

# **Video for Change: Creating and Measuring Social Impact**

## **A Working Paper by the Video4Change Network.**

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### **Abstract**

*Video for Change* refers to the practice of using video to activate social change and ongoing work in this field seeks to define and establish ethical principles that can inform and direct this process and practice. This paper reports on an ongoing action research project with a network of 10 Video for Change organisations. The study investigated what makes Video for Change a unique media-making and social change field and it examined the kind of ethical practices most valued by Video for Change practitioners. The purpose of the study was to inform an ethical impact framework and toolkit to support practitioners to both design for and evaluate their social impact. This working paper reports on the study's key findings, while also highlighting many of the challenges of designing and measuring the social impact of video initiatives across diverse contexts.

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## Introduction

The term *Video for Change* refers to the practice of using video to activate social change. The *video4change* network is a growing international network, comprising ten organisations, that was created to support the Video for Change field. These ten organisations work at both local and global levels in South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, North America, Europe and the Middle East. Throughout 2013 and 2014, the video4change network collaborated with researchers to identify opportunities, needs, challenges and barriers for creating and measuring social impact within Video for Change initiatives. The research team carried out their investigation as a collaborative action research project. The primary motivation for this collaboration was a perceived need for a common language and shared resources that would support Video for Change practitioners to design for, document, and evaluate impact. This paper discusses preliminary findings from this research project in order to consider: 1) what is Video for Change and what makes it a unique media-making and social change field; 2) what kinds of ethical practices are valued by Video for Change practitioners; and, 3) can ethical principles form the underlying foundation for a framework that helps practitioners both design for and evaluate their social impact?

Our research project began in 2012 with a literature review of relevant academic and practitioner materials, in-depth interviews with eight Video for Change organisations, and three funding bodies to better understand their needs, insights and practices. In the second stage of the research we carried out a survey of Video for Change organisations, developed a draft proposal and structure for an Impact Toolkit, and received and responded to inputs and feedback on this from network members and other Video for Change practitioners. As we write this working paper, we are in the third stage of our research project; in this stage, our draft toolkit will be reviewed and tested by Video for Change organisations. In our final stage of the research, we plan to integrate learning from the testing stage before publishing the Video for Change Impact Toolkit. Throughout these different stages, we have committed to an agile and iterative development process: as new resources and technologies are released and new ideas dispersed, we discuss and analyse these with the network and we consider appropriate changes to our proposed toolkit where these are relevant. We also share details about our ongoing learning and development process via the video4change network blog site ([www.v4c.org](http://www.v4c.org)).

During the course of our research, we identified that a number of resources had already been created to support the social impact of video (including guides, technology tools, and toolkits). The majority of the resources we examined focused on the social impact of feature-length documentaries – particularly those made in the global North – and they omitted considerations such as risk, consent, privacy, and accountability. They also neglected to consider the impact of the video-making process, including deeper forms of participation in the production, distribution, and engagement stages while they generally seemed oblivious to content, needs and practices emerging from the global South. These omissions meant that these existing resources had limited relevance to our own network and other Video for Change practitioners who prioritise these considerations.

In addition, our research findings suggested that many of the new materials that have been created for evaluating the impact of Video for Change initiatives tend to emphasise quantitative over qualitative measures of success while most focus entirely on evaluating the reception stages of production over the production and distribution processes. Often these materials place a great deal of emphasis on online engagement and in doing so it appears they assume that target audiences will all have unlimited and unfettered internet connectivity and the same capacity to participate online in terms of time, resources and skills.

At the same time, we did find notable exceptions of materials emerging within the field of Video for Change, with many resources here focused on ethical practices within video making processes. Indeed, many of the video4change network members have created video-making training resources that clearly focus on integrating ethical concerns and values including a focus on the participation of women and girls, identifying and mitigating risks, and understanding or challenging power imbalances (for example see WITNESS 2005; Video Volunteers 2009; Lunch and Lunch 2006).

In our early research process we identified that Video for Change organisations and practitioners wanted support to better understand how the process of production and distribution influences participants, how video can contribute to different kinds of change in different environments, and when engagement is online, how practitioners can move people beyond "clicktivism" and catalyse deeper and more sustained forms of engagement with an issue, campaign or movement. In light of early research, while developing a framework for measuring these kinds of impact, we also wanted to ensure that we clearly identified the core ethical principles that drive the Video for Change sector so we could ensure these were integrated into the Impact Framework and Toolkit we created.

## **What is Video for Change?**

In carrying out both a literature review and interviews with practitioners and donors about Video for Change, we found that there were no comprehensive books, videos, reports or compendiums that detailed the historical development of the use of video for social change and nor did we locate an agreed, commonly used definition for Video for Change. The term itself appears to have gained traction in 2000 when one of the founding video4change network members, WITNESS (<http://www.witness.org>), began to use it in their training and publications<sup>1</sup>. In this early use of the term there was very much a focus on exploring the potential of new levels of access to video-making tools (hardware and software) for addressing social justice and human rights abuses. This paper's co-author, Sam Gregory, in his introduction to WITNESS' second edition Video for Change practitioner guide (Gregory, Caldwell, Avni and Harding 2005, pxii), referred to videos use for social change as an emerging and growing "movement". This early writing on Video for Change also appeared to suggest that the potential of this approach was still emerging and not yet fully realised:

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Witness (2000) Video for Change: A Practical Guide for Activists. Witness: A project of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights; Gregory, S., Caldwell, G., Avni, R., & Harding, T. (2005) Video for Change: A Guide for Advocacy and Activism. London: Pluto Press

“Since the early 1990s, the increasing availability and affordability of technology has fuelled the world of social justice video activism. The movement has also been strengthened by new vehicles for online and offline distribution, by novel ways to get around the traditional gate-keepers of media, and by the proliferation of non-governmental organizations and people’s movements asserting their rights, voices and identities, particularly in the Global South...With access to production and distribution democratized, many more people are now able to participate in the tradition of video and filmmaking to document and challenge prevailing social ills.”

