STORYTELLING: A tool for promoting peace and literacy
This booklet was written by Katy Newell-Jones and Rosie Crowther of Feed the Minds, with stories collected from our partners:

- Advocacy for Social Development and Environment - Uganda (ASDE-U)
- Femmes et Education des Adultes (FEDA)
- Peacebuilding, Healing and Reconciliation Programme (PHARP)
- Sudan Evangelical Mission (SEM)
- Tatua Communication
- Youth with Physical Disability Development Forum (YPDDF)

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You are welcome to photocopy this booklet and use it in workshops. However, please acknowledge Feed the Minds whenever it is used. We would also welcome feedback on the booklet and examples of how it has been used. Please send your comments to info@feedtheminds.org

Further copies of this booklet are available from SEM or PHARP, and also to download from the Feed the Minds website www.feedtheminds.org

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Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ASDE-U</td>
<td>Advocacy for Social Development &amp; Environment - Uganda</td>
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<td>CITAM</td>
<td>Christ Is The Answer Ministries, Kenya</td>
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<td>FEDA</td>
<td>Femmes et Education des Adultes (Women &amp; Adult Literacy), Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV &amp; AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus &amp; Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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Introduction

Storytelling has an important role in African society, especially in the family. Traditionally, children learn about their culture, religion and traditions through listening to stories from their parents. Stories can help people understand the world and each other. However, some stories encourage tribalism and stories can be used to enforce and coerce, so careful selection is important.

Storytelling among adults is often used to entertain but can also be a powerful tool for building peace in divided families and communities. Stories can provide opportunities to resolve conflicts and help people to forgive and reconcile.

Storytelling can be valuable in comforting those who are mourning the departed or other kinds of loss. The storyteller can benefit from feeling they are not alone; that others have ‘heard’ their experiences. The listener can hear a story and understand events through someone else’s eyes and ears. When facilitated skilfully, the storytelling process can help communities develop plans for healing and development.

The art of storytelling has been lost in some communities through war and conflict, as a result of the breakdown of families or as a result of an increase in technology. In order to recapture lost values and skills of storytelling in our communities, workshops were organised in South Sudan and Kenya, under the leadership of Feed the Minds in partnership with Sudan Evangelical Mission (SEM) and Peacebuilding, Healing and Reconciliation Programme (PHARP).

Participants were drawn from South Sudan, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda; all of which have been affected by war and conflict recently. The workshop emphasised the power of storytelling in peacebuilding, trauma healing, civic education, conflict resolution and strengthening literacy, and its role in communities. One of the most useful aspects of the workshops was the discussions which took place on how to facilitate storytelling, which is the basis of this booklet.

At the end of the workshops, stories were collected and guidelines produced for use by facilitators in churches and communities targeting victims of trauma and discrimination and those marginalised because of conflict.
Why has this guide been written?

Feed the Minds, PHARP and SEM are committed to using storytelling, particularly as a tool for peacebuilding. **Peacebuilding** includes trauma healing, conflict resolution, reconciliation, community strengthening and civic education. Peacebuilding is needed in all communities, not just those emerging from war or conflict. Where there is discrimination and stigmatisation against people living with HIV and AIDS, persons with disabilities or other marginalised groups, peacebuilding can build trust, empower individuals and strengthen communities.

Stories can be a way of enabling people who have experienced discrimination, trauma, stigmatisation or violence to tell their story and be heard. They can raise awareness about sensitive issues like rape, displacement, tribal tension or lack of women’s representation. They can be particularly useful in literacy classes and circles in encouraging participants to share their experiences, learning to read and write about issues which are important to them and gaining confidence to take action in their lives.

Many group facilitators know how valuable stories and storytelling can be but lack the confidence and skills to use them. We believe that everyone can use storytelling. This guide has been written to provide advice, ideas and examples.

How can this guide be used?

We encourage facilitators to see this guide as a set of ideas and suggestions. The stories in this booklet can be used as they are presented here. However, in our experience, groups gain most from telling their own stories, discussing them afterwards and learning from each other’s experiences.
Linking storytelling, reading and writing

Often stories are told verbally and not written down. However, we see reading and writing as key elements in empowerment. We encourage facilitators using storytelling to consider incorporating some reading and writing.

