Photovoice in Youth Leadership Research in Papua New Guinea: Successes, Challenges and Learning

Tracie Mafile'o, *Director of Research and Postgraduate Studies, Pacific Adventist University*
tracie.mafileo@pau.ac.pg

Lalen Simeon, *Research Manager, School of Business, Pacific Adventist University*
lalen.simeon@pau.ac.pg

Unia Api
kaiseapi@gamil.com

Ben Thomas, *Dean, School of Business, Pacific Adventist University*
ben.thomas@pau.ac.pg

ABSTRACT

This paper critically reflects on the successes and challenges of using photovoice in recent youth leadership research in PNG. The research was conducted amongst youth in 3 diverse PNG settings: Hanuabada in the National Capital District; Kavieng in New Guinea Islands region; and Goroka in Eastern Highlands Province. Photovoice was successful in achieving some aspects of the project: surfacing rich data on examples of youth leadership; providing a perspective on leadership through the eyes of the youth in a particular community; facilitating dialogue and planning for youth action on community issues. Challenges experienced in the employment of photovoice included: bringing all team members into a shared participatory and emancipatory frame of reference so that the principles of participatory action research (PAR) shape all aspects of planning and implementation of research; complexities of diverse languages within the participating communities; responding to community expectations when engaging with research; engaging support of community leaders throughout the project and beyond.

Keywords: Photovoice, youth, leadership, Papua New Guinea (Pacific), participatory action research

I. INTRODUCTION

The *Successful Models of Youth Leadership in PNG* research project (Simeon, Mafile'o, Api, Gane, & Thomas, 2010) was conducted in 2009 amongst youth in 3 diverse Papua New Guinea (PNG) settings – Hanuabada, Kavieng and Goroka. Hanuabada is an urban village within Port Moresby, in the National Capital District; Kavieng is an urban centre in New Guinea Islands region; and Goroka is an urban centre in the Eastern Highlands Province. The research objectives were to:

- develop a better understanding of successful models of youth leadership in PNG, both positive and negative;

- ascertain the effectiveness of youth leadership programs offered by government, church, or NGOs; and

- improve youth leadership training.

Mafile'o, T., Simeon, L, Api, U. & Thomas, B. (2010). *Photovoice in Youth Leadership Research in Papua New Guinea: Successes, Challenges and Learning*

Page 1

Youth, aged 12-25 years, constitute about one third (28%) of the total PNG population (PNG National Statistical Office; cited in National Youth Commission, 2007, p.17). In contemporary PNG, youth face a number of challenges, for example:

- Lack of access to basic education, with an estimated 33% of youth never attending school (PNG National Statistical Office; cited in National Youth Commission, 2007, p.18);

- A generalised HIV epidemic in PNG where young women between the ages of 15-29 years have a disproportionate high risk of infection (Buchanan-Aruwafu, 2007); and

- Youth cult group and generation name phenomena in secondary schools (Api, 2009; Drawii, 2008)

Developing positive youth leadership in PNG is important to achieve integral human development, one of PNG"s National Goals and Directive Principles.

This paper critically reflects on the successes and challenges of using photovoice in this youth leadership research project in the PNG context. Following an overview of the project and how photovoice was implemented, learning from the project is highlighted and discussed: rich information; action focused dialogue; participatory action research (PAR) and emancipatory frameworks; diverse languages; and leaders" and community support and expectations.

II. PHOTOVOICE IMPLEMENTATION

Photovoice is a research method which engages marginalised groups to contribute to community change (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Wang, 2006). Participants use photography to "voice" their perspective on problems and solutions in their community to policy makers and decision makers.

The photovoice research method was utilised alongside youth focus groups and a survey amongst youth leadership training providers. A total of 31 focus groups, involving over 200 youth, were conducted across the 3 locations, with a range of youth groups (including church youth, school youth, and settlement community youth). Surveys of 4 youth leadership training providers were collected.

