

## Using photo-elicitation to enhance indigenous research method

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### Abstract

This study explores photo-elicitation as an accompaniment in enhancing an Indigenous research method piloted in rural Papua New Guinea. It discusses photographs being used during storytelling as a tool to increase the engagement of the storytellers. They are able to visualize the point of discussion. An Indigenous method emphasizes respect for the participants and that, research should be about the participants and their concerns. It also encourages the participants to be co-creators of the research. Photo-elicitation helps to create a comfortable environment between the researcher and the participants as the focus is on the photograph, a common space for a dialogue between the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, photographs taken during fieldwork enable the researcher to be more connected to the community and persons being investigated, a reminder of the research journey. Hence, the researcher becomes passionate about the research and the purpose of an Indigenous research method is realized.

**Keywords:** Indigenous research method, photo-elicitation.

### Introduction

This study explores photo-elicitation as a technique for enhancing an indigenous research method piloted in rural Papua New Guinea (PNG). It discusses photographs being used during storytelling interviews as a tool to increase the engagement of the participants and to help them visualize the point of discussion. An indigenous method emphasises respect for the participants and that research should be about the concerns of the participants. Photo-elicitation helps to create a comfortable environment as the focus is on the photograph, providing a common space for dialogue between the researcher and the participants. Photographs taken during fieldwork enabled the researcher to be more connected to the community and persons being investigated, acting as reminders of the research journey. Hence, the researcher becomes passionate about the research and the purpose of an indigenous research method is realized.

### Literature Review

Indigenous research methodology (Smith, 1999: Smith, 2012: Wilson, 2001: Kovach, 2009) is a concept that allows Indigenous people to better express themselves by using a set of steps in gathering information/ knowledge, comprehending it and disseminating it according to their specific cultural expectations. The cultural context incorporates a set of values and protocols (Hornung 2013). Denzin & Lincoln (2008) describe the concept of the Indigenous research method as a medium to correct and bring to light the misrepresentations of Indigenous people by their colonial masters. The method should accommodate the Indigenous people's way of life and not be forced upon them, for instance, the art of storytelling as opposed to a formal question-and-answer scenario. Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs & Saylor (2013) assert that storytelling inquiry is especially rich as a vehicle to study

processes and material conditions within organisations. CBT can be classified as micro-organisations.

Humberstone (2004) states that current tourism knowledge is Eurocentric and argues that taking on board alternative perspectives is essential for tourism to allow for better understanding and recognition of the needs of host communities and their environmental contexts. Nielsen and Wilson (2012) also argue that there is a need for Indigenous people to shift from being spectators of tourism studies to contributors by driving research projects and their outcomes. Fullagar & Wilson (2012) suggest that it is essential to know that there are diverse ways of understanding the operation and effects of power and oppression. Tremblay and Wegner (2009) concluded that there is a need to use an indigenous research methodology to study tourism relating to non-Western cases. There needs to be a realisation that it is important to use mechanisms that will allow marginalised communities to confidently and comfortably share their experiences as they see fitting to their situation.

Going further Whitford & Ruhanen (2016) asked, after reviewing 403 published journal articles and seeking the perspectives of indigenous tourism researchers, what an appropriate research methodology in indigenous tourism research might be. The authors suggested (pg.11) that such a research methodology should;

- be guided by indigenous peoples, not the Academy,
- offer reciprocal research benefits,
- use more open and exploratory research approaches,
- be guided by a collaborative and participatory research approach, and
- involve two-way conversations and knowledge exchange.

Harper (2002) defines photo-elicitation as the insertion of photographs into a research interview. The use of photographs as argued by Van Auken, Frisvoll & Stewart (2010) breaks down the power relation between the researcher and participants, stimulates deep interviewing and promotes community participation in planning as the aspirations of the community can be visualized. Furthermore, photographs can be used as an ice breaker between the researcher and participant, Scarles (2010) and it also helps the participants to visualize the researcher's discussion. Ibanez (2004) points out that photographs act as a source of communication between the researcher and participants. Ibanez (2004) also suggested that researchers may use photographs to expand on their questions and their use can lessen the tension of being interviewed by distracting the participants from being too aware of the interview because their focus is directed to the photograph.

