



**WHY POVERTY?**

Evaluation of Why Poverty?  
Analysis of Solar Mamas  
in 4 Countries  
April 2013  
Appendix 5c

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# 1. Introduction

## Goals And Intended Impact Of The Why Poverty? Project

Why Poverty? is a global, cross-media project that reached large audiences through public service broadcasters worldwide and through other mediums. Why Poverty? consists of eight one-hour documentaries, thirty short films for the internet and community screenings, a dedicated website, mobile strategy, viral networking, a global broadcast event, pre-broadcast activities by broadcasters and screenings to decision-makers and community organizations, facilitators guide for education purposes, a multi-language DVD set of all material, and an outreach campaign to follow on the screening of the films by broadcasters.

A global broadcast took place between November and December 2012. The short films were available on-line during this period, while the long-films were available shortly thereafter.

This case study provides insight into the process and outcomes of the broadcast of *Solar Mamas* by focusing on a comparative analysis of responses in Australia, Norway, United Kingdom and the United States.

The overall findings illustrate that the engagement has varied in the four countries with the highest engagement in the UK and the US. The peak of the discussions was on the day of broadcast or immediately thereafter, and in the case of the US around the time of community screenings. These community screenings, in addition to their social and networking potential, provided a forum for discussion with a wider audience on both the movie's themes and the possibility of further collective action. In short, this is a deeper, more lasting form of engagement. The tweets were predominantly praising or recommending the film, rather than discussing the themes deriving from it. In general and throughout the various forms of media the debates were predominantly around women, empowerment and gender inequality and little attention was given to sustainable energy.

## 2. Background To The Case Study

*"Women make up half the world's population and yet represent a staggering 70% of the world's poor. Of the world's 875 million illiterate adults, two-thirds are women. Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, produce half of the world's food, but earn only 10% of the world's income and own 1% of the world's property. On average, women earn half of what men earn"<sup>1</sup>.*

Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the UN, highlighted the potential benefits for entire communities in helping women: "There is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls and the empowerment of women. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, lower infant and maternal mortality, or improve nutrition and promote health, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS."

Mona Eldaief, one of the directors of *Solar Mamas*, concurs, "If you empower a woman, you empower her children and her entire village because she naturally puts money back into her family, into educating them and making sure they prosper."<sup>2</sup>

The Barefoot College in India trains rural women from around the world to become 'solar engineers' or build solar panels. *Solar Mamas* tells the story of Rafea, a Jordanian Bedouin mother who is given the opportunity to learn at the Barefoot College. It follows the challenges and triumphs she experiences while taking up this vocational opportunity.

*Solar Mamas* is directed by Jehane Noujaim and Mona Eldaief. They are both from Egyptian families but are living in the United States. Initially, the film was going to focus on the Barefoot College, but changed its focus to Rafea during the production. The directors became interested when the leader of Barefoot College, Bunker Roy, said that he wanted to go to a village in Jordan to persuade women to leave their children and home to be educated in India.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.whypoverty.net/en/article/110/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.whypoverty.net/en/article/110/>

*"I am from Egypt, but living in America. Being an American Muslim woman I grew up being unable to walk next to boys. So when I saw Rafea and how she wanted to lift herself out of poverty through attending the Barefoot College I became passionate. I wanted to go to hell and back for her as she was living in barbaric conditions. She was in a dilemma of being there for her children and yet unable to provide for them" (interview with director of Solar Mamas).*

The overall purpose of the selecting *Solar Mamas* for the Why Poverty? series was to inform the debate and create platforms for discussion on the issue of linking women's empowerment with sustainable energy use in developing countries. *Solar Mamas* was chosen for a number of reasons: It was a good story about women and about educating rural women without formal education. This was combined with clean energy and environmental issues; it showed the possibilities for getting out of poverty and getting employment; and finally there was south – to south collaboration in development. Hence the story fitted the brief of the Why Poverty? project. Although *Solar Mamas* originally had characters from more developing countries, the focus of the film was changed to Rafea.

*"We did not know the protagonist before we started the film but we knew we were not looking for a victim but a strong woman. The protagonist was chosen because she was strong and went against all expectations of an Arabic rural woman" (Interview with producer).*

A development contract was entered into between STEPs and the director, Jehane Noujaim in June 2010 and the commissioning started soon afterwards. The film was finished in September 2012. The total cost of the film was around €640,000.

*Solar Mamas* has so far received the following awards:

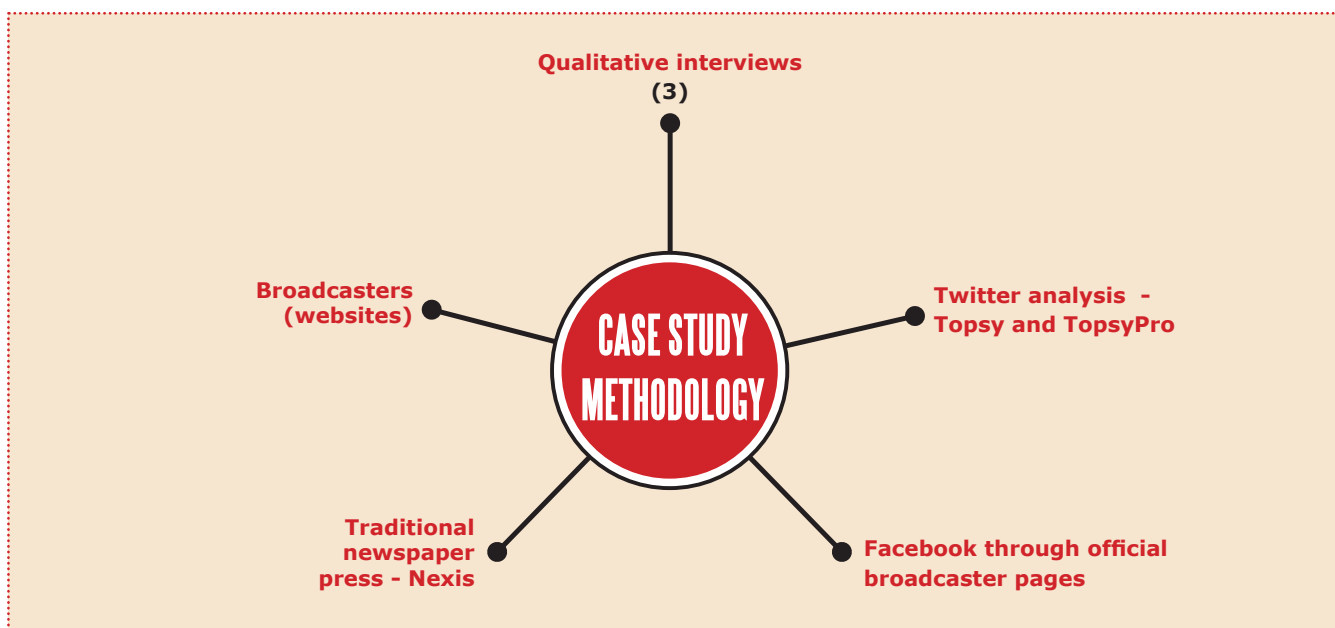
- Peabody Award as part of the Why Poverty? series
- SundanceNow Audience Award
- Oxfam Global Justice Award
- Hilton Worldwide Lightstay Sustainability Award

It is furthermore shortlisted for the One World Media Award.

