

Shaping and Communicating **Developmental Stories**

Key Formula, Phases, Processes and Format

A Primer for Civil Society Organisations

Initiative of Centre for Strategic Communication (Vikas Samvad)



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About Vikas Samvad

Vikas Samvad is a practising Social Development (Nutrition Agriculture and Food Security), Capacity Building, Research & Documentation and Communication Organisation.

It seeks to provide support to and network with the Civil Society Organisations for Storytelling and Strategic Communication. The intent is to widen the civic space towards creating stronger social and public good.

Self learning and action manuals are prepared under the agis of Strategic Communication Centre (Vikas Samvad) capacitation programme for civil society organizations.

If any organization/group feels the requirement of capacity building support, please reach out to us at office@vssmp.org /0755 4252789



Context



When the efforts for communicating developmental issues are in the core of the Vision and Mission of any Civil Society Organisation (CSO), then it is necessary to understand the importance of set of basic principles and follow a process.

Undoubtedly, there are some practical principles and values of Developmental Storytelling and Development Communication.

In simpler words, Developmental Storytelling means Narration of the People's Stories, i.e. their lived reality, struggles, hopes, aspirations and change. It includes the vision and efforts of Civil Society Organisations as a medium and facilitator of Change. This primer is an attempt to grasp some of the basic dimensions for shaping and communicating Developmental Stories.

Key formula and Objectives (for shaping Developmental Stories)

- The most important objective of developmental communication/writing is to build a better society through a process of constructive narration. It aims to take the issues of the excluded and most marginalised people to such platforms and groups that are responsible for bringing about changes in the situation
- Also, the aim is to identify the constructive and affirmative aspects of the society and encourage them
- To create ecosystem towards eradication of the inequality, poverty, exploitation and injustice in the society and bring the values of Humanity, Harmony, Fraternity, Equity and Justice in the common practice including governance and policy making processes
- To analyse the legislations, schemes, systems and innovations intended to break barriers coming in the way of development and to promote the spread of effective programming and governance
- The objective of developmental communication is to inform, educate and inspire the society and all organisations (government, private, civil society and political) in a responsible and sensitive manner with an outlook of inclusive development.

Key Elements

- **Taking sides**

There is no neutrality in developmental storytelling. While doing this work, one takes side of values such as justice, equity, dignity, harmony, civil liberty and tolerance. We 'take sides' with those people and communities whom the society, organisation and government aims to bring out of the vicious cycle of poverty, exploitation, ignorance and inequality.

- **Society's Wellbeing is the most important Element**

'Society or People' are at the very centre of the idea of developmental communication and they have to be given the highest importance. After all, who is affected by deprivation? Who struggle with problems? Who have the hope that situation would change? When the process of change starts? Who are the people who play the major participatory role? Therefore, no entity should be considered more important than society or people.

- **Shedding prejudice**

Frequently, we have some ideas or prejudices about individuals, religions, gender and communities. But when it is about developmental communication or developmental storytelling,

the storyteller needs to seek truthful and factual information about people, communities and problems with a scientific outlook. Developmental Storytelling and Writing is not conceivable with prejudices such as – this particular community is fundamentalist, this community is violent, this particular practice is immoral, this community is a criminal community, people of deprived sections are lazy and so on.

- **Responsibility and accountability**

Before propagating a message/story/photograph, it should be ascertained whether the message being conveyed is likely to hurt someone's dignity. Whether it is likely to spread the feeling of animosity? Whether it might lead to enmity? Whether it might negatively impact security, unity and fraternity of the country? It is the responsibility of the individual and group involved in writing and propagating the message to give answers to these questions with utmost sensitivity.

- **Curiosity and soul-searching**

Developmental stories help society, government system and organisations to improve upon their initiatives/roles. Therefore it is necessary that the people engaged in developmental writing have adequate curiosity for knowing the socio-economic issues. The questions to be asked to self are – what actually are the issues and problems of the community? How can they be solved? What are their causes? For this, it is important to be in continuous discussion with experienced activists, organisations and experts.

- **Study and Knowingness (Constant Curiosity)**

If we do not have clear knowledge and understanding of the different aspects of development, then our stories are more likely to be half-baked and ineffective. It is important to keep reading-studying about such issues.

- **Reference and source**

What and who are the sources of our information. If the information is discreet, fact-based and credible, then the developmental news/story/message will be mature and credible too. It is very important to be very alert about our references and sources.