Banks (2007) noted that photo-elicitation as an aid in interviewing fosters exploration and extended responses, revelations and empowering interactions. Empowerment to the once colonized and allowing them the opportunity to tell their stories their way are the underlying fundamentals of an indigenous research methodology. Castleden & Garvin (2008) also used photographs in community-based participatory indigenous research. However, despite Castle & Garvin's (2008) study being participant-generated photographs as termed by Richard &

Lahman (2014) and the study in the discussion being researcher-generated photographs, Richard & Lahman (2014) both studies noted that participants were engaged in conversations as they were allowed to express themselves using the photographs.

Storytelling can be used as an avenue to allow indigenous people to express themselves seems compatible with the notions of using photo-elicitation in research as suggested by Banks (2007). Shaw, Brown & Bromiley (1998) commentated that storytelling allows people to express themselves meaningfully infused with emotions and can bridge the gap between cause and effect, Gabriel (2004). Sakat & Prideaux (2013) used storytelling as a technique to gather data in a similar CBT research in PNG. Other authors have employed the art of storytelling as a research tool in indigenous studies (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Chilisa, 2012).

Rakic & Chambers (2012) argued that the incorporation of visual methods in tourism studies is becoming more common, citing several examples (Crouch *et al.* 2005; Crang, 1997; Urry, 2002; Selwyn, 1996; Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005). This is appropriate because tourism relies heavily on images as a medium for promotion. Different studies in tourism using visual mediums have been conducted to explore; elements of tourists' experiences (Cederholm, 2004), values and motivations of tourists (Hindley & Font, 2015), and the nature of images used to persuade tourist destination choice (Wang & Sparks, 2014). Despite this growth, Park and Kim (2018) have argued that there is still plenty of room for more visual research in tourism.

### **Methodology**

This observation is part of a study carried out in four different provinces, Eastern Highlands, Chimbu, Jiwaka and Madang, in PNG. Eastern Highlands, Chimbu and Jiwaka are situated on the mainland of PNG while Madang is located along the coast of PNG and also shares its land border with Chimbu and Eastern Highlands. The study involved using an indigenous research method to explore the effectiveness of tourism at the village level. Twelve tourism-related enterprises in eight different communities/villages were visited for this study. The main instrument employed in collecting information from participants was storytelling. However, photographs of different community-based tourism settings from countries similar to PNG were shown to participants as an aid to complement storytelling and deeper thinking so their thoughts and aspirations could be more clearly communicated during the storytelling. The photographs were researcher-generated and labelled by Bogdan & Biklen (1992) as archival photographs found and used because they fit with the context of the research. One of the themes that guided the storytelling was "future plans", under which a topic discussed was the preferred type of future tourism development and whether they would like to add another feature to the existing tourism product. The following photographs/ images were shown to the interviewees, refer to Table 1: Photographs shown to participants.

**Table 1:** Photographs shown to participants

Photographs	Label	Photographs preference by tourism community/site
	Photograph A: Tourist attempting to weave, cultural demonstration	EHP1 CHM5 MAG2
	Photograph B: Bushing walking, nature	EHP1 EHP2 CHM3 CHM4
	Photograph C: Biking in the village, additional activity	JWK1
	Photograph D: Tree house, eco-tourism	
	Photograph E: Basic CBT setup, village stay	
	Photograph F: Advanced accommodation	EHP3 CHM1
	Photograph G: Resort	MAG1
	Photograph H: Cable line, rainforest tour	CHM4
	Photograph I: Canoeing	MAG1

