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research: A visual methods approach to HIV  
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# Engaging youth in community action research: A visual methods approach to HIV and AIDS awareness

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## Abstract

Young people are among the most affected and vulnerable groups in the HIV epidemic. Targeting young people in prevention strategies requires inclusive and participatory approaches. This paper discusses a film production project that involved youths in a remote rural community in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. It explores some of the processes and impacts of integrating a visual methods community action project in a local community context while targeting young people in an effort to engage them in a reflective dialogue on HIV and AIDS.

## Introduction

Young people or adolescents are a key population highly affected by and vulnerable to the HIV epidemic. "Adolescents are the only group worldwide for whom AIDS-related deaths have increased" (Kelly-Hanku et al., 2017, p. 1). In Papua New Guinea (PNG), where this research project took place, young people between the ages of 15 and 24 continue to be one of the most affected groups. A recent study argues for the need to better understand the lives of adolescents living with HIV (Kelly-Hanku et al., 2017). Young people face specific challenges that must be considered and it is therefore most important to involve young people meaningfully in programmes that are targeted towards them. In addition, programmes among this population

should “harness their creativity, resilience and resourcefulness” (Mek et al., 2017. p. 30). Prevention strategies therefore need to integrate innovative communication concepts in order to fulfil the needs of today’s young people.

This film production was a component of the Komuniti Tok Piksa<sup>1</sup> project, which was both a research project and community action initiative. Visual research tools were used within an Indigenous research framework in order to study behavioural practices, perceptions and needs in regards to HIV and AIDS in PNG. The Ruti village drama film project explored 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 and among various community groups.

The project engaged youths who were members of an organised church group. The drama production *Broken home* began as an idea proposed by youths who identified the common theme of polygamy, and how it links to the spread of the HIV virus experienced in the community. The youths took on the challenge to develop the script, do the casting, act, direct and screen their final product. While the first screening was co-facilitated by one of the researchers, the second and third screenings were done solely by the youths, during which they spent time reflecting on their film and on community feedback. The community reaction to the filmmaking process and outcomes indicated an increase in community dialogue and critical reflection on their behaviour in regards to HIV and AIDS. The production offered the youths a space to express their ideas, which were recognised by the community through the screenings. It re-positioned the youths within their own community as active members, and a dialogue was facilitated that cut across a previously difficult and sensitive topic. As a result, for the project, the youths have become more critical about their roles as advocates, seeking support from provincial groups to continue the use of media within their regional area.

Using an Indigenous approach and the creative use of media tools to engage young members of the community in participating in this project facilitated a process of integrating their knowledge of cultural processes in addressing social issues related to HIV and AIDS. The open and flexible approach created a space where participants voiced their concerns and thoughts and were able to develop these further in collaboration with the researchers. Participatory action research concepts of dialogue and reflection, using local processes, set a framework for other projects addressing social issues in the region.

## The context

Despite Papua New Guinea carrying the largest burden of the HIV epidemic in the Pacific region, support for HIV prevention and related activities has decreased in recent years. In 2017, the prevalence rate in PNG was estimated to be 0.9% among adults aged 15 to 49 in a population of about eight million people (UNAIDS, 2017). The epidemic is concentrated among key populations in certain provinces. In particular, the Highlands region has been identified as one of the main geographical areas with higher HIV prevalence rates. Higher

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Komuniti Tok Piksa is Melanesian Pidgin for ‘community talking through the picture’. It can also translate to community talking in parables.

prevalence rates are also found among key groups such as women and girls who sell and exchange sex, men who have sex with men, and transgender women (Kelly-Hanku et al., 2018). Providing treatment to people living with HIV continues to present challenges. Young people have been identified as particularly vulnerable, both in terms of prevention and in terms of remaining on treatments once diagnosed with the virus (Kelly-Hanku et al., 2017).

Despite an improvement in the knowledge of patterns of the epidemic, the National AIDS Council of Papua New Guinea (NAC), at the time when this research study was designed, had noted that there had been an overall lack of epidemiological and behavioural data to steer the national response, specifically in planning for prevention initiatives (2010).