## 2.1 Case Study Methodology

In order to compile this case study the following data was gathered and analysed:

- Qualitative interviews with director and producer (2)
- Qualitative interview with a Barefoot College representative (1)
- Desktop review with particular focus on 'A Comparative Analysis of Responses to *Solar Mamas* in Australia, Norway, United Kingdom and United States' by David Elliott, Marit Erdal, Laurie Jones and Laura O'Shea, as part of their MA programme in the Centre for applied Human Rights, University of York



For the comparative analysis a variety of methods and sources were used to gather information. Raw data was collected from broadcasters, social media sites and websites. Information on Twitter was largely collated through Topsy and TopsyPro, a Twitter analysis tool allowing for country by country searches of online content<sup>3</sup>. Information on Facebook was gathered through reference to official broadcaster pages, and Nexis, an online search tool, was used as a means of gathering information from traditional newspaper press.

The qualitative data deriving from the interviews and 'A Comparative Analysis of Responses to *Solar Mamas* in Australia, Norway, United Kingdom and United States' were coded using Nvivo 10. This tool is a computerised qualitative data analysis tool that ensures rigorous analysis. A set of themes and sub-themes were developed based on the evaluation questions. The data was then sorted according to these themes and sub-themes which allowed for the evaluators to assess the prevalence and trends of thematic responses.

<sup>3</sup>The tool used to analyse Twitter activity, TopsyPro, uses a specialised vocabulary: A 'significant tweet' is one which linked to another webpage and/or was retweeted by another user. 'Exposure' refers to the number of unique Twitter users who could have seen significant tweets (on a given topic) on their personal news feed, either through following someone who posted a tweet originally, or by following someone who retweeted another's original post.



Rafea and Alain from *Solar Mamas*

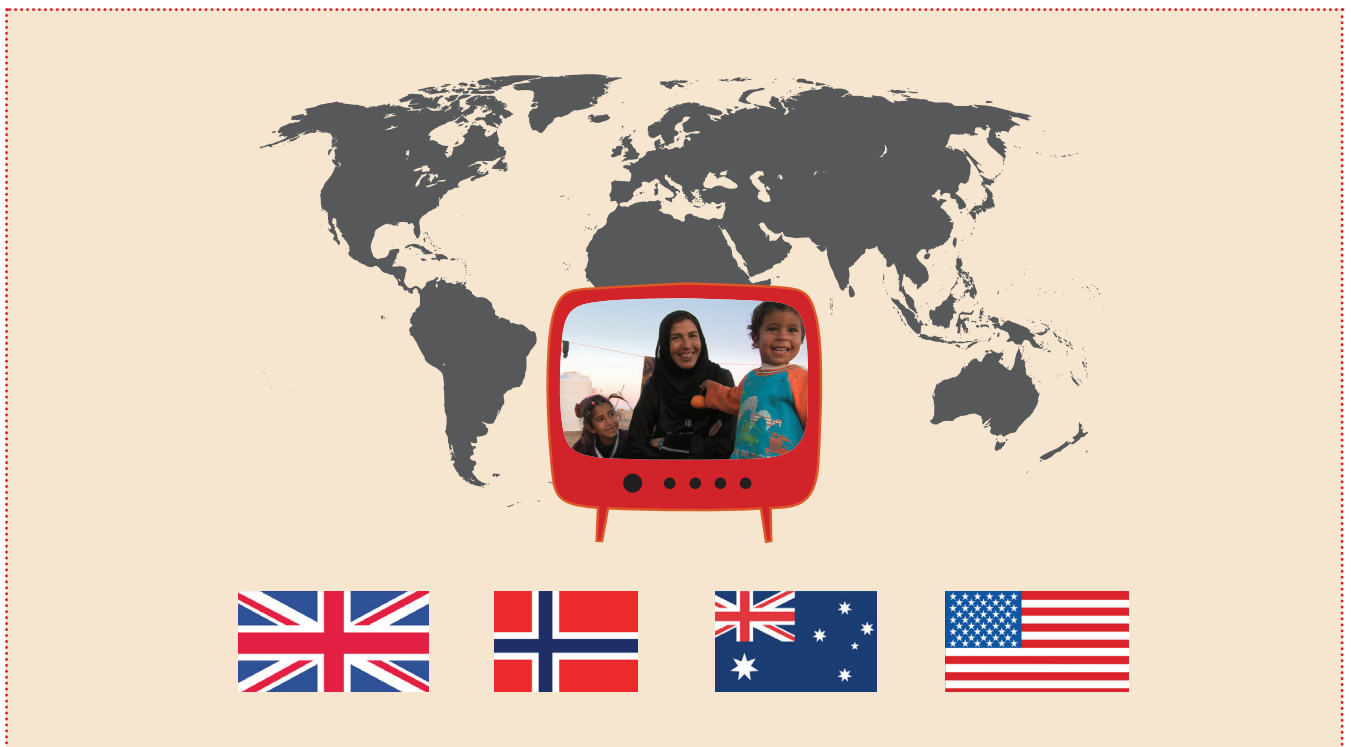


# 3. Demonstrating Outcomes

## 3.1 Solar Mamas In Four Countries

### 3.1.1 Introduction

*Solar Mamas* was broadcast by 69 broadcasters around the world. In some countries, there were community screenings often followed with debates. Countries, where community screenings took place, included the United States (through ITVS), South Africa, United Kingdom, Jordan and Denmark. These screenings were particularly useful as a tool for changing awareness and social norm. The following, however, focuses on the debate created in various media forms in four developed countries as a result of the broadcast of *Solar Mamas*.



## 3.1.2 Australia

### 3.1.2.1 Broadcasting

*Solar Mamas* was broadcast on November 29th at 9.30pm, and available for 14 days after this on ABC's catch-up service, ABC iView. The documentary was advertised by ABC via TV spots and social media posts. The timing of the broadcast coincided with the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology's 'Global Shifts' Social Enterprise Conference, from December 12th - 14th, at which Sanjit 'Bunker' Roy, founder of the Barefoot College featured in *Solar Mamas*, was a speaker.

### 3.1.2.2 Television

In Australia, SBS, Australia's major multilingual and multicultural broadcaster published its review of *Solar Mamas* online. The reviewer particularly approved of the reorientation of the film towards focusing on Rafea instead of Bunker Roy. It was raised that STEPS had given the global discussion on poverty a human face.