### **Eastern Highlands Province**

In a book titled, *The Eastern Highlands* by Uyassi (1990), Eastern Highlands was the first province in the highlands region of PNG to be contacted by Europeans and today it is considered the gateway to the highlands. The first official government post in the province by the colonisers was erected in 1932 at Kainantu. Then moved to Goroka the current provincial capital in 1946. The town is strategically built around the airport. The province just like the rest of PNG goes through two seasons in a year. The dry season is experienced from June to October while the wet season is from December to April with May and November considered as the transitional months. Eastern Highlands shares its land borders with four other provinces; Madang, Morobe, Chimbu and Gulf. Initially, two groups of people were the first to make contact with the Eastern Highlanders. The Lutherans were the first missionaries to set foot on Eastern Highlands in 1919 followed by gold prospectors in the 1920s. The province, similar to other highlands provinces builds traditional houses quite differently from the coastal provinces, the houses in the highlands consist of circular huts with earthen floors. There are eight districts in the province with each member representing each district in parliament and the person known as the governor representing the whole province. The province is also a tourism hub in PNG, home of the Asaro mud man, a tourist icon for the province and the home of the annual Gorokoa Show which attracts tourists from all over. Birdwatching and trekking are also being promoted <http://www.papuanewguinea.travel/easternhighlands>. The main agricultural crop exported is coffee as the province grows most of PNG's coffee. Communities visited in the Eastern Highlands were from the Daulo District and from within the Lower Asaro Rural local level government (LLG).

### **Chimbu**

Outsiders namely the missionaries, gold prospectors and local carriers from the coastal parts of PNG continued to penetrate further into the unknown interior of PNG from the Eastern Highlands. The end of WWI saw the Australians take control of German New Guinea, Papua was considered to be more established by Great Britain than Australia. The Australian Mandate Territory of New Guinea Administration was responsible to the League of Nations for a territory partly explored by Brown (1995, pg35). This promoted the administration to continue to explore and set up administrative posts in the rest of PNG. Chimbu (Simbu) became a province of its own after separating from the Eastern Highlands on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1966, having its own administration. Chimbu as described by Brown (1995) is a place situated along mountain valleys and cultivated the mountain slopes for survival. There are six districts in Chimbu with seven elected members representing the province in parliament. Kundiawa-Gembogl was the district visited for this research. The district is the largest in Chimbu in administrative matters as it consists of two districts. Kundiawa is where the provincial capital is located and is also known as Kundiawa. The district is situated northeast of the province and has four local level governments (LLG). Mitnande LLG is where participants for this research were sought from. Chimbu experienced its first contact with a non-Papua New Guinean in 1933. A German priest travelled from Madang to Chimbu making him the first White Man to be seen by the people of Gembogl <https://simbuprovincialgovernmentblog.wordpress.com/kundiawagembo/>.

Chimbu is surrounded by Madang, Eastern Highlands and Gulf Province. Chimbu is also home to PNG's highest mountain, Mt. Wilhem rising at 4 509 metres above sea level. The mountain is situated within the Kundiawa-Gembogl district. At the foot of the mountain, there are guest houses, trekking facilitators and cultural demonstrators. PNGTPA suggests that activities such as trekking, mountain climbing and caving can be done in Chimbu. The province is known to have rugged mountain slopes that are almost inaccessible.

### **Jiwaka**

Jiwaka became a separate identity from Western Highlands Province in 2012 (Zurenuoc & Herbert, 2017). The province has three districts. Anglimp - South Waghi District, the largest district in Jiwaka is where participants for this research were sought. The district is at the border of Western Highlands and Jiwaka. One of the participants claimed that the people of Anglimp speak Melpa, a language spoken by Western Highlanders and are traditionally, culturally and geographically identified with Western Highlands. The province exports tea, and coffee and relies on its people to maintain its economy. The province compared to other provinces is new and is slowly venturing into tourism. However, tourism activities are happening as it was once part of Western Highlands Province. Anglimp Rural was the LLG visited.

### **Madang**

Madang as previously discussed is a maritime province and at the same time plays a crucial role in linking the coast to the highlands. Tourism is a common phrase in Madang as it dates back to the colonial days when expatriates residing in the province would travel around the province for leisure during their free time. Madang offers tourism activities from scuba diving to bird watching due to its geographical location. The first place to be visited for the research proudly told the story of Prince Phillip of Edinburgh visiting their island in 1971 and swimming in the sea. Madang unlike the other provinces has a long history of tourism.

