The "Real Book"[1] for story evaluation methods
Marc Maxson, Irene Guijt, and others, 2010
GlobalGiving Foundation (supported by Rockefeller Foundation)

About this book

This is a collection of narratives that serve to illustrate some not-so-obvious lessons that affected our story pilot project in Kenya. We gathered a large body of **community stories** that revealed what people in various communities believed they needed, what services they were getting, and what they would like to see happen in the future. By combining many brief narratives with a few contextual questions we were able to compare and analyze thousands of stories. Taken together, these **stories and their meanings** provide a perspective with both depth and breadth: Broad enough to inform an organization's strategic thinking about the root causes of social ailments[2], yet deep and real enough to provoke specific and immediate follow-up actions by the local organizations of whom community members speak.

We believe that local people are the "experts" on what they want and know who has (or has not) been helping them. And like democracy, letting them define the problems and solutions that deserve to be discussed is the best method we've found for aggregating that knowledge. Professionals working in this field can draw upon the wisdom of this crowd for understanding the local context, and build upon what they know. **Community efforts**[3] **are complex**, and our aim is not to predict the future, but help local leaders manage the present. If projects are observed from many angles – especially by those for whom success affects their livelihood – and implementers use these perspectives to mitigate risks and avoid early failure, the probability of future success will be much greater.

About GlobalGiving

GlobalGiving is a nonprofit foundation that runs a website (www.globalgiving.org) that serves other nonprofits around the world. We provide over a thousand NGOs in over 100 countries with the tools and training to raise money from a lot of individual supporters, in effect building a stable support network that sustains the work. Dennis Whittle and Mari Kuraishi left the World Bank in 2001 to start GlobalGiving because they believed they could build a better system for aid delivery and support innovation in the process.

Although we continue to grow, GlobalGiving is very small and aims to remain extremely efficient. We moved just $10 million last year (of the $50 billion total US development aid) from 40,000 donors to about 1500 projects. Our partner organizations typically raise less than $10,000 on GlobalGiving, but to a community-based organization with a $5,000 annual budget, we mean the world. A case in point is the chaos following the 2007 Kenyan election. Large funders withdrew their support on a massive scale in order to mitigate their own risks. So organizations and

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[1] Real book: The Real Book is a central part of the culture of playing music where improvisation is essential. Real books are not for beginners: the reader interprets scant notation, and builds on her own familiarity with chords. The Real Book allows musicians to play an approximate version of hundreds of new songs quickly.

[2] Irene Guijt: Not only social ailments – but constraints on progress in general or development constraints.

[3] Community effort: a clunky phrase we use for any organized service or event by something or someone to help a larger set of somebodies in a time and place – AKA NGO work.

donors flocked to us. We took on these risks and **guaranteed** every donation: if an individual donor is not satisfied with the results of the work, he can reallocate that money elsewhere and we'll pick up the tab. The result has been that projects continued in nearly every case in 2009, and NGOs were willing to promote our pilot storytelling project in 2010.

To ensure that community efforts succeed, we needed a different kind of evaluation system. We often operate under less-than-ideal circumstances, partnering with tiny organizations, where comprehensive impact evaluations don't fit and are prohibitively expensive. The story-based evaluation system we describe here not only provides reasonable information about what is working, but does it for about 5% of what traditional methods cost, when applied across a NGO network.

Part I: Our journey with making sense of stories

"Is this the right road?" Milo Asked.
"I don't know of any wrong road…" he said, "and if it isn't then it must be the right road to somewhere else, because there are no wrong roads to anywhere."
        -from the Phantom Tollbooth, p18.

1.1 Prologue
Summary: Agile Feedback Loops are essential to managing the problems we encounter.

We began the story project after a journey in which we tried to deal with a small community based organization (CBO) [4] in Kenya that wasn't serving its beneficiaries well. We were supporting hundreds of other organizations and really did not have the resources to solve the community's problem. But we persisted because the community was engaged in the process and volunteers appeared out of the woodwork, went to Kenya to help the CBO, and guided the conflict resolution. When all was said and done, it took a lot of time and effort to salvage one organization, and even then this outcome may not be long-lived. You can read the whole story on the link provided.

Through this process we realized that cutting our losses with this NGO would have punished the honest people who were trying hard to improve their community, more than the dishonest ones. We knew we needed a way to support feedback-driven change across the sector. As we were writing the case study we were reminded that

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[4] http://blog.globalgiving.org/2009/09/16/we-are-listening-real-time-feedback-loops/

outcomes don't follow from inputs in a straightforward way, and that things move quickly (and perhaps chaotically) when a community is undergoing a transformation.

Luckily for us the Rockefeller Foundation (who'd already partnered with us on an Innocentive innovation project) took an interest and gave us some money to run a pilot focused on new methods to support community- and complexity-based evaluations. A complexity-based framework[5] provided us with the language we needed to explain to others what we were seeing. The framework also gave us confidence that we were analyzing the situation realistically. Truth belongs to many people, changes continuously, and is heavily shaded by each person's incentives – and the sum of these factors mean traditional program evaluations miss most of what is really happening.

Summary Box 1 lists the most important elements of the sort of monitoring and evaluation system we needed. Here our thinking begins with designing a system around the right inputs: rapid feedback, multiple perspectives, conversations, and mechanisms that give the community control over funding outcomes. This last element is crucial for building trust and aligning incentives with the outcome.

I call this an "**Agile feedback loop**," modeled from the **Agile Software Development**[6] philosophy. Agile systems achieve incremental improvements through iterative user testing. By analogy, Impact is built on layers of incremental success, achieved through listening and adjusting community efforts as they happen.

1.2 Making the transition from evaluation to Agile feedback loops
Summary: What's the right question?

We started by outlining how we would aggregate this community knowledge. We would encourage people who know about

> **Summary Box 1:   We deemed these elements of evaluation to be important:**
> 1. **Dynamic information** – changes in community services and attitudes quickly come to our attention.
> 2. **Multiple perspectives** – change looks and feels different to various people within a community. We wanted to hear about all sides of an event, in case one-sided reports were misleading.
> 3. **Conversations** – feedback loops connect the community and orgs, so that they can both make informed decisions.
> 4. **Community control** – it is easy to ask people what they think, but they won't tell you anything if they're not convinced problems they **raise** will be addressed, and projects they **praise** will be sustained. We found it simplest to give the community some direct power. These include:
>   o **Exclusivity** – ability to remove a local org from GlobalGiving.
>   o **Allocation** – locals can determine where some money goes, choosing from among local orgs.
>   o **Voice** – ability to influence all funders through their frequent and public feedback.
> 5. **Trust** – Works both ways. If donors trust the community and give them some control, they will work to improve and sustain local community efforts.

local organizations to narrate a brief story about the work and complete a questionnaire about their story. The questions were broad and non-specific, and allowed us to convert and plot a dozen aspects of the story along number scales. The SenseMaker® software from Cognitive Edge was a tool to examine all stories and search for clusters of meaning. Irene Guijt consulted with us to develop a signification framework (see Box 2) that would apply to our network of 50 organizations in Kenya.

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[5] Dave Snowden of Cognitive Edge explains the Cynefin framework:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7oz366X0-8
[6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agile_software_development

Dave Snowden of Cognitive Edge also helped. He had used this approach with interactive museum exhibits, to improve organizational management, and with military intelligence, but never in an international development context. Irene was keen to know what GlobalGiving needed to learn the most. This was more challenging than we thought.

To answer that question, I looked back at our yearly evaluations over the years to see what we focused on in the past. This revealed that we had been struggling in a rather disorganized way to find the right question, not the right answer. We had changed our focus yearly. Since 2005, we have focused on measuring organizational learning, quantifying outputs to estimate impact, community involvement in project management, and understanding the system of controls to promote financial accountability.

It wasn't clear which of these foci help the organization better manage its work. Even we weren't actually guiding our decision making through these evaluations, because we knew it wasn't the whole story, as the next example shows:

> **Box 2: A Signification Framework** consists of several questions with answers along multiple scales one can use to extract meta-trends about story themes that relate to projects managed by organizations. The **SenseMaker®** software uses concise questions with two or three categorical answers placed at the ends of a line (polarity) or points of a triangle (triad). The signifier (storyteller) chooses a spot on the line or in the triangle representing the degree of each answer contained in his story. Triads intentionally use ambiguous categories to force the signifier to recode a story's meaning along different reference frames, providing new information. Analyzing these triads provides visually clear trends and clusters within stories that NGO staff can use to then probe (by reading clusters of stories deemed a potentially significant pattern) to answer a larger set of questions.

In 2006 our evaluations focused on the communication chain from donor to project sponsor, organization, and down to beneficiary. In some cases, our evaluator (Keystone Accountability) found that local implementing organizations did not even know about the money they were receiving from Globalgiving (though they did appear to be receiving it). The intermediate sponsor organizations were not relaying messages about which funds went to which projects. Since then we have mostly cut out the "middle man," but this shift was prompted by evidence of how it affects our bottom line (fundraising) and not just because of the impact evaluations. We didn't even ask the question in 2007 because we already knew it was a problem, and couldn't solve it at the time. The real decision was a combination of evaluation and unstructured observations. We *noticed* that implementing organizations promote their projects better on GG and raise more money when we work with *them* directly, and so we started searching for more local partners who could work with us directly. This example illustrates that evaluations usually do not trigger behavior by themselves, but are more often used to justify decisions made by other means[7]. What would have triggered behavior years sooner was asking the right question, or a *system* that helped us find the right question sooner.

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[7] See *Obliquity: Why our goals are best achieved indirectly* by John Kay for a chapter on this subject.

1.3 The Story Signification framework
Summary: Finding the right questions and providing a useful open-ended frame around stories is an iterative process.

We debated several versions of the story "signification framework" and agreed to a design where community members would be invited to share a story about one **community effort**[8] they saw or knew about. For each story shared, we wanted to know:[9]

1. What was the core goal of the community effort? (physical well-being, social relations, economic opportunity)
2. Who benefits from it?
3. Who influences it?
4. Was it a success, a failure, or is the outcome unclear?
5. Were community attitudes about the effort in your story united, divided, or indifferent?
6. Was this community effort too disruptive, or not sufficient to change things?
7. Were outsiders too meddling or too absent?
8. Was decision making process too authoritative or too deliberative?
9. Was your story more like a cautionary tale ("my story is about an effort best avoided at all costs") or a fairy tale ("my story is too good to be true")?

What was the core goal of the community effort?
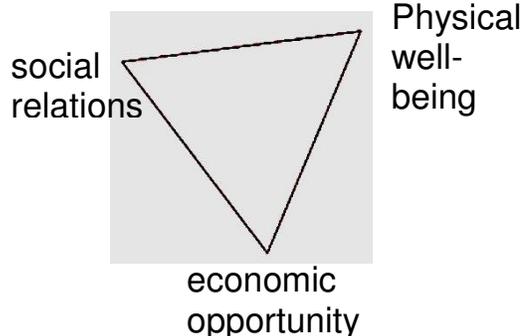
An example of one "triad" question is shown to the left. The storyteller marks the spot in the triangular space that best represents how much of these three core goals were in his/her story.