### 3.1.2.3 Radio

The radio coverage was minimal in Australia. Interviews with Bunker Roy were aired on both ABC Radio Australia and Triple R in December 2012. In both interviews, Roy Bunker emphasised the importance of bottom-up approaches to sustainable development interventions, how compulsively mobile men used technical training to get a job in urban areas rather than using their knowledge to help their own communities and the need to demystify and decentralise sustainable technologies. Triple R also focused on concerns that initiatives like the Barefoot College might let governments off the hook with regards to adult literacy.

### 3.1.2.4 Newspaper

The newspapers in Australia only had limited coverage of *Solar Mamas*. It was briefly mentioned in the Sydney Morning Herald, Canberra Times and Sunday Age in their TV guides for the week<sup>4</sup>. The Canberra Times and Sunday Age praised the Why Poverty? series in general, "as engaging as it is eclectic." The TV Guide (Australia) noted that the series was "not necessarily all about the helpless", as *Solar Mamas'* inclusion demonstrated. Rafea's return to Jordan was described as "a moment of profound transformation for her",

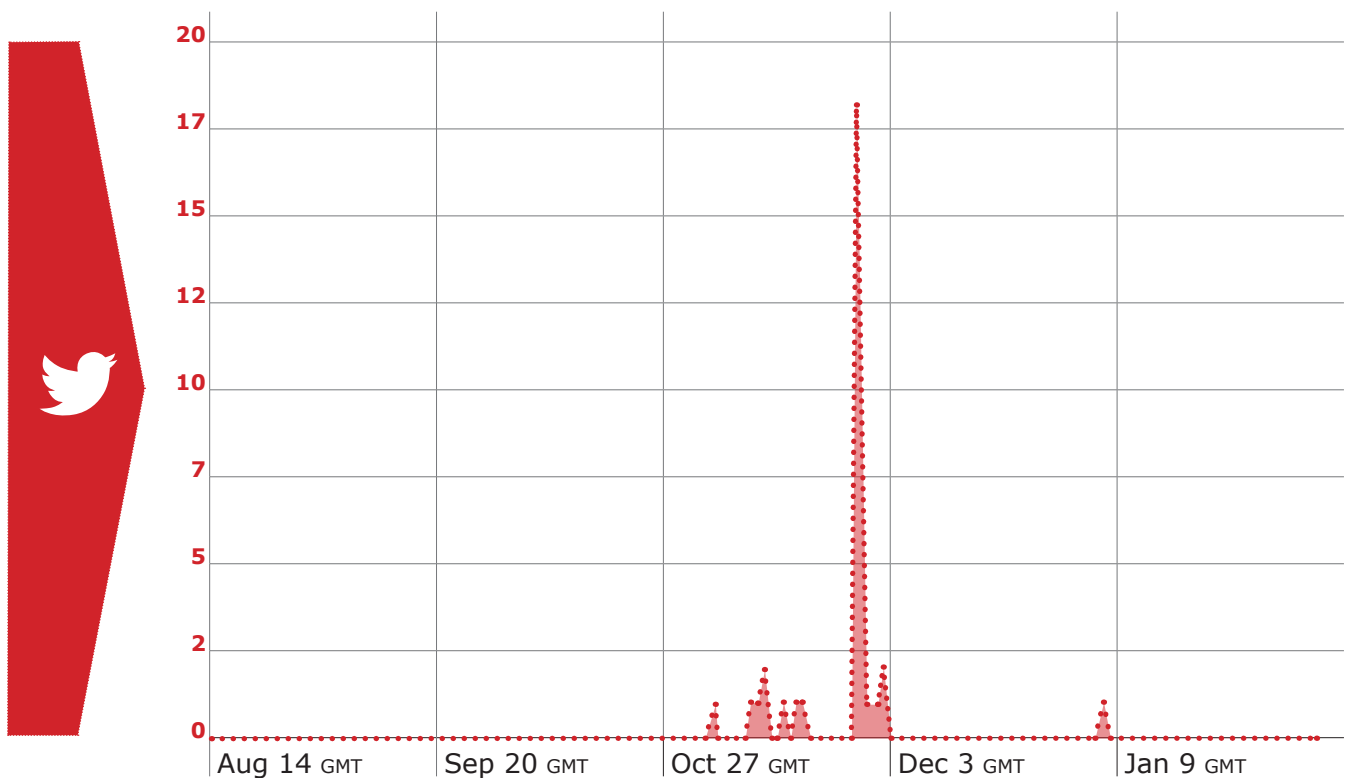
<sup>4</sup> Kalina, P. (2012). Free to Air. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 26 November; Houston, M. (2012). Critics' Choice. *Sunday Age (Melbourne)*. 25 November; The Canberra Times. (2012). Power. *Canberra Times*. 25 November.

but the reviewer did not tackle the socioeconomic obstacles still in her way. Similarly, the Geeland Advertiser, in its short review of November 29th, focused on the positive tenor of the documentary: “the enthusiasm is infectious and the huge task is steeped in optimism.” Despite these positive reviews there was a general lack of engagement with the structural issues *Solar Mamas* attempted to raise.

### 3.1.2.5 Twitter

In terms of volume, *Solar Mamas* did not receive significant lasting attention on Twitter in Australia. The official hashtag #solarmamas was scarcely used at all (4 times in 2012). As can be seen from Figure 1, significant Tweets mentioning *Solar Mamas* peaked at 18 (including retweets) on the air date, November 29th. At this point, exposure peaked at just over 10,000. Activity dropped off sharply the following day and did not recover. Similarly, following ABC Radio’s interview with Bunker Roy on December 12th as part of its Why Poverty? programme, the number of tweets mentioning Roy jumped from 0 to 15, but dropped to 0 again by two days later. These trends suggest a lack of long term interest in both *Solar Mamas* itself and discussions related to the themes it raises, at least as expressed on Twitter.

**Figure 1:** Significant Tweets Mentioning *Solar Mamas* In Australia (August 2012 - January 2013)



A significant proportion of tweets mentioning *Solar Mamas* were from NGOs, bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies. Several Australian based NGOs promoted the ABC2 broadcast of *Solar Mamas* via Twitter, including ActionAid Australia, Care Australia, Caring Communities, Good Return, International Women’s Development Agency, UNICEF Australia and World Vision Australia. Care Australia’s tweet was the most retweeted, at 8 retweets. Tweets from personal accounts were limited to praising or recommending the documentary itself, rather than discussion of issues.

### 3.1.2.6 Facebook

ABC2’s Facebook page advertised *Solar Mamas* on the day of broadcast. The post received 49 likes and 44 comments, and was shared 11 times.<sup>5</sup> This constitutes a relatively low level of activity, but it is worth noting that responses were unanimously positive. Again, the comments were mainly praising or recommending the film rather than discussing the issues raised.

