

Background

'**Capitalisation of experiences, water land and people**' (CE WLP) is the name of a two years initiative of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). It aims at sharing and deepening the knowledge base of SDC and partners on water resource management issues. The process is based on the analysis of experiences with watershed development programmes in India, Bolivia and Mali. It focuses on experiential learning and therefore on learning events where 'experience holders' – the members of the learning groups - come together and exchange and analyse their experiences.

In India the first meeting of the learning group - consisting of around 20 members - was conducted in December 2005. Intercooperation (IC) who is facilitating this initiative, was confronted with the question which method to use when starting a learning process that leads to tangible products and is useful for the persons and their organisations. The challenge was to adopt a method that would create interest, ensure commitment and would provide all the feeling of: *'we learned something, this process is going somewhere, it is different from 'business as usual'*. Story telling was the method used, right at the beginning of the learning event.

Story telling - Innovative method of sharing and learning

Individual experiences, specific examples or moments encountered regarding institutional aspects in water management that led to a change in the person's perception are shared within the group. Telling the experience more than once means that lessons that emerge out of the experiences are further analyzed and brought out as key lessons learnt.

Purpose of story telling

- ◆ To set the context in terms of the time and space that inspired a person to think
- ◆ Convert abstract frameworks into concrete examples
- ◆ To convert theory to practice
- ◆ To apply concepts in real life situation based on evidence of application
- ◆ Help in visualizing the experiences

Source: SDC's Guide to Using Story and Narrative Tools in Development Co-operation - Practitioner's, Version (Draft), Thematic Service Knowledge and Research in Collaboration with Sparknow Ltd., London

What we did

One of the facilitators introduced the method, by telling a story on a lived experience that started with *'I was on a visit to a watershed village suddenly, a person who incidentally was the ex-sarpanch and ex-VDS council member, and who till then was silently sitting on a boulder bund nearby, jumped down and said*



This helped to explain the difference between a story that narrates a lived experience - something unknown to the participants - and a presentation of abstract principles conceptual approaches and politically correct achievements of watershed development work - the business as usual for all the participants.

Subsequently the participants were encouraged to contribute their story about a time when they learned a valuable lesson about the importance of a good institutional set up for sustainable management of water resources. The latter being the thematic focus on the learning event. We adopted the three-step process.

Three-step process of story telling

Step 1: Find a partner (someone whom you do not know too well) and tell the story in 5 - 6 min to each other

Step 2: Each pair finds another pair and work as group of 4

- ◆ The story to be retold
- ◆ Develop 4 post cards with title, main points and key lessons from the story
- ◆ Select one story to be told in the plenary
- ◆ Capture the selected story using a 7 elements structure template

Step 3: Plenary session:

- ◆ Post cards to be pinned on India map according to their respective locations
- ◆ Selected stories to be retold (5-6 min) in the plenary
- ◆ Plenary discussion or reflection on the lessons learnt from the stories

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The facilitators gave a few tips to the tellers and the 'understanders', shared trigger questions and guided them on the reporting through postcards and by using a 7 - point template. Five selected stories were retold in the plenary and key learnings were noted down on cards. With the permission of the story tellers, the selected stories were recorded on video.

Examples of documenting two stories told in the first learning event of CE India, Hyderabad, Dec 2005

Story on a post card

Papamma and poor man's tank

Rao

Story line

Papamma is a poor dalit woman and leader of a women SHG. The instance was a about a time when the government had promised assistance for tank desilting activities but never materialized. A number of letters were sent that got no response. Finally, she mobilized the support of villagers and locked up the government office in the presence of politicians and media. In the end, the funds were sanctioned and work completed resulting in water for two crops in the year

KEY INSIGHTS - LEARNINGS

- ◆ Strategizing and timing the confrontation
- ◆ Drawing support from the media

Story recorded on 7 - point structure template

Title of story	The hijacking of Mhaswandi
Name of story teller	Ms. Marcella
1. The stage	A Village called Mhaswandi where watershed development activities were completed in 2000.
2. The place	Mhaswandi
3. The people	The Village watershed committee (VWC), women SHGs and their apex body, Samyukta Mahila Samiti (SMS).
4. The challenge	The SMS and SHGs were doing much better than the VWC. Now the VMC was feeling threatened and were creating obstacles to the women groups.
5. The action	By the end of the watershed development project period, the good impacts were visible and attracting visitors. Women SHGs federated and set norms and got involved in various economic and developmental activities. But recently the men realized that women were getting all the attention and felt neglected and decided to "clip the women's wings".
6. The action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The men also need attention, opportunity and stimuli ◆ We should also 'listen' to the silent ones (men) ◆ Power equations are changing (men and women; land and landless) ◆ Often we work in isolation of the society, of which communities are a part ◆ Empowerment of the weaker groups to cope with 'power' change and related dynamics ◆ Some strategies are needed to bring groups together
7. Drawing	



Story telling - Innovative method of sharing and learning

What came out

- ◆ Animated exchange among participants; interest in each other's experiences. The method provided scope for conveying qualitative information while recreating an individual's experiences, which - with formal structured kind of presentations - would have been lost.
- ◆ A list of key learnings that was further used to identify thematic topics to be deepened as part of the CE exercise. Story telling was used to glean few lessons; it was felt that further field visits and other forms of analysis are required to make the process more complete.
- ◆ There was no tendency to fall back into '*this we know, this will not work*', which are not uncommon reactions when 'experts' are brought together.
- ◆ 15 stories summarised in keywords on postcards and 5 stories recorded on 7 - point structure template. Good as intermediary products but not 'fit' for sharing with non - participants as there are no self - explanatory messages.
- ◆ 5 stories recorded on video. This was developed into a short DVD with a brief introduction describing the background of the learning event and conclusions drawn.
- ◆ Overall appreciation by the participants of the method. It provided an informal set up where all the participants were at ease and actively participated. All participants could share their stories in the prescribed 5 minutes.
- ◆ The stories risk giving a rosy picture. Probably it requires special encouragement to tell 'failure' stories.

Follow up activities:

- ◆ Identification of focus areas for further deepening of experiences
- ◆ Formation of subgroups based on common interest in the focus areas
- ◆ Field activities by the participants in the form of cross visits, sharing of information and build the scope for cross learnings
- ◆ Outputs to be generated in the form of case studies, videos, posters, leaflets etc. for sharing of experiences with a wider audience.

Capitalisation of Experiences: Water, Land and People