For those of us who read and write easily, writing down our stories can help clarify what we want to say. Also, hearing other people reading our stories can help us see our experiences from a different perspective.

For others who find reading and writing difficult, writing their stories down, often with help from others, can be a way of learning new words and practicing writing, but more importantly, it can be a way of validating their thoughts and experiences. They too can see their own thoughts on paper, however simply expressed, and experience a sense of pride in communicating their thoughts through text.

Key words

The workshop participants in South Sudan selected the following 12 key words, which relate to many of the stories. Each story included in this booklet relates to at least two of these key words. Other groups might read these same stories and select other key words which are meaningful to them.

- Civic education
- Grief
- Conflict
- Healing
- Discrimination
- Loss
- Displacement
- Forgiveness
- Peace
- Stigma
- Reconciliation
- Gender inequality/women
How can members of a storytelling group benefit?

When used in supportive groups, the ‘storyteller’ can benefit from someone listening and bearing witness to their experiences, of sharing their burden of hurt and suffering. Storytelling can enable someone to speak their truth for the first time and to recognise the pain with which they have been living. Perpetrators of violence can also gain from storytelling enabling them to voice their actions, how they feel about them and often the pressures they felt they were under at the time.

The ‘listener’ can benefit from hearing about someone else’s experiences which are similar to their own. Listening to others stories, allows them to see that others are struggling with similar challenges on a daily basis, perhaps flashbacks, nightmares, the inability to visit a particular place (like a water pump where an incident took place), perhaps difficulties in loving a child from rape. In relating to others and their stories, the listener may begin to feel less isolated or guilty and start a process of healing.

The ‘listener’ can also gain from hearing stories of people’s experiences which are very different from their own. This can help people to see the different perspectives in a conflict, sometimes helping people realise the impact of their own experiences. For example: a woman who remained in her village during a conflict, hiding, fearful, witnessing firsthand the atrocities, supporting those who survived, taking on responsibility for others with no family left, dealing with her own loss, speaking with the woman who fled, spending years in a refugee camp, often starved of food and dignity, dependent on unreliable handouts from donors and NGOs, yet also subject to the horrors of rape and violence. They can hear each other’s stories and understand the suffering that the others have been through. Equally important is for these women to hear the story of those who were perhaps abducted, or chose to become combatants, and the trauma they live with on a daily basis.

One of the keys to using storytelling for peacebuilding is the way in which the facilitator or group leader supports the process.
What makes an inspiring story?

Some stories are memorable and inspire people and provide food for thought for days, sometimes even years afterwards. So we asked ourselves ‘What is it that makes an inspiring story?’

Inspiring stories tend to be ones which

- describe events which are relevant to the listener’s lives
- use language which the audience can easily understand
- are convincing and honest
- have some emotion
- do not ‘tell’ the listeners what to think but encourage them to think for themselves.

When using storytelling in groups, the most effective stories are ones which have some, or even all, of the following

- a title which catches attention
- are brief and concise
- are realistic and accurate
- remind people of events
- make it clear who wrote the story, when and where.

However, we felt that the way in which a story is used is just as important as the story itself. So we suggest you also read the next section on how to facilitate storytelling.
How can we facilitate storytelling?

Inspiring stories can be told by adults, young people, children, people who neither read nor write, people with leadership roles- anyone in fact.

In this booklet we are using storytelling as a group activity for peacebuilding, trauma healing and reconciliation, with storytelling taking place between members of the group. The process of storytelling has three important stages:

- Preparation
- During
- Afterwards

Preparation

Creating the right atmosphere for storytelling is important. Trust needs to be built and people often need help in seeing themselves as storytellers. When using storytelling for peacebuilding it is useful to know something about

- the kinds of conflicts and tensions which are common in the participants’ own lives
- the challenges which participants have faced in their lives

Timelines, community mapping and spider charts are just three simple activities which need few resources and can help groups to prepare for storytelling. Each of them can be used with a wide variety of groups, including literacy classes where participants can also learn new words and develop new skills in reading and writing.

With timelines, individuals are invited to describe key events of their lives on the ground or a sheet of paper, using drawings rather than words. They are then invited to talk to others about what they have drawn and what it means to them.

