

Real Stories through Participatory Video Storytelling

Impacts of Training on Community Video
and Community Learning



01. Introduction

The National Workshop on Participatory Video Storytelling Program was implemented by Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF) in partnership with the Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture (PGIA), University of Peradeniya. The objective of this program was to build the capacity of 20 potential youth, on producing community videos on issues affecting underprivileged communities in Sri Lanka, and disseminating them through social media. Moreover this program aimed on providing knowledge and skills on community learning and its relevance in producing community video.

The program engaged 20 youth –both girls and boys from Sinhalese, Muslim and Tamil backgrounds and they were given 8 days of training on producing community videos highlighting various social, cultural, economic and political issues affecting communities in different regions across Sri Lanka.

This final report intends to provide an analysis by giving the details of the major activities of the program; Training workshops for the youth, dissemination of community videos through social media and the projection of community videos. In addition this report contains details about the National Youth Video Summit 2016 organized by SDJF as well as about youth perspectives, media coverage and documentaries with regard to this program.



02. Training workshop for the young video makers



The training workshops for the selected youth were conducted in two stages. The first stage of the training focused on giving the youth an introduction to community video and its pivotal role in bringing the marginalized society to public eye. Then the youth were given a sound knowledge on technical components of making community video engaging them in practical sessions to make them feel confident in using a camera while familiarizing themselves in taking different shots and angles that are essential in producing powerful stories. Later the participants practiced the basic principles of community video by engaging in field visits to various villages. In this process the youth were able learn key principals such as engaging community persons, talking to them in an open space as a group, developing the rapport, creating a sense of ownership, building cross-cultural collaborations and encouraging community members to participate in exploring solutions for their issues.

The second stage of the training focused the production and post-production of community videos. Youth had already collected footage of different community issues from their regions and after giving them a sound knowledge on editing and other production strategies, youth produced 20 powerful community videos highlighting the local voices and local concerns.

03. Community Voices: A social media platform for Community Stories

Towards the end of the training, SDJF received 20 community stories produced by the 20 young video journalists. With an aim of disseminating these community videos through a social media device, SDJF created a YouTube channel called '*Community Voices*' and uploaded them for public display.

Please find the below link to the Community Voices YouTube Channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSu3mjYQIzm7KxeuoxJ3ZAw/featured>



Each community video consisted a community story of 5-8 minutes. In terms of the nature of stories being produced, more than 60% of the stories were based on issues affecting people in their communities, and the rest (40%) were positive stories – about diversity, cultural and religious practices. For instance, there were many stories of right-based concerns especially with regard to environmental pollution, unconstructed roads, and health issues. Apart from that there were stories about women and also about life struggles of individuals. Some of the videos contained religious and culturally significant stories while there were some videos that can be considered as role model stories.

4. Video screening of community videos

With an aim of inviting a mass audience to watch the community videos produced by the young video makers, SDJF organized 15 video screenings in the Matara and Kandy districts. The screenings helped people to understand the issues affecting them and advocate for solutions needed to resolve them. At the end of every screening SDJF was able to collect the feedback from people who came to watch these videos. Most of them shared their perspectives about their community problem and this activity helped SDJF to measure the success of this whole program.



Creating awareness

Sharing her view Devika Priyadarshani stated “through community videos, it gives awareness for the people to know their problems more deeply. Also it motivates and encourages people to find a solution for a particular issue”.

As a person represented the community in making the community video, W.G. Chinthaka noted “I was able to provide information with regard to the garbage issue in Gampola. This issue has

created so many problems in the area and I believe by showing this video we can minimize this issue as it will educate the people about environmental pollution”.

These ideas indicate that when people watch these videos they will realize their own problems. Sometimes people are not aware of the issues in their own village. By showing these community videos it will give confidence for them to take it to the authorities to gain relevant measures or steps to solve the issue. Therefore this tool has been identified as very appropriate by most of the people.

Voice to the voiceless

Chathumi Sewwandhi pointed out “this is a very successful method mainly because it brings out the hidden issues in our communities. It is important that we show unseen issues to make people as well as authorities to know what is really happening in the society”.

Umasa Pabasarani mentioned “While appreciating the development process of a town or village, at the same time it is necessary to educate people about different community issues prevailing in these areas. There are thousands of people who have no say in the media. Their struggles and issues are deep rooted and it is time to give them an opportunity to speak out. This can be done through a medium like community video storytelling”.

These perspectives show that community videos show the problems of the underprivileged communities in our own society. They hardly have a chance to come out and speak for themselves. Thus this is a great way to address hidden issues that need immediate actions.

