience also helps the person systematize thoughts, enhance analytical skills and creativity, and increase awareness. Participatory video production “can serve as a powerful force for people to see themselves in relation to the community and become conscientized about personal needs” (64). The participation of the people who are directly affected by the issue in the production itself brings out their own viewpoint, making them express themselves in a way that is understandable. That in itself is empowering because it develops their confidence. It is transformative as well because, through the medium, marginalized sectors can speak to the audience regardless of their economic background or social status.

The results of the focus group discussions with those who participated in the video productions of REDO revealed a similarity with the perspective of White. Some of the responses were:

PVs create awareness on the problems and issues of the community and, as a result, these can be given appropriate action (Resident, Barangay U.P. Campus).

Binabasag ng PV ang elitistang pagtingin sa media. Ang alam ko, pag gusto mong ma-TV ka, magbabayad kang airtime at mahal yun! Pero sa PV, nabibigyan ng pagkakataon na ipakita ng mga mahihirap ang kanilang mga kwento nang walang iniisip na kabayaran. [PV shatters the elitist view about media. From what I know, if you want to appear on TV, you have to pay for airtime and it’s expensive. PV provides an opportunity to the poor to tell their story without worrying about money.] (Nanay Lita from SAMAKANA-Vitas)

Makamasa ang PV kasi epektibong medium ito lalo nasa mga di nakapag-aral at di marunong magbasa at magsulat. [PV is pro-poor because it is an effective medium for those who were not able to attend formal education, for those who cannot read and write.] (Vic from IBM-San Miguel Chapter)

Educational, has an empowering quality (Members, (Pambansang Tagapag-ugnay ng mga Manggagawa sa Bahay [PATAMABA]).

Simple, but raises important questions (Members, PATAMABA).

Magiging daan upang maipakilala at makatulong para sa pagpromote ng produkto [It will serve as a vehicle for promoting our product] (Member, PATAMABA).

Makapanghibikayat ng mga bagong kasapi ng PTMB [It will encourage others to join PTMB] (Member, PATAMABA).

In addition to enhancing the self and increasing the awareness of those who participated in the process, the PVP's inclusion of the poor, treating them as subjects in the video production process, challenged the elitism of information and communication technology. Informal workers said that the material became a tool for marketing their products because a number of viewers contacted them when they saw the video. Part of the audience who were informal workers from other areas also signified their interest to join PATAMABA.

Framework for PVP: A guide for undertaking the process

In the context of development, the communication catalyst (facilitator or change agent) sees to it that in PVP, the subjects' involvement will have a long-term character. Participatory communication with its "ideological, practical, and functional dimensions" (White, 2003: 36) must be utilized to keep their commitment to and interest in the project alive. It "involves people in an interactive way, making communication resources accessible to them directly, in turn, helping the grassroots people acquire the knowledge and skills that enable partnership in generating messages" (White, 2003: 37).

The suggested guide that follow seeks to help in the implementation of the above-mentioned framework. The application of this perspective should however be seen in a continuum. Factors like the individual members' capacities and the level of group functioning have to be taken into consideration.

INDICATORS	PROCESS
<p>Pre-production Phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What is the subjects' understanding of PVP? * Were the costs and implications to the group discussed? * How was the need for undertaking a PVP established in the group? * Who were involved in the decision-making process? * Were commitment and support for the activities that will be undertaken generated from the general membership? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Establish a certain level of relationship with the group or community (building of rapport and trust). The communication catalyst works in partnership with the community organizer. * Assess the level of group functioning including their knowledge of their VMG and activities that the group has been undertaking. * Get basic demographic information about the members including their age, civil status, number of children, educational attainment, occupation, family income, and their knowledge of ICT. * Through participatory communication, orient them on the method and how it can be used for the organization's purpose/s. With new information and possibilities, the subjects will be able to discuss the implications of this endeavor, to them as individuals and as a group, and decide if they are ready to embark on it or not.
<p>Production Phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What was the time frame for this production? * Who were involved in the management of the production? * Being a partnership, how was the project managed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * With a decision to pursue a joint project, partners plan and talk about partnership and management arrangements.

