



LEARNING BRIEF

STRATEGIES TO MASTER SUCCESS STORY DOCUMENTATION

Stories are at heart of all good communication

“The neuroscience of storytelling tells us that statistics, data and facts are essential, but stories are easy to remember. Stories can activate more regions. So when should we use storytelling? To persuade and motivate, because they appeal to our emotions and capacity for empathy.” -HongKong Polytechnic University

Beyond the box strategies for your success stories:

The 5Ws and H, the traditional format for developing success stories by addressing the ‘who, what, when, why, why and how, provide a first step foundation, however, beyond simply collecting information, a good documenter must be able to align to the donor interest and write a compelling story for the reader.

It does not stop at the first story; every organization must build within every department a culture of story-telling, whether those stories are told by Monitoring and Evaluation through numbers, in words or from the perspective of an Executive Director sharing inspirational insights from a field visit. A story can be told in many formats based on the information that has been collected and its presentation can determine whether a story falls flat or flies. NGOs, therefore must re-invent their success story telling so that at every stage of the narrative there is a person saying: “Wow”.

Key steps to developing an organizational story-telling culture

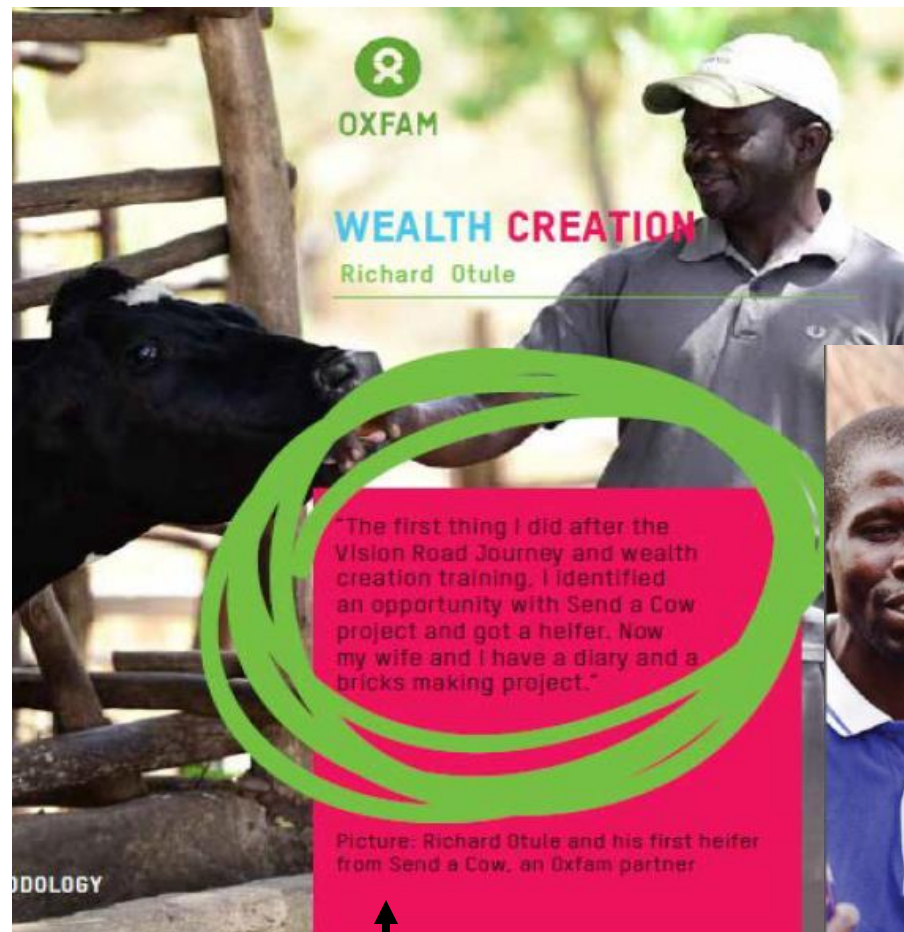
1. **How to build enough content for story generation:** Focus on series. Document your story in phases based on implementation; start at the beginning of the project and document the journey of selected beneficiaries every month, highlighting their challenges and their triumphs. This strategy is used by film producers who have discovered the secret to getting more viewers is to create series that keep people tuned in every week. Have an editorial calendar to guide regular success story collection. Don’t leave it to chance, otherwise everybody will become too busy for it.
2. **Compelling and interesting:** Think about keywords based on the project objectives that you can use in your story. Interview based on the keywords. Get quotations and anecdotes based on the keywords. Once you have the content, think about the basic human needs that the project

was trying to address –livelihoods, food security, protection, even hope for the future. This will give you a cue on how to start your story. The rest of the keywords should be built into the body of the story based on the project interventions. Intersperse the story with direct quotations from the beneficiary. This adds authenticity and flavour to your story.

