

“We’re here and we want our voices heard!”

**(Keisha Josephs, representing the Kalinago people
of St Lucia at the UNPFII)**

**An interview with Nick Lunch, Director of Insight, UK/France-based pioneers of
Participatory Video (PV) after attending the International Funders for
Indigenous People’s (IFIP) 2006 Annual Conference and the fifth annual United
Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII).**

By Catherine Setchell, intern at Insight.

Following the completion of my MPhil in Development Studies at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton, UK, I recently began an internship at Insight, a UK/France-based company that focuses on developing Participatory Video (PV) methodology. With a background in Anthropology and a strong focus on indigenous people's issues in my Masters, I find myself joining Insight at a particularly auspicious time. Insight's Director, Nick Lunch has just returned from New York where he attended the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples' (IFIP) 2006 Annual Conference held on May 16th-17th. On May 25th, Insight launched a handbook on PV at the United Nations Headquarters at the 5th Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) to an audience of over 100 indigenous delegates, NGOs, agencies and government representatives. As part of the Forum's side-event, Nick Lunch facilitated an introductory training in PV to 15 indigenous delegates. Video messages made by the indigenous delegates, on their hopes, challenges and frustrations faced at the fifth annual UNPFII, were then aired to the Forum.

A subsequent outcome of this Forum has been the creation of a new partnership with the Global Human Rights Strengthening Programme (formerly HURIST Division for Human Rights) of the United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP), and strengthening the existing partnership with Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP); with a plan to incorporate PV methods across their 98 country offices. PV will now be used as a means of building local capacity and self esteem in poor and marginalised communities, improving communication links between UNDP staff and their local partners and local communities, and further developing participatory approaches in their programmes. One exciting output from the point of view of funders has been an increase in video proposals by indigenous communities thus enabling indigenous groups to develop better access to donors through the method of PV grant applications.

To learn more about Insight's involvement at the UNPFII and their future partnerships with delegates representing indigenous communities worldwide, I interviewed Nick Lunch at Insight in Oxford.

What is the idea behind Insight and Participatory Video?

Insight promotes Participatory Video (PV) as a powerful means of documenting local people's experiences, wants and hopes from their own perspectives. Participants (men, women and youth) rapidly learn how to use video equipment through games and exercises. Then they direct, film and edit short video messages on issues important to them. PV can initiate a process of analysis and change that celebrates local knowledge and practice, while stimulating creativity both within and beyond the community. Perhaps most significantly, PV is a process that empowers and develops self-esteem. When done well, PV presents the "inside view" in a lively way and is accessible for people at all levels.

At Insight, we have successfully applied PV as a powerful participatory R&D (Research and Development) tool and as an important means of influencing policy- and decision-makers. Chris Lunch (the co-director) and I, have nearly two decades of combined experience in facilitating PV projects at grassroots level, working with communities, NGOs, research institutions and governmental organisations in Central Asia, Africa, China, the Indian sub-continent and the UK.

Insight brings the needs and concerns of the marginalised to the fore. It seeks to build bridges between office-based decision-makers and people on the ground. Insight believes that those who live and breathe a way of life are those who are best placed to understand its limitations and opportunities; they are the true experts.

You were fortunate to be invited to attend the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples (IFIP) 2006 Annual Conference in May. Why do you feel it was important for Insight to be there?

IFIP's annual conference is all about exploring new ways to form and strengthen partnerships between funders and indigenous peoples. As Insight is launching a new indigenous programme it was important for us to attend the IFIP conference so we can form new partnerships and learn from people working with indigenous communities. The conference gave us the opportunity to make contact with many foundations in the US and global organisations working all over the world. We found people to be very like-minded and we made some great connections with certain organisations which led to us hatching some exciting plans to work together. Our handbook on Participatory Video was popular too: we gave out around 50 so hopefully there are people out there reading all about PV.

The conference made it clear to me how useful PV methodology can be in linking indigenous peoples with funders. There is a great lack of participatory forms of communication, by that I mean handing over control to the people on the ground and allowing them to tell their own stories on their own terms. A lot of indigenous communities are hard to reach because of their geographical location, isolation, or they do not have the local support or capacity to set up their own organisations to communicate with funders. Indigenous communities have high rates of illiteracy so there is a need to find alternatives to the written application. PV provides us with a means of including the views of the wider community, including the women and children. It is often the most marginalised and vulnerable groups who are the hardest

to reach, whilst funders continue to come into contact with elite indigenous leaders from the same set of communities. With video, you can reach marginalised groups more easily and work with them in familiar surroundings where they feel comfortable. Their ability to communicate their needs in this way is more empowering because they remain in control of the process.

