Abstract

This paper explores the conceptual and methodological framework of the Komuniti Tok Piksa project, which is both, research project and community action initiative. Visual research tools are used within an indigenous research framework in order to study behavioural practices, perceptions and needs in regards to HIV and AIDS in Papua New Guinea. It explores the ways in which visual methods when paired with a community action approach can be used to facilitate social change and to encourage new engagements between researchers and participants.

Introduction

The South Pacific island nation of Papua New Guinea is facing a serious HIV epidemic. In 2008, 99% of HIV positive case reported in the Pacific were in Papua New Guinea (UNAIDS 2009: 2). Apart from infrastructure and remoteness of places, PNG’s cultural and linguistic diversity are often mentioned in the failure to produce wide reaching HIV prevention campaigns. In an attempt to reach communities, media prevention and education campaigns have been launched, however, often instilling fear into local populations due to the challenges of formulating culturally appropriate messages. The level of stigmatisation within PNG communities is alarming and considering the increasing number of HIV positive people, campaigns need to go further than to address prevention, but create a dialogue among the PNG population about all facettes of HIV and AIDS.

This paper explores some of the conceptual and methodological (research design) aspects of a new HIV/AIDS prevention initiative, the Komuniti Tok Piksa1. This research and community action project employs predominately visual research techniques within an indigenous research framework in order to, firstly, study behavioural practices, perceptions and needs in regards to HIV/AIDS in Papua New Guinea and, secondly, develop communication tools for social change within a Pacific Island context. The authors, who are directly engaged in this project in various roles, explore here some of the ways in which visual methods when paired with a community

1 The Komuniti Tok Piksa project is collaboration between the Centre for Health Communication at the University of Technology in Sydney and the University of Goroka in Papua New Guinea (PNG) under Principal Investigator Prof. Rick Iedema. The Project is funded by the PNG National Aids Council and AusAID.
action approach can be used to facilitate social change and to encourage new engagements between researchers and participants.

This project advocates that visual and creative ways of communication allow for explorations of new spaces to be developed between communities and researchers. Visual communication, as a research tool, can build on existing community communication structures and serve as a catalyst for sharing indigenous knowledge. Participants can be empowered through recording their voices which translated into visual messages can later be heard/shared in the public sphere (Rodriguez, 2001; see Sundar Harris, 2008 for a Pacific Islands example). Visual messages in the predominantly oral cultures of PNG have the power to incorporate local narratives and provoke an emotional response from viewers, stimulating thought and discussion. It is this space for dialogue within the communities that creates ownership for formulating local messages in regards to HIV/AIDS and that has the potential to generate social change.

Following a participatory action research approach, the authors here present their reflections on key concepts and research design actions that have been collaboratively explored at the first stages of this project.

The Papua New Guinean Context

The country’s distinctive context sets up a challenging framework that needs careful consideration. PNG is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse societies in the world, with more than 750 distinct languages (called tok ples in Melanesian Pidgin) in a population of under six million people (Foley 2000: 358). This diversity has often been considered a challenging factor for, what is considered, development. About 85 per cent of PNG’s population live in rural areas, largely dependent on subsistence agriculture and organised around groups of extended families (Papoutsaki and Rooney, 2006). Half of the adult population is non-literate and the many disadvantaged populations speak tok ples, not English, Tok Pisin (Pidgin) or Motu (the three official lingua franca). The geographical terrain and weak transportation services isolate whole regions, which have little access to information on health, education and electricity (The Joint Country Strategy, 2003).

Under colonial administration from Australia (1905-1975), the changes of society as a result of the imposed and to this day surviving administration structures are still felt in many ways today. The adjustment to a new political system and a centralised national government has disrupted structures in this Melanesian society. Indigenous cultures have not been incorporated in the official nation-making process (Jacobsen, 1995), yet in most cases have kept their integrity on a local level.
In the context of globalisation and ideas of development, global structures are intervening with local identities and understandings of PNG communities. Dominant Western perspectives are imposed on people and in the context of post-colonial PNG continue to survive in the structures of institutions, organisations and in the minds of people as superior. Local knowledge and values are not well understood and not used as measurements and criteria for the state of society in international comparison. In a constant Western assessment, PNG is seen as a failed state (Papoutsaki, 2006), with high crime rates in Port Moresby, the capital, and low ratings in the overall UNDP developing countries statistics.

