



Communicating for Impact

Storytelling, Reporting and Visuals for CSOs

Presented by Seun Asala | FEF-OSC Capacity Building

What We'll Explore

- Storytelling for impact
- Compelling impact reports
- Visual communication



Why Communicate for Impact?

Why it matters:

- Visibility
- Connection
- Credibility
- Influence



Storytelling for Impact



Storytelling for Impact

Why Authentic, Audience-Driven Stories Matter



- **Stories are powerful** – they **inspire** people to think and act differently and **connect** stakeholders (beneficiaries, communities, funders, etc.) with your cause
- Unlike dry facts, a well-told story **evokes emotion** and can **shift perspectives**.
- For CSOs, this means a human story can **illuminate the value of your work** more than a list of activities ever could.

Storytelling for Impact

From Transactional to Transformational

- Storytelling goes beyond promoting activities to highlighting impact on real lives.
- For example, rather than saying “we trained 100 farmers,” tell the story of **one farmer whose life changed** – this makes your mission relatable and memorable.
- Research shows narrative messages are **22 times more memorable** than facts alone
- So pairing data with a compelling personal story greatly increases audience **retention & empathy**.



Storytelling for Impact

Authenticity and Audience Focus

- **Tell authentic and 'dignifying' stories.**
 - Avoid 'pity narratives or exaggeration
- Evidence shows that **appeals framed positively (showing hope and agency) outperform pity-based appeals**, leading to higher engagement
 - e.g. more people signed up for emails when shown hopeful success stories
- Audiences respond better when beneficiaries are portrayed with respect and as agents of change, not just victims.

Best Practices for Impactful Storytelling

- Know your audience
- **Story structure:** Problem-Solution-Impact + CTA
 - Alternative structures:
 - “**Story of Self, Us, Now**”, for advocacy
 - **The Hero’s Journey** (spotlighting the beneficiary as hero and NGO as supporting actor/role)



Best Practices for Impactful Storytelling

- **Emotional and visual detail**
 - Use sensory details, quotes or photos to bring stories to life
 - Example: Instead of a generic statement – *“our health camp was successful,”* share a beneficiary’s quote about how receiving care changed their life, alongside their photo (with permission) to forge a personal connection.



Best Practices for Impactful Storytelling

- **Ethical Storytelling**
 - **“Asset Framing”**- highlight a community’s resilience and initiative, not just their needs.
 - Ensure stories do not perpetuate stereotypes or exploit suffering.
 - *Case in point: Mama Hope,*



Ethical Storytelling

- Consent
- Dignity
- Voice
- Truth

From the Field

- BRAC's youth stories
- Mama Hope dignity shift
- Local heroes, real voices

Reflection

- Think of **one story from your work** that deeply moved you. Why did it move you?
 - Share in the chatroom
- **What type of story** does your organization most need to tell better?"
 - A) Beneficiary success story,
 - B) Donor/supporter story,
 - C) Your organization's origin story.



Compelling Impact Reporting



Compelling Impact Reporting

Results-Focused Communication

- An impact report (annual, donor, or project report) shouldn't be a dry compilation of activities.
- It should be a **story of the change** your organization is creating.
- **Focus on the difference made**, not activities done
- Connect the dots from actions to outcomes



Compelling Impact Reporting

Outcome Over Output

- A **results-focused** report clearly highlights how people or communities are better off as a result of the intervention.
- For example: If a CSO ran an education program, an output is *“500 students attended training,”* but an outcome is ***“500 students gained new skills, and 80% have improved their incomes as a result.”***

Compelling Impact Reporting

Output or Outcome?

- Stakeholders – whether donors, community members, or policymakers – care about **the latter**.
- In fact, **outcome- and impact-focused reports** tell a compelling story of your work's contribution to improving lives, backed up with evidence .
- This reinforces credibility and meaning behind the numbers.

Best Practices for Impact Reporting

Link Activities to Impact:

- Think about the outcome for each major activity.
- Use a simple cause-and-effect narrative: ***“Because we did X, it led to Y result for Z people.”***
- This shows how your actions translate into change .
- If you have a results framework or theory of change, use it to structure the report sections so that each activity ties into a larger outcome category.

Best Practices for Impact Reporting

Use Data Wisely:

- Data helps credibility, but use it sparingly and explain it.
 - Pick the data that matters the most
 - Contextualize them with narrative.
- A powerful approach is the “**story + data**” **combo**”
 - Lead with a human story or quote to engage emotion, then reinforce with data to show scale.
- Ensure data is disaggregated or specific where possible to show inclusivity

Best Practices for Impact Reporting

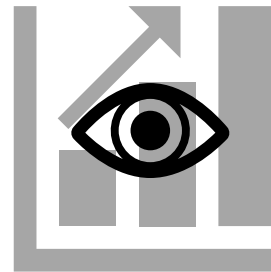
Include Stakeholder Voices:

- Integrate **testimonials** or **quotes** from beneficiaries, community members, or partners directly in the report.
- A brief first-person quote about how the project affected someone's life can break up the text grounds the data in real human experience, making the impact more tangible.