These statements also reveal a significant feature in Community Video storytelling mechanism. That is to bring out a story of one community and show it to the rest of the people. Through this they will get to know about an issue faced by another group of people living in the same country. This creates a massive awareness about all sorts of social, political, economic issues existing in other parts of the country. Through that people tend to question authorities and this can solve many issues as it will directly affect the development of the country as a whole.



Positive stories should be heard

Oshadi Perera from Matara acknowledged “today we get to watch only the problems faced by communities. News is full of issues and there is hardly any room to show talented and skillful people who have built their own careers from their own abilities. In this context community video is a good method as it addresses both positive and negative stories. It is vital to tell about the people whose stories give lessons to everyone. They can be considered as role-models and without letting these wonderful stories to be buried; there should be a way to reveal them to the world. Therefore community video can be measured as one of the best devices to disclose both good and bad”.

When looking at different viewpoints by the audiences it shows that the broader scope of community video storytelling as an alternative media mechanism has been understood by people. Community video is not a tool just to talk about problems of communities, it also serves as a medium to bring out inspiring stories of role model characters in our own community.

As a whole the screening of community videos was very much successful when measuring the feedbacks gained from the diverse audiences. It is important that people relate these stories and reflect them. Moreover, these videos were made including the participation of communities. Therefore, it was very much essential to get their comments and opinions with regard to their own community video.



5. National Youth Video Summit



Community Video Storytelling as an alternative media has not been popularized in the Sri Lankan context. Community Video is produced by the community, for the community and disseminated through national, community, and social media and displayed in target communities. SDJF has noticed that there is more room available for the mainstream media to offer space for real community concerns. It is in this context that SDJF decided to organize Sri Lanka's first National Youth Video Summit.

This summit was held on the 24th of April 2016 in Colombo. The summit brought together more than 200 independent video journalists including experts from mainstream media, development agencies, civil society organizations and academia to discuss the potentiality of Community Video as an alternative media to keep citizens informed, shape their perspectives, facilitate people participation in democratization, and help the citizens to play an active role in fostering wider justice and accountability.

The summit explored the fact that the independent video journalism has enormous potential, in the current socio, economical and political environment for the excluded segments to have a voice on issues affecting their societies.

Attending the National Youth Video Summit, the Minister of Parliamentary Reforms and Mass Media, Hon. Gayantha Karunthilake noted “Within the globalized context, mainstream media has its own struggle and difficulties in catering all the segments in a country. As a result of this global reality, we have excluded communities, voiceless, unheard and underrepresented in Sri Lanka as well. Therefore, Sri Lanka needs a strong community video journalism as an alternative form of media to cater those excluded segments”.

The inaugural session was held under the theme ‘Voicing for the Unheard and Underrepresented - Positioning Community Video’. Heads of news, current affairs, and program divisions of six National Televisions came together discussing the importance of strengthening community video journalism in Sri Lanka indicating that Sri Lanka’s mainstream media is ready to create space for Independent Community Video Journalism.

As one segment of this summit SDJF held the National Community Video Awarding in which the participants of this training program were given certificates for their active participation in this program.



6. Exposure of the Young Video Journalists

Throughout this training most of young video journalists noted that in a context where communities are left out in the mainstream media, community video is an instrument that can mobilize communities to speak for themselves. They have further identified Community Video Story as one of the most powerful tools to talk about ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ stories of people and mobilizing people’s efforts to strengthen governance while holding the authorities accountable.

For instance, Fathima Shanaz a participant of the training program speaking in one of the panel discussions at the National Youth Video Summit mentioned “participation of community in the media is very important. The voices that are unheard and underrepresented need space in the mainstream media. Therefore a tool like community video can surely bring out the local voices. They are given the freedom to speak about their own issues while presenting their own solutions. This is where we need to understand the space given to community voice in Sri Lanka”.

Winning a National Community Video Award at the summit, Nalaka Wehalla, another young video maker of the program noted “this program completely changed my life. I believe that I have the capability to present the problems of communities. It is important that we give space for people to tell their stories to the world. We need to find room in the mainstream media for these excluded communities”.

Moreover, the young video journalists conveyed their experience in this training and how it changed their careers and enlightened their perspectives and attitudes. Sharing his views about the experience in the training program, Charith Amarasekara noted “after hearing the comments for my first community video, it gave me a huge encouragement to engage myself in these types of initiatives. My first community video was about the bad effects of chewing betel and later I made another story about the situation of street dogs in most of the areas in Sri Lanka. I believe that this training improved my skills as well changed my perspective towards social issues. I feel I have the capability to engage with communities and continue these kinds of methods in which the participation of civil society in the Community Video production ensures that the video story is made by people and owned by people”.

