

PARTICIPATORY VIDEO MAKING EMPOWERS WOMEN TO INTERROGATE TRADITIONAL LAND PRACTICES IN GHANA

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Country: **Ghana** - Principal Organisation: **Transparency International**

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ABSTRACT

In 2016, Transparency International gave ten widows from Kulbia village in the Upper East Region of Ghana an opportunity to tell their land rights stories. They used a technique known as Participatory Video, which enables people to use video as a conduit, facilitating and enhancing communication between people who might otherwise never converse. The women learned to

produce videos through experiential games and exercises that demystify technology and open access for anyone, regardless of literacy or experience. They collaborated in authoring a short documentary about their experiences of discrimination and landlessness as a result of widespread corruption by traditional land custodians, and managed to interrogate their landlessness.

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**SECURE
TENURE RIGHTS**



**EQUAL LAND
RIGHTS FOR WOMEN**



**TRANSPARENT AND
ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION**

INTERNATIONAL
**LAND
COALITION**

 **TRANSPARENCY
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the global coalition against corruption

COMPETENCIES

AREAS

**RURAL LAND
GOVERNANCE
WOMEN'S LAND
RIGHTS AND
GENDER JUSTICE
TRANSPARENCY
AND CORRUPTION**

SKILLS

**USE OF MEDIA AND
COMMUNICATION
ADVOCACY AND
CAMPAIGNING
ESTABLISHMENT AND
STRENGTHENING OF LOCAL
INSTITUTIONS**

2

BACKGROUND

Widows in the Upper East Region are particularly affected by traditional land practices. For a woman, widowhood typically means the loss of most (if not all) of her land, which is either sold or given to her husband's family by the traditional land administrator. Land is rarely registered, leaving women without secure rights.

Bribing traditional leaders or marrying one of her husband's relatives is often the only means of continuing to provide food for her children. Women who retain access to land face other challenges: their plots are typically smaller than those of men, and women are less likely to obtain credit.

THE CHALLENGE

Marginalisation, discrimination, and physical and verbal abuse are among the many serious challenges faced by widows in the Upper East Region. Women who lose their husbands are typically accused of "witchcraft", of having killed their husbands, and find themselves outcasts from their immediate community as a result. The stigma of widowhood, and the accompanying

ostracisation from broader community life and decision-making processes, directly facilitate the corrupt practices that leave thousands of women landless and unable to support their children. Many are forced to migrate in search of work or to struggle for survival on the margins of their communities.



OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

In 2016, ten widows from Kulbia village told their stories, first to one another, then to fellow community members and local decision-makers. They did so through a technique known as Participatory Video, which enables people to use video as a conduit, facilitating and enhancing communications between people who might otherwise never converse. The women learned to produce videos through experiential games and exercises that demystify technology and open access for anyone, regardless of literacy or experience. Having obtained the necessary skills, the participants set about collaboratively authoring a short documentary film about their experiences of discrimination and landlessness as a result of widespread corruption by traditional land custodians. They interviewed local chiefs and customary land administrators from their communities, using video production as a mechanism through which to interrogate those in power with uncomfortable questions. They have screened their video to local and national audiences, encouraging public discussion of hidden issues.

MOVING TOWARDS PEOPLE-CENTRED LAND GOVERNANCE

Audiences across the country and around the world have now seen the video produced by the women of Kulbia village, which they named “Pakorpa Susangho”, meaning “Widow’s Cry”. Since its production, numerous screenings and dialogues have been attended by community members, local decision-makers, civil society organisations, and national duty-bearers. In response, government officials and customary leaders, including Ghana’s House of Chiefs, have pledged to protect widows’ land rights. Seven community members have subsequently been trained as paralegals. The participants themselves have seen a remarkable change in their social standing within the community. They were witnessed operating complex technology with confidence, and are recognised as the authors of a compelling portrayal of widowhood in the region. They have earned respect from their peers and the support of their chiefs to overcome the land disputes they once faced alone.

THE GOOD PRACTICE IN FIVE SIMPLE STEPS



1

The Participatory Video project in Kulbia village was planned meticulously over the course of a year before its implementation. It was chosen by a team of experts in land corruption and participatory community engagement from a range of proposals submitted for consideration from various national chapters of Transparency International in sub-Saharan Africa. Land corruption specialists from Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII) worked with a local widows' rights organisation to identify and recruit participants. Ten women with direct personal experience of corrupt practices in relation to their land were selected as representatives of the estimated 50,000 widows in the Upper East Region.

2

A two-week workshop was attended by ten widows (participants) and facilitated by one Participatory Video specialist from the UK, one expert in land corruption from Accra, and four local widows' rights advisors. The workshop was closed to outsiders and organised to create a "safe space" for the women to share, explore, and learn within. Participatory exercises enabled the group to examine their circumstances and uncover the role of corruption in land management decisions. Video provided the means by which the women told their stories, documented their situations, and began to interrogate those with the power to effect change.

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4

The participants and project facilitators reconvened to examine the work undertaken during the previous two months, and to finalise the video. Over the course of one week, the footage was thoroughly reviewed, discussed in detail, translated, and edited together into a 15-minute documentary. A one-day screening and dialogue event took place in the nearby city of Bolgatanga, attended by local government officials, customary leaders (including chiefs and traditional land custodians), community members, and civil society representatives. The women presented their video, shared experiences of being made landless through widowhood, interviewed attendees, and recorded their commitments to support widows' land rights.

5

In the months that followed, the video was screened at numerous events locally, nationally, and internationally, helping to raise awareness of land corruption and its impact on widows in Ghana with new audiences. "Pakorpa Susangho" was screened at UN-Habitat III in Ecuador and at the International Anti-Corruption Conference in Panama, and featured at the World Bank's Land and Poverty Conference in the USA. Screenings have been convened across Ghana, engaging senior chiefs and "queen mothers" in an advocacy program to promote legal protection for widows, in both customary and statutory law, and grassroots support for their land rights.



3 THREE FACTORS OF SUCCESS AND REPLICABILITY

1

Creating a platform for women to share their experiences of land corruption without intermediaries was essential in convincing decision-makers of the honesty and integrity of the video produced and the importance of the messages it carries.

2

Establishing platforms for audiences to watch the video and discuss the issues directly with the women who produced it creates opportunities for meaningful dialogue and raises the profile of otherwise marginalised and ignored women.

3

Surrounding the participant-led process with other experts, representing a variety of fields, including local leaders and activists with direct personal experience of widowhood, ensured the success of the process.

5

LESSONS LEARNED

The project took place over the course of three months, including facilitated workshops and fieldwork lasting just over three weeks. During this time, participants explored their personal experiences, investigated the broader land corruption phenomenon in their communities, learned to operate complex video production equipment,

and produced many hours of high-quality footage. Eight of the ten participants declared that they had never even held a pen before the workshop. All of the women had many parallel duties to attend to (including income generation and childcare) which, while they participated in every minute of every day, meant that it would have been preferable to

have had an extended, perhaps less intense, workshop process organised over a more extended period. Having a budget for ongoing advocacy was essential to the overall success of the project. Our experience confirms that the production of a video was just the first step towards achieving genuine and long-term change.

FIND OUT MORE

Watch “Pakorpa Susangho” (“Widow’s Cry”) online here: <https://goo.gl/LTi1BZ>

A feature article by Transparency International: <https://goo.gl/ffqHH1>

A project summary, with accompanying images: <http://insightshare.org/projects/land-and-corruption>

National press release for local premiere: <https://womghana.wordpress.com/tag/participatoryvideo/>