In this WITNESS guide, Video for Change is used interchangeably with “video advocacy” which is defined as: “the use of video as an essential tool in social justice activism – one that can be deployed as strategically and effectively as more traditional forms of “advocacy” referring to the range of ways to exert pressure for a defined goal of change, including persuasion, relationship-building, lobbying, organizing, and mobilizing” (Gregory, Caldwell, Avni and Harding 2005, pxii-xiii).

Since this time Video for Change has been developing as a concept and practice. The video4change network see Video for Change as an umbrella term and define it as: “the use of video to support social movements, document human rights violations, raise awareness on social issues, and influence social change” (video4change network website 2012). In many ways this more recent definition – although the subject of ongoing discussion and debate – is broader and more inclusive since it captures a number of related yet diverse video approaches that all focus on change-making. The identification and strengthening of commonalities within this emergent field is creating coherency, further establishing it as a field where different video-making approaches and practices can be supported, even as technologies, practices, needs, and contexts change.

While Video for Change is not a term that appears regularly in the academic literature, it is worth noting that the term “video activism” has had limited use (in the English language literature at least), especially when compared with ‘internet activism’ or ‘social media activism’<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, without going into various definitions of video activism and recognising that this term is being used quite flexibly in different places and contexts around the world, we would argue that Video for Change is an alternative and potentially more inclusive, umbrella term that refers to any initiative that consciously wants to use video as an approach to change-making. For example, Video for Change may include: personal storytelling and behaviour change projects that are designed to support people to break addictions or alter practices that are adversely impacting upon their lives; development

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see Thomas Harding’s (1997), *The Video Activists’ Handbook* or see discussions on the use of video as part of broader work on protest, radical or alternative media (Downing 1984; Couldry and Curran 2006), citizen’s media (see Rodriguez 2001) or Indigenous Media (Ginsburg 1991; Salazar 2011).

initiatives that use video to document personal reflections or community discussions; or, the implementation of video-based community or oral history or storytelling initiatives that seek to empower marginalised groups and communities to tell, record or archive their own stories. These kinds of video projects would not fit easily into many definitions of “video advocacy” or “video activism”. Later in this paper we will return to this point to discuss the opportunities and challenges for developing resources for the Video for Change field given its broad and inclusive definition. First, however, it is important that we recognise that Video for Change did not suddenly appear as a new and disconnected video-making approach in the early 2000s. Rather, it emerges from and remains connected to a longer, historical trajectory.

### **The Video for Change Genealogy**

Our research into historical and current uses of video in social change initiatives highlights how technological, political and social developments have influenced how video is used for social change (Notley 2012). For example, the availability of portable video and cheaper film technologies in the 1960s cultivated the development of guerrilla and participatory video practices and movements and, most recently, the widening accessibility of video technologies (particularly through mobile phones) and internet access in the 2000s has been (very unevenly) driving broader participation in social change actions and movements, as well as contributing to new forms and practices of video-making (such as citizen witnessing videos and human rights remix videos). The different approaches taken to use video for social change that we have identified in our research are listed in the below table (Table 1). While we describe these video approaches as unique in the below table, we also recognise from our interviews with Video for Change practitioners (see Notley 2013), that they are not fixed concepts and nor are they mutually exclusive. Very often Video for Change practitioners refer to backgrounds, training and experience with a number of these different approaches and thus they combine them when it makes sense to do so; they also use the same terms in different ways.