Reaction to the themes raised in the film focused on the character of Rafea, or, to a lesser extent, the transformative power of education. Women’s agency was a recurring touchstone; Rafea was described as a “feminist” and an “incredible woman”. One woman from the Northern Territory took these themes a bit further:

*“Imagine !!! women being able to determine their own lives.... this is not only about sustainable and environmental development it’s also about women empowering themselves and their daughters... and taking power back as Rafea says...”*

Unfortunately, it must be noted that comments were mostly of an individual nature, i.e. there was little ‘back-and-forth’ or discussion as such. Also, evidence of further action was largely limited to expressions of support and interest. There were some exceptions to this. One commenter claimed she was “off to investigate IWDA donation now”, while three others asked how they could support or get involved with similar projects. Good Return, a microfinance initiative linking Australians with the working poor in Asia Pacific, picked up on this to promote donations to their projects. It then asked: “ok, big question... how do we as a society build more empathy in our human race?”, but it received only one response and the discussion petered out. ABC2’s page administrators did not intervene in the thread to promote discussion.

<sup>5</sup>As of February 9th 2013.

International Needs Australia supported “the idea of increased discourse about issues of poverty and development” but beyond promoting the broadcast did not discuss what shape such a discourse might take. The syndicated article published on the website of the Australian Society of Engineers noted how the documentary went beyond a behind the scenes look at Barefoot College to explore gender differences in poverty interventions. Again, this did not lead to further debates.

### 3.1.3 Norway

#### 3.1.3.1 Broadcasting

*Solar Mamas* was aired on the 28 November 2012 at 22h30 and on the 29 November 2012 at 09h00 on NRK2. The documentaries became available on NRK’s streaming service a few hours after they were first aired and will be available on NRK’s site until October 2017.

The table below shows the total number and percentage of viewers for each of the 8 documentaries (week starting 25 November 2012)<sup>6</sup>

		<b>Viewers</b>	<b>Percentage – market share</b>
	<b>Average</b>	<b>54 000</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>SUNDAY</b>	Poor Us: An Animated History of Poverty	50 000	4,8
<b>MONDAY</b>	Welcome to the World	71 000	5,3
<b>TUESDAY</b>	Park Avenue	62 000	4,8
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	<b>Solar Mamas</b>	<b>98 000</b>	<b>8,5</b>
<b>THURSDAY</b>	Education, Education	48 000	4,4
<b>FRIDAY</b>	Land Rush	31 000	1,8
<b>SATURDAY</b>	Stealing Africa	28 000	1,8
<b>SUNDAY</b>	Give us the Money	44 000	2,6

*Solar Mamas* was the documentary with the largest audience: 98,000 people, which meant that 8.5% of people watching the channel at the time of broadcast were watching *Solar Mamas*. This is almost twice as much as the average viewer rate of the other Why Poverty? documentaries.

<sup>6</sup>Fossan, M. (2012). Seertall. E-mail to Marit Erdal from NRK Analysis 11 February.

### 3.1.3.2 Television

In the week prior to the launch, NRK aired several trailers to inform their viewers of the coming documentaries and promoted the series on their own webpages. NRK also published a few articles related to poverty around the time of the launch, and linked these articles to Why Poverty? themes. Views from various policy makers were presented and discussed. Redistribution of wealth was the most recurring topic<sup>7</sup>.

### 3.1.3.3 Radio

None of the large radio programmes responded directly to the *Solar Mamas* or Why Poverty? Series.

### 3.1.3.4 Newspaper

Likewise, none of the large newspapers in Norway took the opportunity to write about the themes deriving from the *Solar Mamas* documentary.

### 3.1.3.5 Twitter

There was minimal response to *Solar Mamas* and Why Poverty? on Twitter in Norway. The few tweets that addressed the documentaries were published only during the launch, with no further activities afterwards, suggesting that the documentaries have not sparked a longer term debate on Twitter.

- There were 16 significant tweets about Why Poverty? during the launch of the documentaries that used the hashtag #whypoverty. These tweets were made by individuals, as well as NGOs. The tweets generated an exposure to approximately 8000 Twitter accounts;
- There were 8 tweets to the Norwegian translation of Why Poverty? (Hvorfor fattigdom). Three tweets were made with the hashtag #hvorforfattigdom;
- There were no significant tweets that mentioned *Solar Mamas*, but two tweets that mentioned its Norwegian translation "Mødrene som så lyset". One of these tweets was by one of the York's students who was involved in the Why Poverty? Project;

<sup>7</sup> Husøy, S. (2012). Ekstrem fattigdom kan utryddes. *NRK*. [Online] 25 December. Available at: <http://www.nrk.no/fordypning/1-av-3-i-verden-er-lutfattige-1.8405713> [last accessed 10 February 2013].

- There were 7 links to NRK's airing of *Solar Mamas*. One of the links was by one of the York's students who was involved in the Why Poverty? Project, and 2 of the tweets were by the same person;
- The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (@nupi) had linked #why-poverty to a video parody on aid called RadiAid, in which South Africans send radiators to Norway. This parody was launched around the same time as Why Poverty?, and caused a heated debate in Norway. It is likely that many retweeted @nupi's tweet on #why-poverty because of RadiAid.

### 3.1.3.6 Facebook

Neither NRK, NRK2 nor NRK Ytring have posted updates on Why Poverty? or *Solar Mamas*. As NRK did not post anything about the Why Poverty? film series, it is difficult to assess whether a debate on the documentaries has actually taken place on Facebook. Individuals may have posted comments on their private pages that are not accessible to others.

### 3.1.3.7 Blog

The Norwegian Minister of International Development, Heikki Holmås, posted an article on NRK Ytring, 'Redistribution Against Poverty' where he related Norway's development policies to issues raised in the Why Poverty? series. For instance, he referred to *Solar Mamas* when discussing women's rights<sup>8</sup>. The article did not spur a debate, and the two comments received were not referring *Solar Mamas*.

## 3.1.4 United Kingdom

### 3.1.4.1 Broadcast

*Solar Mamas* was broadcast on BBC4 (which airs international documentaries), on Sunday 2 December 2012, at 21h00. Once the film was broadcast, it could also be viewed on the channel's catch-up webpage, BBC iPlayer, until December 12th. The BBC's webpage advertising *Solar Mamas* was shared online through social media sites 401 times. The BBC scheduled several other poverty-related broadcasts around the time of the Why Poverty? launch, including related television programming, poverty-related radio debates on BBC Radio 3 and written articles.

<sup>8</sup>Holmås, H. (2012). Fordeling mot fattigdom. *NRK*. [Online] 2 December. Available at: <http://www.nrk.no/ytring/fordeling-mot-fattigdom-1.9080942> [last accessed 9. May 2013].