The discovery of the Highlands, the area where the Komuniti Tok Piksa project is implemented, in the 1930s revealed an unexpected large population in the interior mountainous part of the country. Clans with no contact to the outside world were discovered until the 1960’s. Because these lives unfolded within limited geographical areas, people directly communicated with one another through words, sounds and other signals. In these oral cultures, the recording of events was hardly known. The experience of past generations was passed on directly to young people through working alongside or listening to their elders (Rooney, 2004). However, the relatively recent and sudden exposure to the outside world has had a multiple impact on these communities, which had to open up their natural resources for extracting operations, receive an education alien to their traditional ways and convert to Christianity under the influence of various missionaries who brought their Western/Christian values (Papoutsaki & Rooney, 2006; Rooney et al, 2004). Strongly rooted in their culture, they tried to make sense of the outside impacts, accepting some of them and rejecting others. Today still, the majority of the population in the Highlands region continues to live in the rural areas (2000 National Census) with communities maintaining to a large extent their own specific hierarchies, myths, rituals and languages. The adult literacy rate is still one of the lowest in the country. In the Western Highlands Province, for instance, it stands at 23 per cent, while just a 1.8 per cent can read and access news media (WHP Population Action Plan 2006 – 2010).

Increasingly though, this population is taking part in a technological world, seemingly in contrast to their natural environment. An increasing exposure to new technologies, such a digital mobile communication and an influx of media products from overseas are expanding rapidly the communication landscape of the country.

**Voice, Access and Participation in Communication Processes**

The old argument that the poor, disadvantaged sections of the population in developing countries live in a state of ‘undercommunication’ (Melkote, 1991: 145), is still valid today in PNG, despite the technological advancements in the communications sector and several decades after political
The media can facilitate greater access to people lacking a voice, but media output needs to be relevant and useful to them, allowing the expression of their opinions on matters of public concern (Rooney et al, 2004:1).

Much of what has been promised by the information society, including better access to vital knowledge for health and education, has yet to reach the majority of the ordinary people. Because they lack the resources to make their voices heard in the country’s shifting social, economic and cultural landscape, the rural and disadvantaged communities face the danger of being left out of decision making that affects their lives and becoming the recipient of foreign media products with little alternatives to look for (ibid; also see WACC, 2001).

The important task of communication as a social process that can help to bring social change (see Fraser & Estrada, 2003) has been left to the countries few, often foreign owned, media which do not serve all sections of society; instead they concentrate on elite groups such as politicians and businessmen to the exclusion of ordinary people. The challenge to access arises because of the lack of affordable and equitable access to media by the rural population. The penetration per 1,000 people of radios is 86 sets, TV 17 sets and newspapers 14 (UNDP, 1998). Poor nation-wide network coverage of radio, TV and newspapers; fractured network of public broadcasting stations; government health, education and agriculture information not reaching the people, whether provided directly by government or indirectly through the media; and many people not receiving media in a language that they understand; those are some of the main access issues (Rooney et al, 2004, Papoutsaki and Rooney, 2006; AusAID, 2004; UNDP, 1998). The distribution of newspapers is extremely limited outside urban centres. High rates of illiteracy make newspapers inaccessible to many people, not to mention that the cost of a daily newspaper is an expense not all can afford. ‘Paper is expensive, heavy and costly to transport by air’. PNG is a country that has little road infrastructure and a costly air transportation system (Morgan quoted in Nash, 1995, p. 36).