INDICATORS	PROCESS
<p>Research and Scriptwriting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Was there a session on script writing? * Who were involved in the preparation of the script and research work? * How was the script organized? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Having the commitment of the group and particular individuals, the communication catalyst initiates meetings and facilitates the negotiations about the topics/content areas that they will present. These activities become venues for deepening analysis skills and project management. The research is done in partnership with the group. The attitude of the communication catalyst is one of “deference to the people and the community” (White, 2003:23). * Training on scriptwriting can be conducted for identified group members who have the interest and are willing to participate in this activity. * Ethics is discussed at this stage especially when there are delicate topics which will be covered in the script.
<p>Shooting, Interviews, Recording of the Narration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What does “control over technology” mean? * Is enabling the subjects to appear on film and be heard sufficient enough to say that the development process is proceeding or is ownership of the equipment necessary to make that claim? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Discussions about access to and control of the technology in relation to PVP may be undertaken to define how participatory is being participatory. Will it be involvement all the way? This will mean that the subjects will have to be trained in handling the camera, in

INDICATORS	PROCESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Does having the necessary skills in operating the equipment the only way to claim empowerment? * What footage will be taken to illustrate the peoples' situation? * In relation to the interviews, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - who will speak for the group? - what examples will be highlighted? - how will interviews be handled? 	<p>selecting subjects, and in using certain shooting techniques. In this case, exposure and hands-on or experiential learning can be arranged. Can the involvement be selective depending on the capacity of the members? What is important is the recognition of their valuable contribution to the production. In participatory message development, the videographer simply becomes a vehicle for telling someone else's story (White, 2003:23). Thus, in this case, the communication catalyst keeps in mind that the decision of who, what, where and when, why, and how comes from the subjects. They and their stories will be the focus of the interviews or narration. This information will definitely contribute to knowledge generation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Ethics and what to shoot must be discussed at this point.
<p>Video Editing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What is the involvement of the subjects in this phase? Should it be in the whole phase or in identified activities where their inputs will really matter? * Who will decide which endeavors will need the most significant inputs from the subjects? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * This phase of video production is quite technical and time consuming. Again, the same concern as the one indicated above will apply. For interested members of the group, an orientation about this phase will help in appreciating what must be done. Exposure to the

INDICATORS	PROCESS
	<p>activities is possible to enable those who are interested to have a feel of the work, like helping arrange the shots, photos, footage, musical scoring, and giving ideas on how to improve certain frames.</p>
<p>Critiquing and Finalization of the Output</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * In reviewing the output, was there a sense of satisfaction among those involved and the general membership that the video captured their own situation? * Can they say that it was really their work? * What contribution did it make to their own as well as to their group's development? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The concretization of the group's effort can be seen in the draft and, ultimately, in the final output. * The group takes the lead in commenting on the contents of the draft because the film is their story. Technical improvements may be done by the communication catalyst in consultation with the subjects. * Assessment of the experience is done to determine its effects on the group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did the project serve the group's purpose/s? - What benefits did the individual and the group get from the experience? - What were the limitations that they went through? - What problems did they encounter? - On the whole, what can they say about the whole experience?

Summing Up REDO's Experience

Looking back, the team members said that it was a worthy investment. This was affirmed by clients/partners and other stakeholders who participated in the focus group discussions.

Concept construction

The concept of PVP has been enriched in the process of production work. Through an exchange of ideas, the people who participated in the production said that PVP is a development tool, applied in organizing work. The purpose of the material is to show to a wider audience the lives of particular groups of people who have been neglected and have never been heard of. It is proactive rather than passive because groups work hand-in-hand to address their problems and it facilitates empowerment. They agree with White that the process is both educational and liberating.