<b>Video for Change Approach and its historical context</b>	<b>Core values, focus and functions</b>
<p><b>Participatory, Grassroots and Community Video</b> Participatory, grassroots and community-based video initiatives have been proliferating at least since the 1950s emerging strongly in North America, Canada, Latin America and elsewhere when many associations, labour unions, community and citizens' groups and non government organisations (NGOs) emerged to challenge dominant radio and television networks with low power radio, local television, alternative press, theatre and other communication initiatives that sought to speak directly to less powerful communities (Gumucio-Dagron and Rodriguez, no date; Crocker 2003). Often, the focus of these approaches was (and remains) on challenging those who derive power from controlling narratives and discourses by supporting marginalised voices and perspectives to be heard.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides access to media-making tools, technologies and training as well as access to targeted audiences</li> <li>• Focuses on addressing social inequalities and supporting marginalised groups to tell their own stories</li> <li>• Encourages critical thinking and analysis (particularly in relation to development and politics)</li> <li>• Emphasises project self-reflexivity (reflecting on the project)</li> <li>• Focuses on locally-led change and collective action</li> <li>• Often provides local actors or participants with full ownership and control over footage and editing and distribution decisions</li> <li>• Emphasises the importance of local knowledge</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social Documentary Video</b> Scottish filmmaker John Grierson is thought to have first coined the term 'documentary' when reviewing a nonfiction film in 1926. He believed documentary film was the next great medium of information dissemination and was best used as a tool to make ordinary citizens aware and engaged with social issues as a catalyst to social change (Barsam, 1992). Since this time, the lowered costs of film-making have meant that social documentaries have covered just about every social issue imaginable; some of these documentaries have changed the way we perceive, understand and respond to the world around us.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually focused on exposing a single problem or issue</li> <li>• Often guided by traditional journalistic practices and principles</li> <li>• Usually aspires for broad outreach and at times also seeks broad audience participation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Video Advocacy</b> When the term 'video advocacy' started being used in the 1980s, access to cameras had become far cheaper, more portable and therefore more accessible (Willett 2009). Video Advocacy emphasises the use of video to speak to power. Very often the goal is to feed into policy or political change. Since the late 1990s, WITNESS has espoused a specific project methodology they call video advocacy that focuses on "the process of integrating video into an advocacy effort to achieve heightened visibility or impact in your campaign" (Gregory, Caldwell, Avni, and Harding, 2005).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on addressing specific and targeted law, policy or practice change or influencing a particular event/ongoing situation</li> <li>• Success or impact usually determined by whether the video was able to resonate with specific and targeted audiences and participant communities based on a strategy that sets out how law, policy or practice change can come about</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communication for Development, ICT4D and Communication for Change (where video is used)</b> Terms like "communication for development", "development communication" or "development support communication" have been used by a number of international organisations including Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and other UN agencies since the 1960s, becoming more prevalent in the decades that have followed. These terms usually refer to a practice whereby local communities are supported to feed into and critique development discourse and processes. ICT4D is a more recent term that refers specifically to the use of information and communication technologies for development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotes inclusive social, economic and political development</li> <li>• Supports and engages with reflective, critical discourses relating to development plans, practices and outcomes</li> <li>• Can support marginalised communities to impact on and critique development and development projects</li> <li>• Usually provides access to media tools, technologies and training as well as access to targeted audience</li> <li>• Can focus on the development of, or use of, digital technologies to support communication for development</li> </ul>
<p><b>Citizen Journalism Video</b> The increasing accessibility of the internet and cheap video recording devices, particularly starting in the 2000s, has led to a dramatic shift in both the production and distribution of video by everyday citizens. The use of the term 'citizen journalism' usually suggests the adoption of basic journalistic ethics and standards in a non-professional context, often supporting local citizens to tell local news and current affairs stories.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports broader publics to report on the issues that matter to them</li> <li>• Values and enables the production and distribution of local news and media</li> </ul>

<b>Video for Change Approach and its historical context</b>	<b>Core values, focus and functions</b>
<p><b>Witnessing Video</b> The widespread use of citizen footage emerged after major political and social events such as the Twin Tower terrorist attacks in 2001 ('September 11'), the London Bombings in 2005 ('7/7') and in a developing country context, the Burmese people's uprising ('Saffron Revolution') in 2007 (Allen, 2006; Gowing 2009). In each case, citizen's video and still images became the most viewed and emblematic depictions of these major crises. Allan (2013) and WITNESS have articulated this as 'citizen witness' video. Today witnessing video is regularly incorporated into mainstream and alternative news sites and is very often first picked up from social media. The term is also used by NGOs and rights based groups as a form of evidence collection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on the role of non-professionals and individuals enabled by increasing technology access in exposing or addressing rights abuses or social injustice through the collection and circulation of visual evidence</li> <li>• Can include raw video from direct witnessing of an event or personal testimony documentation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Digital Storytelling</b> Digital storytelling pioneer, Joe Lambert (2013), describes this approach to video-making as being about "capturing lives, creating community". Since 2003, digital storytelling projects have flourished around the world. Very often they share a short-video (2-5 minute) format with structured training that is designed to enable non-professional, everyday storytellers to create their own personal "mini-movie". While these stories are not always focused on social change, the form itself has social change imperatives embedded within it, since it is about developing and broadening creative, storytelling literacies and capacities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on intimate and personal experience as an approach to change-making</li> <li>• Focus on personal story as a form of empowerment</li> <li>• Focus on supporting people to tell their own stories, in their own voices</li> <li>• Sometimes emphasises the building up of collective memory and/or community-building through story sharing</li> </ul>
<p><b>Change-focused video memes, remixes and mash-ups and curated collections</b> Increasing access to the internet (particularly broadband access), alongside the increasing usability of video editing software and the ever-developing digital literacies of citizens has changed the way people engage with video content online, particularly since around 2005. There is now some evidence to show that both the remixing and curating of video content 'found' online is becoming an increasingly popular activity in some countries, particularly among a youth demographic (Jenkins 2006a; 2006b) and this is also true for social change remixes with some of these videos quickly reaching millions of people (Gregory and Losh 2012).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on engagement with issues through media creation</li> <li>• Can support people not directly affected by an issue (who may be located in another country) to become advocates</li> <li>• Emphasis on creative commons licensing and the value of remix and participatory cultures</li> <li>• Curated collections can focus on amplifying the reach of videos (whether online or through screening events), providing context or verification, or serve to bring different videos together to tell a larger story.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Video Archiving</b> Video archiving has a long history in the context of national sound and video archives or official state or community-based library collections, while more recent work has focused on digitising old collections and opening up access via online spaces. These collections have at times supported specific social change-focused collections. Archiving social change videos for current and future use has a growing importance given that old video tapes and films are vulnerable to damage or loss, while social media sites hosting videos are vulnerable to being shut down or censored on short notice. Many large collections can be found (through effective tagging) on large video-sharing sites, such as through YouTube channels; other initiatives create their own websites to host archived collections.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasises knowledge creation and access to knowledge</li> <li>• Focuses on documentation and preservation of events and histories that may otherwise be ignored or forgotten</li> <li>• Emphasis on taking responsibility for collecting and making videos available to the right people (may not be public access)</li> <li>• Can emphasise bringing together different videos to tell a larger story about a specific issue or history</li> </ul>
<p><b>Oral History and Testimony</b> The practice of recording and retelling oral history is as old as humanity. Digital tools that support oral history to be recorded, found and categorised have been growing since the proliferation of cheaper video technologies and the development of the internet but the field of anthropology also has a long history of using film to record unrecorded cultures and cultural practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasises knowledge creation and access to knowledge</li> <li>• Often plays a special role in indigenous communities by seeking to ensure local knowledge and languages are not lost</li> <li>• May restrict access to the knowledge generated where it considered appropriate to do so</li> <li>• Focus is often on ensuring people are able to record the stories and histories they feel must be told</li> <li>• Can play an important role in post-violence or post-conflict reconciliation</li> </ul>