It is not only access to information that is problematic, but the content as well. PNG has the biggest media industry in the region, however, foreign ownership, colonial legacies in media attitudes and training, insufficient interest from government and civil society in public information, poor communication amongst civil society and media organizations and dominance of Western communication approaches have all contributed to the production of communication content that is not reflecting the socio-cultural context and needs of communities (ibid). Furthermore, the lack of audience-driven content raises the issue of voice and participation. Communities’ views and concerns are rarely reflected in the current media content, which use predominately official sources of information reflecting the views of the urban, educated elites. There is limited audience participation and feedback. Few forums are held where the voice of
people can be pre-recorded, commenting on issues of public interest. Lack of resources and basic equipment further aggravates the situation (AusAID, 2004).

The new generations increasingly engage in new media tools while watching many of their traditional customs fade in their local villages. The introduction of an affordable nation wide digital mobile network in 2007 has contributed to increasing communication possibilities among the population. In addition, since the new millennium, we have seen the emergence of *haus piksas* in many Highland villages. These are movie houses which often screen films non-stop, predominantly from overseas, such as Asia, Africa or India. These *haus piksas* to some extend replace the common gathering place in villages. The passive reception of overseas content poses some danger in undermining local values and further highlights issues of voice, access and participation in the public sphere.

The issues of access, voice and participation in public communication process accentuate the challenges in disseminating information contributing in raising public awareness about HIV/AIDS.

**The challenge of addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic in PNG**

HIV/AIDS in PNG was first diagnosed in 1987. By 2004 it was considered a serious generalised epidemic (NACS 2008). Infections have been increasing at approximately 30% per year since 1997 and it is estimated that 88-70% of these infections occur in rural areas (NACS, 2006a). Lack of coordination of prevention strategies has restricted effective action combating the spread of the disease. Misinformation and confusion about causes, effects and transmission is widespread and extremely damaging to education and prevention campaigns (NACS, 2006b). Earlier interventions through the media have had a number of effects, including an increase in stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV (PLWH), uncertainty about transmission modes. Some mass media interventions, including the ‘scare tactic’, Dr. Clement Malau’s forward advertisement, ABCs of HIV & AIDS and the Condom song, mostly lacked a locally grounded perspective. The HIV/AIDS epidemic PNG demands now innovative research approaches that encourage the communities to utilize their own resources.

In light of the adverse effects of mainstream media awareness on HIV & AIDS in Papua New Guinea, several HIV/AIDS programs varying in approach and methods have been developed over the last few years, including initiatives by the very large community of local and international NGOs engaging mostly from a ‘development’ perspective, the numerous Churches and governmental bodies. Some stand out because they have chosen to develop original and creative ways to raise awareness that target local communities. PNG VSO’s engaging directly with local
Volunteer Services Overseas (VSO) in PNG set out to refine the use of theatre as a tool for HIV & AIDS education and positive behaviour and attitude change. This was done through its Tokaut AIDS Awareness Community Theatre (ACT) programme. The ACT team comprised VSO staff specialised in drama and theatre and community based theatre groups from two communities of Western Highlands and Madang Provinces (Levy, 2008a, b). Both target communities were regarded as most remote, where media exposure, access to basic services, transport and communication system are limited. It is apparent at the onset that ACT employed largely a Participatory Ethnographic Action Research (EAR) methodology together with theatre techniques that had a two-fold purpose; to create awareness of HIV & AIDS as well as gathering data on the community’s awareness levels and behavioural attitudes, especially towards issues of sexuality.

The first round of theatre performances, testing the scripts in the two communities highlighted three points. Firstly, the need for thoroughly considering local and cultural contexts those communities live in and know fully well. The first scripts focused on the need to impart critical and highly technical information regarding HIV&AIDS. This overrode the need to ensure a cultural and local context in which to receive the message. The message was perceived as coming from the outside, therefore, ineffective. In response, the team decided to revisit the first script and used local knowledge, interpret local context and customs and included these in the dialogue and action. Secondly and further stressing - the cultural-insider in intervention activities are an integral and important part of interpreting local and cultural contexts. Including their knowledge in the planning and development phases can contribute to positive outcomes, as seen in this visual approach. Thirdly, the reflexivity approach by ACT allowed performers to look back on their
work and re-strategize. The performers realized the importance of theatrical devices. These included; the message, structure, defining space, developing scenarios, working with a narrator, directing and rehearsing. They noted that these devices needed to work especially with the audience in mind. These were immediate reflections of the group’s work.