Timelines can be a safe and creative way for people to start talking about difficult times in their life as they can choose what to include and how to talk about it. They are also useful way of learning more about people’s lives and the challenges they have faced or are faced with. People can then choose which events in their timeline to use for storytelling either verbally, or in writing.
Timelines

Purpose:
To help participants share the major events of their life and understand the stresses and challenges which others have faced.

Activity:
- Working alone participants draw a timeline of their life showing important events such as marriage or displacement
- Participants spend some quiet time thinking about times of challenge such as drought, loss and war
- Participants practice telling their own story in small groups of 3 - 4 whilst others listen
- The group chooses 1 story to tell other participants:
  - 1 person introduces the story
  - 1 person tells the story
  - 1 person explains why the story was chosen and what makes it an inspiring story
- Whole group discussion about stories including what rights have been denied or accessed
- The group reflects on what lessons they can learn from the story and how can they support people in their own communities.

Facilitator’s notes: This activity helps participants to discuss different perspectives and understand other people’s views. It is important that participants are not under any pressure to talk about particular times in their lives but can choose to say as much or as little as they want to.

Timeline of a village being overrun by rebels in Kambia, Sierra Leone 2001
With community mapping participants are invited to draw a map of their own community in small groups and then discuss key issues, for example where there is tension or conflict or where women might be most at risk.

Written words are not used, only drawings, which allows non-literate people’s voices to be heard as clearly as those who read and write well. This activity helps people to understand each others’ communities better and see them through other people’s eyes. Issues can then be identified and participants are usually very keen to tell stories from their experiences of the conflicts in their own communities.

**Community mapping**
(adapted from Doe, McCaffery & Newell-Jones, 2004, page 79)

**Purpose:**
For participants to share knowledge of their communities and the types of conflicts in their daily lives.

**Activity:**
- Participants form groups of 3 – 6 people.
- Each group maps out their village or community.
  This can be done on the ground using available materials such as sticks and stones, or by drawing on a large piece of paper.
- Each group marks the main areas of conflict in their communities. They discuss these ‘flashpoints’ and the causes of conflict.
- Each group talks the other participants through their map.
- The group selects one or more types of conflict to discuss and find solutions to.

**Facilitator’s notes:**
- Using objects or drawings rather than words, allows everyone in the group to focus on their community and does not exclude anyone who is non-literate.
- It is important that everyone feels able to join in. There are no ‘wrong’ answers, expressing ideas and opinions is very important and everyone’s ideas can be included.
- This activity can be used as the basis for storytelling within the group, followed by working through some of the issues identified, exploring how to build peace.
- Mapping can also lead onto other literacy activities (e.g. beginner level adding key words to the map, intermediate level writing about the conflicts in their communities).
Community map of Kibera slum, Nairobi, Kenya 2010, showing the tension between Christian and Muslim communities, with gangs crossing the railway line, competition for schools and fighting breaking out at the rubbish tip.
Spider charts can be used to share experiences and stories in a group which can lead to peacebuilding and strengthening communities.

**Spider charts**

**Purpose:**
To share experiences and stories around a specific theme.

**Activity:**
- A key word is chosen by the group and placed at the centre of a page (e.g. leadership, death, voting)
- Participants call out words which they connect with the key word (e.g. men, corruption, responsibility, kindness, voting, democracy)
- Participants are asked to talk about why they chose these words
- Participants are invited to share stories of their experiences which have been triggered from the key word and the discussion.

**Facilitator’s notes:**
When calling out words, or brainstorming, it is important that everyone’s words are included. There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers as different people will link the key word with different experiences in their lives.

This activity can be useful in literacy circles as it naturally leads on to selecting new words, learning how to spell them and putting them into sentences devised by the participants.
When stories have been selected and the group is ready to tell and listen to each other’s stories the facilitator will usually:

- choose a place where everyone is comfortable and there will be no interruptions
- allow participants to choose what they tell so that they do not feel pressurised to speak about things they want to keep to themselves
- make sure the storyteller knows why you want to hear their story and that they can tell as little or as much as they choose to
- make sure the storyteller knows that their story is confidential and no-one else will repeat it unless they authorise it.
**During**

Whilst the story is being told the facilitator should keep their attention on both the storyteller as well as the group. The South Sudan group devised the following suggestions for a successful facilitator:

- Show attention, show interest and listen carefully
- Have sympathy and kindness in your heart
- Keep eye contact if the storyteller is looking at you
- Avoid unnecessary interruptions from you or the group
- Ask gentle questions for clarity or encouragement, if they are needed
- Allow the storyteller to tell as much or as little as they choose
- When emotions overflow a gentle word or pat on the arm might be helpful
- Have personal confidence in listening; do not try and think of ‘useful’ things to say
- Allow a moment of quiet immediately after the storyteller has finished.