The dynamics of HIV transmission in PNG are influenced by a great diversity of sexual cultures, with different values, norms, beliefs, and practices. The potential for sexual transmission of HIV is heightened by early sexual partnerships, including polygamy, extra-marital sexual partnerships and inter-generational sex; the exchange of sex for cash, goods and services; low and inconsistent condom use; high levels of sexual violence and rape; mobility; and the use of penile inserts and modifications. (NAC, 2010, p. 19)

Due to these reasons, awareness campaigns have faced enormous challenges. As seen in other regions, social-marketing strategies with one-way messages around HIV and AIDS prevention, especially through mass-media product marketing strategies, have only had limited success (Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006). NAC has undertaken a number of initiatives to create awareness, with many church-based organisations (CBOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and corporate organisations developing various strategies.

Theatre and television drama has shown some success in its awareness-raising and behaviour-change application. People prefer the edutainment approach also because it is reaching a largely illiterate population who might not have regular access to mass media (Corrigan, 2006). When the focus is on socio-cultural change, the intervention needs to “focus on what is circulating within the social domain, what is shared within the community ... which will not change any individual behaviour directly, but it will address the climate [and] set a frame for discussion” (Lie, 2008, p. 293).

Two locally driven initiatives have been notable in their innovative response to HIV through the arts as a means of raising awareness and research. *VSO Tokaut AIDS Awareness Community Theatre Project* has been an action research project that trialled community-led theatre in rural communities (Corrigan, 2006; Levy, 2008). The visual quality of theatre defied language barriers as messages were played out to reflect to communities their realities. Along the same line, the *Community Conversations* approach has been adapted by the NAC. In this project, dialogue within communities was used as a facilitation mechanism to identify the driving forces of the epidemic, specific to local settings (Reid, 2010). Most recently, a study used photography, voice and filmmaking to better understand the lived experiences of adolescent girls living with HIV (Mek et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2018).

The localised approach was pivotal in the success of these research and awareness initiatives, along with the appropriation of technology and valuing of

community experiences and beliefs as a way of both facilitating the message creation and creation of knowledge among participants. Such approaches were reinforced in the literature (King & Lupiwa, 2008), which showed that cultural diversities, sensitivities and fear were delaying the success of the national response to HIV and AIDS.

### **The *Komuniti Tok Piksa* project: visual methods and indigenous action research**

The fundamental idea behind the *Komuniti Tok Piksa* project emerged from the need to develop sustainable approaches to slowing the spread of HIV and AIDS by communities themselves in order to be successful. To facilitate this process, KTP developed a number of creative research approaches that sought to move beyond the collection and analysis of research data, to involve participants actively in the creation of prevention strategies that can be used to educate others in PNG (Thomas, Papoutsaki, & Eggins, 2010).

In this approach, it is essential to facilitate a dialogue between researchers, participants and communities. Prevention messages implemented at national level are often one-way, and do not always fit with the communities' communication structures and communication needs. While visual technologies are only partially available in PNG communities, they enable – when used appropriately – a responsive process allowing for reflection and dialogue to emerge.

The *Komuniti Tok Piksa* project sought to facilitate such visual dialogues in the Highlands region of PNG (Thomas, et al., 2010). The camera, whether video or photographic, was used as a tool to collaboratively produce visual material to study, reflect on, and to eventually use to create messages for potentially larger audiences. By doing so, the locally specific driving forces of the HIV and AIDS epidemic were discussed, and solutions developed at the local level. The visual material challenged perceptions and opinions, and viewed collectively prompted community discussion.

The level of participation was determined by the communities; whether they contributed to the visual products by being interviewed or telling their stories, or whether they actively participated in taking pictures. Considering the rapidly emerging technologies in PNG communities it is particularly youth that can be mobilised by the use of technology. By engaging actively in a creative and technological process they engaged in content and formed new relationships in the community. While KTP's approach might be easily defined by the novelty of bringing technology into PNG communities, it was its underlying concepts and processes that allowed for technology to be used in culturally responsive ways and in ways that communities determine as appropriate. The foundation for that was grounded in an Indigenous approach to research and practice.