In a follow up larger evaluation (see Levy, 2008a,b) consistency of knowledge about HIV & AIDS as an effect of the theatre performances became more evident. Remote communities still expressed a weariness due a lack of knowledge about modes of transmission, maintaining that mosquito bites, saliva and urine contact can allow transmission. There was large response to the impact of testing. Many respondents noted that a negative result would cause great relief and greater caution would be taken. A positive response would cause people to either warn others of the disease or react adversely. There was also an increase in cross-generational communication with parents expressing concerns about educating the young. The same desired effect is not evident in cross-gender communication between man and woman. The most interesting of results comes from the school-age children who displayed a great deal of knowledge around HIV & AIDS, even without having experienced sex. The impact of Tokaut AIDS was summed in a local teacher’s comment, “They have learnt to live with the idea that HIV & AIDS is among them”. The acceptance of the presence of HIV in the area is made obvious through the requests for information, not about transmission and prevention anymore, but about blood test, counselling and care for person living with HIV or AIDS (Levy, 2008:44).

A significant recommendation was for mediums such as theatre (meaning ‘To see’), to contemplate community engagement tools such as community conversations for deeper community changes and consensus. The seeing, hearing, relating and understanding aspect of visual mediums can break linguistic and literacy barriers and engage people in dialogue on issues affecting them (ibid).

Within the Pacific Islands region, another impacting awareness initiative has been the Wan Smolbag Theatre’s production, 10-part series Love Patrol soap opera, disseminated over broadcast television and DVDs. Following the South African successful Soul City model, Love Patrol is an edutainment (defined as the art of making social issues part of popular and high-quality entertainment formats, see soulcity.org.za/about-us) television series that aims to raise awareness on socially significant issues such as sexually transmitted disease (including HIV), crime, gender inequality, family breakdown and violence (for the role of entertainment and education as strategy for social change see Singhal and Rogers, 1999). Love Patrol’s reach covers most of the South Pacific island countries including Vanuatu, Fiji, PNG, American Samoa, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Samoa. Surveys from Vanuatu, Fiji and the Solomon Islands showed that for each country over 80% of those surveyed have watched the series (Love Patrol
Evaluation Report). The common feedback was about Love Patrol’s realistic quality as well as the messages being conveyed that could easily be identified with by Pacific islanders. It was noted as an effective vehicle in the promotion of dialogue and communication, tailored to people in local contexts, fostering community dialogue and communication whilst promoting advocacy, presentation and change (ibid:3-4). Taboo issues could now be discussed openly in homes as it was been watched openly and no one was blamed for raising the topic. Through entertainment and using visual language, the series have affected people’s knowledge and attitude, stressing a need for more comprehensive HIV, AIDS and social significant information. While the impact is unclear for PNG, the potential is there, indicating another approach to reaching directly the homes of ordinary Papua New Guineans.

The project: Komuniti Tok Piksa

The Komuniti Tok Piksa project engages researchers on multiple levels in dialogues with the communities in regards to HIV and AIDS. The project uses PNG’s strong visual tradition and the idea of performance as concepts to build on processes that bring about engagement and community change. Komuniti Tok Piksa develops both a research tool that tries to understand the virus on a different level - how behaviours are acted out, how they are performed and lived - as well as it seeks to create educational material that can reach a wide community network in PNG. The project’s unique features are an appropriation/localisation of visual research process to the Melanesian culture; the opportunity for the camera to offer a reflection tool to the community and the engagement of young researchers in the emerging potential of visual and arts-based methods.