**Afterwards**

The way a group responds after someone has told a story can have an enormous effect on the storyteller and the healing process. When storytelling is being used for peacebuilding and trauma healing, the following points are important:

**Do**

- Do thank the storyteller for sharing their story
- Do recognise the courage needed to share their story
- Do allow the storyteller time to sit quietly if they want to
- Do encourage the storyteller to talk about the parts of the story they want to, before discussing other areas
- Do allow plenty of time for discussion afterwards
- Finish by giving everyone the chance to say what they have gained from the story.

*Bearing witness to someone’s story by listening and connecting with the storyteller is one of the most beneficial things a good listener can do.*
Don’t
• Don’t start asking lots of questions straight away
• Don’t try and give advice or to find solutions
• Don’t encourage others to go straight into their own stories
• Don’t move on to other things too quickly.

As a listener your role is NOT to give advice, solve problems or find answers.

When using storytelling with a group, encourage the group to identify the key issues. The storyteller has been brave enough to share their story: we should be brave enough to bear witness by recognising where discrimination, violence or rape has affected someone’s life. Often this is best done in pairs or very small groups so everyone has a chance to talk about the story whilst the storyteller has some time to sit quietly on their own or talk to the facilitator.

Support the group in relating the issues to their own lives. For example, if a story describes discrimination, you could invite them to think about the ways in which different people are discriminated against in their community. You might also ask if there is any discrimination in their own family, or if they know where someone might go to get support in the community.

Finally, it is important to gently encourage everyone to take away a message for themselves from the story, answering the questions

’What have I gained?’ and ‘What might I do now?’
Supporting Literacy

One of the advantages of storytelling is that everyone, whether they can read and write or not, can tell a valuable story. Feed the Minds is committed to supporting literacy through all of our partnerships and has developed a Five Point Literacy Plan (see inside back cover) which acts as a reminder whenever we are working in communities where some people have limited literacy skills.

The Five Point Literacy Plan is not just for programmes where literacy circles or classes are being offered but for all partnership programmes. In all community-based programmes there will be people with a range of literacy levels. Some people might read and write with ease, whilst others might have few or no literacy skills.

We should
1. Know the literacy skills of our partners / communities
2. Not discriminate against those who are non-literate
3. Adapt any written materials to be suitable to our ‘audience’
4. Adopt ‘literacy friendly’ approaches (see below)
5. Share good practice in developing literacy skills.

For example, an HIV and AIDS project would be more effective if the printed materials are in simple language; a voter education project would engage voters more, if ordinary community members could read the voter registration forms.

‘Literacy friendly’ approaches

By ‘literacy friendly’ approaches we mean carefully using reading and writing activities so that people use the literacy skills they already have and extend them slightly. This might include

- drawing community maps without words initially, then adding just a few words, like school, church, bore hole written clearly next to illustrations to help those with limited literacy skills make the connections between words and pictures easily
- asking a group to identify key words from a story which they would have difficulty writing and inviting them to help each other.

Another way of supporting literacy whilst storytelling is to ask people to tell their stories in small groups and then for the group to select one story to tell to the whole group using just a few, perhaps six, sentences.

Several of the stories in this booklet came from using this very simple technique.
A story in six sentences

Purpose
To enable people to share key events in their lives in a simple form.

Activity
• In small groups, participants select stories, for example from a personal timeline or mapping activity
• Together they make up six short sentences which tell the story and write each one separately
• The group shares its story with other groups and discusses the key issues.

Facilitator notes
This activity works well whether people have high or low levels of literacy. The process of deciding on the six sentences pushes the group to identify the key points. The result is that these stories are often extremely powerful and can generate a lot of discussion and peacebuilding activities.

If storytelling is being used in a literacy circle or class, the story could be used as the basis for a whole range of activities. For a class with beginners, simple key words could be selected and a family group could be built up, probably in the local language.