Bringing new technology into communities that they might otherwise not have access to inevitably can create tensions; and so do research approaches that do not fit with community approaches. An indigenous approach to

research, in our case a Melanesian approach, allowed the KTP researchers to ensure that communities have a say in the research process, and that they take ownership of aspects of the research process. Understanding communities' perceptions does not only require using tools that might provide a better platform for dialogue, it also enables the research project to follow the community's structure and rules.

An indigenous approach to research values relationships and the trust of participants. It takes them on board not as informants but as co-researchers and as significant guides in the research process. Relationships to each other are acknowledged and form the basis for any action research to continue. Knowledge is regarded as relational (Wilson, 2008), and the relational accountability of the researchers becomes paramount to the research process.

Specifically, the Melanesian research approach (Vallance, 2007) used here allowed the leading researcher (Joys Eggins) to anchor the research project within shared values (held by Ruti people and researcher), taking in both environment, social, communication, religious spiritual beliefs and community interaction as fundamental to the research experience and impacting the data. The relational encounter of the researcher and community within those spheres created an enabling environment for the research.

## Methodology

This project combined an Ethnographic Action Research (EAR) (Tacchi, Slater, & Hearn, 2003) and visual methodology (Prosser & Loxley, 2008; Thomas, Papoutsaki, & Eggins, 2010) working in harmony with an Indigenous research approach (Wilson, 2008; Bishop, 1998; Vallance, 2007). The research design acknowledges that socio-cultural history, community context and specific situations play a critical role in determining the methodological approach and impact of project initiatives (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). In our case, the project relied on local knowledge and stories to enable the community to produce the audiovisual material.

The methodology of this project used the Komuniti Tok Piksa's participative filmmaking and reflexive viewing methodology placed in a Melanesian research framework. Essentially, this has been inclusive, creative and relationship-based research. In accordance with this approach, the process involved recruitment and ongoing training of local researchers and students. This has enabled the research to remain sensitive to community values and build on both new and established relationships with individuals and community members as the research process unfolded. Reciprocal relationships were formed as the research team interacted with the community through which stories emerged, were captured on video and shared on screen with the communities themselves. Feeding back recordings served as a catalyst for community-developed HIV and AIDS-prevention strategies.

Together with the community youths and other members, the local researchers activated the PAR cycle (observe-reflect-plan) and put in place a set of actions following initial observation, supported by a baseline study,

and community reflection and discussion. These actions were then realised, being iteratively reflected on and revised as the research progressed and as the community was given opportunities to comment and respond (Thomas, Papoutsaki, & Eggins, 2016). The main steps in the research process included the following:

1. **CONSENT AND COMMUNITY INTRODUCTION:** The local researchers first identified the community to conduct their research in. In this case the selection was influenced by an existing relationship of the leading local researcher (Eggins) with this community through relatives, which facilitated entry into the group. A community introductory meeting was then held with the community and consent was gained from the community.
2. **BASELINE STUDY:** Observation and interviews were conducted to assess the general level of HIV and AIDS education and knowledge in the community. Based on the results, the researchers worked with the community to design a method that was appropriate to their level of knowledge, the way in which information is disseminated, and the particular interests of the community.
  - 2.1 **COMMUNITY PROFILE AND COMMUNICATIVE ECOLOGY:** As part of creating a comprehensive profile of the community and its young members, the research team created a profile of the community (i.e., topology, resources), and facilitated the drawing of their communicative ecology which, along with the baseline, formed the basis of understanding knowledge and information dissemination patterns.
3. **REVIEW RESEARCH TOPICS AND DEBRIEF:** Having iteratively revised the research topics to be inclusive of community perspectives and needs, the researchers revised and planned the next stage. They incorporated relevant community members, as the specifics of the research were finalised.
4. **RECORDING OR CREATION:** The research team, supervised by the principal researcher (Eggins), recorded community narratives or facilitated, where appropriate, creative workshops with the youth. In this case, they recorded a narrative film.
5. **DOWNLOADING, DIGITISING OR EDITING:** The filmed data was then edited on-site, involving participants.
6. **COLLECTIVE VIEWING:** Once the product was prepared, the community was invited for a collective viewing. The researchers, together with the immediate participants, then presented their artistic creations to the community.
7. **REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:** Following the screening, the researchers facilitated community discussion focusing on the issues raised by the visual outcome. Open discussion about HIV and AIDS relevant to the community was stimulated.