Forerunner to the project is Yumi Piksa, a pilot project which was streamlined and tested through the engagement of university students through filmmaking with PNG Highland communities (www.yumipiksa.org). The Yumi Piksa pilot project was a participatory action research project through which local students in the area of Expressive Arts developed their own processes of negotiating the filmmaking process with the community members. It explored the use of visual methodologies within a Melanesian research framework2 and the potential to enhance research capacity at PNG universities through the use of arts-based methods (Thomas, forthcoming). Yumi Piksa has demonstrated unique engagement of students and communities by using visual tools, a high capacity for student researchers in engaging in arts-based research processes and the capacity of producing films that communities identify with through localising the filmmaking process. Within the Yumi Piksa project, the art of filmmaking was explored in the context of research applying a Melanesian framework. Filmmaking processes were interrogated for their

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2 A Melanesian research framework is an approach that incorporates a Melanesian worldview within the research methodology and design (Valance, 2007). Melanesian is a term to describe the common cultural features of people from Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji.
value as research process. Most visible was the potential of the visual medium to be used as immediate reflection for individuals and groups to engage in dialogue and self-critique.

Photo 2: The Yumi Piksa crew interviewing Ataizo Motahe in Massy Village, Eastern Highlands Province PNG (Photo by Verena Thomas)

The Komuniti Tok Piksa project uses the self-reflexive potential of filmmaking to engage participants in visual dialogues about their own environments and their own situations, stimulating an engagement that comes from within their cultural setting. While in some instances, the camera can be seen as intrusive, seeing one-self and one’s community on screen can provide a new space for engagement. This ‘new space’ is particularly important when discussing sensitive issues in the context of HIV and AIDS.

Research Design

The Komuniti Tok Piksa research design draws on a number of concepts whose interconnections create a unique opportunity to face some of the challenges in regards to HIV and AIDS in this area of the country. Through collaboration between the team’s diverse members (local and non-local, grassroots and academic) and engagement with the participant communities in a holistic approach that embraces the socio-cultural dynamics of these communities, this research project uses predominantly visual techniques in order to develop communication tools for social change within the local context. The combination of these approaches presents an unprecedented study in the Highlands of PNG.

Some of the key questions this project seeks to address are: How can visual methods be used to explore challenging social/health issues such as HIV and applied innovatively in their prevention and education; How can the voices of the communities be brought into the public sphere using visual communication and create a common consciousness among people; How can local narratives and indigenous knowledge be incorporated most significantly in researching and designing strategies for HIV prevention in a specific socio-cultural context.

Using a Participatory Action Research approach, the research team has seen the design and conceptual approach framework of the planning process developing gradually through
discussions and negotiations with the various team members and the communities. In that sense, both the design and framework evolve and develop continuously, even during the process itself (Bodorkos and Pataki, 2009: 329).

Approach

The core element of this research is based on the concept of action research, including elements of ethnographic action research (EAR) (Tacchi, Slater, & Hearn, 2003) and participatory action research (PAR) (Wadsworth, 1998). The epistemological foundations of PAR, such as being context-bound, focusing on real-life problems, seeking for diversity and trans-disciplinarily (Bodorkos and Pataki, 2009: 316), resonate with the nature and aims of this project.

Action research starts “from an orientation of change with others” rather than the change of others (Reason & Bradbury, 2008:1). Participants, researchers and community members engage in processes of cyclic action from observing, reflecting, planning and action (Ibid.). The project seeks to assess the construction of knowledge and the negotiation of meaning on the level of communities, as well as in higher education by employing the benefits of using visual technologies. The aim of the research is that by tackling both areas – higher education research and community development - a dialogue is developed that has its roots in Melanesian culture and appropriates the use of video suitable to the community’s own interests.