For example, the word gun might be selected from the story, which participants could build into the family group all of which end with -un;

   gun  run  sun  fun

These words can be made into sentences, or woven into a story.

The soldier waved his gun. We had to run. It was so hot in the sun. It was no fun.

With a more advanced group of literacy learners, the participants can work in small groups, first of all writing one of their stories. Then the rest of the group discuss what they would like to happen next which would build peace in the community and write their own short follow up story.

More ideas about literacy and peacebuilding activities can be found in Integrating Literacy and Peacebuilding: A Guide for Trainers and Facilitators, 2004 available online at www.balid.org.uk/literacy.htm
Stories and poems

The following stories and poems have been written by partners of Feed the Minds in 2010. Most were told during the workshops in Kotobi, South Sudan, some were developed later.

Some of the stories were told initially out loud in small groups which included several literacy facilitators. Afterwards the group ‘captured’ the story in a few short sentences which could be used in literacy circles. In many cases these short summaries are just as powerful as the longer stories.

Although many of these stories tell of hardship, pain, grief and loss, all of the authors have managed to rebuild their lives and are active members of NGOs in their communities, contributing positively in so many ways as peacebuilders.
War is SO cruel

This is the story of the abduction and loss of my brothers
Our village was attacked by rebels
All 16 of our family members were taken by rebels and accused of being collaborators with the government
Out of the 16 people, 6 men were killed
The 6 were all my brothers
The memory of the loss is still painful to us

Yotoma James, Kotobi, South Sudan, May 2010

Questions for groups to discuss:
1. What effect do you think these events had on Yotoma’s family?
2. How do you think Yotoma feels about surviving?
3. How could the family remember the men they lost?

Key words: conflict, loss, grief, healing, reconciliation
Struggle with stigma

I am an orphan, I lost my parents from HIV and AIDS
My father was a driver, driving a lorry from Kampala to Arua
He had very young lady who happened to infect him with sickness
He refused to go for testing
And he died in 1996 in a miserable way
As a result we suffered a lot
And some of us ended up without being educated

My sister lives with me and helps care for my daughter
I am teaching her to read and write.

Gasi Stella, Kotobi, South Sudan, May 2010
based on her experiences in northern Uganda

Questions for groups to discuss:

1. How might Stella and her family have suffered as a result of HIV and AIDS?
2. How do you think Stella feels towards her father?
3. Do you know someone living with HIV and AIDS? How do you behave towards them? Who else is discriminated against in your community?
4. Do you know how to find out your HIV status?

Key words: discrimination, forgiveness, gender inequality/women, grief, healing, loss, stigma
Denied education by his beard

When father was at school, war broke out
The war stopped
Father went back to school
Teacher refused to allow him to stay
He had grown a beard
He was sent back to marry

Christopher Malone, Kotobi, South Sudan, May 2010
based on his experiences in the war in Sudan

Questions for groups to discuss:
1. Who do you know who missed out on education due to conflict?
2. What discrimination is there in this story?
3. If your child was refused school where would you go for advice?

Key words: civic education, conflict, discrimination
Did I choose right?

In the war there were not many doctors or medicines
I lost my father because of this
Then my husband was so ill and I was told he must have medicine from a long way away
Should I stay with him or go to fetch medicine to save his life?
I went to fetch the medicine
But he died while I was away without me at his side
It broke my heart not to be there.

Gertarude Philip, Kotobi, South Sudan, May 2010
based on her experiences in the war in Sudan

Questions for groups to discuss:
1. What part did the conflict play in each of the deaths of her father and husband?
2. What health services are there now in your community?
3. How do you think Gertarude might rebuild her life?

Key words: conflict, loss, grief
Mr. Fred Mugerwa is a student at Makerere University. He has a physical disability.

One day Fred was on his way home to Kampala city, when he was refused a taxi. The taxi driver shouted, ‘I do not have time for deformed people’. Other people were allowed in the taxi and nobody helped Fred when he was pushed out the taxi.

Fred is a member of an NGO called Youth with Physical Disabilities Development Forum (YPDDF). He knew that there are laws in Uganda and internationally that protect the rights of person’s with disabilities and decided to seek justice. With advice from YPDDF, Fred went to the Uganda Police and Human Rights Commission and made a complaint against the Uganda taxi company.