Throughout this process, a combination of data collection methods was used, including participant observation, diary and field notes, baseline survey and communicative ecology mapping from the research team members, and on several occasions by the youths themselves who were asked to keep diaries (a combination of written and audio-recorded notes) and map their own communicative ecologies. Data was collected during two field trips to Ruti village in the Western Highlands of PNG between August 2010 and January 2011. The processing of findings followed a linear narrative structure, incorporating data from the different stages of the process followed by a thematic analysis.

## Discussing the process: Getting a sense of the community

### A. FORMING RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship of the researcher with the community, as well as the relationships within the community itself impacted the community's perceptions of the project. The balance of relationship plays out in various forms, through 'politics' both literally and within community contentions, in uncertainties about the project application, in hierarchies with communities, and between researcher and community.

The Indigenous research paradigm, especially from a Melanesian research approach, accepts relationships as fundamental to the experience. Submersion into community relationships, including those between researcher and community, forged by the researcher allow them to unpack experiences and find thematic undercurrents that influence the way people make decisions. The Indigenous researcher is also a stakeholder in the relationship web and thus obliged to maintain it, taking the role of the researcher to another level, this of a critical, reflexive, stakeholder researcher. The researcher's relationship to the community must be clear and significant enough to make them a stakeholder in the relationship.

*Joys came here through a connection; you, young people sitting here know this. She came and slept in my house and worked with the youths and you showed your film in other communities. I am very happy about this.* (Gigau, closing comments, 28 January 2011, Ruti village)

The youth participants understood the need for a strong relationship. The project created a new group among the Ruti youths, one that is seldom together due to community contentions, or because some are away in schools. These divides were not as obvious during the workshop and screening times, and often any contention about the project was either disregarded or spoken in whispers. This in turn shows that the youths were willing to protect their work and achieve new grounds with it.

*Because everything we do promotes our community, district, province and country, we have to work together. Us youths here gathered, must hold hands in order for things to work well. Despite whatever doubts we've had, we've worked together as a team. Both boys and girls must*

*cooperate here. We must maintain what we've done the next time this team comes back and I'd like us to maintain respect. Whatever you ask us to do, we will listen. At first, I thought we'd just be working in the community, but as we sit and reflect, I've come to understand the step-by-step process of our work.* (Solo Rox, closing comments, 28 January 2011, Ruti village)

After the research fieldwork, communication was kept up with the youths in order to maintain the relationship. Project outcomes needed to be contextualised within the relationships formed between researchers, participants and community members during and beyond the time of the project in the community.

#### B. ASSESSING HIV AND AIDS KNOWLEDGE

A baseline study, using guiding interview questions, was conducted with 24 participants from the Ruti community in order to assess the existing HIV and AIDS knowledge prior to the intervention. It was found that HIV is associated with negativity, stigma and death. People living with HIV were looked upon as victims and pity was expressed towards them. Condoms were viewed negatively as promoting promiscuity. The overwhelming response from the Ruti community members was a belief that following Christian principles can deter risky behaviour, especially sex. From the baseline, the emphasis on being faithful was firstly a religious one. The importance of the church in Ruti was evident in the community mapping, communicative ecology, and ensuing dialogue that faith provides protection against HIV.

The youths' Christian references challenged socially tolerated behaviours such as alcohol abuse and sexual promiscuity, among other issues. The youths did express differences in faith and practice; some said being faithful to Christ will help you prevent contracting the virus, but continued to say that they found it disgraceful to have an HIV positive person in the family. There was a lack of knowledge about HIV diagnosis and the symptoms of the disease. The majority of the respondents identified physical appearances as signs of a person living with HIV.

Sources of awareness about HIV were largely received from faith-based and community-based health organisations that would visit the community.

#### C. UNDERSTANDING LOCAL COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES

Like most other rural communities, Ruti has been experiencing a rapid shift in the way people communicate. Technological advancement and improved communications structures have been facilitating new forms of relationship building. This has also impacted on the decisions people are making regarding their sexual behaviours. The emergence of mobile communication has affected how people communicate. Easier access to others through mobile phones has been influencing decisions about sexual behaviour and sexual negotiations, as it emerged from the data.