Table 1: Video for Change Genealogy

## **Ethical principles and practices in video-making**

As Spence, Alexandra, Quinn and Dunn (2011) point out, ideas, policies and laws regarding ethical media conduct stem from morality, both public and private, as well as from notions relating to harm minimization, respect for individual rights (perceived and legal), and ideas about the public good. However, we would argue that many of the new frameworks being promoted and used to design for and measure the impact of Video for Change initiatives, particularly those emerging in the US with a focus on feature-length documentaries, have included no, or very limited, discussions about ethical checks and balances. This is a trend that shows some signs of change: for example, BRITDOC's Impact Guide, launched in 2014, (<http://impactguide.org/>), includes an exploration of 'top down' versus 'bottom up' approaches to change, suggesting "the act of making a film (or other media) is often as important as who sees the film once made" and that, "films using such top down approaches have achieved great things on individual issues. But at worst, such approaches can manifest in ways that are patronising and even disempowering."<sup>3</sup>

For many of the members of the video4change network a 'bottom up' approach is fundamental to effective and ethical social change. This raises the question: should outreach success be the central measure of impact success? What if, for example, the people the video was meant to support were inadvertently harmed or hampered by its making or the community the video sought to support were against its release and felt it unjustly portrayed or represented them? Or what if the people whom a video is supposed to support or represent have conflicting reactions, such as the negative reactions of some audiences in northern Uganda to the 'Kony 2012' video campaign, as opposed to the supportive reactions of teenage audiences in the USA (see Gregory 2012)? In these cases, one million or one hundred million YouTube views may be either irrelevant or a negative result.

Whilst recognising that not all video-makers will have the same ethical concerns and priorities, we felt that ethical considerations needed to be central to our Video for Change Impact conceptual framework given the alignment of the video4change network with marginalised and excluded communities, and with the frequent focus on challenging powerful and influential institutions and actors. This is not to suggest that Video for Change approaches should only focus on creating change from the 'bottom-up', since, for example, many Video for Change practitioners also emphasise targeted policy and legal change and may employ more traditional forms of documentary making to do this; however, we would argue that a Video for Change approach emphasises and makes central the needs and concerns of the actors, communities and movements it seeks to support.

In order to begin analysing the ethical concerns and priorities of the video4change network and other Video for Change practitioners, our research first sought to elucidate and understand shared core values and beliefs that shape the practices of Video for Change practitioners. Our analysis was based on findings from interviews with the video4change network members and 45 responses to an online survey focused on Video for Change and Impact that highlighted a number of shared core values and

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://impactguide.org/2.1.1.php>



ethical concerns. We have now adopted six of these shared values and concerns as the basis of an Impact model and toolkit we are developing. We believe the first two of these shared values and ethics (detailed below) are most relevant at the beginning of a Video for Change project, while the following four are relevant to all stages of a Video for Change project from planning to evaluation.

## **Video for Change Shared Values and Ethical Concerns:**

**1. Be clear and open about your plans and objectives.** This is an important ethical issue since the actors or communities we want to work with and support can feel vulnerable to media exploitation. Transparency about intentions support solid foundations for trust. It's also important for managing expectations: what time and resources will go into the initiative and what will and will not be possible.

**2. Have a clear rationale for why and how video is a useful approach to creating specific change.** Very often Video for Change initiatives ask actors or communities to give up their time or to contribute other resources to support an initiative. These actors may need to know there is a well-formed strategy behind an initiative (or a plan to develop one) in order to make informed choices about contributing their time and resource investments. Defining your 'Pathways to Change' (which we discuss later in this paper) can also be an important collaborative process that involves the communities or actors you want to benefit from your initiative. Again, this is not always critical: for example, some videos (such as protest videos) respond immediately to situations and they may be prefaced with strategic planning. However, knowing what your video needs to achieve, to create, or to contribute will help shape the way you create, present, and distribute your video.

**3. Analyse power dynamics.** Power influences everything: our ability to make decisions about our own lives; our ability to change situations; the resources we have access to; and what we are taught, know and think. Since Video for Change is about supporting positive social change, it's important that the video-making process seeks to identify and understand how power is impacting on the issue we are working on and on the people we are working with. In this way, participants and video-makers can make better assessments about how power might impact the initiative and how it might be challenged.