In this first draft you can see a strong emphasis on organizational governance. These questions had emerged after a series of iterations with Irene suggesting key issues for GG based on her readings of our existing materials, evaluation reports and discussions with John Hecklinger and myself. We were convinced at the time that these questions would serve our purpose (after months of debate). I present the first draft of the signification here because I want to highlight how our thinking changed during the project.

Whereas most M&E processes employ many, many questions, variables, indicators and evidence collecting, developing a signification framework is like a *sumi-e*. This Japanese technique of rice paper painting forces the artist to see objects and distill them to their essence, using the fewest possible brush strokes. Refining this questionnaire involved stripping questions to essential 'need to know' elements.

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[8] "Community effort" was a phrase we developed later, because there is no good word for NGO projects within a community yet.
[9] The actual surveys are in the appendix.

Alfred Hitchcock's famous logo is like a *sumi-e:*

Certain questions were immediately dropped because they confused most of people we tested it on in Kenya[10] (e.g. question 9 above). The second draft shifted focus away from items the typical community member would not know about (incidentally, most of the foci from our earlier evaluations) to universal questions that allowed us to better map the community work in its local environment.

Second draft questions:
1. What is the core goal of the effort? (physical well-being, social relations, economic opportunity)
2. What core goal was missed in the effort?
3. Who Influences the effort?
4. Who benefits from the effort?
5. How united/divided/indifferent are community attitudes about the effort?
6. *(added)* What advice would you give a friend from this effort?
7. Was this story about an effort that succeeded or failed?
8. *(added)* How essential was the NGO to the effort?
9. Your story relates to… (chose up to 3 of 12 topical themes)

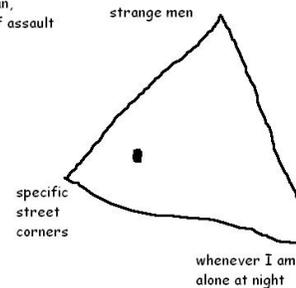The complete final survey appears in the appendix.

In thinking about the real problem here, I am continuing to explore ways to systematically find the "right" question. The storyteller often knows the most important question to ask for her story. How do we capture that knowledge?

In a totally open version, the storyteller defines the story signification:
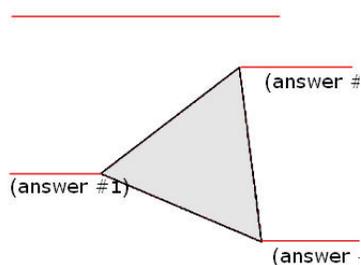
In this hypothetical example, the storyteller wrote her own triad question, defined the three axes, and provided her answer by placing a dot in the space. Adding a blank triad is useful to explore the most creative or insightful questions we could add to a future survey, but is likely to spread the results too thin. What we need is a means to **let the storyteller define the right question** while also constraining the possible questions enough that we will derive useful clusters of stories with similar question frames. We'll soon be testing such a method. I call it the **story marbles approach**:

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[10] Rule of thumb: 30 subjects is a good test pool size. Also, always test your questions in the same culture you intend to study.

Imagine, for example, that we want the storyteller to choose the top three most important story elements from among 10 categories (similar to the "Your story relates to..." question we used). Instead of using checkboxes:

□ social relations □ safety □ water □ food □ shelter
□ skills & training □ education □ freedom □ sports & creativity □ health

We could have them perform an exercise with a bag of marbles or clay stones that represent these concepts (with labels, symbols, etc.). The story scribe would draw a circle in the dirt and place a doll or object in the center to represent the storyteller in his story. She could instruct him by saying, "Here are 10 marbles. Each one represents something that might be part of your story. Choose three of them and place them on the ground around yourself. Put the marbles that are the most important part of your story closest to yourself. Put the marbles that matter the least on the edge of the circle."

A typical response to the "Your story relates to..." question might look like this:
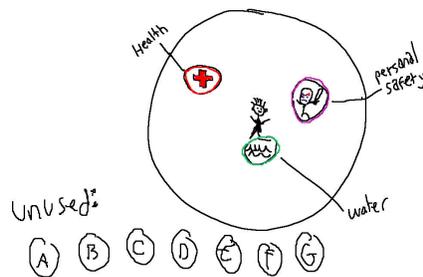

By choosing three "significant" stones and placing them either close to or far from himself in the center of this circle, the storyteller is defining both **what matters** and **how much** each element matters. By not choosing the other 7 marbles, the storyteller implies that these are automatically less important. Mathematically, this is a one question survey that encapsulates 3240[11] possible answers, assuming that stone placements are limited to just three levels of detail (center, edge, or somewhere in the middle). The idea is to associate a **quantitative map of what matters** in the story (from the storyteller's point of view), without overwhelming the storyteller with a tedious process. This may be a less scary and more intuitive approach than paper surveys, and anyone, including a community mover and shaker who happens to not read, can play the game. The tools for completing signification don't even have to look like a paper or computer survey at all, but I think a mix of paper and marbles will work best. This arrangement can be drawn, scanned, and coded just like a triangle, or one can snap an image and send it by phone, where a computer can analyze the arrangement and save the coordinates.

There is an additional, unused axis here. For the sake of simplicity I've left off an aspect of the question that one could simultaneously map this way. Imagine that after the question about "what" is complete, the story scribe pulls more toys out of the bag.

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[11] Combinatorial logic: 3 of 10 stones placed in a space at one of three levels of importance. Using 12 stones increases it to 5940 possible combinations.

She could have some houses (town), a family of dolls (family), a shield with local markings (tribe), and a big house (government). Assuming the symbols are tailored to intuitively mean the same thing to all people in one community, she could instruct the storyteller to now place three of those objects anywhere on the edge of the circle near or far from the marbles. Things that are close together are things that relate closely to each other in the story. After this arrangement is done, she would ask the storyteller to remove everything and paint a picture of the community with just the toys, placing them near or far from the center of the circle to represent how he sees his community – what aspects of "community" are paramount.

This might take a while, but it is far more interesting and game-like to the people involved. What began as a survey has turned into a potentially fun activity. And yet you are mathematically eliminating thousands of unimportant questions in the process of aligning each story along a handful of essential story axes, capturing the essence a la "*sumi-e*." Mathematically, each questionnaire format is equivalent:
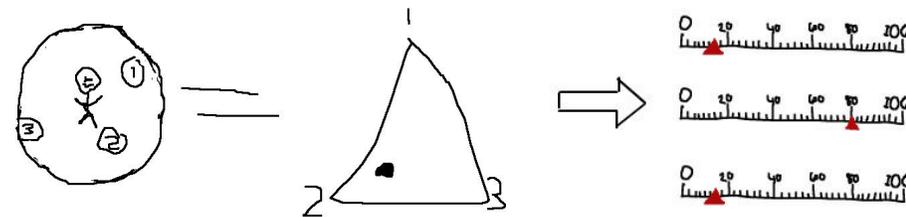
Three marbles reduce to a triad, which reduces to three scale axes, which gets stored as numbers (0 to 100) for analysis[12]. Though mathematically similar, the way the data is collected and the prompting situations where these questions are asked *does* affect the results – so it is worth testing two or more methods. **The goal is to find the right question, and frame answers it in a way that allows many answers to be compared and analyzed.** And obviously, good designs capture mostly what the storyteller meant to say, and less what the surveyor wants to hear.

Having spent a lot of time thinking about questionnaires, it was time to test them in the field. The next section explains how we managed that process.

1.4 Building community partnerships as the entry point for collecting stories
Summary: You must have a network of local people who trust you and who are trusted by the community for the story project to be possible.

In February of 2010 I started writing to all of our GG partners in Kenya and explaining what we were trying to do. There were over 50 partners but we knew from past experience that only a dozen would probably play a big role. This community follows the $^{80}/_{20}$ rule of any social network: 80 percent of the people are silent observers; the remaining 20 percent do 80 percent of work.

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[12] Going from left to right, representations are reducible but not equal. There are several combinations of three scales that look the same on a triad; marking 100, 100, and 100 on three scales puts a dot in the center, just as does 50, 50, and 50. Likewise, moving marbles within a circle provides greater grouping possibilities than placing one point inside a triangle. The best choice of survey tool is the one that is flexible but not so complex it is confusing.

Our plan going in was to find local partners who would host events and connect us to other local institutions that had computers people could use to complete the survey. By February, 2010 I had lined up meetings with 7 of our 50 organizations and was in contact with about a dozen. I also planned 3 workshops to meet with 120 new organizations interested in joining GG. These active partners are the top of a pool of literally 300-400 organizations we have contacted over the years.

Trust
Building trust is certainly something you cannot do quickly, but is easy if you listen to them for several years and do your best to serve them well, as GG has done. This is my biggest concern for others who might try to copy our story model but overlook the importance of community partnerships. If you are a government agency with no existing relationships with local organizations, much less local community members, you are better off finding a partner who has an existing network – like GlobalGiving. Even we follow this rule. We have a strong network in Kenya and Uganda but not in the Democratic(!?) Republic of Congo (DRC); hence we are working through *mGive* there until we can build up our own trust network.

In the five weeks I was there in Kenya, the only organizations to fully participate in story collections either had an existing relationship with us or worked with one of the partners that was participating. During this time I did interact briefly with over 150 organizations who came to workshops and did not participate. This should be strong evidence that a "chain of trust" really does matter if one wants to attract new partners.

Honesty
It was amazingly helpful to be able to be totally honest with our partners in emails about the process, rationale, and intentions[13]. Because our mission at GG aligns with most organizations' missions, most partners were supportive. All were overworked, and many simply lacked time and resources to commit – so many organizations did not participate. Not all organizations endorsed the idea. Because our mission is to support their missions, any partner that can't get behind something we're trying to do usually has some useful advice we ought to consider at the very least. The most common concern was a lack of clarity about how these stories would lead to specific, tangible conclusions and actionable results. Most Kenyans have now participated in some form of evaluation that led to nothing, and many feel exploited by the process. "Africa is not your laboratory!" a Ghanian leader once told me, during a discussion about "extractive" a data research project I was doing. This is a real concern, and so it sharpened our focus on providing immediate, tangible benefits to every person who shared a story.

Immediate benefit
Even before a single story was collected, we were asked by our partners to predict the future and explain the outcomes of an entire complex interactive system. Others asked us if this just another way to build feel-good content for our website? Storytellers and collectors alike did not understand how telling stories could change anything in the

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[13] This contrasted with a very similar project we tried elsewhere. Because it was a randomized controlled trial (RCT), we could not be completely honest about the whole project. NGOs are our partners, our implementers, our analysts, and our decision makers – people who must understand why before they do something. The need to keep subjects "blinded" disrupted the fragile incentives organizations had to promote the feedback program.

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community. I didn't promise much, and avoided false promises[14], but I did promise them that all stories would be public and accessible.[15] This alone seemed to be more than some of them had been promised in the past. Since then we've faced some unnecessary hurdles in getting stories back to the community members themselves[16], but our goal (provide an immediate benefit to the storytellers) is still in sight.