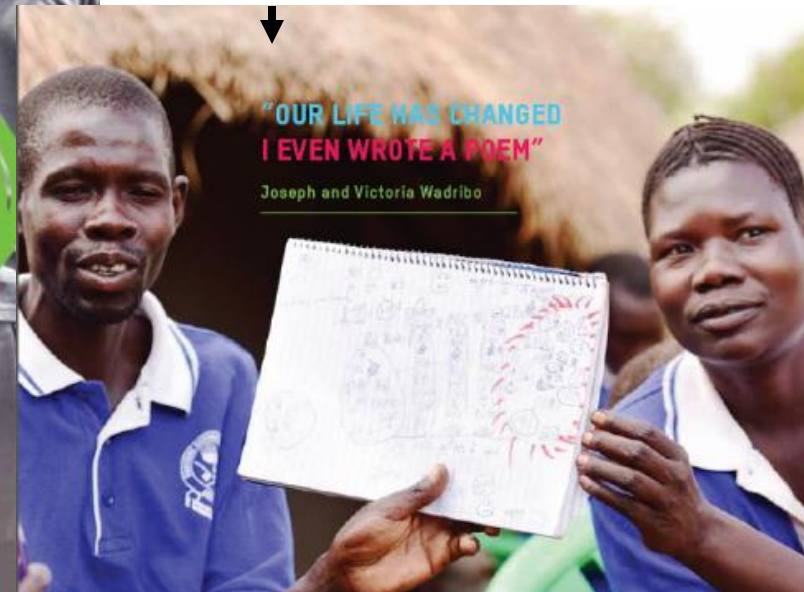
3. **Engaging the reader.** Give a face to the story by quickly introducing a representative beneficiary who readers can relate with. Provide some context –location, family, societal norms, main economic activity or other relevant details. Readers are more interested in reading people’s stories than reading about the organization funding them or the implementers. This type of information is secondary and should be placed in a sidebar or at the end of the story.
4. **Story banking:** Develop a specific centralized location where stories can be stored by topic, project or intervention. All stories should be stored in the story bank for quick access by all organization staff.
5. **Get everyone involved:** Redefine the success story –a story is not necessarily a long detailed narrative; instead think of it as information that is compelling enough to illustrate change. If everyone in the organization believes that a story is simple and accessible to them, people will be encouraged to document their stories even if they are only two paragraphs or a picture with an interesting caption. The success story is not the monopoly of the communications department.
6. **Share the story:** Set up a simple email newsletter for a single story every month. You can automate this for six months or even a year if you have many stories. Use services like Mailchimp (www.mailchimp.com) which have ready-made templates and great features that help you track the response to your stories. (Don’t forget to use a great picture in your story.)

Different types of stories

1. **Themes that always work.** When thinking of stories to document focus on the following types of stories: strong change, a great quote, a fabulous picture, a great approach, lots of numbers, the project champion, and the combo which has all the previous elements.
2. A story can be a **single powerful beneficiary quote** or a volunteer who observes transformational change where they work.
3. **Faces pictorial.** Get individual face shots of beneficiaries. Write a one-liner about how each is benefitting. People connect with faces and this can build goodwill and make your project memorable.
4. **Story infographic.** Use visuals to illustrate your project beneficiary journey. Timelines, icons are incorporated to create an interesting graphical overview of the story.
5. The **numbers storyline.** Highlight some key project numbers and link them back to how the beneficiary is benefitting to showcase the impact of your project.
6. Create a **multimedia PowerPoint with animated photos and text** or a slide show with project keywords that you can share during presentations as an opener or closer.
7. **Podcast.** If a documentary is beyond your budget, record the audio of your beneficiaries telling their stories (long used by BBC radio) and convert them into short clips for upload to your website.



Story type: The change that has occurred



Story type: The great quotation that summarizes the project intervention.

Story type: The extraordinary champion who has put into practice every element of the project interventions



Where to find more resources:

Impact and Innovations Development Centre www.iidcug.org