Ibrahim Mohamed Azward, another participant of the training program stated “my habit is making videos stories but community video storytelling is a completely different mechanism. Through the experience I gained in this workshop I was able to make several videos about issues in my own area. Recently there was a fire in my village and I did a video about it which was later broadcasted in an online website. Therefore I see this program as a turning point in my life”.

These statements reveal that the program has been very successful in changing the mindset of young video journalists while encouraging their potentiality to engage in media initiatives like these. Their passion and interest towards involving themselves in video making is a good sign that voiceless communities will be heard and desperate silence will no longer remain as a static element in the society.



7. Media coverage for the program

This training program reached a wider coverage in the print media. 04 press articles were published in local newspapers. Below are the details of the published articles.

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| I. | Vidivelli Newspaper | 30/10/2015 |
| II. | Meel Paravai | 30/10/2015 |
| III. | Iru Dina Newspaper | 07/02/2016 |
| IV. | Sunday Observer | 30/04/2016 |

Apart from these local newspaper articles there were 14 online news websites which carried articles about the Program. Below are the links to Online News Articles which were published on the training on community video.

- I. Hiru Bussiness News - 11/11/2015 <http://www.hirunews.lk/business/120054/call-for-application-from-young-film-video-makers>
- II. Adaderana.lk - 13/11/2015
<http://adaderana.lk/entertainment/33048/pvs-call-for-application-from-young-film-and-video-makers>
- III. Courier Boys - 16/10/2015
<http://courierboys.com/mobile/localdet.php?recordID=4228>
- IV. Newceylon.lk - 16/10/2015
<http://www.newceylon.lk/2015/10/%E0%AE%B5%E0%AF%80%E0%AE%9F%E0%AE%BF%E0%AE%AF%E0%AF%8B%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%A4%E0%AF%88%E0%AE%AF%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE%95%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%9A%E0%AF%8D-%E0%AE%9A%E0%AF%86%E0%AE%AF%E0%AE%B1%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%B1/>
- V. Kattankudy News First - 16/10/2015
<http://kkynewsfirst.com/2015/10/16/%E0%AE%B5%E0%AF%80%E0%AE%9F%E0%AE%BF%E0%AE%AF%E0%AF%8B-%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%A4%E0%AF%88%E0%AE%AF%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE%95%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%9A%E0%AF%8D-%E0%AE%9A%E0%AF%86%E0%AE%AF%E0%AE%B1%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%B1/>
- VI. Vavuniya Net - 16/10/2015 <http://www.vavuniyanet.com/news/68876>
- VII. TTN news.com - 16/10/2015
<http://ttnnews.com/%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE%A3%E0%AF%8A%E0%AE%B3%E0%AE%BF-%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%A4%E0%AF%88%E0%AE%AF%E0%AE%BE%E0%AE>

- [%95%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%95%E0%AE%9A%E0%AF%8D-%E0%AE%9A%E0%AF%86%E0%AE%AF%E0%AE%B1%E0%AF%8D%E0%AE%B1/](#)
- VIII. Engalthesam - 16/10/2015 <http://www.engalthesam.lk/26578>
- IX. Kilakkuvaan - 16/10/2015 <http://www.kilakkuvaan.com/2015/10/video.html>
- X. Valvettithurai.org - 16/10/2015 <http://www.valvettithurai.org/call-for-application-for-short-film-projects-in-srilanka-5200.html>
- XI. Your Kattankudy.com - 16/10/2015
<http://yourkattankudy.com/2015/10/16/application-for-film-industry/>
- XII. Karaitivunews.com - 16/10/2015
<https://sites.google.com/a/karaitivunews.com/karaitivunews/pira-ceytikal/171015-vitiyokataiyakkacceyarittamilamnatatiraippatammarrumvitiyovideotayarippalarkalvinnappikkalam>
- XIII. Kilakku.info - 16/10/2015 <http://www.kilakku.info/2015/10/video.html>
- XIV. Makkalnanpan - 16/10/2015 <http://makkalnanpan.com/vacancy/>

8. Documentaries highlighting the changes

SDJF produced a documentary about the talented young video journalists of the program. During their training workshops as well in the performances these youngsters showed their capabilities and talents in many skills. In this documentary youth were asked about their perspective on community video storytelling concept and their experiences during the training. Please find the below link to the workshop documentary.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_d1Vx4XRFA

9. Conclusion

In brief the National workshop on participatory community video storytelling programme can be considered as a successful initiative by SDJF while closely working with Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya. The program was able to capacitate 20 young video journalists on community video who have already started promoting this mechanism in their own regions. The community videos produced by these young video makers gain positive responses on YouTube as well as on iVoice news website of SDJF. Therefore it can be considered as a good sign that community video can create a turning point as an alternative media to bring local voices, local concerns and local efforts.