**4. Make the right decisions about participation and inclusion.** Video for Change initiatives can empower people; but they can also disempower. For example, a video can (re-)victimise people because the video-makers have not carefully considered the consequences of whose story and voice is included or excluded and how this may create or perpetuate problematic discourses (including stereotypes). To prevent this, Video for Change practitioners can take a number of steps to ensure their initiatives support appropriate inclusion and that this inclusion will be a positive experience for those involved.

**5. Be accountable.** Most Video for Change practitioners we interviewed believe that their practices and outputs should be made accountable to the communities they are seeking to support. For this

reason many Video for Change initiatives will include processes that allow communities, campaigns and movements to direct, monitor, and/or evaluate initiatives. Accountability is also about making the right decisions about co-ownership including addressing issues relating to copyright, intellectual property, and editing decisions and processes.

**6. Assess and mitigate risks.** Video-making and video circulation can introduce significant new risks to vulnerable participants and communities and it can exacerbate others. These risks may be caused, for example, by not having spoken to the participants about risks and/or options to remain anonymous or through a lack of planning for the safe storage, sending or receiving of digital files. In order to ensure Video for Change initiatives do not exacerbate conflicts, tensions, problems, and inequalities, and in order to ensure the safety and security of marginalised and vulnerable communities, efforts should be made to carry out and to respond to a careful risk analysis.

We believe that these ethical considerations require that we push far beyond measuring outreach and audience numbers as sole indicators of social impact; rather, they imply that we need to define and evaluate the impact of important modes of participation through the entire video-making workflow including research and planning, pre-production, production, post-production, distribution, outreach engagement, ongoing assessment, and communicating results and impacts. As Jessica Mayberry of Video Volunteers says: “your process IS your ethic” (personal communication 2014). This focus on defining the kind of participation that matters across the full video-making cycle critically differentiates Video for Change from more traditional forms of documentary practice, which often keep communities and social movements at arms length – either because they do not know how to engage people using participatory methods, or they do not value participation, or because they feel they want to fall in line with more traditional journalistic ethics in order to make claims about objectivity.

These ethical principles we have outlined also suggest a symbiosis that, whilst placing some limitations on intervening actors, also provide opportunities for deepening engagement and relationships that contribute to different types of social impact. The integration of these ethical principles may require additional resource investments, but they move to protect the communities, movements, and actors that Video for Change makers seek to serve, while providing methods of engagement that enable co-ownership. This nurturing of mutual respect can contribute to creating the meaningful and long-term relationships that are required for sustained social change. For example, a Video for Change initiative with an engaged set of participants or constituents can leverage these relationships to increase outreach, conversation, dialogue, influence and action over a long period of time.

While these core principles are considered important among the video4change network members and other practitioners we have consulted with, we want to again emphasise that we see Video for Change as an umbrella term that may include many different practices and practitioners who emerge from diverse contexts. Some practitioners will not strategically plan their Video for Change initiative in advance for a variety of different reasons and they may not have considered or have strictly adhered

to all or any the ethical principles we have outlined; reasons for this may include, for example, because they are responding to an immediate situation like a conflict or an act of violence; or they may not have received any Video for Change training or support. However, we believe that not considering these core ethical Video for Change principles increases risk and lowers the potential for different kinds of social impact and for this reason, we argue that wherever possible it is worth carefully planning a Video for Change initiative in advance, using defined ethical principles to achieve this.

## **Impact Metrics and Impact Stories**

The current prevalent focus on the reception (audience) stage of impact is at least partly the result of new technologies and cultural practices that help measure online outreach and engagement. The ability to aggregate metadata, to use algorithms to interrogate large datasets, and the ongoing development of off-the-shelf analytics software, allows video-makers to analyse distribution and some forms of online engagement in new and useful ways. However, the kind of data collected from online analytics tools is also limited. Other points of interaction, engagement and outreach are not rendered visible by these tools and as a result, other ways of seeing impact can become neglected in a rush to declare success by counting online views, hits, tweets, comments and clicks. For example, online analytics tools will not help analyse the experience people had at a discussion following a private or public screening of a video or the experiences of those who were involved in a video's production; these experiences can be critical to success and this kind of success can be much harder to understand, measure or evaluate.

Holistic approaches to understanding impact can be conveniently ignored when there is an overemphasis on the quantitative, or on a very limited set of approaches to measuring impact. For example, within the reception stage of a Video for Change impact project there are critical issues regarding the balance between data collection, privacy, and digital security: a consideration not mentioned by the current suite of Impact Guides that have recently been released for video-makers<sup>4</sup>. The result of this oversight is that what is measurable becomes over-emphasised as opposed to what is impactful for a specific initiative, in a specific context. We concur with ProPublica's Richard J.'s comment in a white paper on the impact of non-profit journalism: "we should want to take great care that we not create pressure to undertake only that work the outcomes from which are likely to be quantifiable" (Tofel 2013, p. 20).