The taxi operators offered Fred money to settle the case. Fred refused to accept payment because he wanted the taxi company to be proved guilty in court so that others can learn from his situation.

*Henry Nyombi*, Youth with Physical Disability Development Forum based on experiences in Uganda

Questions for groups to discuss:

1. What type of discrimination has taken place? How do you think Mr. Mugerwa felt when he was refused to board the taxi?

2. Have you ever been discriminated against? Where could you go for support?

3. Would you have taken the money offered to Fred by the taxi company, or taken the case to court?

Key words: *civic education, discrimination, stigma*
I cry silently...

Heavy footsteps enter the house
My heart beats faster and faster
My mother screams a few minutes later
The footsteps leave soon after!

I cry silently and try to sleep
I must go to school tomorrow
I wonder why my father beats my mother.

Judy Amunga, Tatua Communication, August 2010
based on her experiences in Kenya

Questions for groups to discuss:

1. Why do you think the man beats the woman in this story?
2. How do you think the children might feel?
3. Who can help this family in your community?

Key words: gender inequality/women, grief, loss, conflict
Neighbours in peace

I am a man who can make peace
I love my country very much,
How can I be killing my neighbour,
When he is a human being like me?

Why is my neighbour starving,
Hungry,
And I have food?

I am standing under the sun,
which is surrounded by stars,
To swear that I will never leave you hungry, my neighbour!

**Boniface Ambani**, Kibera, Kenya, August 2010
based on his memories aged 13 years

Questions for groups to discuss:

1. How do neighbours behave towards each other in your community?
2. How could you help your neighbour?
3. How could your neighbour help you and your family?

Key words: *conflict, reconciliation, peace, healing*
Education as the key to peace

Maria lived in a remote village where educating a girl child was not so important. People liked Maria for her kind heart and work with the church, but she had hardly been to school. Her friend Gloria was educated because her father was a school teacher.

A teacher, by the name Peter, befriended Maria for marriage. Both their parents agreed on the dowry. After their engagement Peter was privileged to go to France for further studies. Before he left they agreed to communicate on the wedding preparations. Little did he know that Maria did not write or read well.

Peter wrote to Maria from France to tell her how beautiful the country was and how he missed her. Maria ran to Gloria to read the letters for her. Though Maria trusted Gloria, Gloria was jealous of Maria who was getting married to an educated man when she thought it should have been her.

Gloria made up bad words to hurt Maria and turn her against Peter. Maria was traumatised, thinking that Peter did not like her any more. She ran to her mother telling her what Gloria said was in the letter from Peter. Her mother knew Gloria was the only educated girl in the area who had longed for Peter as her husband. She suspected that Gloria might be lying to Maria.

She comforted her daughter and encouraged her to join an adult literacy class which was a bit far from her home. Maria took that risk and joined the literacy class. Gradually, she learnt to read and write. When she went through the letters from Peter she found that what Gloria was telling her was not true.

She decided to write to Peter herself, explaining what happened. She found slowly she could read Peter’s letters and write some of her own. They were able to reconcile and plan their wedding.

Felicien Nemeyimana, Kotobi, South Sudan, May 2010
based on experiences in Rwanda
Questions for groups to discuss:

1. How can we describe the relationship between Maria and Gloria?

2. What role did Maria’s mother play in this relationship?

3. What advice can you give to parents who deny their children education?

4. How can literacy be a tool of reconciliation and healing?

Key words:
gender inequality/women, reconciliation, peace
Women standing together

There was a lady called Gladys who lived in a small village. She could only read and write a little but she was well organised and kind. When the time came for digging she would dig her own garden, then she would organise for the younger women to dig the gardens of the women who could not do it for themselves. The women who were disabled or who were older looked after the children while their gardens were dug.

The time came for the elections to the education committee and the women said to Gladys, “We must have a woman on the committee, will you stand for us?” Gladys agreed and put her name forward.

There was a meeting and one man said, “Gladys, you are kind and can cook well but you cannot read and write well. So you cannot be on the education committee.” Other men agreed. When the vote took place, it was done by raising hands. The women were too scared to vote for Gladys because of what the men said. So Gladys was not elected.