Best Practices for Impact Reporting

Visualize Results:

- Use charts, infographics or before-and-after comparisons to illustrate key results
- A graph of progress toward a goal or an infographic timeline of the project can convey a lot at a glance .
- Visual elements not only make the report more appealing but also help readers grasp the story quickly.



Best Practices for Impact Reporting

Be Honest and Contextual:

- Acknowledge challenges
 - Impact reporting should discuss any hurdles faced or lessons learned, which shows **transparency**.
- Briefly explain the wider context
 - Discuss wider related issues as background for your work to make your report more credible.
 - This also helps readers appreciate the complexity and adaptability of your work.

Best Practices for Impact Reporting

Focus on Audience Needs:

- Tailor the report's language and detail to who will read it.
 - **Donors?** - high-level outcomes and ROI on their contributions,
 - **Community members?** - stories of local change.
 - **IDEA:** create two versions of reports (one heavy on data for funders, one more story-driven for general public).
- No matter what, keep the writing clear and jargon-free so that it's accessible.

Best Practices for Impact Reporting

Action-Oriented Conclusion:

- End reports with “*what comes next*” – a forward-looking statement or call-to-action
 - (e.g., “With these results, we’re inspired to reach even more villages next year – and we invite you to join us.”).
- This makes the report not just a retrospective, but part of an ongoing story that readers can be involved in.

Tools and Templates

- **Results-Based Management (RBM)** frameworks or **logical frameworks**
 - Used by many donors and INGOs
 - Adapt to a simple outcome flow:
goal**→**outcomes**→**outputs/activities, to track progress
 - This approach helps to organize information

Tools and Templates

Create, provide or refer to an *Impact Report Template or outline*.

- For example, a basic template might include:
 - Introduction (mission and purpose of report),
 - Key Achievements (with data highlights),
 - Stories of Change (case studies),
 - Challenges & Lessons,
 - Thank You/Next Steps.

Tools and Templates

Encourage using **guiding questions** when writing. E.g.:

- Who was engaged?
 - How did they feel or what feedback did they give?
 - What did they learn or gain?
 - What did they do differently as a result?
 - And ultimately, what difference did this make?
- Ensuring your report answers these questions will naturally create a narrative flow that connects activities to meaningful results.

Compelling Impact Reporting

Illustrative example



- A small health NGO in Kenya produced a **one-page impact brief** with the story of a mother in a remote village who safely delivered her baby at a clinic the NGO supports.
- The brief **combined this story with a few key stats** (e.g., "maternal clinic visits increased 50% in our target region, contributing to a drop in complications").
- By **putting a face on the data**, the NGO turned a standard report into a compelling narrative that helped secure continued funding.
- This exemplifies how **data paired with storytelling** can showcase real outcomes effectively.

Reflection

- What is one change you can make to your next report to focus more on outcomes over activities?
 - Share in the chatroom

Amplifying Impact through Visuals



Amplifying Impact through Visuals

The Power of Visual Communication

- We live in a highly visual age – and using visuals is a necessity for impactful communication.
- Studies show that people remember 65% of information when it's paired with visuals, compared to only 10% with text alone .
- Moreover, visuals are processed by the brain much faster than text.

Amplifying Impact through Visuals

The Power of Visual Communication

- A strong image or graphic can convey in seconds what might take paragraphs to explain.
- For CSOs with big missions but limited time from audiences, visuals are key to breaking through the “information overload” barrier.
- Visual storytelling also enhances the emotional connection, trust, and credibility that nonprofits rely on .

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Amplifying Impact through Visuals

Infographics

- Because infographics **combine text and imagery**, they improve comprehension and retention of information.
- Use infographics in impact reports or social media to highlight key metrics or how a program works.
- (Tip: Even with modest resources, CSOs can create infographics using free tools like Canva or Piktochart.)

Amplifying Impact through Visuals

Photography

- A compelling photo can tell a story at a glance.
- High-quality, authentic photographs of your organization's work and beneficiaries help audiences visually connect with your mission, see your impact, and feel emotion .
- Use photos to put a human face on issues – e.g., a portrait of a beneficiary smiling next to a new water well speaks volumes about the outcome.

Amplifying Impact through Visuals

Photography

- Photographs show impact in a way that's tangible and credible (e.g. “before and after” photos to show change) .
- On a budget? today's smartphones are great!
- Focus on capturing genuine moments and stories, not just staged group shots.



Amplifying Impact through Visuals

Photography

- **Best practices:**
 - Ensure photos are **authentic** and **respectful** – show people in a dignified way, **active** and engaging rather than passive.
 - Always get **consent** (use release forms, explain usage).



Amplifying Impact through Visuals

Videos

- Incredibly engaging – it combines visuals, sound, and narrative, making it memorable.
- As one digital media trainer put it, video “captures all senses more than any other visual tool”



Amplifying Impact through Visuals

Videos

- CSOs can use short videos (even 1-3 minutes) to showcase impact testimonials, project highlights, or campaign messages.
 - For example, a 2-minute video of a community member walking through their new school building and explaining how it changed local education can deeply move viewers.