1.5 Technology and Design – February 2010
Summary: Design for people with access to only very basic technology, or eliminate technology from the equation altogether.

Prior to arriving in Kenya, Dave Snowden encouraged us to try various high tech tools that would facilitate story collection. He talked about using a special pen that records what you write in memory and synchronizes it with audio recordings (cost: $300). He said they were nearly ready to roll out surveys that could be collected using an iTouch. This sounded alluring because the iTouch has a colorful touch screen and anyone can place a finger in the triads or along diads to mark their preference (cost: $200). Likewise, other technology vendors offered custom solutions on phones that required either (a) smart phones, (b) replacing the user's sim card[17], or (c) web enabled phone features[18]. We planned for our main option to be hosting a website that anyone with a computer could use to enter their story and complete the signification survey[19]. Overall, these technologies were not cost-effective and introduced new problems into the project, such as:

- Worrying about stolen equipment
- Raising the required tech-literacy in order to participate, which would require training
- It would limit story collecting to places where people would have access to technology.
- Knowing who our people will be before we start (for any phone-based sampling)

We went in ready to try several approaches but quickly focused on offline, paper-based collection after initial testing. The fancy dictation pens and handheld devices were not ready by the time I left for Kenya in March, 2010, so we have no data on how they would have worked. Even the web survey was extremely limited, because it could not run without the Internet. Michael Cheveldave at Cognitive-Edge talked about producing an offline version using Adobe Air, but even that requires fancy computers (with at least Windows XP with SP2 or Linux) and an Internet connection to install the prerequisites. The issue was moot as the Abode Air version of the web

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[14] A common outcome many partners wanted to hear me predict is, "if you participate, donors will read your stories and donate more money." If this does happen in the future, it cannot be predicted today.

[15] Note: Making data "Accessible" doesn't mean a thing if people are not told explicitly how to find it. "Accountability" is more than providing open access to data. Our ideal - "Authenticity" – is making our data not only public, but also traceable back to the source so that others can determine whether it is reliable.

[16] Only about 300 of 3000 storytellers provided a local phone number, and a good number of these were inoperable. In the future we must find some kind of instant number verification to complete the feedback loop. On 10-12-2010 we were able to send 4 text messages back to all the story collectors, thanking them, connecting them to a public story repository website, giving them a $10 GG giftcard they could use to allocate money to any existing or future partner organization, and explaining how to redeem the card online or with the help of our local Kenyan coordinator.

[17] Example from an experiment using mobile cash transfers: http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=2936

[18] EpiSurveyor: http://www.episurveyor.org/user/index

[19] Others have worked with schools to provide access to a survey like this, but it did not work for us.

form wasn't available during our project anyway. So I arrived in Kenya with strong social assets and not a lot of technology. In retrospect that was probably a good thing.[20]

1.6 Field testing and scaling up – March 2010
Summary: Choosing the right signification questions will require testing. Don't cut corners here!

We started the first story collector training session at HotSun Films. We had three laptops, 2 GSM modems, a whiteboard, and an entire professional editing lab of G4 PowerMacs in the next room. I did a chalk talk and handed out papers while Zipporah, my assistant worked with their technicians to try to get the GSM modem connected to the Internet. After 3 hours of trying and several calls to Orange and SafariCom, nothing was really working. The web form was a failure because technology – even at one of the most technologically advanced film schools in Nairobi – under the shadow of downtown skyscrapers – was the problem. I was frustrated that we couldn't use a computer to collect data unless it was running the Internet, when we didn't really need the Internet. So we switched to paper.

Subsequent trainings went better because we ignored the computer requirements altogether. A computer was available in only one of a dozen collection sites and a scribe was still necessary to get that data entered too. However, after two weeks we had collected about 50 stories, and improved the signification framework[21].

Scaling up story collection
Once the revised signification framework was represented on the web forms and in new printed papers, the real experiment began. In April 2010 I held daily trainings for a dozen potential story collectors at a time in four parts of Kenya (Kibera, Kamukunji, Eldoret, Kitale). We didn't choose these sites; they chose us. That was where our interested partners worked. We had longstanding partners in Mathare, Kisumu, Mombasa, and elsewhere but none of them took our offer, so we didn't work there. Over the 15 or so trainings, I introduced the idea to about 120 young people and we retained about 50 collectors who each turned in at least a dozen stories from their peers.

Through our partners we reached out to two schools in Kibera. One invited us to do a training, but neither had a computer lab. In fact, none of these sites had computer labs other than Internet Cafes, and using these would have been beyond our budget. We met in hotel lobbies, on top of a bio-gas facility, in community libraries, NGO offices, outside, and occasionally in meeting centers (which only cost a few dollars to rent). In every case, it took most of an hour to explain what we were doing and why they should participate, because (a) we had no public interactive website to display stories that had already been collected and (b) it took some time to discuss what it was we were asking them to do. Partnering with *Map Kibera*[22] was extremely helpful for demonstrating that very basic information can be shared using the Internet and

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[20] Imported technology can be a crutch. In 2003 I arrived in West Africa on a Fulbright to do a 6-month survey of computers and Internet in rural areas with 8 of my own laptops. It made a little difference, but using what was available led to much more meaningful insights.
[21] Read more thoughts about revising the framework and setting the "context" for questionnaires in the appendix.
[22] www.voiceofkibera.org

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phones. With one demonstration laptop and a static copy of an ushahidi website, we could usually show what these stories could do.

I left in mid April 2010 with 6 organizations working to collect stories and liaising with a local coordinator, Zipporah Sangiluh. Irene Guijt and John Hecklinger visited to monitor progress over the next month.

By mid June 2010 we had nearly 3000 stories. Over 1000 of these came from a single day event in June. TYSA, a community based organization in a very rural area outside Kitale, organized a village *baraza*, or meeting where people talk about what has happened in the last year and pledge to support continue work in the future. This was a planned annual event and TYSA's ingenuity was to incorporate the storytelling project into their stakeholders meeting. Of the 1000 stories, 140 dealt directly with the work of TYSA itself. Of the 2986[23] stories transcribed for the story project overall, 230 dealt with GlobalGiving partners.

Transcribing 3000 stories

If March-April felt like pushing a boulder uphill, May-June felt like trying to stop a boulder rolling downhill. For other organizations and community members, seeing people within the community taking part in the storytelling project was confirmation that it must be worthwhile. (Well, that, and word got out that we were offer $10 for each 20 stories submitted.) We stopped rewarding story collectors on June 15th and it took nearly 3 weeks to transcribe these stories. The only personnel hurdle we faced in Kenya was finding enough good, competent transcribers to hire. As a result we didn't start entering all of the stories into the web forms until June. Our first paid transcriber stopped responding to emails and phone calls and it took a great effort to retrieve the stories she had been given. We gave her a little bit of money for her time but essentially got no work output from her. Then we hired 3 more that worked and volunteered with VAP, one of the organizations that tried to be involved in collecting stories, but who ultimately only had ties to a handful of stories.

We also realized that thinking about **two types of user experience** could improve data quality. We designed a web interface for a casual storyteller who might navigate through the form once or twice. In reality, about a dozen people entered all the data and had to navigate the same form repeatedly. We experimented with transcribing all the stories into a spreadsheet for mass uploading, but that didn't work well either. Next time around, we will **support bulk data entry** and provide transcription tools that **do not require continuous Internet access**, which was not an option with our web survey.

Cost-effectiveness

Talking with partners, we learned that the going rate for NGO professionals in Kenya was $300-500 a month. We couldn't afford to hire more than one of these, but we could afford to hire a huge number of very part time workers for specific tasks. If we consider story collectors a type of micro-evaluator, and $10 bought 20 stories and

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[23] I generally say "about 3000" instead of the exact number of 2986, because in reality there were probably several hundred stories lost during the chaotic transcription process that followed rapid collection. Such is the nature of low-cost versatile paper-based solutions – we never expected to receive 100% of the data. We expected only 80% of the data to be useable. To our surprise, 91% of what was transcribed (2637 stories) was complete enough to be useful. Our transcribers were instructed not to transcribe stories which were irrelevant or extremely brief (e.g. "I was hungry and ate ugali for lunch") and had no other survey data attached.

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took about 5-20 hours of work (depending on whether the story collector convened group sessions or worked 1-on-1 with storytellers), then our $1200 hired about 50 collectors to gather 3000 stories at a rate of $0.40 per story, representing a total of between 250 and 1000 hours of work. The wages to local staff, story incentives, and transcribers for the fieldwork totaled about $15,000[24]. Outside expertise and software licensing actually was the largest expense, coming in at about $40,000. As a person who laments the utter lack of detail in what things cost in the NGO world, I provide you with this information so you can make an informed decision about you might structure your storytelling project. I wished evaluations allocated at least 33% of their funding locally. We can lower the cost of evaluations across the sector by sharing more of what we all are learning (hence the reason I'm writing this free guide).

Localization

During collection, we provided both an English and Swahili version of all web/paper forms and allowed people to choose the language. Kenya may be unique in this respect, but our efforts at localization (providing Swahili worksheets and web forms) were wasted for one unpredictable and extremely practical reason: Most people prefer to speak Swahili but write in English, because English sentences are shorter to write. More than 95% of stories came in English. I suspect that repeating this project in other countries would reveal that writing in a foreign language or relying on written responses in general to be a hurdle. Training and incentivizing local youth scribes could solve both of these problems, and are probably more cost-effective than computers with Swahili interfaces. We are also looking at combining the usual multiple-choice questionnaires with drawings that don't require literacy.

1.7 Analyzing stories: the vision
Summary: We want a system that helps organizations identify what they have learned from the stories and take specific follow-up actions.

As much as I wanted to cheer about collecting thousands of stories in such a short time, we still faced a larger challenge of running these stories though analyses that would yield specific, actionable lessons to the organizations in the community. This process is still ongoing, as it should be, and like art or literature, will hopefully spawn many rich discussions and multiple, competing interpretations. The kind of analysis we are aiming for is **not one overall set of lessons**. The data set is too rich to be reduced that way. We aim to entice story analysts[25] to search the data for specific answers within a local context and relate it to what they care about.

Our goal is for the story project to generate a **continuous flow** of stories in and lessons out. Relying on a crowd of analysts to generate personalized conclusions may sound preposterously complex, but we are already surrounded by interfaces that do this quite well. Facebook shows you the news from the point of view of your immediate circle of friends. No two Facebook pages look the same, and yet they sit on top of an ever growing network of story fragments (most of which lack any useful information by themselves). This is an example of an interface that enables emergence of what's happening and what matters to important people, and serves as a

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[24] Didn't double-check this number yet. Total Grant was $70,000 but not all of it directly paid for fieldwork. Over half went to consultants, GG operating costs, and technology.
[25] A story analyst is anyone who cares enough about her own community to participate in the process, either in person or online, and not necessary a paid professional.

highly effective human relationships manager. Any dynamic project management tool should have similar flexibility.