A mobile phone company, Digicel, has enabled people to communicate even if they do not have phone credit. Digicel has formulated a number of packages such as the one toea<sup>2</sup> text after 10pm, the 18 free SMS after paid texting and CREDIT ME feature allow continued transfer of messages. Users

have developed codes that pertain to certain messages. For example, CREDIT ME K99 translates to 'goodnight' or 'night-night'; CREDIT ME K60 translates to 'hurry' or 'sixty' in Tok Pisin, and might also mean 'come' or 'go', and CREDIT ME K43 translates to 'love you'. All the youths owned mobile phones and charged them using miniature solar panels or at the local trade store for K1 per hour.

Radio has been the most viable medium in rural PNG. However, the media landscape is shifting as more and more *haus piksa* (makeshift cinema houses) pop up in villages (Eby & Thomas, 2016). It was interesting that the youths did not mention the *haus piksa* as much as the adults, who viewed them as having a negative influence on young impressionable people:

*We have to take care of ourselves in the village. If you have a daughter, make sure she isn't standing at the market until 6 o'clock, and boys too. Don't frequent the village cinema, gambling places and social nights. The disease is in the village. The film made reference to the city, but I say it's a lie, the disease is in the village.* (Viewer 8, Ruti screening, 22 August 2010, Ruti village)

*When my husband goes out to the haus piksa or gambling places, I become worried. I have a baby boy and I'm a young woman and I become worried about these actions.* (Female respondent, baseline interview, 22 August 2010, Ruti village)

There was one *haus piksa* in Ruti village and a few along the road situated within community perimeters. The *haus piksa* is usually made from bush materials and looks larger in size than a house. Operators might use generators or have access to electricity, and charge viewers a minimum of 50 toea to watch. They mostly show Hollywood action productions. Minors can be found among adults watching movies rated R (Restricted), MAO (Matured Audiences Only), and PGR (Parental Guidance Required) (Eby & Thomas, 2016). Some community members felt that the films being screened in *haus piksas* encourage promiscuity.

Apart from *haus piksas*, community members showed considerable exposure to the visual medium. The collaborative creation of films was something new, but access to the visual medium is expanding with improved support structures.

*A man from Goroka had acted in a movie like this one. The movie was called O Papa God. These kinds of films have educated us in the communities. We all know about the disease. But when someone dies, we return from the funeral and continue doing the same thing. And we're still contracting the virus.* (Viewer 1, Kotna screening, 28 January 2011, Ruti village)

*The disease has spread to everywhere and we know this through radio, television and read it in the papers, in front of houses, they put sign boards.* (Respondent, baseline interview, 24 January 2011, Ruti village)

Online access to most of the youths in Ruti is difficult, while in-school youths can access the internet. Youths, through the baseline survey, said illicit

materials were being distributed by urban dwellers that frequent the village. The youths referred to them as 'high class' people:

*The people who spread the disease are high-class people who look through the Internet and see how white people have sex. These high-class people's children also view these pictures and teach us and then we get involved in sexual activities and end up with AIDS.* (Respondent, baseline interview, 24 January 2011, Ruti village)

At the time this research was conducted, the communication landscape in Ruti was visibly changing and there was potential to harness visual tools more strongly. This, however, needed to be done carefully and in consideration of the perceptions and attitudes that existed in relation to available communication tools.

#### D. KNOWLEDGE AND CONSENT

In the first visit to Ruti, information and presence of the research team sparked a dialogue about the project. Often there were doubts about benefits, and money or some kind of material gain was debated. That was expected and was discussed during the first visit. The doubts became more pronounced during the first village screening when a man posed a question: "What does the community benefit from this film?" This question most definitely popped up in corridor whispers, and lingered even after the last visit – leading to misconceptions held among some of the youth.

While, out of all the community visits, only one man asked this question, it was nonetheless a big concern as the concept of 'benefit' came through in problematic encounters. The obvious response would be that the community collaborates in the creation of a visual message for social change, but the concepts of monetary gain and behaviour change became somewhat confused.