The situational characteristic of action research allows for the evaluation of individual and community transformations, revealing how knowledge is processed and constantly (re)formulated within the discourse of culture (see Gegeo, 2002). Visual analysis and ethnographic techniques are used to engage community members in interpreting interviews and behaviors. Video ethnography is increasingly recognized as an effective and accessible methodology, particularly in its ability to create dialogical approaches to change (Iedema et. al. 2006). Community interpretations are workshopped with local researchers and participants through reflexive visual analysis. Ethnographic data also serves the translation of the understandings of local narratives into the development of educational material. Firstly, through the participation of student researchers and junior staff who are part of research teams, conducting research in all five Highlands provinces; secondly, through the participation of community groups within their local setting. Each team has researchers that are community/cultural insiders, enabling the building of relationships built in trust, contributing in the creation of ‘uncoercive communicative spaces’ (Bodorkos and Pataki, 2009). Each team spends time in identifying the communicative ecology of these communities (Tacchi, Slater, & Hearn, 2003). Data is collected from research teams within their provincial team and consolidated for the larger project at the University of Goroka.
Setting and Participants

The research project is based at the University of Goroka, the only University in the Highlands region. The University has a focus on Teacher training education and attracts students from all over the country. While ‘Creative Industries’ is taught as an area of study, taking a significant part within the institution, arts-based research methods are seldom incorporated in the research designs students apply in their current research projects.

The innovative research approach within the Highlands provides researchers an opportunity to apply local concepts and act them out through community participation. Using creative methods, as Knowles and Cole (2008) have argued, is “part of a broader commitment to shift the dominant paradigmatic view that keeps the academy and community separated: to acknowledge the multiple dimensions that constitute and form the human condition – physical, emotional, spiritual, social, cultural – and the myriad ways of engaging in the world – oral, literal, visual, embodied” (p. 60). Arts-based research methods are closely linked to cultural approaches to transformation and social change. Highlands cultures are known for their capacity to express themselves creatively. The setting provides a unique location to explore engagement in creative research methods with communities.

Contributing researchers are final-year undergraduate or postgraduate students, as well as junior staff members from the University of Goroka. Overall the project engages 20-25 researchers. Participants are divided into 5 provincial groups and will be conducting research in at least two communities in every Highland province. The number of community participants varies depending on the relationships formed by the researchers. Researchers are provided with a workshop program exploring the areas specific to the Komuniti Tok Piksa project, including an understanding of the overall approach of research for social change, visual methodologies, HIV and AIDS social research and Melanesian values and exploration of local interpretations of these concepts and how they translate in Tok Pisin or/and local languages.
Visual Research Process

The engagement in visual and filmmaking processes expands the action research framework. Due to the large amount of visual data collected, the research facilitators undergo a selection process of the material that will be incorporated in feedback sessions with the communities. Reflection of the recorded material provides an additional level of validation of the analysis of the data and serves as a trigger for dialogue among participants (further explored in part on Visual Dialogues). By using visual tools and looking back at them, researchers as well as community members enter a process of participation, observation, filming, selection, reflection and positive change (see Iedema & Merrick, 2008). Through its explorative nature, the project stays open to adopting the most effective and culturally appropriate processes. In a country with strong oral traditions, linguistic diversity and high illiteracy rate, it can be argued that visual methods are more appropriate in engaging communities in research and community action practices. Through their potentially higher level of engagement, research results are more likely to benefit these communities.

Conceptual Approaches

Communication for Social Change

HIV and AIDS has long been recognised as more than just a health issue. It is significantly impacting on development issues in affected countries. In developing countries, already limited services are further stretched by the epidemic. While development communication is long recognised as a specific field, critiques of the conceptualisation of development have explored to what level approaches to development really improve the lives of the grassroots (Escobar, 1995). The two prevalent models in the field of communication for development and social change, despite their many variations, aim to either produce a common understanding among all participants in the a development initiative by implementing a development project (top down model) or engage the grassroots in making decisions that enhance their own lives (bottom up model) (Servaes and Shuang, 2007:2). While many HIV and AIDS messages have been mostly created by government and marketing agencies, the idea of communication for social change (CFSC) provides some ideas in terms of messages created at the local level (see Servaes, 2008).