Despite the current momentum building around measuring the impact of communication for social change initiatives (particularly for social documentary video), there appears to be some resistance to emerging practices as well. Recently, the Fledgling Fund (2014), one of the funding bodies currently driving new approaches to defining and measuring video impact, published an open letter which notes that in a recent survey of US-based documentary filmmakers (Aggregate 2014), 62 per cent of respondents answered 'no' when asked: "Do you think there should be metrics to measure the social

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<sup>4</sup> For example, BRITDOC's Impact Guide 2014, Harmony Institute and Bay Area Video Coalition's Impact Playbook 2013 and Media Impact Project's Web Metrics Basics for Journalists 2014 do not discuss data privacy and security even though they all discuss and encourage data collection.

change created by a film?” On the one hand, this may indicate a reluctance by many social change film-makers to accept new models focused on data driven assessment and that perhaps they want more diverse and nuanced forms of engagement and impact to be recognised. On the other hand, this may also indicate that some film-makers may wish to avoid certain levels of accountability for the results of their productions or that many documentary-makers want a distinction made between their videos and direct social change work, which they see as being beyond their interest, scope or skillset. Regardless of the motivations for this result, the survey findings do point to serious limitations in approaches that emphasise quantitative indicators to measure success and predominantly online methods for impact measurement, even among the specific video form of social documentaries. As the Fledgling Fund (2014, para 6.) conclude in their own analysis: “this style of [quantitatively-focused] analysis can capture only very specific aspects of a project’s social impact. It will inevitably miss much of the crucial long-term, off-line, grasstops and/or deeply personal impact that a project can have. For example, a new conversation around a dinner table about an important topic, a moment of personal healing, a quiet donation made to a cause after a viewing and discussion, or a closed-door influencer screening that could have policy impact in the longer term are all incredibly important ways in which documentaries have impact beyond what can be captured by big data.”

This is not to completely discount the value of online analytics and metrics tools for impact measurement; however, we would suggest that at the very least we may need to resist the use or at least over-use of these new metrics tools until we at least find more effective ways to collect “thick data”, as Tricia Wang (2013, para 6) describes it. Wang suggests: “thick data reveals the social context of and connections between data points. Big Data delivers numbers; thick data delivers stories. Big data relies on machine learning; thick data relies on human learning.” In this way, we would argue that emphasising the need for thick data when assessing impact might help to ensure that outreach analytics and metrics are not completely disembodied from their social context in a way that may give a misleading or completely false impression of success. In the rush to quantify online distribution and social media participation, it’s important to start not by asking ‘what can we count?’, but rather, ‘what really matters and to whom?’ Thus, the Video for Change Impact Toolkit we are developing does not primarily promote number-based metrics or indicators as a way to provide a quick tally on audience and participation; instead it balances the use of quantitative indicators with the use of qualitative methods to tell “impact stories” that serve to capture and understand rich and diverse experiences.

Further, in many cases, online analytics tools are completely irrelevant to success: participant communities and target audiences for Video for Change can be small (perhaps even just made for the creator or for a few policy-makers) and target audiences may not be online or have very poor quality or limited internet access. We believe that it is important that Video for Change initiatives do not assume that more is more when it comes to audience and impact or that everyone has equal opportunity to participate in the same ways and in the same places. We believe this acknowledgement can be used to support an ongoing conversation about the impact of exclusion where not everyone who wants to participate has the capabilities to do so due to a lack of time, money, information, skills, literacy and freedom of expression; or because of censorship or the limited language availability of

content or training. In terms of digital exclusion, while 2.3 billion people were online in 2012, two thirds of the world's population (and three quarters of the population from developing countries) were still not using the internet. Other media technologies remain far more evenly dispersed: for example, 75 per cent of households in developing countries have a television set compared with just 20 percent of households have internet access. Mobile developments, in particular, are accelerating access to internet-based communication in developing countries: yet while there is 75 per cent mobile broadband penetration in developed countries, the figure is just under 20 per cent for developing countries (ITU 2013). The cost of broadband access and the quality of broadband (both very important for streaming video initiatives) also still vary enormously (ITU 2012b). These ever-changing but also fairly persistent disparities mean that, video distribution and outreach strategies focused solely on online outreach remain problematic in most, if not all, parts of the world.

## **Impact Pathways**

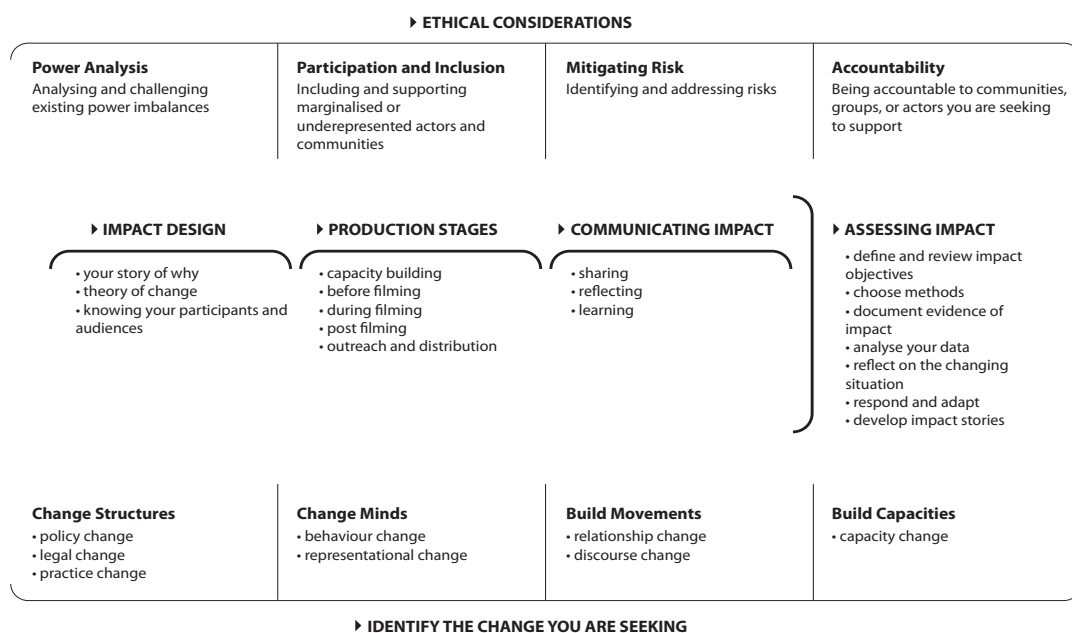
In our research project we use the term impact to refer to any change made to a situation or context. Assessing impact means documenting what has changed but also documenting all the things that contributed to that change and it means capturing intended and unintended impacts as well as positive and negative impacts.