It seems impossible to remove doubts occasionally articulated by community members in regards to potential monetary benefits from the project. The immediate participants of the project, as discussed below, however, were clear about their voluntary involvement and the benefits to themselves and the community in regards to the film production they proposed to engage in. The researchers sought to engage in reciprocal relationships as much as possible and to establish understanding with participants through ongoing discussions and reflections.

#### E. IMPLEMENTING THE VISUAL PROJECT

In the process of introducing KTP to the community a group of Ruti youths came forward and expressed that they would like to produce a dramatic film based on a story idea they had developed. Through this process the youths' perceptions about HIV and AIDS would be visualised. The story essentially was about a village man who leaves his family to visit a friend in the town of Lae, where he takes a second wife and faces the possibility of life with HIV.

As a team, we advised the youths about how to prepare for drama presentations and how the camera would work with them to capture the story. The participants comprised five females and seven males in the 14 to 27 age group. The youths participated and contributed depending on their

commitments at home. There was a lot of discussion about where to film, the storyline and casting. We decided initially that a narrator's script and screenplay should be drafted for everyone. The researcher (Eggins) assisted the youths with typing the screenplay. The youths then spent a lot of time rehearsing their parts under the bamboo shades, using the script as a guide.

Over a period of one week, the team developed a screenplay, conducted shooting, reflecting and editing in the community. As we filmed, crowds of people would gather, watching the actors performing to the camera and talking among themselves about what was happening. At one point, some of the characters were shifted around, depending on who could play out the role better. The main characters were played by Sesmo, Solo, Maria and Esther, who were natural actors and didn't seem shy or disturbed by the crowd. As planned, they improvised the dialogue, bringing to it the local language and common phrases and gestures. After the shooting, we viewed the footage and noticed areas that needed improvement, and discussed what roles each person was playing.

We spent a few more days filming other scenes and taking footage of the environment around Ruti. The youths would watch as their footage was edited on the laptop. The researcher (Eggins) talked them through how television programmes, the news or other films are made. The youths appeared fascinated by the process and giggled with excitement about how the story was slowly being pieced together. Seeing themselves acting and dialoguing with each other on the laptop made them so excited they would pinch each other and laugh. In that process the youths began to realise the potential benefits of the project, as later articulated by participant Sesmo Teabag:

*I see the youths are showing an interest in this program because it will help us change. This is not for money or for food. I see clearly that this is purely voluntary. This is good because when we showed the film to other communities, they were able to learn. I think it was very helpful because the young people were involved. (Sesmo Teabag, diary entry, 26 January 2011)*

Upon completion the film was screened in three different communities within Dei district. The first screening in Ruti village took place soon after the final cut was made. The second and third screenings took place some months later in Kotna then Kenemba. The film triggered discussions around a number of issues.

#### F. FEEDBACK AND DIALOGUE

The film became a catalyst for dialogue; it attracted an audience and stimulated a thinking process that led to a dialogue among the group. The film idea appeared to be captivating. Audiences watched with smiles as the youths spoke in the local Melpa language and portrayed typical mannerisms and slang. Community members watching the Ruti youth's drama said the film was educational and a good initiative. The main characters quickly became popular, with children calling them by name. This shows that the dramatic impact was substantial as people remembered the characters, what they did and said, and the story itself. The creative visual output enabled people to remember the stories, the conflicts and resolutions in those stories, which all

have underlying messages. These messages were unpacked as the audience began sharing their opinions about various issues following the screenings. One respondent said he appreciated the film as a tool for preserving culture:

*We've never seen a film of our community. It's something the white-man does and brings to us and so we're happy to watch our own. Some of our cultural practices, such as gathering during the mourning period, were acted out by the youths and we are happy to see it on film (Viewer 1, screening, 25 August 2010, Ruti village)*

Another woman spoke about uncertainties towards their husbands:

*I see that we the mothers don't go out looking for this disease. Some women in cities do carry the virus around, but us mothers who remain in the village don't know. We think that our husbands will be faithful to us when they go out, but they bring back the virus. (Female Viewer 7, Kotna screening, January 2011)*