Amplifying Impact through Visuals

Videos

- Videos don't need to be high-budget productions; **authenticity and storytelling are more important.**
- Simple interview clips, animations, or even photo slideshows with narration can work well on social media and webinars.
- (Tip: Consider leveraging free or low-cost editing apps, and always add captions for accessibility.)

Amplifying Impact through Visuals

Digital Design & Graphics

- Beyond infographics, other graphics (icons, diagrams, charts) and consistent design elevate communications.
- A well-designed report or social media graphic using your CSO's brand colors and logo **adds professionalism**.
- **Visual consistency** helps people recognize your organization and trust it.

Amplifying Impact through Visuals

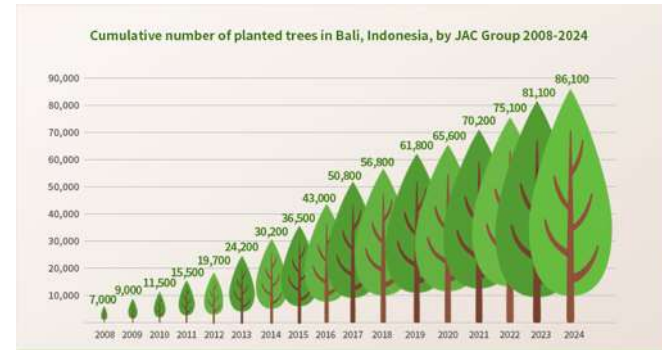
Digital Design & Graphics

- Encourage participants to use **templates** or graphic **design tools**
 - For instance, free presentation templates are available to make content visually compelling without needing a full-time designer .
 - Many resources (like Canva, etc.) offer ready-made designs where you can plug in your information.

Amplifying Impact through Visuals

Engaging Through Visuals – Example 1

- An environmental NGO in South Asia creates a simple **infographic** to show the progress of a reforestation project.
 - It visualizes **“trees planted over time”** and the corresponding increase in local biodiversity.
 - On social media and in donor newsletters, it gets high engagement, because it's easy to understand at a glance.
 - It helps stakeholders see the impact (literally) and is more persuasive than a text description.
 - Best practice: **turn data into visual stories to let supporters quickly grasp your achievements**.



Amplifying Impact through Visuals

Engaging Through Visuals – Example 2

Photo Story Series.

- A grassroots education CSO in West Africa runs a **photo series titled “Faces of Change”** featuring students from their programs.
- Each photo has a short caption/quote of the student's dream.
- This visual storytelling campaign on social media humanizes the organization's work – supporters can connect a child's face and story to the abstract issue of education access.
- It results in increased local support and even media coverage.

Amplifying Impact through Visuals

Engaging Through Visuals – Example 3

Video Testimonial.

- A short 90 second video from a livelihoods project in Latin America follows a single mother through her day, showing how a microloan from the CSO helped her start a small business.
- Her narration describes her increased income and hopes for her children.
- This video is used at a fundraising event and on YouTube - Many comment that they feel more connected to the cause after seeing and hearing an authentic story.

Visual Best Practices

- **Clarity and Purpose:**

- Every visual should have a clear purpose.
- Ask, "What key message or data point does this visual convey?"
- Avoid clutter or overly complex graphics that might confuse. Simplicity often has more impact.

Visual Best Practices

- **Consistency:**
 - Use consistent colors, fonts, and style aligned with your organization's branding in reports and slides.
 - This creates a professional look and reinforces your identity .

Visual Best Practices

- **Alt-Text/Accessibility:**
 - Don't forget accessibility for those who may not see them (visually impaired or just people skimming).
 - In reports or online, provide captions or alt-text for images (e.g., "Photo: A farmer stands in a lush field made possible by new irrigation – smiling proudly").
 - This not only aids accessibility but ensures the context isn't lost.

Visual Best Practices

- **Leverage Free Resources:**
 - A lack of a graphic designer or big budget is not a barrier.
 - Budget-friendly tools:
 - **Canva** (for social media graphics, reports),
 - **Piktochart** or **Infogram** (for infographics),
 - **PowerPoint** or **Google Slides** (for basic design using templates),
 - Smartphone apps for video editing (like **CapCut**).
 - Experiment and learn with these tools – the learning curve is worth the improved engagement visuals can bring.

Exercise

“Text:

- ‘Our program grew from 2 to 10 communities in a year.’

“Visual:

“Which one has more impact for you?”

Recap and Key Messages

Communicate to Multiply Impact

- **Tell better stories**
 - Authentic, audience-centered stories can move hearts and minds, making your mission and beneficiaries shine.
- **Report outcomes**
 - Focus on results and outcomes – show the **difference made**, not just the activities.
- **Use strong visuals**
 - visuals can dramatically boost understanding and engagement

Let's Discuss



One Thing You'll Try Next

- Commit to one idea from today's session
- In the next two weeks, try one idea from today – maybe run a social media poll as an interactive story, or create a one-page impact summary for a recent project – and share your experience on our forum.

Your Stories Can Change the World

- Your organizations are doing amazing work – now go ahead and communicate that impact boldly and creatively.
- We can't wait to see your stories lighting up the world!"

Thank You!