Unlike feature documentaries, which often try to directly attribute substantial social change to a particular film, Video for Change approaches often focus on smaller, or more incremental forms of change. Video for Change is more often seen by practitioners as a cumulative contribution to change – part of a social change ecosystem that includes, but is not limited to, media and media-based engagement. This isn't to say that Video for Change initiatives do not have direct impacts; rather, that these specific and attributable changes exist within a conceptual framework that acknowledges many moving parts and contingencies that are contributing to (or working against) the same form of change.

Our consideration of what makes Video for Change unique from other kinds of media or video-making has moved us toward adopting a more holistic a model that emphasises “impact pathways”. Impact Pathways refers to the many processes and actions throughout the duration of a project that might contribute to impact. Video for Change initiatives also often produce multiple products and engage communities and movements across the full video arc including planning, capacity building, production, outreach, usage, and evaluation. This means that our impact framework needs to consider the entire initiative – rather than only assessing the impact of a single, discreet specific video output – when designing for and assessing impact. We believe what is missing from the current impact models and toolkits that have been created for documentary-makers is an approach that considers the entire video-making process and seeks out points of impact along that pathway. We believe that, by supporting and promoting an ongoing approach to monitoring and evaluating impact (rather than a ‘one-off’ assessment at the end), an Impact Pathways framework can assist video-makers to understand what is and is not working in their activities so they can respond in an agile way. We believe this Impact Pathways framework is also more congruent with the nature of collaborative,

networked, or crowd-sourced production and distribution processes that are participatory and multi-authorial and that require ongoing responses to outreach and engagement. We also consider this approach to both designing for and evaluating impact to also be more closely aligned with a bottom-up and participatory form of accountability.

## Video for Change Impact Pathways Framework



In capturing impact, our approach also seeks to document and understand both more immediate short-term impacts as well as longer-term impacts. These immediate impacts could include, for example, informing new audiences about an issue through screening events, building the capacities of social movements through the provision of training, or mobilising target audiences to take an action like attending a rally or signing a petition. Longer-term impacts, such as changing social attitudes or changing a public policy or law, are more likely to require multiple efforts over time by many different actors. We believe shorter-term impacts are often either the complete focus of evaluation methods used in the video and communication social change field or they are completely ignored in impact evaluation. The Impact Pathways approach we are now in the process of developing instead seeks to document and understand shorter term impacts in a way that helps practitioners to understand and tell stories about how different activities and ways of working might or might not be contributing to the creation of the right environment or context that is needed for longer-term impact and broader social change.

## The challenges and opportunities involved in adopting an Impact Pathways Framework

As we have outlined, the Video for Change field has evolved in tandem with the movements and organisations involved, and often in-line with the technologies available for video-making, organising, and audience engagement. The latest developments that are changing and driving how video is being used for social purpose activism highlight some of the challenges and opportunities of using an ethically-driven Impact Pathways conceptual framework that emphasises the needs, aspirations, intentions, and safety of communities affected. For example, there are many challenges in applying bottom-up, participatory forms of accountability across the full spectrum of Video for Change initiatives and remix video is perhaps the most problematic of the forms of emergent activism for the ‘impact pathways’ approach. Drawing on what danah boyd (2008) has characterised as the properties of the social media and networked publics – namely, persistence, searchability, replicability, scalability and three related dynamics – of invisible audiences, collapsed contexts and the blurring of public private – we can see how content created in and for one specific audience, time and place is embedded with assumptions around purpose, visibility and privacy. Yet videos can have their context collapsed and their audience and visibility radically altered when they are replicated, remixed, and re-shared, and this can have both positive and negative impacts for participants in the original context.

We see this dilemma present in the human rights and social justice world as well as the world of everyday popular remix and meme-based viral video. An iconic example of the latter is the persistent patterns of remix and re-adaptation of the footage of ‘Star Wars Kid’<sup>5</sup> where personal footage of a teenager pretending to be a character from Star Wars was shared, publicised, and remixed (often disparagingly), and was viewed by over a billion people. In these cases, intention and context are removed in ways that were at the time unimaginable to the creator. In the Video for Change context, remix videos are increasingly being created by producers who are physically close to the issues, violence, or trauma they are exposing, and by those who are acting as remote or distant witnesses. One example of this type of practice is the work of Tamer Shaaban, an Egyptian student living in the US, who produced ‘The Most AMAZING video on the Internet #Egypt’. This remixed footage of the Arab Spring went on to become one of the most widely-shared videos of the Tahir Square uprisings of early 2011 (Gregory and Losh 2012).