Goals for our kind of analysis[26]:
1. Make data digestible:
- Generate a library of *people's lived experiences* that facilitate decision making and *evidence-based policy*
- Generate *rolling baselines* to continually update evidence base
- Visualize *shifting patterns of impact* as perceived by different perspectives, including beneficiaries
- Ground feedback to donors in a useful framework that allows *groups of beneficiaries* to be heard

2. Measure the actions taken:
- *Seek surprise:* allow people to recognize trends that do not conform to their own pre-existing worldviews
- Enable *cross-silo and cross-organizational thinking* - moving away from a narrow understanding of attribution of efforts
- Track *actions taken* and the specific lessons that prompted it, via a peer to peer knowledge management system

Example of how an organization uses stories: TYSA
Trans-Nzoia Youth Sports Association (TYSA) met to discuss the 140 stories collected about their organization posted online. They identified eight specific themes and frequent mentions about three of their four projects (education, sports, and capacity training). However Francis Gichuki says that the discussion was mostly about why a forth project (child rights and protecting children) was not mentioned much, although stories about these issues did come in. "It is interesting because we do a lot on this issue," Francis Gichuki said in an interview. "It is a gap we are seeing. A gap between our service and the community's awareness."

Another story sparked a lengthy debate about how TYSA should address the root causes of crime in the community. It began, "A friend of mine lost six of his friends in one year to crime, police gunned them down….we need to get something constructive to do [other] than getting involved in crime…" and mentioned TYSA specifically as the organization that needed to help. TYSA's staff debated the right course of action: should it provide more sports opportunities to keep at-risk youth busy, or take these and related stories to local leaders, raise awareness, and ask for help? Up to this point TYSA's mission had been to promote youth sports as a means to curb teen pregnancy and other social problems, but there was now a compelling reason to broaden the scope. This prompted them to examine related crime and safety problems.

A "pivot story" like this might transform an organization's understanding of its mission (from youth activities to youth advocacy in the case of TYSA), or confirm a new direction is the right one. Recently TYSA has engaged youth and specifically asked them to talk about what they want to see in the new Kenya constitution. This is one small aspect of a larger project, but may grow as stories come in about the ideas that emerged from these discussions on democracy.

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[26] Thanks for Irene Guijt for providing this useful framework.

Gichuki also noticed that stories about HIV or early pregnancy mentioned that TYSA had shared information with them but did not mention condoms. This led to an internal debate about whether the community wanted TYSA to provide condoms to youth, or whether the storytellers were even aware that such devices were needed to act out the advice TYSA gave youth. TYSA is planning more specific follow up discourse with beneficiaries as a result of this ambiguity. If given access to an SMS feedback tool, Gichuki said they would probably want to ask, "Which specific activity should we give top priority in your community?" His impression is that this approach is "very fast" and can give them a sense of what services they should improve, or as in the case of HIV, re-examine their messaging. Gichuki also wished that GlobalGiving was more connected to local leaders, because they could benefit from knowing what the community thinks even more.

Recently, TYSA won an award from the MDG Trust for its work on Goal #3 – "Promoting Gender Equity and the empowerment of women." To illustrate how different story data is from typical organization reports, I compared TYSA's stories with the phrases from TYSA's winning application to the MDG Trust. Both sets of information are about the same goal - empowering girls – but communicate the reality in different ways (direct quotes):

TYSA application to MDG Trust	Stories about TYSA related to girls empowerment
This project used sports to empower rural girls especially those affected by the post election violence. The mentors (mostly women) perform different roles including home visits when need be to check on progress of players and hold discussions with parents. TYSA started with only one girl in 2002. To date this school has enrolled hundreds of girls through the football program. Atieno Oduor, 'I dropped out of school in form 3 when I got pregnant and then married in 2007. We stayed well at first but in short period things changed totally and life became tough and harder for me to stay in marriage. I was blessed with a boy but to raise food was terrible.'	Provides sanitary napkins to girls They encourage girl who they drop school because of been pregnant. They tell them you have to go back school after got your baby. The girl realy lost hope in life and even decided to get married as a second wife as she was so desperate. There is a boy who befriended a form four school girl. The girl was pregnated and the boy disappeared. The mother of the girl is now taking care of the child after the girl gave birth. When she tries to tell them the dangers of sex before marriage they laugh at her, but she still insists to remain a virgin.

Neither version is more correct than the other; these are just two sides of the same project. But if you are working at TYSA and want to know whether the aspect of the program where mentors visit girls at home is leaving a lasting impression on the girls, you could look through the stories for evidence. This is less clear than the outcome, as many stories talk about the support a girl has received, but none mention visits or mentors explicitly. One story states: "It has help to brought back people who are at home brought them to school." But even this can be interpreted many ways. So on the

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whole, these stories can be scanned to answer many questions, but may not always be difinitive.

Emergent views: Events from many angles
All stories are available online at tinyurl.com/ggkenya and more examples of results are found at www.globalgiving.org/story-tools. The ggkenya ushahidi site geo-locates stories and allows you to search the content. Unfortunately, SenseMaker® is proprietary software, so we couldn't put it on the web. A public version is still in development.

GlobalGiving's use of the stories
GlobalGiving's mission is to run a marketplace that supports NGOs and fosters innovation in community efforts worldwide. We don't fund or manage the projects. What we really want to know is whether the NGOs people talk about do good work in the eyes of the community, and which storytellers might be **stretching the truth** in their stories. When stories are true, they provide a clear community signal about NGOs that can be used to create a global **reputation system**. We use this system to invite good NGOs to join our network, and intervene on behalf of the community where there is a clear pattern of an NGO not doing what its beneficiaries want.

So how do we tell if stories are true? Here are some guidelines:
1. Stories from many different (independent) sources are more trustworthy.
2. Stories from beneficiaries that include special details only project staff should know are untrustworthy.
3. Stories that share a similar narrative structure, and come from around the same time, but from different sources less trustworthy.
4. Stories from a source that has a long track record of submiting other trustworthy stories are also trustworthy.
5. Stories that provide unexpected lessons (perhaps a mixture of positive and negative aspects of an NGO) are more trustworthy.
6. Stories with excessive NGO self-referencing or formulaic praise are inauthentic.
7. Verification – using face to face meetings, SMS feedback – how do other people within the community react to questionable stories?
8. Stories that *djotjog* (below) are reliable.

Note: These criteria are very similar to the authenticity criteria adopted by the Jesus Seminar in 1985: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_Seminar

Djotjog Mapping
The Javanese word *tjotjog*[27] refers to a state of being where two things affirm and validate each other. Story *tjotjog* is not two people saying the *same* thing; rather, story *tjotjog* is when many people tell slightly different stories that reinforce some common theme among all of them – a theme that is hard to predict beforehand and may not even be conscious in the minds of the individual storytellers. However, if storytellers are presented with this meta-theme afterwards, most if not all of them would agree that the common theme harmonizes with their own experience. At the thematic level,
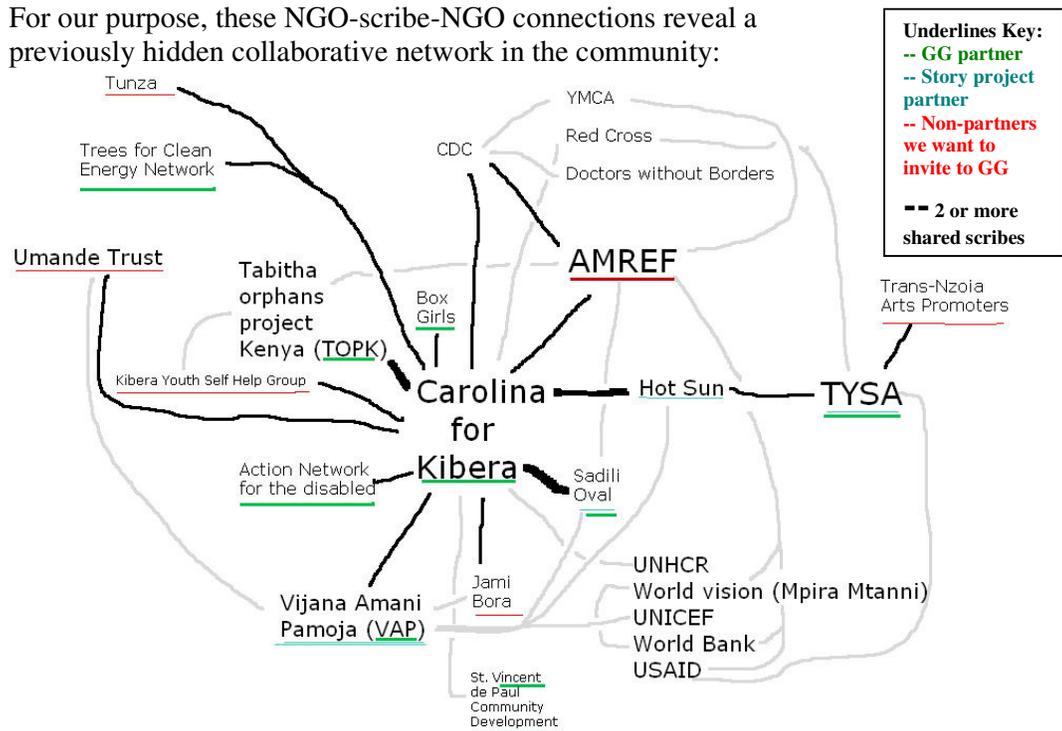
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[27] The religion of Java By Clifford Geertz. University of Chicago Press (c) 1960, p33.

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djotjog leads to the emergence of new understanding about what is happening in the community. Either story elements or community attitudes about NGOs can *djotjog*. When we map who shares stories about whom, a confluence of stories about the same NGO with similar meaning from many sources is *djotjog* – and thus our basis for trusting this data, and the NGO. For example, this organization (TYSA):
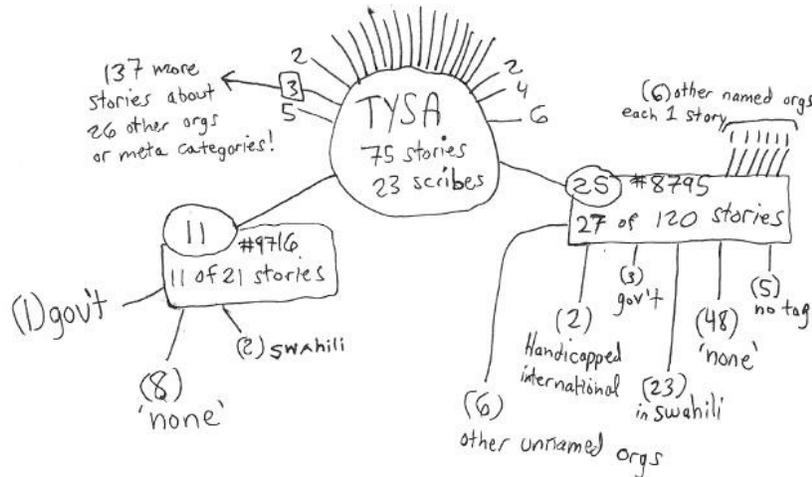
Has 75 stories told about it through 23 scribes. Several of these scribes submitted oodles of stories about others subjects too. We tend to like diversity in who gets mentioned in sets of stories submitted by a scribe. In practice, it may be rather difficult for our NGOs to systematically manipulate stories coming from a large number of scribes. I believe this "real book" will be extended in the future to better outline how we detect and correct story manipulation, and how story elements themselves *djotjog* into trusted and clustered information.

