Participatory Video to promote land rights of women

A case study of how corruption impacts on widows in the northern region of Ghana

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Introduction

Widows are amongst the most marginalised and discriminated against members of society in the Upper East region of Ghana. The moment a woman is widowed, she is subjected to a litany of ritual humiliations and abuses. Paramount amongst the many challenges she faces thereafter is the confiscation of farm lands and property by relatives and fellow community members; frequently rendering widows and their dependants landless and destitute.

In the Upper East region, decisions over land allocation are controlled by the traditional land custodian (known as the Tindana), who also oversees any land-related disputes. ‘Tipping’ the Tindana is expected, even mandatory, and those who give the most generous ‘tip’ will invariably find decisions are reached in their favour. Impoverished widows struggle to be heard in the decision-making processes that determine the reallocation of their land, and are frequently rendered entirely landless.

Materials & Methods

Participatory Video is a set of techniques for groups to explore their own issues and bring about positive change. The filmmaking process enables participants to take action to solve their own problems and communicate their needs and ideas to decision-makers.

In 2016, ten widows from the small village of Kulbia joined a Participatory Video process to explore and document the land issues affecting widows in their community. The group comprised women of different ages and diverse experiences. All the participants are illiterate and none had operated video equipment prior to the workshop. They learned basic video skills through a series of experimental games and exercises, working together over several months to create a powerful video on corruption in the community and the resulting loss of land by those who are most vulnerable: widows.

The participants developed a good level of skill and confidence with iPad tablets and other equipment used for the video production. They worked together to explore their experiences and circumstances in great depth, during a series of participatory exercises and discussions; developing a sophisticated understanding of the issues and the actions required to change the situation facing the estimated 50,000 widows in the Upper East region.

Results

The women produced a powerful short video entitled ‘Pakpora Susangho’ (Widow’s Cry), which was screened to traditional leaders and civil society representatives at a unique gathering in November 2016. The participants presented their video and hosted discussions, during which they interviewed local leaders and recorded stakeholders’ commitments to supporting widow’s land rights.

‘Pakpora Susangho’ can be watched online by visiting: bit.ly/2ghU9Co

Over recent months their video has been showcased at conferences around the world, including the UN Habitat III in Quito and the IACC (International Anti-Corruption Conference) in Panama City. Numerous screenings, sensitisation and dialogue events have been conducted across the country for community members, local leaders, civil society organisations and national duty-bearers; generating widespread publicity for the issues facing widows and the role of corruption in land management. In Kulbia village, several widows have been trained as paralegals, to support widows in their land struggles, and numerous widows have reported significant changes in their relations with fellow community members, and standing within community life.

Conclusions

Participatory Video is a powerful tool for empowering marginalised groups and amplifying unheard voices. Widows are discriminated against, demonised, and kept outside of community life in the Upper East region; however this project helped to raise their profile and communicate their experiences. They were witnessed operating complex technology, with confidence and ease, by those who regularly abuse and chase them away. The women told their own stories, presented their own findings, interviewed decision-makers, and applied pressure for change on their own terms. As the video is screened and discussed in ever wider circles, the opportunities for positive personal and systemic change increase.

“Our issues have only ever been whispered amongst ourselves, between widows. We could never have discussed our issues openly...let alone discuss them with the Chief! Now our issues are being shared and we have sensed change in the air.”

Participant, Kulbia Village

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