Another set of questions emerges when we consider the relevance or appropriateness of the Impact Pathways conceptual framework when videos created through acts of citizen witnessing<sup>6</sup> and citizen journalism seek to share documentation of a crisis in ways that are not guided by prior strategy, or by an assessment of the ongoing ramifications of risk for communities depicted in or potentially affected by the video. This raises the question: are people creating a Video for Change initiative if their intentions are not clear, or if they are not guided by the ethical principles we have outlined, or if they see themselves as part of a loose collective or an ad-hoc contributor? Curiously, citizen witnesses and

<sup>5</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star\\_Wars\\_Kid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Wars_Kid)

<sup>6</sup> Citizen witnessing is a term used at WITNESS in a way that connects with the work of academic, Stuart Allan. See for example, Allan, S. (2013) *Citizen Witnessing: Revisioning Journalism in Times of Crisis*, Polity: London.

citizen journalists who record their own video footage or source it directly from primary or secondary sources – particularly when documenting acts of violence – must make a rudimentary decision about their Impact Pathway when they upload to commercial video-sharing platforms like YouTube. This is because these platforms will often exclude context-less content that breaks their rules on violent acts, hate speech and other forms of objectionable content, but will allow it to remain if context and presentation indicate that it falls within an educational or documentary context: that is, if in its presentation the sharer has made explicit that they want it to be used and seen as documentation, evidence, education, or news (Glenesk 2013).

The practices of video curation and archiving, both involving the aggregation of video content, have also emerged as Video for Change approaches in recent years, and these too offer challenges in terms of ensuring our Impact Pathways approach remains relevant. These kinds of video initiatives often take on the responsibility for assigning context, meaning, and distributive reach to citizen's media, acts of citizen witnessing, and documenting. Examples of work in this field include the environment and social justice focused video sharing platform, EngageMedia (<http://engagemedia.org>); the WITNESS collaboration with Storyful and YouTube, 'The Human Rights Channel on YouTube' (<https://www.youtube.com/humanrights>); journalistic experiments such as 'Watching Syria' by the New York Times (<http://projects.nytimes.com/watching-syrias-war>); and many acts of individual curation that emerge as trusted sources in particular contexts, such as the 'Only Mehdi' YouTube channel during the Green Revolution in Iran in 2010 (<https://www.youtube.com/user/onlymehdi>). Each of these Video for Change initiatives cited here clearly aspires to use video to support social change, whether that involves changing minds and behaviours, or changing structures such as policies and practices, or building movements or individual capacities. Yet, these curating and archiving processes sometimes ignore, or do not know the original creator's intent. In such cases, the removal or addition of context can contribute to less than appropriate handling of video material. This too can challenge the ethical principles that underpin our Impact Pathways framework.

The ethical foundations of our Impact Pathway framework are particularly challenged in the case of so-called 'perpetrator videos' – a genre of videos shot by perpetrators of violence or rights violations – that have often been re-purposed and re-contextualized as evidence of both specific human rights violations and of general patterns of violations. In an analysis of the use of Egyptian police violence videos, Gregory and Zimmerman (2010) note how in a number of ultimately crucial cases, footage shot by policemen themselves, such as the el-Kebir case of torture, was collated, re-contextualized, and identified as human rights footage (not as entertainment or an attempt at humiliation) by bloggers like Wael Abbas and Noha Atef. Yet this same footage, can also be found alongside footage from other contexts of police and state violence in videos like 'Police Brutality – Police Get What They Deserve', a remix video seen close to two and a half million times on YouTube before it was taken down; in this case specific incidents of police and military abuse are subsumed into a broad narrative that loses all connection to the specificity of each incident within it. In some of these perpetrator video remix incidents – for example, the notorious Squatgate incident in Malaysia – the individuals who were abused and violated in the videos requested that others stop circulating the footage (Padania, 2006).



Citizen witnessing videos and perpetrator videos (to an even greater extent), complicate requirements for informed consent and informed participation – two key ethical principles of Video for Change in the impact framework we have described in this paper. This is due to the fact that informed consent is not considered a fundamental citizen-reporting method, and in the case of perpetrator videos, the stripping of power and agency from the victim is precisely the point of the act of filming (for more, see Gregory 2010). Solutions to these situations are hard to find – and as noted above, may rest more in the vagaries of platform judgements on consent, or in the decisions made by a range of sometimes unidentifiable or unaccountable intermediary actors.

Adding to these concerns regarding shifting online structures and dynamics, is the over-emphasis of the value of online environments, which can lead to widening disparities and the exclusion of marginalised voices. As we have noted, most of the world's population are not able to easily view videos online. Initiatives that focus only on online distribution need to be evaluated in terms of who they include and exclude and what effect this has on overall impact.

These issues describe just some of the challenges of the emergence and expansion of the Video for Change field. This diversification will continue as technologies develop and as an increasing number of varied stakeholders start to participate at different stages of Video for Change initiatives: including capacity-building, consultation and framing, filming and editing and curation and distribution. Since Video for Change includes many diverse approaches, developing a framework and toolkit that will support both the design and evaluation of impact is proving challenging. However, we believe that a flexible conceptual framework that is underpinned by the shared values and ethics that already exist in this field will provide a useful way forward. One step we will now be taking with the ongoing development of our Video for Change Impact Toolkit is to test and iterate the Impact Pathways framework in a range of contexts to ensure it is appropriate and usable across the broad spectrum of Video for Change initiatives.

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