For our purpose, these NGO-scribe-NGO connections reveal a previously hidden collaborative network in the community:

Underlines Key:
-- GG partner
-- Story project partner
-- Non-partners we want to invite to GG

-- 2 or more shared scribes

This network map connects organizations by their shared scribes, not their funding. The first shocking conclusion is that **Carolina for Kibera belongs in the center**, when they chose not to participate in the storytelling project. However, four of the five partner organizations that helped source and train our scribes can be linked back to C4K through the stories they collected. Second, some **interesting NGO clusters emerge**: community based organizations in Kibera (center), health organizations (top), and large international NGOs (bottom). Finally, although stories about **GlobalGiving organizations** (underlined in green) comprised only 10%, they *djotjog* in the sense that multiple scribes mention them. Moreover, most of the organizations frequently mentioned through different scribes are part of GlobalGiving. It also identifies who we should recruit (organizations underlined in red).

We believe this is an essential bit of bottom-up knowledge for our global NGO reputation system. **Communities whose leaders work together, prosper.** Mapping community efforts and the groups that sustain them is essential to building a stronger, more self-sufficient community, and can also be a means of reducing our exposure to risky organizations.

Part II: The Survey Meta Game[28]

Okay, nuts 'n' bolts time. You've read through the narrative of what we did and why we did it. Here's my explanation for the design. I'm going to talk about eight issues:

Outline for Part II:
2.1. Detecting and correcting misinformation
2.2. Dumping random sampling and starting locally relevant conversations
2.3. Encouraging cross-narratives
2.4. Dampening problematic story flows
2.5. Locally verifying and working with story trends
2.6. Balancing incentives to participate
2.7. Turning learning into a social lessons network: ideas for the future

2.1 Detecting and correcting misinformation

I'm assuming most people who work in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) study statistics, sampling, and the effectiveness of interventions to help the poor. None of those really prepare you to deal with all the problems with measurement that sink you before you ask the first question. What does help is **thinking about psychology, game theory, and behavioral economics**. These are all systems of thought that deal with manipulation. As you ask questions, you are manipulating people (hence using psychology). Whether you like that word or not – you must manipulate people with your questions, survey locations, and your presence as a person of a certain authority to get them to tell you the truth. And even if you get the question, context, and questioner right, people in many situations are still better off lying because the rules are such that lying benefits them more than the truth (see behavioral economics). **The meta game is about using a system to detect and correct misinformation.**

Once you know what's happening, you can then design a survey that changes the rules and rewards people who are honest (game theory). So here is a brief outline of how we dealt with these problems:

The "questionnaire questionnaire":

Questions: Did questions tip off what we wanted to hear?	Questions were designed to be neutral, so that a person could not tell which answer is the "right one" to pick. We were not great at this, but we were at least aware of the problem and took some evasive action in question design.
Questioner: Did we use trusted liaisons to ask the questions, so that we get back honest answers?	Huge advantage from choosing to train and hire young people within the community itself to ask the questions. They were free to ask anyone in any place.
Context: Did the location where the questionnaire was completed influence	The environment sets the context. Instead of taking people to an NGO office,

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[28] Wikipedia: Metagaming is any strategy, action, or method used in a game which transcends a prescribed ruleset, uses external factors to affect the game, or goes beyond the supposed limits or environment set by the game. Cheating in evaluations can be thought of as a game, and therefore prevented through metagaming.

what was said?	scribes worked in the community. Some scribes took papers home with them and asked others in a "safe" setting. However, we also aware that we over-represented young, male street guys, because scribes worked in the streets, where mothers and the elderly were underrepresented.
Subject: Was the target (NGO) of the questions able to manipulate results?	No. Although NGOs were named in the survey, they had little power to rewrite answers to questions in their favor, so we feel that collecting papers directly helped.
Incentives to lie: **Reciprocity**	If a person has a relationship with a local NGO, that NGO could reward them for saying what outsiders are looking to hear. We know that most of our story collectors have relationships with NGOs, and all of our storytellers have some relationship to story collectors.
Incentives to tell the truth: **Financial**	Collectors who completed a large number of stories received a $10 reward per 20 stories completed. This is probably a stronger incentive than NGOs could offer to someone for planting exaggerated stories about their successes (what I called "glorious narratives"[29]). Also – people who "played both sides" would be observable in *tjotjog maps*, explained later.
Incentives either to tell the truth or to lie: **Reciprocity**	Reciprocity can be both bad or good: Bad reciprocity is when two NGOs post "glorious narratives" about the other, and neither story is accurate. Good reciprocity is when the person telling the story gets to read what others said in their stories afterward. As both a contributor and user of information, they will provide true stories because they want accurate information in return. This is called "network reciprocity." We want NGOs to use these sstories, and thus promote good reciprocity.
Incentives to tell the truth: **Information and Reputation**	Where possible, we later sent an SMS to scribes and storytellers thanking them for participation and showing them the title of their story – proving we heard them. Future goal is to make this a 2-way conversation, so that information

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[29]**Glorious narratives**: The sort of exaggerated success stories some NGOs coach their beneficiaries to tell when the funders pay a visit. Even without manipulation, people psychologically prefer to accent the positive, unless there is an incentive to do otherwise.

	becomes the reward, and thus organizations will be able to boost their local reputation.
Privacy policy: Anonymous versus protected feedback.	Generally speaking anonymous feedback is more common than the identity-protected feedback system we use. Our privacy policy is that we store the phone numbers of the storytellers and scribes and don't release them with the stories. However, we will allow NGOs to ask specific users follow up questions via our SMS gateway, unless they opt out.

2.2 Dumping random sampling and starting locally relevant conversations

There is one major downside to random sampling. If the sample is biased, you will either never know or must leap over huge hurdles to detect that bias. Demographic questions can reveal broad trends that *might indicate* a sample bias, but rarely prove there was a real bias. In our social model we get down to the heart of the matter and track the most important kind of bias in our work directly: relationships.

The most unorthodox part of this design was to kick random sampling to the curb and deliberately encourage NGOs to connect us to their beneficiaries and friends. After they participate, we invite these people to go out into the community and ask their friends for stories, and so on, until you have a growing network of engaged citizens. This is about as biased a sample as you can get, if you are trying to estimate some average value for the community as a whole – such as median income or incidence of HIV. Every person in the sample has a special relationship with someone else within the same sample. However, we aren't trying to estimate averages; we want to know which NGOs are doing good work, and what is happening. This sample is a useful place to start because we assume that good NGOs connect to good people and other good NGOs, creating a large (yet mostly invisible) network of community development activists. If true, then starting with any group of NGOs "inside" the network should eventually lead us to the most connected and appreciated NGOs in that community. Those who operate in isolation are probably not helpful to GG anyway, and could even be frauds or vapor projects - nothing more than a post office box.

"Why are you *intentionally* creating a selection bias?" you might be saying. "That's bad!" you shout. And you would be right if you were trying to make *statistical inferences* about the whole population from this data.
"But that's the point! What good is a result that doesn't apply to the whole population?"
I'm sooooo glad you asked! Here is what:
1. One local organization with limited resources can't create a program to treat the whole population, but it can address smaller pockets of problems that appear to be the most pressing needs of the loudest people.
2. A local NGO can use direct feedback loops to expand the sample. If they decide to do something based on this data, they can announce it by SMS to all

the people across all stories and request feedback. If the population generally disapproves of it, someone within the group will complain to the NGO.
3. Data comes to NGOs in iterations, not as a one-time glob of opinions, so the attitudes of both the staff and community can evolve.

"But what about in cultures where certain enthnic groups are suppressed or where women are culturally conditioned never to talk about important issues?"
Excellent counterpoint. Wouldn't you like to know that those people are missing from your sample, so that you can deliberately work to add these sub-groups to your overall worldview? Random sampling won't get elderly women in ethiopia to open up to you, but experimenting with the right trusted intermediary as the questioner might. Because this method is non-random, you can grow a large diverse focus group over time. It fosters **locally relevant conversations** that the *local* decision maker can use. She will also have two tools at her disposal; one to recognize the limits of the data (*djotjog mapping*), and the other to improve it (*agile feedback loops*).

And here lies the second major difference between what we do and what pollsters do. A scientific poll seeks to achieve precise population-wide estimates that reveal tiny changes in attitudes over brief periods of time. We want something different and less audacious – which is to discover what one group of people cares about and share it with another group of people that have the power to change the community. Our non-random sample is a pretty good sample of the sorts of people we want to talk to – namely those who want to work with NGOs and help their community. We depend on them to speak for the larger, silent community until those community members opt in to the system as well. The overall picture of community needs might be interesting to journalists and outsiders, but it is the micro-feedback-loop that matters more, because it triggers specific action.

2.3 Encouraging cross-narratives

For comparison, here are two other organization story networks. The first one (Carolina for Kibera) reveals a phenomenon that we would really like to promote systematically: cross-narratives. **Cross narratives** are stories from scribes who were sourced and trained through one NGO that describe other NGOs. At the heart of *tjotjog mapping* is a philosophy that each person can only boost another's reputation, and that the best reputation is built of spontaneous praise "building blocks."