Identified within this field is the idea that participants need to be owners and active creators of their own development. Within the area of development communication which has seen modernisation and dependency theory as well as the multiplicity model, communication for social change has argued for localised use of communication tools through which “people themselves define who they are, what they need and how to get what they need in order to improve their own lives” (Parks et al. 2005). The CFSC model describes a process “where ‘community dialogue’
and ‘collective action’ work together to produce social change in a community that improves the health and welfare of all its members” (Figueroa, et al. 2002: iii). By providing a space for dialogue, local groups can identify their own issues and be involved in decision-making processes affecting their communities.

Using video in the context of communication for social change means facilitating a process in which community members can participate as active creators, decision-makers and interpreters of their own visual representations. In contrast to mass mediated television, video for social change often focuses on the process of creating media more than on the end result (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001). In the process the camera becomes a tool, engaging community members as social actors in the mediation of their social and cultural content (Ginsburg, 1995). As such, participants actively create meaning while being recorded. The captured material then makes the process of meaning making visible to both, community members and researchers.

**Developing Indigenous Research Concepts**

The field of communication in academic research has been dominated by a Western discourse. While through communication for social change the practicalities of projects have been localised, the theoretical components of designing communication research projects often follow Western frameworks. Similar to other disciplines research frameworks often remain deeply rooted in Western thought. Pacific scholars have argued that there is a need to incorporated Pacific epistemologies within research frameworks applied in the region (Gegeo & Gegeo-Watson, 2002; Huffer & Qalo, 2004). This is not simply about incorporating indigenous content into research projects but understanding how knowledge is created and theorised in Pacific communities. The gap between individualistically orientated Western principles and a more community engaged Pacific worldview has impacted on higher education and on the performance of community development projects (Papoutsaki, 2006: 6). The incorporation of indigenous perspectives into research frameworks in most cases provides a more ethical way of conducting research in Pacific communities, more valid ways of interpreting research and overall will provide insiders and outsiders with appropriate frameworks to impact policy decisions (Huffer & Qalo, 2004).

For Papua New Guinea, it seems appropriate to apply a Melanesian research framework. Relatively little developed in theory a Melanesian research framework overlaps with an indigenous research framework (Vallance, 2007). Paramount to conducting research under a Melanesian research framework is the respect to the community and regarding any research undertaken in the light of benefiting the community at large. It is invested in maintaining relationships with participants and these relationships are manifested through a process of exchange (reciprocity). Traditional academic text-based forms are limiting in the ways in which researchers can engage in research practices within a Melanesian framework. Artistic expression,
which has been central to Papua New Guinean community life, provides us with further possibilities to engage with communities in research. Visual tools offer opportunities to create spaces for artistic participation and a more equal exchange in predominantly oral cultures.

**Visual Methodologies and Social Change**

Information alone does not generate changes, whereas communication - which implies participation, sharing of knowledge in a horizontal way, and respect for diversity and culture - is key to social change. (Gumucio-Dagron, 2003:3)

[Video] is indeed kaleidoscopic and is responsive to the hands in which it is held. (White, 2003:99)

![Photo 4: Different generations being interviewed in Okiufa (PNG)](Photo by Verena Thomas)

Visual Methodologies and arts-based inquiry focus on creating dialogical engagement. Arts-based methods aim at creating relationship and providing an “arena of exchange” for participants (Bourriaud, 2002:18). The Komuniti Tok Piksa project focuses on the process of filmmaking within communities. While it creates an engaged space, the process of making films provide us with creative opportunities to complement and enhance the research processes. It can further provide a space in which social change can occur. There are various characteristics of filmmaking that provide such opportunities. In the following we focus on two concepts significant to the Komuniti Tok Piksa project: (1) The potential of film to be used as a tool for individual and group reflection and (2) the idea that film can be used to incorporate local concepts and ideas in the research process.

**Visual Dialogues**

Visual experiences form a key component in our daily lives. “Visual knowledge provides one of our primary means of comprehending the experience of other people” (MacDougall, 2006: 5). Visual information stays in our memory stronger than textual information does and images connect strongly with our emotional experiences. Many of us have been influenced by films that
we have seen and that we remember long after. Here, we would like to explore the idea of film in the context of what we term ‘visual dialogue’. By visual dialogue we mean the engagement through film or photography as a process of reflection through which a dialogical engagement among a group is stimulated.