### ***Photographs***

PNG Tourism Promotion Authority's (PNGTPA) website, <https://www.papuanewguinea.travel/corporate-site>, was identified as a point of reference in selecting the appropriate photographs (Tourism Promotion Authority, 2024b). The website recommends the following tourism activities that tourists can engage in while in PNG: birdwatching, cultural activities, scuba diving, cruising, fishing, kayaking, snorkelling, surfing and trekking (Tourism Promotion Authority, 2024a). The photographs were chosen in accordance with their similarities to the type of environment and the type of tourism being offered at the various communities visited for this study. All photographs are of tourism settings in various third-world countries similar to PNG.

### ***Coding***

The inclusion of photographs during storytelling encouraged the participants to elaborate on their responses. The conversations were recorded using a voice recorder, then translated into English and transcribed by the researcher. Each site visited was given a code consisting of

letters and a number. The letters represented the names of each of the provinces visited while the numbers represented the numerical order of the sites/communities visited within each of the provinces. Table 1: Photographs shown to participants, show not only the photographs but also the various sites/communities preferences of the photographs and how they would like their current tourism offerings to be in the future. Participants were asked why they chose a particular photograph; the responses were then separated into similarities of why they chose a particular photograph over other similar photographs.

## Results

The first community visited in Eastern Highlands (EHP1) indicated photographs A and B as their preferred future. They would like to see tourists engaging more with the community by trying out such things as target shooting (using traditional bows and arrows), weaving bilums (over-the-shoulder bags) and making traditional ornaments. This supports the notion that tourism could benefit everyone if it is shared with other members of the community and not just the main tourism resource owners. To date in this community, only a few tourists have actually participated in activities with most, more interested in watching cultural performances in the form of traditional songs and dances. This community also, if requested, will do bush walks with tourists, however, they pointed out that the treks need to be done properly so it is fitting and more attractive for tourists. The second community visited (EHP2) opted for photograph B as it fitted with their current practice, trekking. While conversing with the interviewees it was realized that bushwalking, trekking and mountain climbing were terms used interchangeably. The interviewees described the current trekking situation as risky and hazardous, mentioning that there are no proper railings to prevent tourists from falling. The track starts from the main road and leads to a cave, which holds traditional beliefs. The third tourism site to be visited also within Eastern Highlands (EHP3) was a locally owned husband and wife tourism tour operator, who presented themselves as an eco-tourism cultural centre. They shared their aspiration by discussing something similar to photograph F: Modern accommodation, but with traditional architect and elements to it.

In Chimbu, the first stopover was at a lodge (CHM1). The owner indicated that it would be nice to have electricity as shown in photograph F. As she suggests, the picture looks as if the place is situated somewhere in the forest which is the type of environment that surrounds her. However, the second place visited (CHM2), also a lodge owned by a family, shared that it would be nice to re-open the airstrip in the village so tourists could travel to them directly by air. The lodge seemed to already have the basic facilities in place to support tourism. The third tourism service provider (CHM3) was a family-owned business managed by a female family member providing trekking services. She instantly pointed to photograph B, saying the treks leading to Mt. Wilhem (the highest mountain in PNG) are in desperate need of maintenance and it would be nice to have proper walkways that will enhance the experience of tourists.



**Figure 1:** The photograph is of CHM2 (The second place visited in Chimbu)

While in Chimbu two other groups of people involved in tourism activities were invited to take part in the research including a family involved in lodging and trekking, one of the pioneers of tourism in the village (CHM4). Photograph B was indicated as their ideal facility for trekking while photograph F was marveled at as the long-term dream. This family also mentioned using a cable line as a way of conducting rainforest tours that could assist in preserving the environment and give people a better view of the natural environment. The last group was a cultural group (CHM5). Photograph A was chosen by this group who described it as appropriate for them as they have specifically set up cultural demonstrations so tourists can experience for themselves and participate in traditional activities. Currently, the group is focused on traditional dancing. The photograph was not the same as what was desired, but it stimulated the participants to express their longing for a specific spot in their community that would accommodate their needs in relation to providing tourism experiences to visitors.