Carolina for Kibera (C4K) is a long-time GlobalGiving partner (the 15th organization to join, actually) that only works in one slum in Nairobi. It has a local headquarters but receives a lot of support and direction from managers at the University of North Carolina. It runs a lot of projects but doesn't tend to collaborate with local NGOs much. We gathered that impression from meeting with NGOs throughout Kibera, including some that share the same property with C4K but whom have never been invited in to C4K's offices for a meeting.
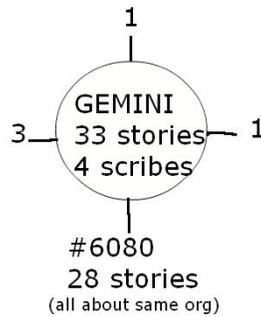
We met them and asked for their help in recruiting story collectors (scribes). They chose not to help directly, and did not send scribes to any of our other trainings as far as we know. So none of the 15 scribes in this map are directly connected to C4K, but the fuller map explains where these stories are coming from:

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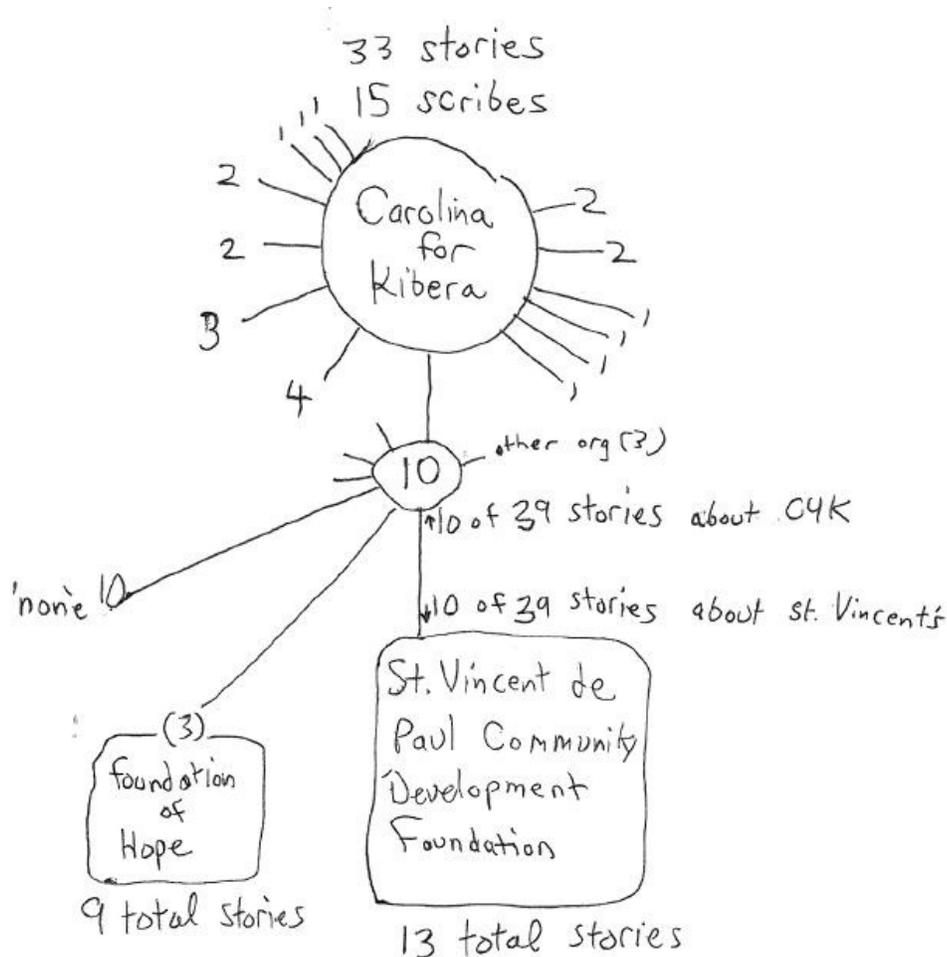
From the fuller *tjotjog map*, it is apparent that a third of the stories are from someone who was trained through an event hosted by St. Vincent de Paul Community Development Foundation. This person also scribed several stories from Foundation of Hope, which is a newer GG partner we know less about, but that looks promising as a connector – meaning that we will ask for their help in locating more scribes next year. Through **cross-narratives (**scribes sourced from one NGO collecting a lot about other NGOs), we are able to trangulate and trust three NGOs with greater confidence than if we have carried out this story collection in silos – with strict instructions to only tell stories about the one NGO we wanted to know about. We would have gotten stories from a different kind of person – intricately connected to the organization as a "model beneficiary" in any case. This method allows us to sample the edges of an NGO's beneficiary community, as well as the "model beneficiaries."

2.4 Dampening problematic story flows

The third case is one we want to avoid. GEMINI is a long-time GG partner, hosted a training for story collectors, and ultimately did not source any cross narratives:

23

```
              1
              |
          / GEMINI \
  3 ——  | 33 stories | —— 1
          \ 4 scribes /
              |
           #6080
          28 stories
        (all about same org)
```

Nearly all the stories can be traced back to the same source, who did not collect stories about any other NGO. Since the person wrote her name beside the phone number in the data (although we did not want names), I decided to "verify" the source. I looked her up on Facebook, and she was there. I wrote her a message: "Do you work for GEMINI?"
Reply: "No I don't."

I'm not sure whether this true. But without connections to any other organization, the data comes to a dead end and the stories stand on their own merits. On that front, some of these stories are signified by the storytellers as the most positive accounts, exemplifying a unified community. On a deeper level, I found that the stories that were collected in my presence mention GlobalGiving by name, and not necessary GEMINI. This is usually evidence that the beneficiaries were told they would be talking to GlobalGiving, and may have been coached on what to talk about. Normal beneficiaries don't know who GlobalGiving is, and we're fine with that. Many don't know which organizations are working in their community; we're not fine with that.

2.5 Locally verifying and working with story trends

Once we have story trends and know the network connections that explain how stories got to us, we can verify these trends in a much more direct way than relying on models or statistical inferences. We can ask people in the next meeting if it seems to reflect their perspectives or not. These follow-up meetings are essential for closing the loop on whether the knowledge in the stories is *tjotjog* with the perspectives in the community.

We use can also use this map to pick the location and invite key attendees, along with a larger invite to the general community. A statistically valid method would be to invite a few of the most and least reliable NGOs to attend, and then highlight the results of both groups while asking the same question: do the conclusions from these stories about this or that NGO match your own experiences? You can scribe additional stories right now to answer. One of several things could happen:
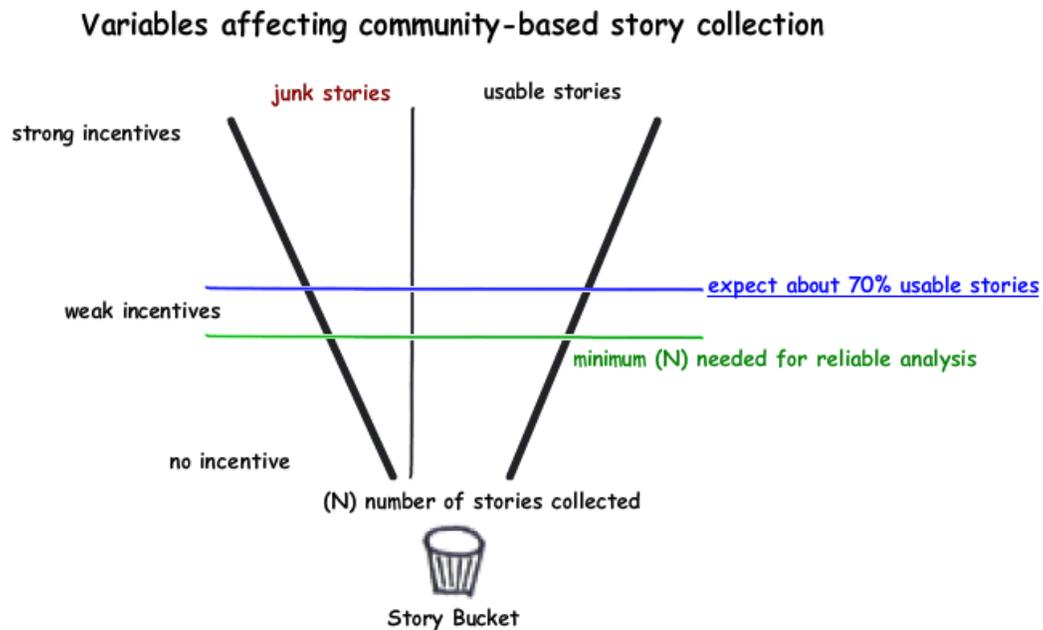 • **Confirmation:** People could all affirm that this is true, and submit a bunch more stories at that time that are not coming from the NGO or the story collector.
  • **Discourse:** Insiders and outsiders in the crowd could start debating whether this is the community view, or just a view from a select few. Ruckus debate ensues, and you videotape the whole thing for youtube as "democracy in action." Each side gets heard, and the final product shows a mixture of viewpoints on the NGO or community need.

- **Evasion:** An NGO that truly misrepresented itself will try to avoid a community meeting at all costs, especially when the attendees are outside of its control. Record their excuses and refuse to publish the stories until confirmation can be reached. The excuse you can use is that this NGO seems to be statistically isolated from others in the network – which is true as part of how you identify them – and therefore needs to be connected through this meeting and the other issues / NGOs that may come up.

There is nothing more powerful for fixing a community than a moment when a cheater is "outed." *Tjotjog mapping* is a means to detect cheaters and correct the problem by arranging interventions. This approach is speculative at the moment, but a nearly identical approach has been used to identify and expel hundreds of teachers who cheated on their classroom's standardized exams in Chicago.[30]

2.6 Balancing incentives to participate

There is a direct relationship between how many stories we can expect to receive and the incentives people have to go out and collect them. Most people need a good reason to participate, so we give them one. The following diagram represents the various influences we think are useful in predicting how many stories one can expect, and how much of it will be junk:

Variables affecting community-based story collection

junk stories   usable stories

strong incentives

expect about 70% usable stories

weak incentives

minimum (N) needed for reliable analysis

no incentive

(N) number of stories collected

Story Bucket

I think the case where there is no incentive at all to collect stories is a special one not well-represented in this diagram. In the absence of personal rewards for scribing stories, many come from people who have other incentives. The easiest motive to understand is the desire of a small NGO to appear like they are making a huge difference, and hence deserve to be given new grants. Sometimes an individual has his own agenda and wants to define the debate by shouting. This is harder to achieve

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[30] *Freakonomics* by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, Chapter 1, p15. Harper Perennial (c) 2005.

However, by offering some small incentives to neutral story collectors, we see that the self-promoting stories are drowned out by other voices.

Without any incentives to collect stories,

In our pilot, I only have doubts about the stories from 1 of the 242 organizations mentioned. About 150 of these are mentioned only once, so I won't consider them until more stories are collected. But for the two dozen organizations that were mentioned in large a enough sample of stories that there could have been a deliberate push to submit "glorious narratives" about their work, only one of these organizations submitted stories with a surprisingly consistent narrative structure to them[31], and all through the same person. The scribes for this organization had nothing to share about any other organization. I would be very interested to ask these storyetellers for stories about any other organization in the future, so to compare how the narratives proceed. But getting reasonable information about 19 out of 20 possible orgs is a passing grade to me. As we scale up, we will rely on a crowd of story analysis to highlight suspiciously glorious narratives about the same NGO told in the same way.

We think that as we increase the incentives, something else might happen to the data. Instead of getting stories that look like a public relations expert wrote them, we would get more junk. When word of our incentives had reached the widest audience in Kibera, Kenya, we noticed some people were sending in stories given the minimum effort possible in order to gain an immediate financial reward. This was easy to curb, simply by rejecting junk stories on the spot[32]. We expected to need to toss out 30% of stories at our incentive level. In reality, we tossed out only 9% of what was transcribed. I'm not sure how many stories were not transcribed to begin with because they were so incomplete or irrelevant. Next round we plan to decrease the incentives further to perhaps $10 per 60 stories (instead of 20). We can adjust incentives until the fraction of junk and manipulated stories we receive are minimal.

As noted in the meta game table – our eventual goal is to replace financial incentives with reciprocity and reputation incentives. These cost us nothing but can be just as potent motivations. They require that people gain as much from the knowledge as they do from the money before it will work, so there is a long transition phase we must overcome first. Providing direct control of at least some funding to local organizations (via GlobalGiving gift cards sent to mobile phones) also transfers the focus from personal rewards to the community.