Participants were introduced to photovoice after the focus group was conducted, through verbal explanation, a handout, and an example of photos and comments on a laptop from a youth photovoice project in the USA. The young people were then asked to select a leader to take responsibility to take photos over a period of 3-4 weeks and to jot in a notebook comments on why the photo was taken. The youth were instructed to take photos of both good and bad leadership in their community. The key community contact people collected the cameras and notebooks and returned them to the researchers. A photovoice workshop was then conducted for each location. While cameras were given to 13 groups, and most of these 3 groups returned pictures, youth from only 7 groups (totalling 15 young people across the 3 locations) eventually participated in a photovoice workshop, or one-on-one photovoice reflection, with a researcher.

During the photovoice workshop, those present were given the opportunity to review their photos and then to make a selection of 4-5 photos that: depicted a REAL situation; were a CLEAR and good quality picture; were SAFE in that the people in the photo would not be uncomfortable or disadvantaged if the photo was displayed publically; and, finally, said the most about YOUTH LEADERSHIP. After selecting their photos, the young people presented their photos and comments on a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation and gave further narrative. Following this, a group discussion was facilitated, generally around the question of how youth leadership could address issues reflected in the photos. This discussion was recorded and later thematically analysed. These young people then gave a presentation back to the community on the research findings, alongside the researchers.

Mafile'o, T., Simeon, L, Api, U. & Thomas, B. (2010). *Photovoice in Youth Leadership Research in Papua New Guinea: Successes, Challenges and Learning*

Page 2

III. PHOTOVOICE PROCESS, DATA AND OUTCOMES: SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES AND LEARNING

A. Successes

Photovoice was successful in achieving aspects of the project objectives. The data that emerged from photovoice was organised under six headings: environment, infrastructure, entrepreneurship, and employment. These themes added an image-based dimension to the data collected via focus groups and surveys; the photovoice process also provided the space for action focused dialogue with youth.

1) Rich Information

Photovoice surfaced rich information on examples of youth leadership and the lives of youth in these contexts from the perspective of the young people. For example, *Photo 1* below illustrates youth contribution to the informal economy and how families work together. The young person who took the photo commented: "Catching fish in the river is hard; this woman sells fish everyday because her father is a good fisherman." The discussion revealed that some families have a regular income from this, but it takes the whole family to work together. The youth also shared that some out-of-school youth fish in groups to earn money to support their families, while others sell firewood and crafts.

Figure 1. Photo 1

A group of youth in Hanuabada reported that they had formed a dancing group. The young person who was a leader of the group commented that the group "is registered and therefore we take part in a lot of functions in clubs, hotels, etc. We get paid to dance. Most of the dancers are unemployed, grade 6 drop-outs. This is how they earn their own money."

Photovoice also provided a youth perspective on leadership more generally – that is, how youth perceive existing leadership in their setting. The youth in Goroka, as in all the 3 locations, were concerned about environmental issues and particularly the vast amount of littering in their community. *Photo 2* was taken by a young person in Goroka who commented: "This picture reflects bad leadership...as rubbish is thrown out through the window just outside the residential building of a health institution."

Figure 2. Photo 2

Leadership responsibility for infrastructure development also emerged as a theme from the photovoice exercise. A young person in Hanuabada took *Photo 3* of a road in the urban village. The youth of Hanuabada expressed concern that leaders are not fixing the village roads. The road below is poorly constructed and maintained, but it links up with the well-maintained freeway that connects Port Moresby with Waigani, where government buildings are located. Similarly, in Goroka the young people reported that when the Australian Prime Minister was visiting Goroka, all roads were upgraded to show a good image but after that visit potholes developed on the roads around town and in their view nobody was taking responsibility.

Figure 3.   Photo 3

On the same environmental theme, a young person took *Photo 4* stating: "This picture shows signs of good leadership. Mostly councillors and assistant leaders provide rubbish bins so that people can put their rubbish into the bins."

Figure 4.   Photo 4

A Goroka young person shared in the workshop the perspective that youth realise their value when they are engaged in community service such as renovation, the content of *Photo 5*. The young person who took this photo stated: "Working bees (people work together on a community project) help youth to see their importance in the development of the community."