- **Reading and Editing**

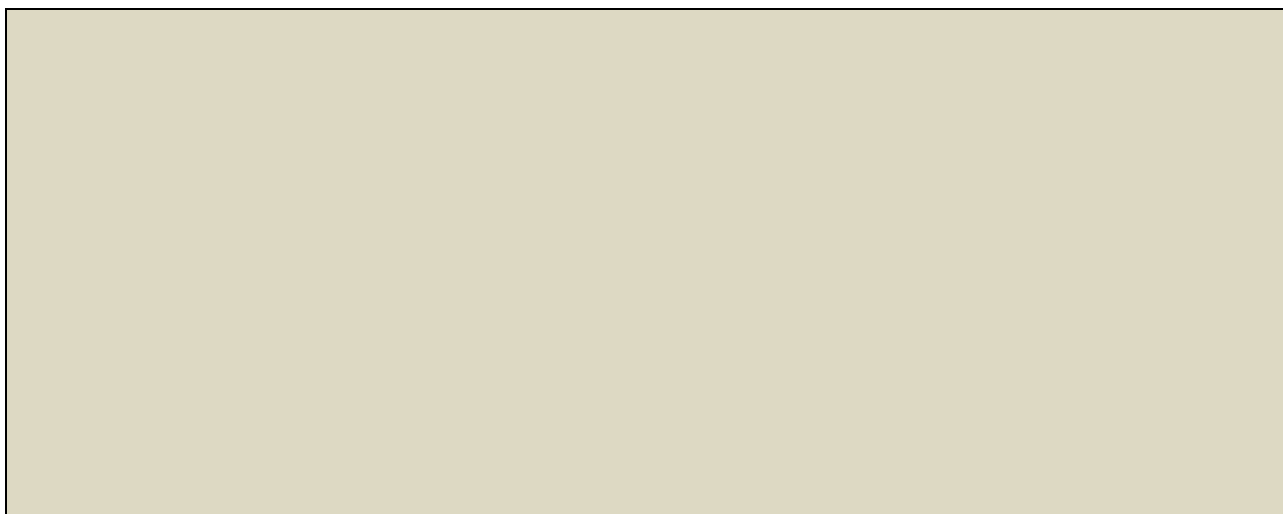
It is important to read the story written by us from the perspective of a reader. Ask yourself whether the subject is clear? Is the presentation factual? Is the message clear? Is the choice of words proper? Is there any confusion anywhere? Is there any repetition? It is better to correct the story oneself. After this, you can get it read by your associations and be ready to make improvements based on their feedbacks.

Basic Format

Phases and processes of Developmental Writing

What is the subject?

(It is important to have a clear subject/topic when we want to engage in developmental storytelling based on writing, videos, films or photographs. Write your subject in 2-3 sentences. It is important that the subject is genuine and its genuineness could be verified. What is the meaning of a subject? We can see that there was some problem facing the community/people, initiative for solution was taken and some initial changes are visible. There is a woman who took an initiative to solve a problem and achieved success. There is a problem that is affecting people/community. There is a project or scheme which is helping in changing the situation of a community. Issues of environment, water crisis, health could also be subjects. Once subject is selected, we should find answers to (what is the place – village, district, state, country etc, what community is it related to – rural, urban, scheduled caste community/people, scheduled tribe community/people, children, women, minorities, transgender/other gender communities etc.) these questions.



What are the criteria for selection of the subject?

(Storyteller, Writer or Journalist does not create a subject. They experience and identify an already existing subject, researches about the subject, finds information related to it and effectively informs it to others. When a subject is identified, then it should be clear whose problem are we talking about? Who is explaining/narrating the problem? If the subject is about change in a situation, then it should be clear who is providing details about the changes. These details can be provided by members of community, women groups, children, teachers, sarpanchs, and representatives of voluntary organizations and so on.)

Who are the main characters?

(When the story of a subject related to development is told or propagated; then it should be clear from the outset as to who has been most affected due to the subject/problem/change. Who played the most important role? Therefore the story should be told from the perspective of affected people and in their language. Also, when story of a change is told, then it will be mentioned as to who were the reason for the change. Who made the plan? Who took initiative? Who provided encouragement? Who provided resources, etc.? These are the ones considered to be characters of a developmental story.)

What is the most important issue/point?