An issue of contention discussed following the screening was the distribution of the anti-retroviral treatment (ART). A male viewer commented:

*The white-man brought this medicine into our community and the six million people in PNG will die from this because people are knowingly spreading the virus. I appeal that we stop ART. (Male Viewer 3, Kenemba screening, January 2011)*

This indicated a lack of understanding with regards to the use of ART and the fact that people can maintain a healthy life once on ART treatment. The dialogue also entailed further questions from the community about uncertainties regarding ART, where to send orphans or how many people in PNG were infected. The youths facilitated the discussion, often referring to the church as a means for prevention and good living. The screening created a space for community dialogue, but was limited in some ways. Firstly, women spoke out less compared to the men, who dominated the discussions. Secondly, the presence of the video camera limited the space for dialogue in a way. Most of the male viewers were talking to the camera rather than with the group.

In essence, the film caused viewers and producers to engage in critical self-reflection. They began discussing issues that they faced as a community and those they faced as individuals:

*We did not realise what was happening inside our families, our homes and our community. But now I'm happy this project has come into our community. I drink beer, get drunk and engage in bad things and I forgot my family. When I look back now, I realise that I shouldn't have been ruining my life like that. (Youth diary entry, 27 January 2011, Ruti village)*

After viewing the film again, the youths noted polygamy, adult peer pressure, psychological effects on children, family wellbeing, and alcohol abuse as the biggest problems coming through in the story.

## Discussing the impact on participation and community response on youths

In this project, the research journey of the team members and their interaction with the community was processed in a narrative way that took into account not only data directly linked to the main topic but also peripheral material, including observations about the community, cultural and social behaviours, and reflections of the researchers as they came to certain realisations about their role in these communities and as indigenous researchers. The narrative unpacked various processes and thoughts that the local researcher (Eggins) had as a cultural insider, while bringing in voices from the community. The use of a narrative highlights various aspects of community life that community members considered important, such as food, water, land, wood and cash crops. This approach has generated a wealth of data that has led to a thematic approach to the analysis of the findings. What follows is a discussion of the impact on the youths in particular as a result of their participation in the project:

### A. MOTIVATION AND EMPOWERMENT

The film stimulated dialogue and exchange of community thoughts and encouragement. The youths facilitating the process began to see the impact of their dramatic film and the potential it had to create dialogue. It made them realise their potential as well, and this impacted on the youths' motivation to keep working on the project. The community's encouragement and demand for more films made them excited about continuing. This also demonstrated a common desire for the project to continue to create more films in their community.

*I'd like to say thank you to the youths, both boys and girls for making this CD (film). I like it. Overseas, they make CD (films) and the people there are able to see what their communities looked like before. Now you've made one of our village, our culture, and we like what we see. (Viewer 6, Ruti screening, 22 August 2010, Ruti village)*

*Now in remote places, many people carry the virus and we don't understand our situations, so it's good that you've come to these remote communities and talked to us. We're grateful. (Viewer 5, Kotna screening, 27 January 2011, Kotna village)*

Importantly, all these stemmed from their initial participation and willingness to get involved, to see the challenges and rewards that motivated them in the end:

*I really agree with this project because when we showed the film to other communities, I saw that people were learning something, they understood it and agreed with it as well. I think you (the researchers) received great help because we youths got involved. (Sesmo Teabag, diary entry 2, 28 January 2011, Ruti village)*

*When we showed the film in other places, I think we challenged them,*

*we showed this to improve our community life.* (Kopex Mul, diary entry, 28 January 2011, Ruti village)

*We told them we were showing a drama we made on AIDS. We explained this and the community was happy to learn from this film.*

(Youth reflection after Kenemba screening, 28 January 2011, Ruti village)

It was observed that the youth's involvement in the production, screening and distribution of the film presented the youths in a different light within the community. There were interesting comments coming from the community, which were written as news stories later on and disseminated through the print media. The youths saw copies of the stories and they became very excited. One of the said, "You've exposed us youths from the back-pages of Western Highlands and we are all psyched up to do more. People are watching the film and talking about it and we're happy that we got involved." Another participant noted:

*I want to say thank you for Joys and the team for coming to Ruti because I see that this is going to help our community. The project has brought us youths together in this community and they've shown a big interest in it and through this cooperation, I believe the community will change. I see clearly that this is voluntary work and it will encourage change. I believe in the project because when we showed the film in other communities, we challenged them.* (Youth diary entry, 27 January 2011, Ruti village)

Apart from the youths' reflection on their experiences with the project, their motivation and eagerness to work came through in other ways. During both field trips the youths always came early to the research team's house, especially the males. The females came when they could. This was a dilemma, which the project needed to consider. The lack of female participation in the project reflected the lack of women's roles in organised activities, especially when it comes to decision-making or oral liberty. There are seldom situations where a woman is seen addressing the community or openly voicing her opinion. Their role in this project was minimal and a more inclusive process needed to be planned for subsequent phases of this project.

#### B. REALISING A KNOWLEDGE GAP

When the youths proceeded to screen the films, they demonstrated a lack of knowledge about HIV. This also came through in some misconceptions in the baseline survey about diagnosis. The focus on the film, especially technical professionalism as well as the audience's control over discussion topics, gave little time for the youths to provide correct information. The youths did, however, use the film to generate awareness and challenged the audience to turn negative actions into positive change. They encouraged viewers to be engaged in church activities and to think smart during seasonal activities such as election periods and the coffee season during which sexual promiscuity is high. The youths used parables, common in Melpa oral tradition, to make a point; this can become an important aid to awareness, accompanied by visual material.

The research process demonstrated not only to us researchers, but most

importantly to youth as collaborators, the need to have extensive knowledge about HIV when facilitating discussions with community members. During the screenings, some viewers asked questions about HIV and AIDS, but the youths could not always respond accurately:

*How many people in PNG have AIDS? What province rates the highest? I'd like to know this.* (Viewer 13, Kenemba screening, 28 January 2011, Kenemba village)

*We don't know the statistics; we've only come to show this drama film. We're not from the office of the AIDS council, we're just students.* (Facilitating youth 1, Kenemba screening, 28 January 2011, Kenemba village)

It was obvious that in the cyclic process of creation, viewing and reflection, there needed to be an intervention from expert facilitators with regards to providing information around HIV and AIDS. The awareness the youths developed, as a result of the project, pointed to the need for HIV and AIDS information. It validated input from both medical and other experts who could work at the community level to disseminate information targeted to youth.

In our efforts to facilitate a process that was endogenous, we began to understand the limitations of the project. Perceptions of HIV and AIDS were at times misconstrued because of gaps in knowledge. As a group within the Ruti community, youth needed access to correct information. Having an expert assisting raised the profile of youth in the community and increased the impact of their awareness-raising efforts. There was potential for the group to become an important source of information and reference for community members once fully knowledgeable about the various aspects of HIV and AIDS.

## Conclusion

The project's approach has begun to show that visual participatory action research (PAR) provides a powerful means for engaging local communities in discussions about HIV/AIDS that has the power to alter and refine people's perceptions and values regarding disease, care and health behaviour. The footage and images circumvented language, literacy, and cultural-taboo barriers. Because the footage and images were anchored to experiences of the community itself, they became tools for reflection, discussion, idea generation and norm re-evaluation. Dialogue among community's young members was powerful in that learning was communicated in ways that were meaningful to these young people and accepted among other community members.

The open approach to let the participants guide the creative process presented various outcomes. It allowed the researchers to better understand community perceptions, including scenarios of risky behaviour. The viewing of the Ruti film drama stimulated important community discussion among audiences. The product therefore served as a stimulator within the local

context, yet its value for wider audiences still needs to be assessed by the research team. The film might re-inforce negative community perception towards HIV and AIDS and requires re-assessment in terms of its educational value to other communities.

The desire by the youth to shoot another film or refine the one they shot, as well as their wish to know more about HIV facts, were important signs of community mobilisation. Considering audiences, they developed an interest and willingness to listen to messages around HIV and AIDS. In realising their potential role as HIV community advocates, they wanted to receive information and pass it on to others. This demonstrated a shift in HIV and AIDS communication. This community mobilisation was crucial in establishing a foundation for behavioural change in communities in the PNG Highlands.

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