Figure 5.   Photo 5

Mafile'o, T., Simeon, L, Api, U. & Thomas, B. (2010). *Photovoice in Youth Leadership Research in Papua New Guinea: Successes, Challenges and Learning*

The photos taken by the young people bring the perspectives of PNG young people who participated to the fore and reflects what Guba and Lincoln (2005) refer to as an emancipatory era in research - emancipation from „the coerciveness of Truth, emancipation from hearing only the voices of Western Europe, emancipation from generations of silence, and emancipation from seeing the world in one color‟ (p.212).

2) Dialogue and Planning for Action

The photovoice workshop facilitateed dialogue with youth around the leadership issues they perceived in their communities. Importantly, this included discussion on what youth were able to do to address leadership and other community issues, for example environmental issues.

Strategies for youth action on environmental issues arising out of discussions included:

a. organizing youth groups to do rubbish collections;

b. educate family members to put rubbish in the proper place; and 6

c. competition amongst homes, with prizes for the cleanest yard.

Greenwood and Levin (2005) argue that validity of action research centres „on the workability of the actual social change activity engaged in, and the test is whether or not the actual solution to a problem arrived at solves the problem‟ (p.54). While we were not able to follow through with groups in actioning specific strategies generated, there were some positive outcomes of the research project. Anecdotal feedback was received from one of the churches that as a result of involvement in the project, the church acted on giving more leadership responsibility to youth in church programmes. There was also an unexpected ripple effect, with significant change taking place in the village of Dr Lalen Simeon, the leader of the research team, who is from New Ireland, the Province of one of the research locations. After the completion of the research, the community was aware of her work on this project and as part of a visit she made to her village, a youth committee was established which secured youth leadership as an integral aspect of community functioning. This demonstrates the strength of having an „insider‟ indigenous researcher in work with indigenous groups for follow through and uptake of research findings within a communal cultural context (see Smith, 1999).

IV. CHALLENGES AND LEARNING

A. PAR and Emancipatory Framework

Adopting a participatory and emancipatory frame of reference and ensuring that principles of PAR shaped planning and implementation throughout the entire research project was a challenge. According to Kemmis and McTaggert (2005), PAR is distinguishable from conventional research by the characteristics of „shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation toward community action‟ (p.560). PAR was new to most members of the research team. Although we shared articles on photovoice, there was little time to discuss PAR in-depth and to agree on how the theoretical framework would guide and inform what we did. There were also key community contacts that had a pivotal role in the implementation of the project. Given the distance to two of the three locations, the community contact needed to monitor the young peoples‟ progress with the photo taking and were asked to collect the cameras and return the disposable cameras to the researchers for processing. While most cameras were returned, less than half the participants engaged through to the stage of the workshop and presentation back to the community – so iterations of the cycle of plan-act-reflect (Crane & Richardson, 2000) did not fully unravel. The challenge was possibly impacted by the fact the photovoice was one of two other methods which are not necessarily underpinned by a PAR framework.

The learning from this is that a combined training workshop on PAR prior to the commencement of the project - which included the research team, key community contacts and some young people from each location - would have enabled principles of PAR to become engrained within the broader team and

Mafile'o, T., Simeon, L, Api, U. & Thomas, B. (2010). *Photovoice in Youth Leadership Research in Papua New Guinea: Successes, Challenges and Learning*

Page 5

throughout the project. Further, having several rounds of phototaking, with mini-workshops in between, would have enriched the dialogue and process. This way, consciousness-raising opportunities (Carlson, Engerbretson, & Chamberlain, 2006; Freire, 1972) would have more readily presented for researchers, assistants and participants alike. 7

B. Diverse Languages and Locations

Complexities arose from the diverse languages within the participating communities. Language is a salient factor in qualitative research as „different languages construct different ways of seeing social life, which poses methodological and epistemological challenges for the researcher" (Larkin, de Casterle, & Schotsman, 2007, p.468). Language was a complicating factor when it came to explaining photovoice and to the critical dialogue on the photo content and possible actions. Although one of the benefits of photovoice method is the ability to communicate through an image, there is still a reliance on language in the explanation of the task and in the interpretation of the photos to lead towards action and change.