Jiwaka was the next province to be visited after Chimbu. A Guest House combined with a cultural centre was the first point of call (JWK1). Again photographs B and F were chosen. Photograph B, according to the storytellers, looked more suitable for the kind of activity tourists indulge in, while photograph F looked more realistic for the type of environment they have. An additional activity that was identified to be later included is biking as illustrated by photograph C. The last stop in Jiwaka was another cultural centre (JWK2) owned by an individual who relies heavily on the community to keep the centre in operation. Photograph A was the closest image to his plan of offering immersive cultural experiences for tourists with proper facilities for tourists to relax while taking part.

Being a coastal province, Madang was different from the highlands provinces. An island known for hosting picnics and a swimming spot for tourists was of interest as it also has remnants of WWII (MAG1) (Nolan, 2017). The family here opted for something smaller than the resort portrayed in photograph G, one that is manageable and overlooks the sea. After sighting photograph I, it was indicated that it would be appealing to introduce kayaking as an added activity for tourists. The last place to be visited was also in Madang but located further inland from the coast. The village in previous years was active in tourism (MAG2).

International tourists would visit the community to experience the cultural demonstrations that occurred in the village. The experience included; traditional cooking, dancing and the production of artifacts. However, it's been almost twenty years since they've experienced tourism in their village. They blamed it on the lack of infrastructure such as having a sealed road and lack of commitment by the provincial tourism bureau. They saw Photograph A as similar to the type of tourism they can offer.

Photographs D and E were not considered by any of the participants from the four provinces visited. Photograph E was of a basic CBT in a village while photograph D was of tree-houses promoting eco-tourism. While the idea of eco-tourism is being embraced and considered by the participants, the concept of a tree house did not appeal to them. This could be attributed to the locals' perception of traditional architecture influenced by their cultural practices and tree-houses are not a common practice in PNG. Photograph E was of a basic CBT set up in a village, it was not chosen by the participants as a stimulus to discuss their plans as a lot of the participants identify with it as being the stage they are currently at.

### **Conclusion and discussion**

Photo-elicitation not only can be used by the researcher to enhance the participation of the respondents but the researcher as well. Photographs taken during the research process also help the researcher to retain memories of what was said and done during data collection. Photographs of people and places create a sense of sincerity and appreciation by the researcher, this helps to create a lasting relationship between the researcher and the participants and gives personal meaning to the research (N'Drower, 2020). Not only are voices being heard but the faces and places that go with them, making the whole process visible, the intangible can be visualised giving the researcher a good grounding in the research. The photographs then become essential for the researcher to reflect upon to add value to the research notion, not only are thoughts being processed but these thoughts are deeply drawn from the researcher's intuitions and not just from responses being extracted by the research questions being asked. However, this may cause the researcher to be emotionally involved resulting in the interpretation of the data being biased. The researcher, therefore, must find a balance between his or her personal thoughts and feelings and the reality of the situation by critically looking at the findings before passing judgements.

The findings are not just based on intuitions, instincts and face value interpretations by the researcher but rather from the underlying desires, aspirations and thoughts projected either directly or indirectly through the storytelling and conversations between the researcher and participants. Hence, in the case of applying an indigenous research methodology as the epistemology, the research therefore becomes about the people, for the people and by the people.

Photo elicitation does enhance the interviewing process and, in this case, storytelling. It helps to turn illusions into realization, emphasizing the representation of people's ideas, views and what they desire for themselves (Harper, 2002). The storytelling and sharing of experiences and aspirations took place at the local level, involving members of the village/community

(ward level) which make up the districts in the provinces. Indeed, photo-elicitation could be used as a planning tool for tourism involving community participation at the various districts and can be channelled through the local level governments and institutionalized at the village level.

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