Conducting a participatory video project with farmers involved in the Fodder Adoption project activities in Mieso Woreda, Ethiopia: Report on a short consultancy

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Brief
The aim was to use participatory video as a tool for capturing community views and perceptions on their collaboration with the Fodder Adoption Project over the last 3 years. Fodder Adoption Project of ILRI has been working with farmers and other stakeholders in Mieso woreda since early 2008 to develop fodder resources using a local stakeholder platform for implementation. We wanted to allow our target farmers to give their views on fodder development activities and whether the involvement of a wide group of stakeholders has been a useful approach in terms of accelerating development.

The ethos of the Participatory Video (PV) project is to allow farmers to give an honest impression of what has gone on during the FAP project. We are experimenting with the use of PV as a monitoring tool for project success. Following production of the film, we will screen and film reactions to the community view from different strata of stakeholders (local, ILRI, donor) to get different views on how project activities have proceeded. We also want to document something of the process of using PV.

Duration and dates:
13 days work including planning, training of farmers, shooting and editing film. Training commenced on 20th Sept and filming finished on 23rd Sept 2010.

Participant Selection:
A range of participants were requested based on age, gender, and social status. We arrived in Mieso on Saturday 18th Sept to liaise with the Pastoral Office and Woreda Administration. Permission was requested and granted for the video training to go ahead. Derese Kasa from the Office of Pastoral Development was asked to nominate participant farmers with the assistance of local DAs (Development Agents).

A maximum of 8 participants were requested but this was increased to 10 at the request of the Pastoral Office. Participants consisted of 10 farmers and 1 DA. There were 9 males and 2 females of different ages. The farmers came from a mix of PAs, some had been involved in the project longer than others. Some of the PAs were some distance from Mieso, the capital of the woreda, and arrangements were made for them to stay in town for the duration of the training. Sunday 19th was spent collecting the farmers from their villages and bringing them to Mieso town.
Names of Participants | Peasant Association (PA)
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1. Mahammad Abdulla | Kenteri
2. Abdella Adem | Kenteri
3. Umer Ali Roba | Gorbo
4. Zahara Mumme | Gorbo
5. Mahammad Boru | Hunde Misoma
6. Ahmed Abdulla | Hunde Misoma
7. Ibro Dadhi | Hargiti
8. Qasim Abdella | Hargiti
9. Fatuma Nure | Huse Mandhera
10. Jemal Yuya | Huse Mandhera
11. Abinet Ketema | DA (Development Agent) Gorbo

**PV Process**

Training commenced on Monday 20th at the Woreda Administration Office with a brief introduction of the consultant and participant farmers. The consultant and FAP team explained the purpose of the training to the farmers. As a starter, a PV film produced by another Oromo community was screened to the farmers. Participants were taught how to use video equipment using games and exercises based on the Insight PV Training Model. These included, 'The Name Game', 'The Interview Method' and 'Show and Tell'. Two handheld digital cameras and accessories were used for the training. The emphasis throughout this process is on exploring the equipment directly through practical use, rather than by lengthy lecture or explanation. Participants were taught how to use the camera and camera equipment such as a tripod and external microphone. Farmers were encouraged to help one another to learn as part of the approach, in this way students become teachers. This style of teaching also builds confidence and collaboration among the group and enables them to teach others in the future.

Throughout the training and filming process the film footage is played back to participants which acts as a review mechanism and a learning exercise. This allows participants to improve their message and skill with the camera. The Playback Process also enables analysis to be done throughout the PV process in a collaborative way.

After participants were taught the basic functions of the camera and learned basic interviewing techniques and how to present to the camera, the process moved to the planning stage. Using participatory techniques participants identified and analysed issues relating to the Forage Adoption Project. Participants were asked to explain the Project, and to identify the things they feel have worked best, the weaknesses, and opportunities for positive change in the future. Group discussions enabled everyone involved in the making of the film to communicate their ideas.

After the main issues and messages has been identified the Storyboard technique was used to plan the film in detail. This functions as preparation for the filming process so there is a clear idea in advance of roles, what, who and where will be
filmed. This process is valuable as it helps to provide some structure to filming and cuts down on the amount of editing to be done. The technique also gives participants control over the process as it enables them to plan, direct and film from beginning to end. This helps to ensure that the story is theirs.

Once the planning stage is complete and participants are happy with their storyline they move onto filming, using the Storyboard as a guide. The filming took place in the FTC (Farmers Training Centre) in Gorbo kebele of Mieso woreda.