PNG is one of the most linguistically diverse nations in the world, with more than 800 indigenous languages. Nonetheless, there are three national languages – English, Pigin English (Tok Pisin) and Motu. While Goroka and Kavieng use Pigin English, Motu is the preferred language in Hanuabada. Two of the research team members were Tok Pisin speakers, all four of us spoke English, but none of us could understand or speak Motu. While the youth in Hanuabada could understand and speak some English and Tok Pisin, it was clear that their preferred language of expression was Motu. This was evident both during our visits to the community, attending some church programmes to engage youth in the project, and during the photovoice workshop. There would often be two or three languages being spoken and interpreted and either the community contact, parents or one or two young people would interpret back to Motu. There was a marked difference between our experience where there was not a shared „language of comfort" between researchers and participants and it certainly took longer to achieve the tasks at hand.

An example of youth photovoice pictures and commentary were downloaded from the internet and shown to participants to help explain the project. The disadvantage of doing so however was that the pictures from the youth in this study tended to mimic what the youth had seen in the photovoice example which was about a different project with different objectives. For example, there were a lot of photos in the example about littering, tidiness and cleanliness in the streets – and „rubbish" was a dominant theme in photos collected by the young people in this study also. This could be coincidental; however, it seems more likely that they were influenced more by what they saw in the example, than by what we said in our instructions. In the practice of implementing photovoice, it may be better to illustrate using a localised example by one of the researchers, rather than examples from other contexts. The overall learning, however, was a reminder about the salience of language in research where understanding and action are primary objectives. It also raises questions about the impact of the research amongst Pacific peoples being centred in English, where English is a globalising language continuing the legacy of colonialism (Autagavaia, 2001).

C. Engaging Leaders' Support and Meeting Expectations

Engaging community leaders" support throughout the project was a challenge. There are a number of contributing factors. First, identifying who the leaders are, and the appropriate leaders to engage with a youth focused project, is not a straightforward task. We relied on our community contacts, and their interpretation of who should be contacted was not necessarily the same as others in the community. In Hanuabada, for example, there are a number of Councillors that could have been contacted. In addition to Councillors, there are also traditional leaders, which community members reported was a system that was breaking down as a result of „modernisation" and urbanisation. 8

Secondly, infrastructure and logistical challenges impacted on the project more generally and the engagement of leaders more specifically. For example, in Goroka the public meeting where we reported back the findings and the young people presented their photovoice images and narrative, was held in a

Mafile'o, T., Simeon, L, Api, U. & Thomas, B. (2010). *Photovoice in Youth Leadership Research in Papua New Guinea: Successes, Challenges and Learning*

Page 6

school hall. Unfortunately, there was heavy rain on the night of the meeting. In this location, many of the roads turn to mud under heavy rain and people tend to stay indoors. Further, there was a power blackout, another consequence of heavy rain. The team improvised and used car headlights to light the room. These infrastructure and logistical limitations impacted on the sustained engagement of community leaders and policy-makers.

Finally, the engagement of some leaders was a challenge because youth issues and perspectives were competing for leaders" and policy makers" attention amongst other politically high profile priorities.

Conducting the research also raised expectations by youth, community and leaders. In every location, youth requested some form of leadership training. They were keen to participate in the research, but they also wanted something back from the team of researchers and the university who they perceived as having resources (including funding, knowledge and skills) to provide a training opportunity. As a result of this, a leadership-training workshop was conducted in each location with the young people (although at the time of writing the Hanuabada training was yet to take place). This delayed the overall project delivery timeline and stretched the budget beyond what was originally planned, but it was seen by the team as important to "give back" to the community for their participation in ways that they define as useful.

Strack et al. (2004) found the issue of raised expectations for youth empowerment in their use of photovoice amongst youth and warn that lack of substantial change can „leave participants feeling more hopeless and unempowered than when they started" (p.57); they recommend selecting sites „where an ongoing commitment to youth empowerment is already in place" (p.57). An issue with such site selection criteria is that the resources and commitment in a community is not necessarily known until a project is substantially underway. The other consideration is that photovoice can be the very tool for raising awareness and building capacity acting as a catalyst for change in settings where youth empowerment was not previously evident.

V.   CONCLUSION

Photovoice has immense potential as a method for research and social change. The following reflection was written early in the research by the first author as a result of a Sunday visit to Hanuabada. The reflection highlights contradictions of „development" and recognises the „voice" that photovoice and the research project as a whole was endeavouring to bring forth.