Strengths and potentials of PVP

Both the subjects and partners deemed the experience worthwhile. The benefits that they mentioned were at the level of the self as well as of the group.

In relation to the self, members of the group agreed that their skills in analysis were sharpened because, during the process, there were venues for discussing realities, concepts, and perspectives. In the process, they became more articulate, self-assured, and open to the ideas of others. The activities stimulated creative expression. They also cultivated the development of capabilities and potentials.

As to group functioning, those involved realized the building and strengthening of group identity, cohesiveness, and cooperation. Of course, there were differing views, passionate discussions, and questions about certain decisions were made. But since participatory communication was the overriding frame in decision making, the problems were resolved. They also recognized that their planning and decision-making skills greatly improved.

The project provided channels for interacting with one another more often and widened communication avenues for establishing linkages

and partnerships. Moreover, it transferred control of the technology and responsibility to track the project's own goals and objectives to the participants and to the group as a whole.

Limitations

The difficulties and limitations that the group identified were mainly in the areas of:

- * High cost of using the technology – How can grassroots organizations own and maintain a video production facility of their own? Are funding agencies willing to fund these projects? Will the project be sustainable in terms of maximally utilizing the equipment and having trained members who will produce videos on a continuing basis? The time element has to be considered also.
- * Time-consuming process – Can groups spend that much time for endeavors like this? Ensuring participation of the general membership will mean considerable period that will be spent for discussions, consultations, and similar activities.
- * Technical expertise is needed in the management and operation of the equipment and facility.
- * Groups may use the equipment and facility not for the intended purpose.

In summing up the experiences of REDO, one can say that video production was a learning experience for the team and the groups who were engaged in the activities.

In the use of advanced communication technology, a development frame can be introduced to consciously generate materials about the situation of the poor or marginalized and present their realities in a medium, expressing themselves using their own language. *Kabado kami sa pagharap sa kamera* (We were nervous to face the camera). *Basta totoo ang sinasabi mo, kabiti nakapikit ka, mabibigkas mo ang gusto mong sabihin* (As long as what you are saying is true, you can say what you want to say even if your eyes are closed). *Kabado ako pero gusto ko talaga ng maiparating sa labat ang kalagayan namin dito sa Vitas.* (I am afraid but I want to let the public know the real situation here in Vitas).

Indeed, participation is important to make programs and projects relevant, meaningful, and sustainable. This was also attested by those who participated in the video production.

In the development process, token or lip- service involvement is not participation. It will only have value when the officers and the general membership know the status of the project and are committed from its start to finish.

Referring particularly to PVP, while in the process of video production and enriching the construct in the context of development and advocacy work, the experiences of REDO showed that putting into practice the principles of organizing while relating with partners/ subjects during the making of the materials led to the empowerment of the latter. White (2003) was correct when she mentioned the centrality of the perspective and role of the communication catalyst/videographer in the production. One's regard and the way the individual relates with members and groups will spell the difference between passivity on one hand and pro-activity on the other.

The orientation of PVP as well as knowledge in the technical aspect of the work will give them a sense of confidence to use the equipment for their benefit. Improvements and problems while the working on a project must be known so that those involved can learn from them.

On the issue of access to and control of technology, the maximum objective is for the marginalized sectors to own and manage a video production facility on a sustained basis and to have the capability in making their own video materials for advocacy. If this is not possible, partnerships with government and non-government organizations with the same vision as theirs can be established to produce advocacy materials that can be used in classrooms and communities, as well as in seminars and conferences in order to facilitate social transformation.

PVP as a construct has an ideological basis. That is its strength. The challenge now is for development workers and communication catalysts to maximize its use.

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Leticia S. Tojos is a university extension specialist at the Research, and Extension for Development Office of the University of the Philippines College of Social Work and Community Development. She earned her doctoral degree in communication from the U.P. College of Mass Communication.