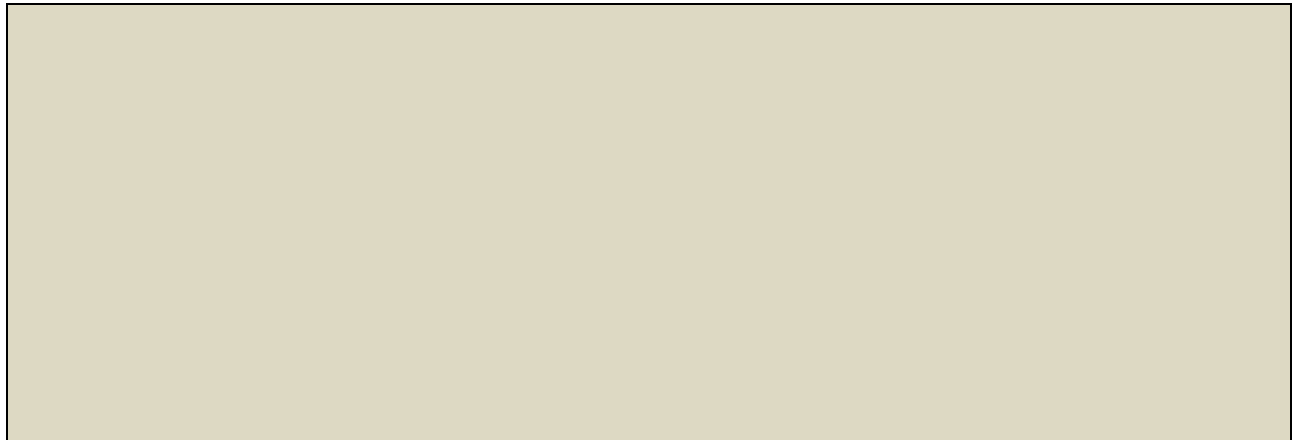
(What do we want to tell about the selected subject? Think whether the reader will find something new while reading/watching the story? Has there been any change? Is some problem being conveyed? Has there been some innovation/new experiment?)

How did the change come about?

(When the details of the subject/situation are being given, it should be clear as to how and with whose initiative the change occurred? The situation might have changed due to some woman's initiative, due to good work by the panchayat, due to initiative of a teacher of an ASHA worker, due to some group initiative, due to a government scheme or due to an initiative of an organization and so on. When the answer of this question is given, then the information on reasons/medium of the change should be factually recorded.)

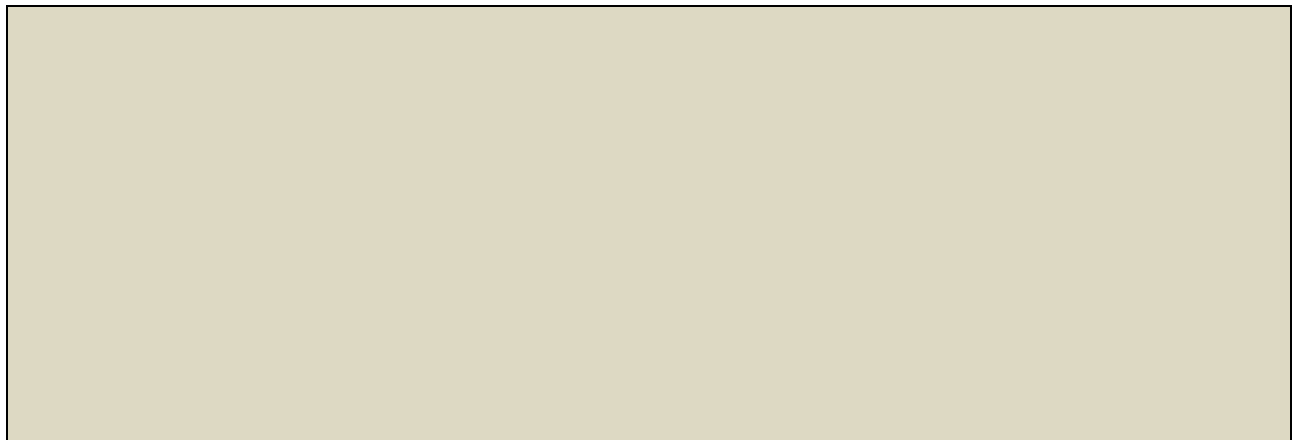
What are facts?

Are facts and figures on the changes, being written/communicated, available? What was the situation earlier and what is the current situation? What is the difference between earlier and current situation? What is the source of the facts being shared? The sources of information/facts should be credible. Facts and information should be such that could be cross-checked.



Details with imagery

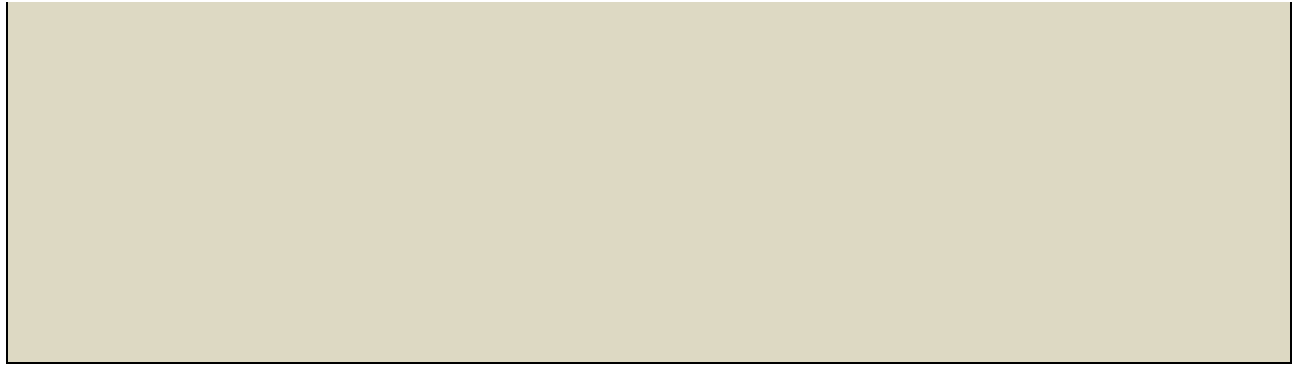
(Everything cannot be told through facts and statements. A developmental story finds connect with reader/audience when it has such description of the place, situation and problem that can be felt. When we talk about subject of cleanliness or agriculture issues, we should describe the ground scenario. While writing a story on resolution of drinking water problem, it could be mentioned that earlier, women had to traverse rough terrain, a part of which passed through dense jungle, to fetch water; but now the situation has change. Such imaginative description of the situation is splash throughout the story/news.)