The BBC partnered up with the Open University, a distance learning and research university, for the launch of the Why Poverty? film series. The Open University used the series as a resource in a research project regarding poverty and social exclusion in the UK, and promoted the material online as an educational resource. They also made additional video guides to accompany each of the documentaries, which featured further information about the issues raised in each of the films, taking the specific narrative of the documentary as a springboard for interrogating the wider global issues. Featuring the analysis of statistical information, these additional videos encourage people to look at data behind the documentary narratives. The video accompanying *Solar Mamas* looked at gender inequality via a consideration of the gender inequality index, dissecting the criteria of reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market, and considering the relationship between human development and gender equality.

### 3.1.4.2 Newspaper

After airing on the BBC, reviews of *Solar Mamas* were published in national broadsheet newspapers. The following themes were discussed in the various newspapers:

- The Independent discussed the underlying issues of gender relations in Jordan<sup>9</sup>.
- The Guardian<sup>10</sup> acknowledged that the film series sought to change both lives and attitudes, before considering the position of women in Jordanian society. In response to this article, online comments noted the difficulties of educating women who were illiterate or unable to read and write in a shared language, as well as acknowledging the potential for initiatives to represent “an amazing way to help people out of poverty. Using only rural women, providing them with real skills and not just throwing money their way”.
- The Times<sup>11</sup> focused on Rafea’s marriage, highlighting her role as second wife and how this limited her opportunities.
- The Sunday Times<sup>12</sup> named *Solar Mamas* as its pick of the day, and recommended the documentary to its readers. The article picked up on gender and education as the dominant issues of the documentary, with references to feminism and the inability of Jordanian girls to stay in school past the age of ten. It also placed emphasis on Rafea’s role as a second wife, her husband’s threats of divorce and taking the children.
- The Observer<sup>13</sup> ran a piece featuring interviews with the directors of each of the eight documentaries. The interview with Mona Eldaief, the codirector of *Solar Mamas*, discussed the obstacles Rafea faced in the film, along with issues contributing to poverty

<sup>9</sup> Sutcliffe, T. (2012). The Weekend’s Viewing: An alien or just a decomposing racoon? Take a guess... *The Independent*. 3 December.

<sup>10</sup> Dowling, T. (2012). TV Reviews: Solar Mamas; Homeland. *The Guardian*. 2 December.

<sup>11</sup> Clay, J. (2012). Viewing Guide. *The Times*. 1 December.

<sup>12</sup> Segal, V. (2012). Critic’s Choice. *The Sunday Times*. 2 December.

<sup>13</sup> Fox, K. (2012). Documentary-makers join forces to expose the evil of global poverty. *The Observer*. 18 November.



in a more general capacity. These issues include the inherited feeling of hopelessness within the village (an “ingrained cycle of thought that contributes to poverty”), passed down from previous generations following issues such as drought and the damage caused by the war in Iraq. The interview discussed access to welfare, the need to rely on informal income, crime and lack of opportunity, before considering the expected role of women in Rafea’s society, in relation to the shamefulness of enrolling in work and education. An online response to the article considered the mainstream media’s tendency to “ignore most of the world most of the time,” arguing that it is “time people in Britain were given more chance to know more about how the world works to create injustices we should all be part of addressing.”

- The New Internationalist<sup>14</sup> provided an overview of the Barefoot College, the institution tracked in *Solar Mamas*, via an interview with Sanjit Roy, the founder of the scheme. The article, which was published in June 2012, focuses on the Barefoot College programme, how it came about, what it tries to address and how it works, rather than considering the then unreleased documentary specifically. But following the launch, the writer of the article tweeted a link to the documentary, alongside a link to her article, recommending people watch the film and learn more about the project.

### 3.1.4.3 Radio

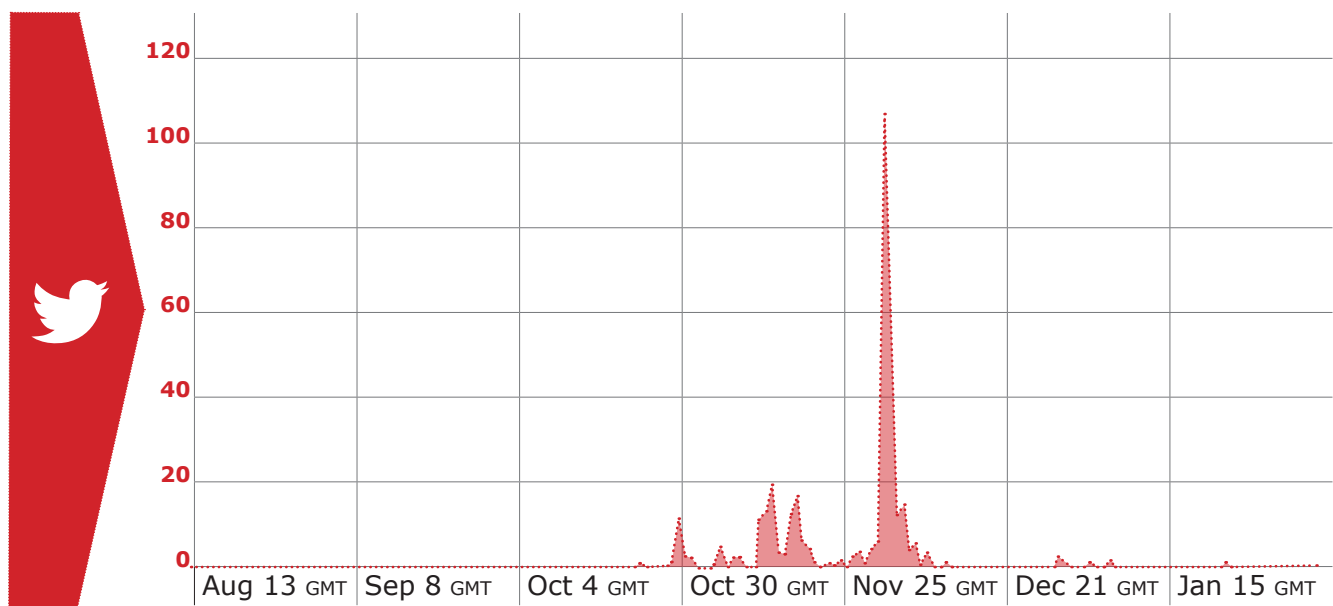
The BBC scheduled a series of radio programmes to accompany the Why Poverty? series with a focus on poverty related issues. On the 20. November, 2012 leading up to the broadcast, a radio broadcast on BBC Radio 4 presented by Nick Fraser considered how to get the world talking about poverty. The show played clips from *Solar Mamas*, and addressed the larger question of addressing poverty in the Western world. From the 26 November to the 30 December, 2012 BBC Radio 4 broadcast a five part radio series, which tackled issues such as aid, education as a means of poverty reduction, poverty in the UK, the causes of malnutrition and private capital as an antipoverty tool. These radio programmes tended to focus on poverty more generally, rather than *Solar Mamas* explicitly.