With the advancing of technology, video has become an immediate tool. Gone are the days that we have to wait until the film is developed by a chemical process. We can record and watch the captured material immediately. This process has immense reflective potential as it can be shared within a group, letting everyone share the same perspective. In reality everyone has a different perspective. Video condenses our perspective. It allows us to focus on what has been recorded. By guiding the recording process through a facilitator, research topics can be explored by generating a focus by the group.

The Fogo process in Newfoundland in the 1960’s, organised under the National Film Board of Canada’s Challenge for Change program and today known as the precedent for the emergence of the field of participatory video, demonstrated the strength of video for community empowerment. Filmmaker Colin Low and community development worker Donald Snowden at first intended to document the reality of communities in 'poverty of information and organisation' (Snowden, 1984) and to identify social problems. During the process of filmmaking, Low and Snowden - who had envisaged potentially training people in filmmaking - started to experiment with direct feedback from the community and collaboration in editing decisions. The result was the establishment of new channels of communication between community members as well as different communities, and most importantly self-reflection of the community members (Crocker, 2003).

![Photo 5-6: Ataizo Motahe and his wife watching their film in their house in Massy (PNG)](image)

The process of viewing one-self has been described as empowering and raising self-confidence among participants. "The act of seeing ourselves can join the links of self-observation, establishing a clear identity that may have been nonexistent. Identity and self-definition are necessary prerequisites for personal empowerment" (White, 2003:66). In the process of seeing
ourselves we have the opportunity to create a distant position to ourselves, reflecting on our actions.

For communities, the collective watching of video material means the negotiation of shared meanings and understandings. It creates an opportunity to discuss perceptions within a group. This process becomes particularly important within the context of HIV and AIDS which is surrounded by taboos and stigmatisation. Knowledge is put out in the open and through collective viewing everyone is brought on the same level for discussion.

**Researcher and Community Action**

Visual and creative ways of communication allow for explorations of new spaces to be developed between researcher, educators and communities. Tools are offered for reflection and feedback on the communities’ situation.

Visual messages in the predominantly oral cultures of PNG have the power to incorporate local narratives and provoke an emotional response from viewers, stimulating thought and discussion. Video has the potential to be both private and public. Messages can be generated for viewing in the community but also for wider audiences, profiling the communities’ stories and presenting people’s ideas in the public sphere. Visual communication as a research tool can build on existing community communication structures and serve as a catalyst for sharing indigenous knowledge. Participants become empowered through recording their voices which can later be heard in the public sphere (Rodriguez, 2001; Sundar Harris 2008). Communities feel valued when their ideas are recorded. As Stella Lukula, one of the *Yumi Piksa* participants has experienced “…our communities have lots to tell and by words we won’t value that, but through video we will value that” (Interview with Thomas, 2009). At the same time, the communal spaces where visual expressions were featured on a regular basis in Papua New Guinean villages are changing.

Young generations, already attuned to technology, see the engagement with visual recording technology as a challenge. Currently the issue of HIV and AIDS in Papua New Guinea as represented in the media is instilling fear and negative perceptions into people’s minds. Images and language are foreign. Young and upcoming researchers can play a crucial role in facilitating engagement with media, the community action to produce their own messages and educate others in the country.

**Conclusions**

It is the visual space for dialogue within the communities that creates ownership for formulating local messages in regards to HIV/AIDS and that has the potential to generate social change. Locally created content contributes towards maintaining the cultural diversity while reaching to
others by producing not standardised messages, but tools that can bring out each community’s ideas and messages and share them with others.

The design of the project’s research methodologies within an indigenous framework in combination with visual methods allows not only for crucial data to emerge but presents a platform for research capacity building in Papua New Guinea and the wider Pacific region as new spaces of knowledge sharing between researchers and communities are created. In the process, both researchers and communities become co-facilitators and co-creators of new knowledge and ideas.

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