Policy/Law/Scheme related aspects

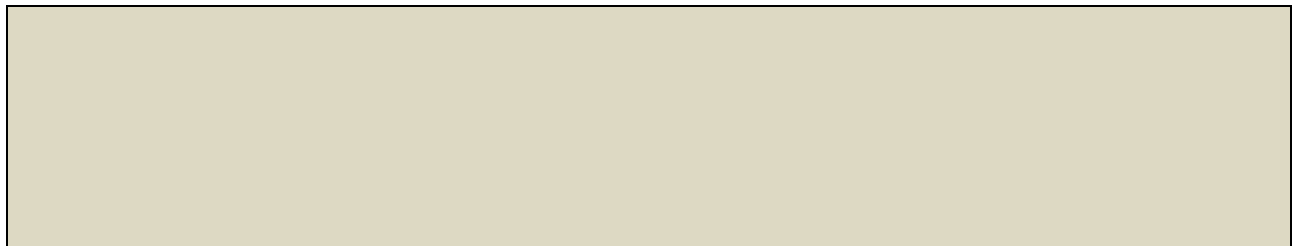
(What are the policies, schemes and laws related to the subject that has been chosen? Need is being felt for what other policies? What are the experiences related to implementation of policies/schemes/laws? These points should be mentioned factually.)





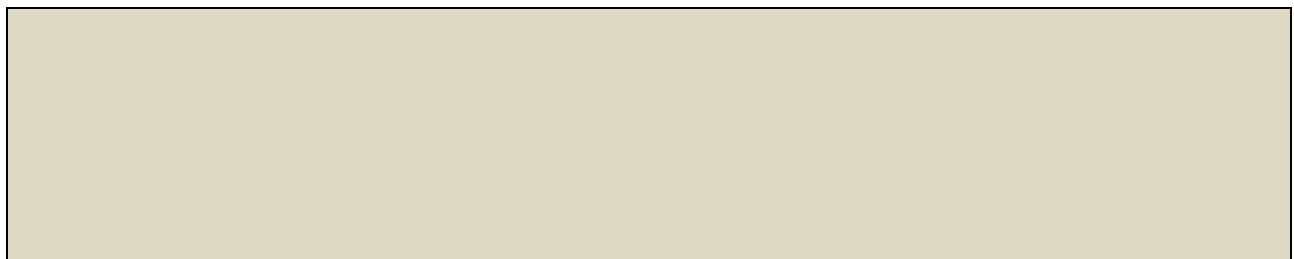
The version of affected people/group/community

(Some community/group or individual will always be at the center of developmental story/writing. It has to be ensured that the outcomes of the story should be clear from their statements/version. It should also be ensured that the statements/versions of the groups/communities being depicted in the story should be presented correctly and with the original reference.)



Identity of the individual/community

(While initiating developmental storytelling, often such stories are told where the dignity of an individual or community has been hurt. In such a situation, it should be ensured that the story being presented does not further hurt the dignity of the individual/community and if necessary, their identity should not be mentioned.)



Tentative Structure/Format

Headline

Sub-headline

Introduction of story/news (100-150 words)

- Answering what, where, when, who and how
- Answering in brief
- Using effective and clear-meaning words
- Description should match the headline
- Information should be factual

Description in the story/news (400-800 words)

- Expanding the what, where, when, who and how
- Giving details of the 'why' and 'how' in the description
- Using facts
- Why is the selected subject, a developmental subject?
- Adding the statements/thoughts/versions of the related/affected people
- Maintaining clear link to the headline
- Not including any private opinion, outlook or prejudice

Using effective photographs

- The photograph should be visibly linked to the developmental story
- Give caption to the photograph
- If necessary, give the description of the photograph

Outcome/conclusion in brief (100-150 words)

- At the end of the developmental story/news, present the brief conclusion of the entire story. This can together include the problem, initiative to resolve the problem and the actual change