Gladys asked her friends, “Why did you not vote for me?” They said, “Did you not see the way the Chief looked at me with his eye?” Gladys and her friends were sad. The education committee had only men.

The next year the community had received some training in civic education, electing leaders and the importance of the opinions of women and people with disabilities being heard. The vote was a secret ballot. Each of the candidates was represented by a bean or a seed. Everyone picked one bean or seed and put it in the ballot pot.

This time the women were not scared and Gladys was elected. Now the work could begin to make the women’s issues to be discussed.

Katy Newell-Jones, Kotobi, South Sudan, May 2010
based on experiences in Cameroon

Questions for groups to discuss:

1. Were these elections democratic and fair?
2. What kinds of discrimination were there in the story?
3. How do you select leaders in your community?

Key words: civic education, discrimination, gender inequality
Healing through forgiveness

My father was polygamous, with several wives. The whole family was managed by the legal first wife, so her children and grandchildren benefited. They had advantages such as food, education, clothes and other basic needs. There was so much conflict in the family.

While my education was denied, my brother’s studies were sponsored by our father. But my mother was determined and with the help of a missionary and one of my sisters, I got my education. None of my sisters attended school for long.

When the war of liberation of DRC came, my brother promised to provide transport for my family but he took only his own family. My sisters and I were left deserted, traumatised and vulnerable.

When the troops came to our village, they met us in our house and took away my sisters. Minutes after, they came to take me and forced me to watch them being raped violently.

One military man came and saved us and took us to the barracks, but one of my sisters refused to go with us. Later I returned to look for her but found she had hanged herself.

We were two years in a refugee camp. When repatriated, I found my brother and reconciliation is taking place slowly. Now, years later we are living peacefully supporting and assisting each other. The deep wounds, however, will take many more years to heal.

Ekombe Athumani, Kotobi, South Sudan, May 2010 based on experiences in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Questions for groups to discuss:

1. In what ways were women’s rights abused?
2. How did Athumani rebuild his family?
3. How might you have felt if you were Athumani?
4. What was the cause of the conflict in the family?

Key words: conflict, discrimination, displacement, forgiveness, gender inequality, loss, peace, reconciliation
## Five Point Plan

Feed the Minds has developed a plan for using literacy to strengthen all projects.

| 1. Literacy levels of beneficiaries | **What is the literacy level of local people?**  
*How do women use literacy and numeracy?*** |
|---|---|
| 2. Avoid stigma and discrimination | **Are we excluding non-literate people from workshops, trainings or positions of responsibility?**  
*How can we make sure that non-literate people are included in project activities?*  
*Do our written materials act as a barrier to people with low literacy levels?*** |
| 3. Examine and adapt written materials | **Are we using simple words and sentences that people will understand?**  
*Can we use pictures or diagrams to explain this?*  
*What language will most people understand?*** |
| 4. Develop literacy skills where possible | **You don’t have to be a literacy facilitator to help participants develop their reading and writing skills:**  
*Identify key words for participants to learn*  
*Use pictures and words together*  
*Read text written on the blackboard aloud*  
*Breakdown complex words*  
*Emphasise initial letter sounds*  
*Use mixed case words not capital letters*** |
| 5. Share ideas for promoting literacy | **Have teachers and facilitators shared their skills and experiences with other people in our organisation?**  
*Has our organisation shared good practice and ideas for promoting literacy with other NGOs?*** |
References

Below are some useful references for using literacy and storytelling for peacebuilding, trauma healing and civic education. All are available to download for free online.


Feed the Minds is an ecumenical Christian international development charity. We support the most marginalised individuals and communities around the world through education.

This booklet focuses on storytelling, which we believe is a particularly powerful literacy and empowerment tool. It has been written to encourage you to use the storytelling method, and provides advice, ideas and examples of its success.

**Stories can enable people who have faced discrimination, trauma, stigmatisation or violence to share their experiences and be heard. They can raise awareness about sensitive issues like rape, displacement, tribal tension or lack of women’s representation.**

**Stories can be particularly valuable in literacy classes and circles, encouraging participants to share their experiences whilst learning to read and write - covering issues which are important to the participants and enabling them to gain confidence and take action in their lives.**

We hope that you find this guide useful and inspiring and would love to hear about your storytelling experiences.

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