<sup>14</sup> Hantias, G. (2012). African Grannies Go Solar. *The New Internationalist Magazine*. 1 June.

### 3.1.4.4 Twitter

In terms of Twitter responses to *Solar Mamas* in the UK, there are a few points worth noting. Firstly, in relation to the volume of content found on Twitter (as shown below by Figure 2) the majority of engagement with *Solar Mamas* took place on 2 December, 2012 the day the film was broadcast in the UK.

**Figure 2: Significant Tweets Mentioning *Solar Mamas* In The United Kingdom (August 2012 - January 2013)**



TopsyPro found a total of 110 significant tweets relating to *Solar Mamas* on this day, indicating a higher level of online engagement than any other day before or after the broadcast. More interestingly, these 110 significant tweets were 'exposed' to a potential 112,509 people between 2 – 3 December 2012. Analysing exposure allows for a more meaningful understanding of the number of people who witnessed material regarding *Solar Mamas* via Twitter on this day. Although these people were not actively engaging or posting about the documentary, a potential 112,509 were made aware of the film and its issues. Between 3 – 4 December 2012 the number of significant tweets declined to 34, but these tweets were 'exposed' and potentially seen by 71,298, keeping the online debate going in a substantial way. By February 2013, the cumulative exposure of significant tweets regarding *Solar Mamas* (which indicates the total amount of people who viewed significant tweets and online content relating to *Solar Mamas* in the UK since the film began to circulate) reached 480,416 people. Although the number of people posting about *Solar Mamas* declined after the broadcast, which perhaps indicates a lack of longer term engagement,

this cumulative figure is helpful in indicating the film's visibility on Twitter in the UK. The figures mentioned only cover content deemed 'significant' through the aforementioned criteria, rather than all tweets referring to *Solar Mamas*, but they are helpful in being somewhat indicative of the conversation inspired by *Solar Mamas* taking place in the UK.

The majority of tweets either recommended watching the documentary itself, via praise or the posting of links to clips/viewing platforms, or reviewed the film in some way. A search of the 'Top Tweets' from the UK about *Solar Mamas* on Twitter shows this: the film was described in tweets as a 'powerful film', an 'excellent documentary', an 'amazing project', 'very interesting', 'inspiring', a 'must-see' and an 'outstanding project'. Although tweets like this were in the majority, discussion of the issues did come up too. In the 'Top Tweets', the theme which tweeters picked up on most was the role of women, rather than themes such as education, climate change, or social inequality, for example, with references to 'patriarchy', 'women', and in one instance, 'girl-powered poverty busting'.

Through a TopsyPro analysis of tweets, which found 335 significant tweets (involving links or retweets) about *Solar Mamas* within the UK in the past 180 days, a similar pattern emerged. Tweets recommending the film, praising the film or linking to reviews of the film were the most common in content, with UK tweeters saying the following: 'amazing', 'loved it', 'moving', 'good watch', 'wonderful documentary', 'beautiful story', 'eye-opening', 'extraordinary', 'amazing story', 'uplifting and real'. Although the majority of tweets and retweets were of this nature in content, discussion of themes and issues also appeared, with examples of tweeters referring to gender inequality, empowerment, feminism and women more generally. When picking up on themes from the film specifically, gender-related issues were the most common, but references to Rafea being a result of her local reality were also apparent, with tweeters commenting on 'poor local areas', and Rafea being 'a brilliant woman, sadly born in the wrong place'. 'Empowerment' was more commonly mentioned than 'education', and references to 'poverty' itself were scarce. The link between the different issues was not often commented on, apart from some references to the link between empowerment and education. Although representing a minority, one tweeter did consider multiple issues rather than just one main theme, writing: "#SolarMamas by @askwhy-poverty raises the critical issues of the 21st century – gender inequality, poverty and climate change."

### 3.1.4.5 Blog

A number of individual persons and organisations posted blogs about the *Solar Mamas* documentary, discussing various aspects of the film. Although the capacity to trace which online blogs are discussing the documentary is limited, there are examples which can be discussed. For example, online blog DocGeeks (a documentary blog) covered *Solar*

*Mamas'* broadcast on BBC 4 following its broadcast. The post involved both a review of the documentary as a narrative, alongside a consideration of how the themes of the film slot in to the Why Poverty? series as a whole. They explicitly championed the film's ability to 'capture the tiniest detail and the bigger picture in the true art of storytelling'. Another blog, 'What's on TV', which recommends programmes for readers, listed *Solar Mamas* as a must-watch, providing a review of the programme and highlighting its main themes. Overall the various people blogging about the documentary seem to, much like in the tweets, represent a mix between people directly engaging with the issues and themes, and people reviewing/recommending the film.

### **3.1.4.6 Screenings**

Screenings of *Solar Mamas* also took place around the UK, with some screenings showing the film alone, and others showing them back to back with other Why Poverty? documentary films. As well as the screenings which have already occurred, *Solar Mamas* is going to be broadcast as part of a film festival in York, in collaboration with the Human Rights City project taking place throughout the year.

## **3.1.5 United States**

### **3.1.5.1 Broadcasting**

*Solar Mamas* appeared on PBS's series 'Independent Lens', on 5 November, 2012 at 22h00. Women and Girls Lead, a public media initiative to focus, educate, and connect audiences worldwide, highlighted *Solar Mamas* before, during and after the broadcast.

### **3.1.5.2 Television**

The Independent Television Service (ITVS) actively promoted *Solar Mamas* before, during and after the PBS premiere.

### **3.1.5.3 Newspaper**

Newspapers throughout the United States promoted *Solar Mamas* and commented on the film's themes of education for women. Many of the newspaper articles merely mentioned a local screening date and time, but many either summarized the film or gave a review. Positive language such as "inspiring" was often used, appearing in a variety of articles. Most of the newspapers that featured the movies came from the larger cities such as New York,

San Francisco, Los Angeles and Austin. The *Austin Chronicle* promoted the film's broadcast on Independent Lens, noting also the structural issues highlighted by *Solar Mamas*:

*"Socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural factors are but a few of the obstacles facing hundreds of millions of women seeking education across the globe. Statistics indicate that by providing education and skills for a woman an entire village can develop the means to escape many traps of poverty. Microcredit and community centers that allow free access to vocational training have proven enormously successful in many developing countries. Barefoot College (<http://www.barefootcollege.org/>), an NGO founded in 1972, seeks to provide empowerment to rural women through sustainable solutions that improve living conditions, health, environment, and community<sup>15</sup>."*

### 3.1.5.4 Facebook

To advertise the 5 November 2012 premiere on PBS's Independent Lens, the Independent Lens Facebook page updated its cover photo on the 2 November, 2012 to a photo of *Solar Mamas*. The cover photo change received 19 likes, (the page itself has over 200,000 likes) and a few comments. One Facebook user said: "Loved it. Amazing footage that frankly, could only have been captured by women filmmakers. Thank you for this film!!" Independent Lens posted another advertisement for the film on the 5 November 2012 which received over 400 likes, offering as an incentive "a limited-time sticker for watching tonight's film<sup>16</sup>."