2.7 Turning learning into a social lessons network: Ideas for the future

Like the tools we have grown accustomed to on the Internet, the future of this collaborative analysis method for story projects is in a system that makes a few tasks easy and fun:

1. Detecting Patterns in stories
2. Summarizing information from stories into a tweet-length nugget

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[31] In addition to closely resembling the organization's own narratives in reports, each of these stories mentioned GlobalGiving by name although there was no reason why beneficiaries would know of us.

[32] Three examples of rejections: A wheel barrow is a useful tool... One day I saw two giants fighting in the forest... I love my mother and she is good to me.

3. Proposing lessons to one's peers for discussion
4. Receiving feedback on the lesson
5. Receiving public recognition for one's personal contribution to the group

All of these will happen at a typical meeting where a batch of stories is discussed by the staff of an NGO trying to achieve something for the community. **In person**, it is as simple as presenting a dozen people with 100 stories to read and sort, and then inviting each person to share one story from the set that seems to hold special meaning or significance[33]. Step 2 in the above process could be a summary of stories with repeated elements, or it could be focusing on a **pivot story[34]** – one that contains a certain combination of elements that take the reader's thinking in a new direction.

Detecting 'pivot stories' (Cynthia Kurtz's term) or 'myth stories[35]' (Dave Snowden's term) happens almost automatically with face-to-face group interactions (according to Cynthia Kurtz), but rarely happens when stories are formalized as data and anonymized. Dave Snowden argues that a unique strength of his approach to story analysis is that one first examines story clusters and trends that may lead to lessons, and only afterwards does one examine the individual stories to explain the overall patterns[36].

I can see the value of both approaches. The drawback to pivot-stories is that the story may be emotionally powerful and yet not reflect the overall sentiments of the community. Conversely, the approach of viewing trends/clusters first ignores the way that humans tend to work, and can miss some non-representative stories which have greater power to transform society and thinking. Martin Luther King Jr's "I have a dream" speech might have been a brief anecdote when viewed among the thousands of sentiments in the US Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, but it was significant on a human scale because it became a pivot story that inspired many other stories that would not have otherwise be told. Likewise, many stories about discrimination in the South could have been told, but a relatively small number of egregious lynching tales were the ones that moved the masses to action.

We want people to be moved, but also to be moved by a rigorous analysis of stories that represent a large, important trend or problem. So in this sense, I believe pivot-stories *are* a valid starting point in an iterative storytelling framework, where the follow-up stories add more context to the pivot. An interface that toggles between both the micro and meta modes of thinking will be very effective for online forms of social learning. We will focus on this in the next phase and explore the different kinds of face-to-face meetings where the stories will start to 'work' for them through locally embedded sense making.

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[33] Rick Davies pioneered something similar, called the "most signification change" method.

[34] See Cynthia Kurtz's blog for more on pivot stories: www.storycoloredglasses.com.

[35] The difference is that 'myth stories' represent a local viewpoint that many people share and whom all deem significant, whereas 'pivot stories' are stories that hold significance for the many listeners.

[36] There are drawbacks to these face-to-face interactions which are well-known among anthropologists/sociologists and which we avoid by using the entry point of anonymous individual stories. These drawbacks include **group think** (clustering of opinions), self-censorship, and domination by 'leaders' in the selection of what is and isn't relevant. We'll need to look into this in detail in the next phase.

Filtering

Traditional evaluation relies mostly on a human visiting and writing a report once or twice a year to a small audience of professionals, who then allocate future funding or relay the conclusions of that evaluation to the local implementers so they can improve. In this information train there are at least three stages where humans can unconsciously filter the message: from beneficiary to evaluator, evaluator to funder, and funder back to implementer. Too often the information fails to reach the caboose (the implementer on the ground) and never informs the local community or peer organizations. In 2010 I asked for a show of hands at three workshops in Kenya on whether anyone had received an evaluation from an outside organization. About a quarter had, but the only organization who appeared to relay the full reports back to implementers was GlobalGiving. A success rate of one out of a hundred funders is too small to have a systemic impact on how the work is done at a local level.

If you want proof that self-reported information is filtered, here it is:
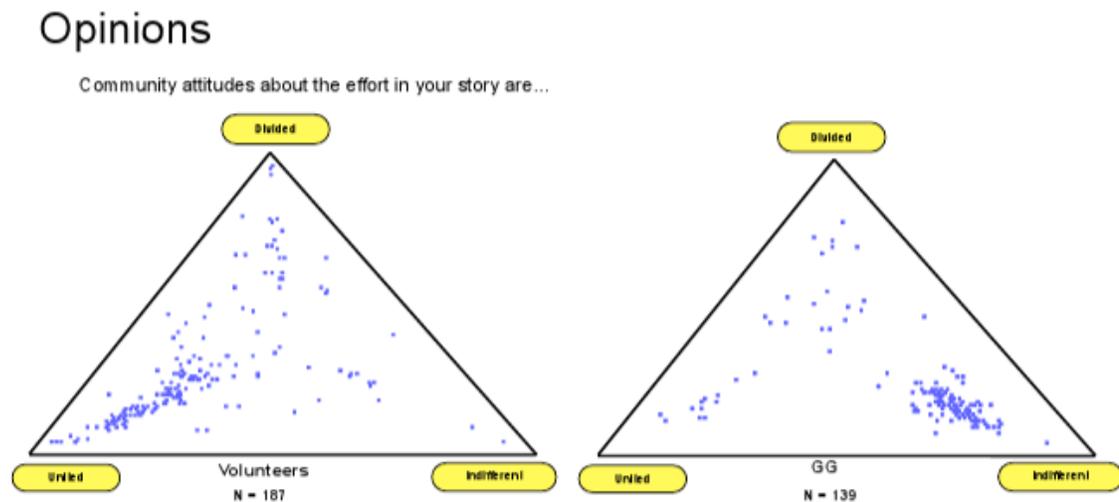
In the above example, we asked a group of fans of GlobalGiving on Facebook (volunteers) to each read a dozen or so reports about the work of some Kenyan NGOs. These volunteers turned in 187 surveys on these reports. We then compared this one question about how people perceived community attitudes to a group of 139[37] stories told about these same NGOs by community members who know about them. The broad trend was that **indifference** was common in most stories, and the GG stories were no different. However, when volunteers read organization reports they came away with a rosy picture of the work, with community attitudes united in support of the project. These projects were professionally evaluated in 2009 and were generally successful, non-controversial efforts. Self-filtering is probably stronger when something is at stake, such as a grant.

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[37] This group only contained 5 of the 33 GEMINI stories, which were atypical of the rest of the set in that GEMINI stories because we think they were entered by the NGO staff directly and show no "indifference" in their answers to this question.

Seminal Influences:

- Irene Guijt, consultant: http://nl.linkedin.com/pub/irene-guijt/6/826/213
- Cynthia kurtz's story blog: www.storycoloredglasses.com and http://www.storycoloredglasses.com/2010/08/steal-these-ideas.html in particular.
- Our 2009 case study: http://blog.globalgiving.org/2009/09/16/we-are-listening-real-time-feedback-loops/
- Scott Guggenheim – Crises and contradictions (about the power of giving community basic knowledge about World Bank projects in Indonesia): www.cultureandpublicaction.org/bijupdf/guggenheim.pdf
- Lant Pritchett – it pays to be ignorant: A Simple Political Economy of Rigorous Program Evaluation: www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/lpritch/ignorance_v2_r1.pdf
- Dave Snowden and Cognitive Edge: http://www.cognitive-edge.com/ who created the complexity-based software we use, SenseMaker[R]

Part III: Appendices

Appendix one: Initial ideas framework for what mattered to GlobalGiving and what we wanted to learn about through storytelling:

Topics related to possible narrative questions:
Community support (for a project)
Justice
Community defined
Hopes and dreams
Local leadership

Theme clusters:
Corruption, transparency, governance
Family, individualism, community
Listening, leading, following, storytelling
Attempting, achieving, failing, trying
Altruism, generosity, reciprosity, sharing, giving
Beneficiary, client, recipient, partner
Needs, hopes, wants, dreams, demands, requests, deserves

The most important question to us: (Direct Question): is this project and organization community supported?

Relates to:
What does "community" mean to you?
What does it mean for community to support?
Here is a project that does …(x)... So what does it mean in your life?
How has this project changed your life?

Other approaches that might be useful:

Tell me a story of a good leader. Why do you admire him/her?
Tell me of a time when the community needed something, and either did or did not get it.
Tell me a story of helping someone else
Tell me of a time when the community was united

Previously (2009) – we used a 3 question survey, starting with a bumper sticker:

(1) What does your community need?
(2) Name an organization that serves you well
(3) How do you know?
   (see www.globalgiving.com/ideas)

In person (2009) we tried 5 questions for video interviews of project leader and their staff:

(4) Tell us who you are. Describe the work you are doing.
(5) What does your community need most?
(6) Can you name another organization that you respect and admire?
(7) How do you know that you are listening to the people you serve?
(8) What is something you did recently (last week) to help your community?
(9) In one word – what is globalgiving?

Appendix two: First coded version of signification framework.

Global Giving and the Use of SenseMaker Suite®:
The Signification Framework for Use in Kenya (pre-trial version)

Prompting Question

Two story streams will be pursued to seek stories related to specific GG projects and those related to generic stories of community efforts. '

COMM NARRATIVE
Tell me about a community effort.
Tell us about a community effort that would either encourage or discourage others to try something similar. Describe ONE specific moment. If you have more than one to share you'll have a chance to come back to this page later.

PROJ NARRATIVE
Tell me about your project.
"What specific moment made you proud or ashamed about the project? What happened?

TITLE
Title
Please give your story a title.

Filters (Triads)

For those using paper to collect information, only one X can be placed in each triangle. Storytellers need to locate the X in relation to the three options for each question.

BENEFIT - LEADERS
BENEFIT – PEOPLE
BENEFIT – OUTSIDERS

INFLUENCE – COMMUNITY
INFLUENCE – LEADERS
INFLUENCE – OUTSIDERS

CORE GOAL – LIVING
CORE GOAL – SOCIAL
CORE GOAL – ECON

MISSED – LIVING
MISSED – SOCIAL
MISSED – ECON

OPINIONS – UNITED
OPINIONS – DIVIDED

1. *Benefits*
   Those benefiting from the community effort in your story are...
      Community leaders, community members in need, people outside the community

2. *Influence on results*
   The results so far have been influenced by...
      Priority needs from the community, desire of a local person, wishes from people outside the community

3. *Core contribution*
   This community effort improved ...
      physical living conditions, social relations, economic opportunities

4. *Opportunity missed*
   This community effort failed to improve ...
      physical living conditions, social relations, economic opportunities

5. *Agreement*
   Community opinions and feelings about the community effort are:
      united; divided; indifferent

6. *Overall result of efforts*
   The community effort described in your story is ....
      successfully meeting community needs, failing to meet community needs, uncertain if meeting community needs

Filters (Polarities)

7. *Degree of impact*
   The change caused by the community effort in the story is...
      overwhelming and disruptive <--> insufficient and too slow

8. Influence of outsiders to the community
   In the community effort in the story, outsiders …
   meddle too much and inappropriately <--> ~~listen too much and~~ might as well not be there

9. *Decision-making*

In the community effort in your story, decisions were …

> bogged down by excessive consultation <--> top-down decisions

10. *Desirability*

The kind of community effort related to your story is …

> best avoided at all costs <--> too good to be true

Multi-Choice Questions

Pick 1 but no more than 3 for each question

11. *Own involvement*

Your involvement in this community effort can be described as …

- very involved from the start
- involved once you saw what was happening
- wanted to be involved but you were ignored and excluded
- unaware of what was happening
- wanted to be but didn't know how to get involved
- none
- prefer not to say

12. *Feelings*

The story makes you feel ….