There is also scope for using PV in the evaluation and monitoring of projects that have already received funding. Visual and anecdotal methods of evaluation by the communities themselves can enable people to have a say in how the project has benefited them. This enables them to share the projects' mistakes and the lessons learnt, in order to inform funders more directly and to help develop new and better projects. It is powerful when funders make a human connection with communities they are donating to. They are inspired by being able to see what difference their support is making, and thus continue to support worthwhile initiatives.

Following the IFIP Conference, Insight facilitated PV training with indigenous delegates from over 10 different countries at the UNPFII. What did this involve?

We offered delegates the opportunity to make video diaries about the Forum to show to their communities back home. This proved very popular as it was an important and unique opportunity for some of the delegates to voice their criticisms and responses to the Forum, discussing ways it can be improved, their frustrations, as well as their hopes. PV is a practical tool – if you do it yourself you will see how quickly you feel empowered. It really helps you clarify your own ideas and communicate them with others.

We trained the participants through simple games and facilitated story boarding activities to enable them to lay out their messages in a narrative order using simple sketches in cartoon strips. When it came to the filming, people split into their groups and rotated roles, so each individual had a go at filming, presenting and editing. They put together a series of seven video diary films, all containing strong and important responses to the UN system and the Forum itself. We edited these into a highlight presentation video. This was put together with a lot of humour and was very heartfelt, which is why I think it was so well-received. We also managed to create DVDs for each of the groups to take home with them at the end.

Then the video was screened at a side event at the Forum in the main assembly hall at UN headquarters. It was very well attended, with an audience of around 150 people. The film went down particularly well. People were cheering and clapping and the film received a standing ovation from several of the indigenous delegates! We also got a favourable response from directors of various divisions of the UN, co-hosting the event. The following day we showed it to UNDP staff at an internal presentation where the special Human Rights Advisor of the Democratic Governance Group, Patrick van Weerelt told me watching this film had really resonated for him, and helped him understand how he could use this process of PV to improve their programmes.

Can you tell us about some of the main messages that came through in these video diary films?

The messages that came out of the video presentation were very powerful and it showed an effective and inclusive way of enabling delegates to deliver clear messages from the heart and on their own terms., without the stress of performing in front of an audience at a conference. There are some fantastic quotes from the films which reflect a general common view by indigenous delegates of the UN's annual Forums, as well as PV as a tool in development:

“Video can be used to bring communities together who face similar challenges and bring them face to face with decision makers”

Jare Ajai of Nigeria.

“(Here at the UN) it is like they are speaking to lawyers and sometimes you wonder whether they make the language difficult so that we don’t understand what happens in there.

They print thousands and thousands of papers and they want us to carry them home. Instead of giving us the resources to do some projects at home they rather make a lot of paper which I think is often just left here on the tables.”

Mary, Masai Leader, Kenya.

“We need to get away from the type of linear, hierarchical, rational thinking processes and get back to our own indigenous thinking processes which are primarily very holistic, very egalitarian, very inclusive.”

Tiokasin Ghosthorse

A Masai leader, Mary, shared with us her own reasons for making a film: ***“this is the fifth time I have represented my people at the forum and each time when I sit on the plane home I am worried that, for all my efforts, I have so little to show my people what has been going on here. Now I can feel excited and proud to show them the video I created and help them understand the challenges we face”.***

What lessons do you think can be learnt from these messages?

I think the video showed that we need to rethink how UN meetings are structured and what spaces are being created for dialogue. Dialogue is about an exchange of views and there seems to be very little space for feedback and response in these kinds of forums. The Indigenous Forum is about representing indigenous people at the UN, so using PV is an exciting opportunity to actually embody and reflect the indigenous philosophies. I hope that at the next Forum the UN will invite us to do proper trainings and provide a formal workshop space to do PV with the indigenous delegates, so we can do the training justice.