**Strengths**

Farmers were very enthusiastic about the PV process and remained interested and engaged throughout. ILRI researchers and members of the local administration expressed their surprise at the reaction from farmers to the process. One of the aims of PV is to also change attitudes towards farmers held by development workers. The farmers, and others at grassroots level, are often perceived as being incapable of using such technology or being involved in planning or decision making processes.

The PV process highlighted some gaps in the project particularly in the area of communication. Participants complained that they are not listened to, although they communicate their issues and problems through the DAs. It also highlighted some confusion on the part of farmers about the various stakeholder involvement and the aims of the project. They spoke about work that had been done through the IPMS project as being part of FAP activities, this included the introduction of sweet potato and training they had received on molasses and urea blocks.

One of the aims of FAP is to enable local stakeholders to identify problems and work together to provide solutions. Farmers can and have identified problems and have communicated them to the DAs but the participants involved in the PV project expressed some dissatisfaction in the fact that no action has been taken. Although the fodder promotion aspect of the project seems to have been largely successful, the role of stakeholders perhaps needs further work.

Farmers have made certain requests for things they need assistance with, including: the introduction of new breeds such as Borana cows (apparently there are already some in the area); assistance in establishing co-operatives for meat and milk marketing; and they would like more practical demonstrations, in particular they mentioned wanting to visit the Melkasa Agricultural Research Centre. They also identified Pest Management as a problem.

The training overall was very successful and the resulting film is interesting and raises a number of issues, but could be improved through further work. There is a lot of scope for the film to be used for different purposes in the future. Firstly, the edited film should be played back both to the people involved in the process and to larger community groups, and information collectively analysed. It can be read in a number of different ways, from different points of view, and could be used as a reference point to tease out and further develop certain issues. For example, the film can be used as a basis for further interviews, not only with farmers but also with other stakeholders, including local government and ILRI researchers. The PV
recordings can also be useful to local people, and perhaps serve as a way of sharing their practices and knowledge with one another, with wider communities and development practitioners. It can also be used by future projects as a Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Tool, if introduced from the start of the project.

**Weaknesses**

The group size was at times difficult to manage. In future it would perhaps work better to keep the size to around 8 people, unless more facilitators are available. It also needs to be highlighted that the PV process involved 10 farmers selected from around 100 FAP participants so the views may not be representative of all. For example, this was reflected in the fact that some of the participants had not received fact sheets and could not read them, also many had not participated in field days and experience sharing visits for a variety of reasons, but these experiences may not be shared by all. This aspect should be born in mind for the selection process in future activities.

Language was a problem at times; I have basic knowledge of Afaan Oromo which was very helpful. There was no-one among the FAP staff who could speak the local language which made translation difficult. For the future ideally someone should be trained in PV and the local language to make the training more efficient.

The majority of filming took place in a Farmers Training Centre. Ideally participants would have filmed their own farms and activities but this was not possible due to time constraints and logistical difficulties. In addition, the participatory process should extend to the editing stage but there was not enough time. Therefore, editing was done by the consultant based on the Storyboard produced by participants during the video training.

One of the dangers of PV is that the process can be either misunderstood or hijacked. One needs to be aware that using video in a politically sensitive environment must be carefully managed. Also the aims of the PV process need to be clear to all involved, if the aim is to capture views of community members then this may include views that those at higher level may not want to hear. It is also easy for those with more power and position to take over and to influence the filming process. For example, there were some criticisms of the FAP project from farmers but these were not included in the final film. There was a certain amount of pressure to emphasise the more positive aspects of the project, and to a degree this is reflected in the film. Care and sensitivity to all concerned needs to be taken during the facilitation process, and in the future it perhaps needs to be made clear that all stakeholders will be given a chance to put their point of view across, not just the farmers. This may result in a more balanced point of view overall.

Participants were keen to continue using cameras after the training. One of the dangers of PV is that it can raise expectations. Ideally the training should be followed up in some way. I noticed that there are facilities available in the woreda for video work to continue, but this may face resistance on the part of local staff. It seems that there are potential blocks to such developments, these don't come from farmers themselves but from those at higher level. Participants requested certificates and to
be able to see the finished film, it is important that this is fulfilled because it can potentially affect the way that the PV project is perceived in the future.

It also is important to bear in mind that film as a teaching and learning tool is very valuable for a number of reasons, but it also has its weaknesses. Farmers have been taught and shown various 'best practices' through film by local DAs as part of the IPMS project. Although they found this useful they expressed that they are not confident enough to implement the ideas they have been shown. They commented that such teaching should be followed up by practical demonstration and hands on training.