The attention given to *Solar Mamas* by Independent Lens' Facebook page was nearly half of the Facebook attention paid to *Park Avenue*, which highlighted poverty in the United States. It is unclear if the topic was more attractive to the Facebook fans as it was an American based issue, or if the advertising time/day/photo size made it more appealing to "like."

In addition to advertising for the PBS broadcast, Facebook was used to invite users to attend local screenings of *Solar Mamas* across the United States, from New Orleans to New York City.

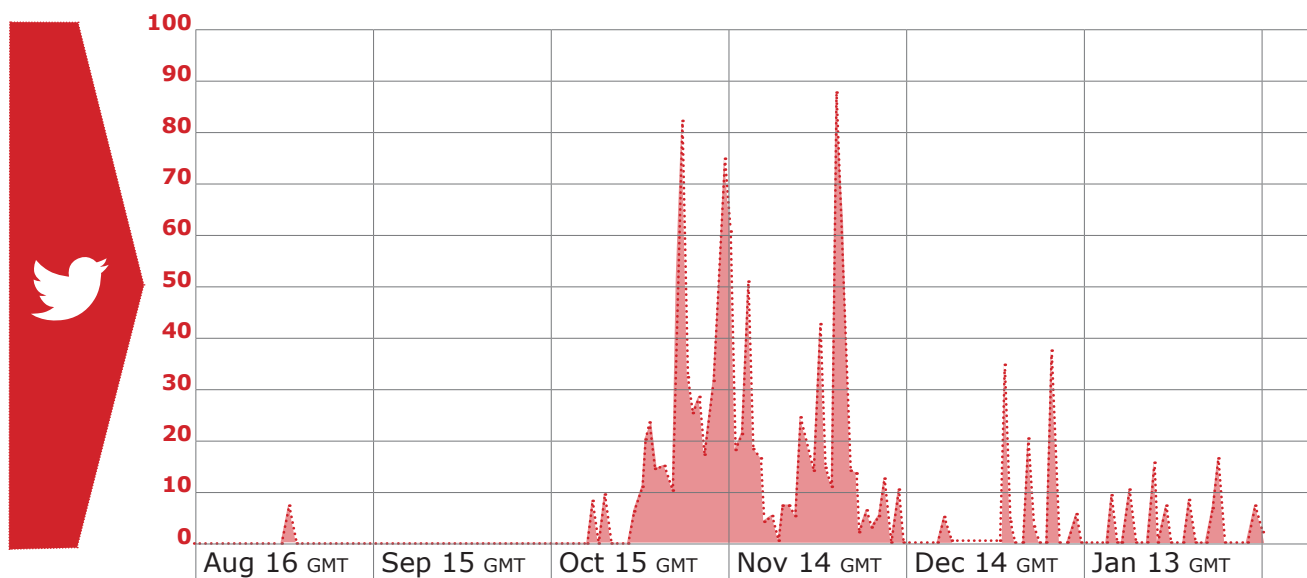
<sup>15</sup> Cape, J. (2012). Who Loves the Sun. *Austin Chronicle*. 5 November.

<sup>16</sup> A time sticker on Get Glue is a virtual sticker that people can display on their Get Glue pages <http://m.getglue.com/faq>

### 3.1.5.5 Twitter

From October and before the PBS broadcast, many of the live showings were happening around the country and the engagement on Twitter was therefore high in the United States from the end of October. Activity increased again around the time of the public broadcast, as shown below in Figure 3. This indicates that people were active on this particular social media outlet as a result of both live screenings at a local level and the broadcast on PBS. As in other countries, the reaction was overwhelmingly positive. One user, who had attended a screening in New York organised by Stranger than Fiction, described it as “inspiring” and lauding the “incredible” women featured in the documentary.

**Figure 3: Significant Tweets Mentioning *Solar Mamas* In The United States (August 2012 - January 2013)**



The total volume of tweets in the United States far exceeded the other countries that were examined in this report. As can be seen in Figure 3, the tweets began peaking before the original showing on PBS Independent Lens, which shows that local screenings inspired action in this form of social media. Furthermore, exposure to *Solar Mamas* on Twitter was very high. Between 14 – 15 November 2012, 90 people created new tweets with the words *Solar Mamas* (see Figure 3). The exposure rate on that given day peaked at 878,233 people. It would appear that Twitter has played a major role in spreading the screenings, concepts, and tweets of *Solar Mamas* fans. It is less clear how people will take this further. Many tweets could have continued discussing women’s issues, education, or other films but did not link back to Why Poverty?

### 3.1.5.6 Blogs

Blogs nationwide which have reviewed *Solar Mamas* have been largely positive in their assessment. about.com published a feature on several of the films, including *Solar Mamas*, which unpacked some of its more complex themes<sup>17</sup>. Blogs have also been used to promote local screenings in New Mexico, New York, Texas, North Carolina, California and more.

### 3.1.5.7 Social Engagement And Public Events

*Solar Mamas* received national attention in several renowned film festivals prior to its public broadcast, and was promoted through Sundance. Hundreds of local screenings took place across the U.S., but were concentrated in California and New York. New York's IFC centre, which shows independent and classic films, screened *Solar Mamas*, using a variety of advertising platforms including Facebook (579 likes). The screening, part of the 'Stranger Than Fiction' series, was followed by a question and answer session with the directors. Many public screenings were hosted by universities (for example, Soka University in Orange County, California), and community cinema events showed *Solar Mamas* nationwide. The San Francisco Main Library put on a free screening of the film in its Koret Auditorium on 13 November, 2012<sup>18</sup>.

## 3.2 Organisational Strengthening And Mobilisation For Barefoot College

It was not possible to ascertain the overall scope of organisational strengthening as a result of broadcasting *Solar Mamas*. However, for the Barefoot College in India, the broadcasting and screening of *Solar Mamas* led to an increased interest in the organisation:

*"During the airing of the Why Poverty? Series the Barefoot College was approached by people who wanted to fund us" (Barefoot College representative).*

As they were part of the film, the Barefoot College used the opportunity strategically and applied for funding for the development of a website and a media campaign. Funding was received and the website and media campaign was developed just at the time of the launch of the film.