In my experience the most successful meetings are those that are facilitated in a manner where everyone is given the opportunity to speak, and issues are also discussed in small groups where the ideas, recommendations, actions and steps that come out of these meetings are really *owned* by the group and not just by one or two people who lead the meetings. PV collects real life experiences and strategies for

development from people on the ground, such as the communities the indigenous delegates come from. I would like to hear more directly from local people who live the lives and the struggles that are being discussed at these Forums. This grassroots expertise can be combined and synergised with the scientific and bureaucratic expertise held by UN officials and other agencies, in order to create something far more powerful than already exists. Unfortunately I saw very little of this at the UN and I believe there is a lost opportunity here. The UN needs to reach out, and find ways to make it easier for ordinary people to participate. Video is one of the only ways that people's voices can be heard more clearly. It is costly to fly people half way across the world to participate in these forums and it can also be inappropriate. It can be very distressing for people arriving at the UN to state their case, whilst at the same time their communities may be facing daily abuses of human rights. Arriving in New York at UN headquarters can be an overwhelming experience for any of us, and I feel that many indigenous people may be at a big disadvantage in their efforts to network and lobby successfully at the Forum. Delegates may have huge expectations that the UN will be able to help them, but the system is so complex. The evidence we gathered shows that it can take years for things to take affect and some people felt very little was being achieved.

PV is an extremely powerful advocacy tool for representing indigenous perspectives, but ideally I would also involve decision-makers, funders and agencies in responding to PV films with their own videos. We have learned that PV allows a more direct, human way of communicating. By responding with humility through the same means and in a language that can be understood, the decision-makers are given a face and can respond as equals. For a person who feels marginalised, being heard is of huge value and may be the first step towards greater empowerment.

PV can build bridges and allow peoples' points of view to be understood, as often local groups don't understand the complexities of why something can't be done by the powerful decision-makers. Through PV the decision-makers can explain why it can be difficult to make the changes people are asking for. It is not very empowering for people to just shout and complain, but if you can understand how a system works then you can build your own strategies to navigate a more effective path to achieve change.

What have been the outcomes since the UNFPII?

Delegates responded enthusiastically to the raw and honest portrayal of participants' experiences at the UN; the struggles and frustrations as well as the positive elements. The Forum screening illustrated the potential for video to act as a medium for sharing stories and struggles with others but also as a way to hold the UN system to account, improve listening processes and help generate a healthy feedback loop.

Since the workshops and screening there have been some exciting developments. Delfin Galapin, the GEF Small Grants Director (SGP) wrote to each of his national coordinators within a few hours of the presentation with great excitement about PV, urging them all to introduce the PV process as a tool to support a more participatory and equal relationship between funding agencies and (often illiterate) communities. He spoke of the need for funding agencies to accept video proposals from these communities. He also recognised the use of PV to build capacity and self-esteem in poor and marginalised communities. Currently PV proposals are being pioneered by

SGP in Nepal and Indonesia, with future work proposed in many other countries, with the help of Insight's handbook. Some regional PV trainings for trainers are being planned with Insight; the first in Uganda in November will focus on the Batwa pygmy communities living near the Rwandan border. Insight is currently working with the SGP National Coordinators in Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan on a strategic project to develop PV as a medium for sharing best practice on a regional and global level.

Another development since the Forum has been that Special Human Rights Advisor, Patrick van Weerelt has been initiating discussions to develop ways that PV can be used to connect UNDP country offices in some of the poorest parts of the world with some of the poorest, most marginalised communities; and how it can be used to hold the country offices to account, and demonstrate how development aid is not reaching the poorest communities, and the possible reasons why. Patrick has recently allocated resources for the development of PV in the new Global Human Rights Strengthening Programme, a significant UNDP four year programme. The aim of this programme is to fully integrate human rights into its policies, programmes and processes, and provide meaningful guidance to the application of a human rights-based approach to UNDP programming processes. We are very proud and excited that Insight has been invited to design a strategy and seek local partners to carry out this work. Through Patrick's remit, there is every possibility that these video messages could be watched right to the highest level of the UN.

Finally, how could IFIP members support your work?

The IFIP conference was a wonderful springboard for what happened later at the UNFPII. It was significant for creating links and networks for our future work with indigenous people and communities. Insight is a small organisation with extraordinary opportunities to make an impact but we need to grow as an organisation now. We've been working hard with very few resources to pioneer and promote PV. We've now built up a good track record and raised our profile, so we're in a good position to maximise the impact of PV and spread our experience and learning. We want to develop local capacity for PV in the South and help set up a network of participatory community media centres. So right now, we're looking for development funding to cover core costs so we expand our operations.

If you are interested in supporting Insight, please get in touch with Nick Lunch for more information: nlunch@insightshare.org. Website: www.insightshare.org

Insights into Participatory Video: A Handbook for the Field by Nick and Chris Lunch at Insight, partly sponsored by UNDP Global Environment Facility Small Grants Projects (GEF SGP); HURIST; and the Civil Society Organisations (CSO) Division, can be purchased from Insight for £15 inc. postage and packing. Contact Nick for further information.