Precipice @ Hanuabada

Today I was sitting on a precipice

On one side

The turquoise sea stops at the multi-story building on the rise

A crane lingers in waiting for Monday morning when development will proceed to
develop

On the other side, the other story

The greenish greyish sea is the foundation for poking up poles

On top are perched daily lives, homes, modest

Water overspills into the sea hoping to be washed away with waves of progress

From the front the Word is spoken behind the red cross sewn on shiny white satin 9

At the back, the young woman's response is silent

Mere scribbles on a blank A4, phat graffiti style writing says it all.

The use of photovoice as part of this research project on successful models of youth leadership illustrates the capacity for photovoice to illicit rich data in addition to linguistic-based methods alone. Photovoice, because of the process of critical dialogue, also brings the research closer to contributing to sustained community change after the completion of the research than other methods. There were inherent challenges in the implementation of photovoice, which provided points of learning for the research team in this project. Photovoice is underpinned by a PAR theoretical framework, which is not mainstream across the academic disciplines and the community at large. As such, there needs to be intentional educational measures to invite participants (whether researchers or community members) to consider the validity of such a frame of reference. In a context of such language diversity, the impact of meaning being lost in translation and the dominance of English cannot be underestimated. A youth photovoice project requires real engagement not only with youth, but with leaders and other community members. The community"s and the youth"s expectations need to be considered as part of a research process so that research is not a process of simply extracting data from a given location and community – rather the research becomes an engagement which ultimately benefits the community in which it takes place.

References

Api, U. K. (2009). The Role of the Teacher in Addressing Student Occult Sub-Cultures in a Papua New Guinea Secondary School: A Case Study. Unpublished MA (PastMin), Pacific Adventist University, Port Moresby.

Autagavaia, M. (2001). Social work with Pacific Island communities. In M. Connolly (Ed.), New Zealand social work: Contexts and practice (pp. 72-84). Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Buchanan-Aruwafu, H. (2007). Youth vulnerability to HIV in the Pacific. In C. Jenkins & H. Buchanan-Aruwafu (Eds.), Cultures and Contexts Matter: Understanding and Preventing HIV in the Pacific. Manila: Asian Development Bank.

Carlson, E. D., Engerbretson, J., & Chamberlain, R. M. (2006). Photovoice as a social process of critical consciousness. Qualitative Health Research, 16(6), 836-852.

Crane, P., & Richardson, L. (2000). Reconnect action research kit. Canberra: Department of Family and Community Services, Commonwealth of Australia.

Drawii, J. T. (2008). Cult on the Rise? Students' Perspectives on Cult Issues in Secondary and National High Schools in Papua New Guinea. Unpublished MEd, University of Waikato, Waikato.

Freire, P. (1972). Pedagogy of the oppressed (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). London: Penguin Books.

Greenwood, D. J., & Levin, M. (2005). Reform of the social sciences and of universities through action research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd ed., pp. 43-64). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd ed., pp. 191-215). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (2005). Participatory action research: Communicative action and the public sphere. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), The Sage handbook of qualitative research (3rd ed., pp. 559-603). Thousand Oaks: Sage. 10

Larkin, P. J., de Casterle, B. D., & Schotsman, P. (2007). Multilingual translation issues in qualitative research: Reflections on a metaphorical process. Qualitative Health Research, 17(4), 468-476.

Simeon, L., Mafile'o, T., Api, U. K., Gane, B., & Thomas, B. (2010). Successful Models of Youth Leadership: A Study of Papua New Guinea Youth. Port Moresby: Pacific Adventist University.

Smith, L. T. (1999). Decolonising methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples. London, Dunedin: Zen Books and University of Otago Press.

Strack, R. W., Magill, C., & McDonagh, K. (2004). Engaging youth through photovoice. Health Promotion Practice, 5(1), 49-58.

Wang, C. (2006). Youth participation in photovoice as a strategy for community change Journal of Community Practice, 14(1/2), 147-161.

Mafile'o, T., Simeon, L, Api, U. & Thomas, B. (2010). *Photovoice in Youth Leadership Research in Papua New Guinea: Successes, Challenges and Learning*

Page 8