<sup>17</sup>Marin, J. (2012). The "Why Poverty?" Documentary Series: An International Initiative to Raise Awareness of and End Poverty. about.com. [Online] Available at: <http://documentaries.about.com/od/events/a/The-Why-Poverty-Documentary-Series.htm> [last accessed 15 February 2013].

<sup>18</sup>Wilson, E. (2012). 'Solar Mamas' screens at Main Library'. *Examiner*. [Online] 12 November. Available at: <http://www.examiner.com/article/solar-mamas-screens-at-main-library> [last accessed 15 February 2013].

*"The first rush of traffic and money was a consequence of the launch of the film. When the film was launched, the Barefoot website had 150,000 hits in one week, while we normally have 25,000. During the airing of the Why Poverty? Series we saw 50 emails a day from people who had seen Solar Mamas. People wrote to us and wanted to do something. The Barefoot College was also approached by people who wanted us to attend panel discussions on poverty and women empowerment" (Barefoot College representative).*

### 3.3 Advocacy/Policy

Although it is still too early to ascertain whether any policy changes have taken place there are some evidence of engagement by policy makers:

The Norwegian Minister of International Development, posted an article on NRK Ytring, where he related the Norway's development policies to issues raised in the Why Poverty? series. For instance, he referred to *Solar Mamas* when discussing women's right. The key themes were redistribution through taxes and the education of women.

In the United States, some screenings provided an opportunity for activist audience to engage with influential non-state actors. For example, delegations from the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program attended a screening at the Meridian International Center in Washington, D.C., which featured a question and answer session with featured speakers, including Jennifer Silberman, vicepresident of corporate responsibility at Hilton Worldwide Inc. and Safaa Elkogali, a senior economist at the World Bank.<sup>19</sup>

Finally it should be noted that there were also examples of engagement of policy makers in Jordan:

*"We have already screened the film twice in Jordan. The queen came out and said she was very proud of these rural women providing alternative energy. The Jordan Times then published the article on the negative impact of the film. Then the Royal Court, through the Local Development Director, contacted Rafea. They sat down and told her that they want to help." (Co-director of Solar Mamas).*

<sup>19</sup>Meridian International Center, (2012). Solar Mamas Featured at Meridian! MIC. [Online] 27 November. Available at: <http://www.meridian.org/component/k2/item/884-solar-mamas-featured-at-meridian> [last accessed 15 February 2013].



## 4. Lessons Learned

In general, 'professional' and blogged reviews of the film and discussion of its issues in newspaper articles and on radio and TV, tended to be more nuanced. Social media platforms, with their low barriers for production and emphasis on brevity, are perhaps not the ideal forum for detailed discussion of the complex structural issues underlying global poverty.

One problem common to Australia, Norway and the United Kingdom was that social media activity mentioning *Solar Mamas* dropped off sharply following the initial broadcast. If social media activity can be taken as a proxy for national interest (an assumption that is by no means certain), it would seem that there was a noticeable lack of long-term interest in the film. This pattern was not unique to *Solar Mamas* either – for each documentary in the series shown, social media activity peaked on the air date and plummeted the following day. Interest in one film was replaced by interest in the next. That this pattern was *not* replicated in the United States is worthy of investigation. Not only was overall volume higher (which was to be expected given the population difference), but, crucially, interest was more sustained. In fact, activity on Twitter peaked 10 days *after* the initial broadcast on PBS and has continued to spike periodically, albeit at a lower rate, since then. This could be because of the high number of community screenings.

Community screening took place on a large scale in the US. The screenings in the US were often coupled with panel discussions with e.g. the film directors and producer. The screenings mostly took place at universities, local art cinemas and libraries. Community screenings in the US have provided an opportunity for activist audiences to engage with influential non-state and state actors. This could be used as a more sophisticated, indirect model of appeal to the state. Screenings seem to be a better vehicle than on-line forums for deeper engagement.

An outreach strategy should have been developed and launched together with the launching of the films. One suggestion was that this should have been coupled with a sufficient budget for outreach activities to provide a platform for actions against poverty. Likewise, there were a number of examples where people were showing interest online but were there was insufficient follow up by the moderator. There was simply no outlet for their interest.

Although the Why Poverty? project did not intend to promote any specific organisation, in the absence of campaign and action platforms, individuals, organisations and donors focused their interest and funding towards the Barefoot College.

It appears that people engage more with their own local issues i.e. the Americans were more engaged with the documentary *Park Avenue* than *Solar Mamas*. Hence, to get a global conversation going, films need to be made representing as many regions / countries as possible.



## 5. Conclusion

*Solar Mamas* has been a powerful documentary and the responses to it have been very positive across the board. Broadcasters used a combination of several platforms to market *Solar Mamas* and the Why Poverty? series. All of them used TV advertisement on their stations and online promotion, i.e. their own websites and social media pages to varying degrees. The production of written materials and the use of radio were less common.

Evidence of engagement has varied from the four countries with highest engagement in the UK and the US. The peak of the discussions has been on the day or immediately after the broadcasting of the film and in the case of the US around the time of community screening. In general, there has been little on-going and long term engagement. In terms of Twitter the content of the discussions were predominantly around praising or recommending the film rather than discussing the themes deriving from the film. In general and throughout the various media forms the debates were predominantly on women, empowerment and gender inequality and little attention was given to sustainable energy.

The global broadcast had some promising outcomes. There was an increased debate on poverty issues around the days of broadcast; the Barefoot College had six times more hits on their website as a result of being part of the film; and hundreds of live screenings of *Solar Mamas* took place across US and were combined with ample coverage on independent blogs and high Twitter activity in US. Screenings, in addition to their social and networking potential, provide a forum for discussion with a wider audience on both the movie's themes and the possibility of further collective action. In short, this is a deeper, more lasting form of engagement. Additionally, 'professional' and blogged reviews of the film and discussion of its issues in newspaper articles and on radio and TV, tended to be more nuanced, and have also been used as promotional tools for local screenings. Social media platforms, with their low barriers for production and emphasis on brevity, are perhaps not the ideal forum for detailed discussion of the complex structural issues underlying global poverty.

The film has been unique compared to the other Why Poverty? documentaries by portraying one development organisation, namely the Barefoot College. For the Barefoot College in India, the broadcast and screening of *Solar Mamas* led to an increased interest in the organisation and an organisational strengthening. The Barefoot College used the opportunity strategically and applied for funding for the development of a website and a media campaign. Funding was received and the website and media campaign was developed just at the time of the launch of the film.

The film has not lead to any known policy changes as yet, but there were some examples of engagement of policy makers in the debate. *Solar Mamas* has raised issues and subsequent debates that policies could address namely gender equality, women's rights, education of girls, employment of women, training of illiterate rural women, vocational training, alternative energy and climate change.



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[www.whypoverty.net](http://www.whypoverty.net)