- proud/happy
- hopeful
- indifferent
- angry/frustrated
- anxious
- don't know

13. *Needs*

Your story most relates to (pick 1 but no more than 3):
- Access to food, shelter, work
- Sense of safety
- Social connections
- Knowledge
- Self-esteem
- Leisure time
- Creativity
- Freedom
- None of the above
- Not sure

14. *Relationship to community effort*

Your connection to the community effort you are sharing
- community volunteer
- receiving direct benefits
- government official
- international visitor
- funding agency
- organization staff member
- national visitor
- evaluator
- other
- prefer not to say

15. *Knowledge of the community effort*

You have known about the community effort in your story ....

- since the beginning, when it was first suggested
- as it was being planned
- as it was being implemented
- after it was finalized and being used
- for a few days
- do not want to share

16. *Source of information*

How did you find out about the community effort you are sharing?

- saw it myself
- someone told me about it
- information shared by leaders / officials
- do not remember
- prefer not to say

17. *Time*

How long ago did events in the story take place?

- Within the last month
- Within the last 2-6 months
- Within the last 6-12 months
- Between 1 and 2 years ago
- Longer than 2 years ago
- Can't remember

About You

HOME – DISTRICT
HOME – NO ANSWR

STORY – DISTRICT
STORY – NO ANSWR

SEX – MALE
SEX – FEMALE
SEX – NO ANSWR

AGE – 10
AGE – 15
AGE – 20
AGE – 35
AGE – 50
AGE – 50+
AGE – NO ANSWR

EDUC – BASIC READING
EDUC – SOME PRIMARY
EDUC – COMPLETE PRIMARY
EDUC – SOME HIGHSCHOOL
EDUC – COMPLETE HIGHSCHOOL
EDUC – COLLEGE
EDUC – OTHER
EDUC – NO ANSWR

REV TITLE

18. Where do you live?
- District
- prefer not to say

19. *Where did/does your story take place?*
- District
- prefer not to say

20. Sex:
- Female
- Male
- prefer not to say

21. Age:
- younger than 10 years
- 10 to 15 years,
- 16 to 20 years
- 21-35 years
- 36-50 years
- older than 50
- prefer not to say

22. Educational level
- Basic literacy
- Primary school – started, not completed
- Primary school completed
- High school– started, not completed
- High school completed
- College /university
- Other
- prefer not to say

Title
Do you want to change the title of your story? If so, the title is now …..

<u>**Appendix Three:**</u> **What we ended up printing after one month of iterations and retesting:**

Can you share a **story** about one past **community effort** you witnessed or know about? Think of a "community effort" as any organized activity led by a person or NGO to improve the lives of *your* community. Describe *one specific* day in the life of this effort, event, or experience. Explain what happened. What came out of this effort? What would you tell others who were trying to accomplish the same goal?"

Write your story now. After, the story collector will use this guide to ask you some questions.

1.a. Write the name of the NGO that led the effort.
If none was involved, write the name of a person who led the effort.

1.b. Give your story a title.

Place a dot within each triangle to represent multiple influences. Let the position represent the balance between the choices at the points. Your story can reflect a combination of these choices.
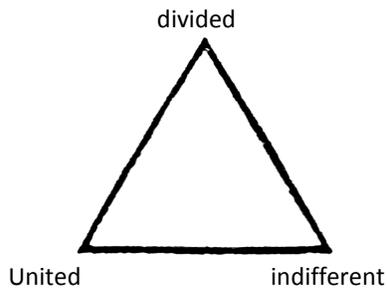If a question does not relate to your story, skip it by checking the box "N/A."

3.a. This community effort improved…   3.b. This community effort failed to improve…

4.a. Those benefiting from the community effort in your story are…   4.b. The results so far have been influenced by…

5.a. Community attitudes about the effort in your story are…

divided

United   indifferent

5.b How would you advise a friend who wanted to organize a similar community effort? What part could be improved the most?

the people involved,

the location   the plan
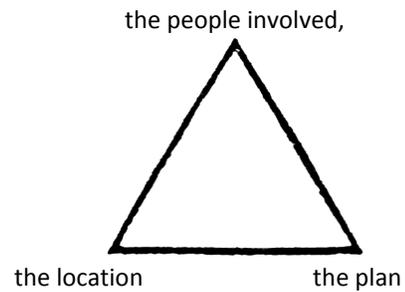
Place a dot along the line to represent how closely your story aligns with each word:

6. This story is about a community effort that…

Failed ——————————————-————————-—— succeeded
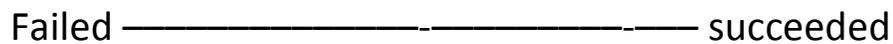
7. This story…

Would have happened
anyway without an
organized community effort ————————————————-————-———--————————-————————— Impossible without an
                                                                                    organization's help.

8. This story **relates** to:
[CHOOSE UP TO 3:]

_ sense of safety
_ water or sanitation
_ food
_ shelter
_ HIV/AIDS

_ other health issues
_ informal learning / training
_ social relations
_ self-esteem
_ formal education
_ creativity
_ freedom
_ none of these

_____

[CHOOSE ONLY 1 ANSWER:]

9. Your **connection** to the community effort in your story was…
_ Observer
_ Beneficiary
_ Organization staff member
_ Volunteer
_ Other

10. **When** did the story take place?
_ 1 month ago
_ 2-6 months ago
_ 6-12 months ago
_ 1-2 years ago
_ More than 2 years ago
_ Can't remember

11. **Where** does the story take place?
[Region, Village name]

12. **Sex**: Male / Female
13. Your **Age**
1-10
11-15
16-21
21-35
36-50
Older

14. **Who** most needs to hear your story?
_ Everyone
_ Leaders
_ NGO staff
_ Friends and Family
_ My community
_ None of these

15. **Other** information:
• 	Story collector – write your phone number
• 	Story giver – write your phone number if you wish to be contacted later.

Appenidx Four: Revised Framework for 2011

GlobalGiving Story Project
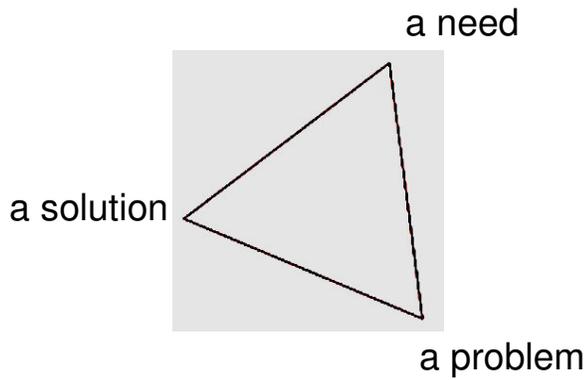
Questions? Write to mmaxson@globalgiving.org
This framework is licensed from Cognitive Edge. For more information see www.sensemaker-suite.com

(1) **Please tell a story** about a time when a person or organization tried to help someone or change something in your community:
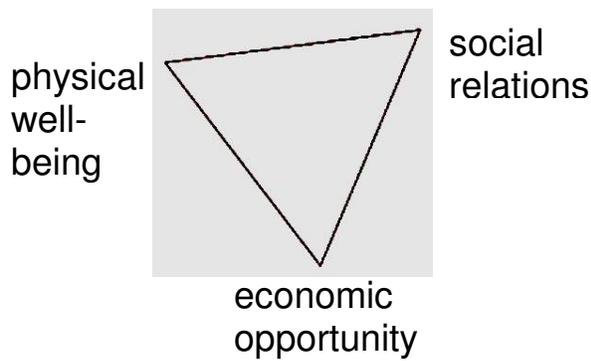
(2) Give your story a **title**:

(3) Can you name the **organization** involved in what happened?
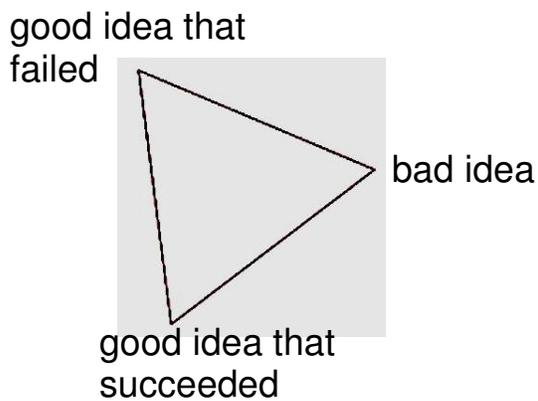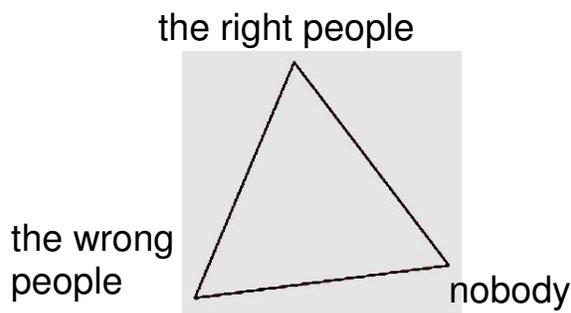(or write 'individual' if a person led the effort.)

(4) Your story describes…

a need

a solution

a problem

(5) The story is about…

physical
well-
being

social
relations

economic
opportunity

(6) The story describes a…

good idea that
failed

bad idea

good idea that
succeeded

(7) Who benefited from what happened in the story...

the right people

the wrong people

nobody

(8) How do you **feel** about your story? (pick 1)

☐ **inspiring** story I will remember forever
☐ **horrible** story, I will remember forever
☐ **important** story I will remember for a long time
☐ a story that I won't remember

(9) Which of these **relate** to your story? (pick 3)

☐ Food and Shelter
☐ Security
☐ Family and Friends
☐ Physical needs
☐ Knowledge
☐ Respect
☐ Creativity
☐ Self-Esteem
☐ Freedom
☐ Fun

(10) What is **your connection** to what happened in the story?

☐ **I helped** make it happen
☐ **I saw** what happened
☐ **I was affected** by what happened

(11) My story is most **related** to... (pick 1)
☐ family
☐ ethnic group or tribe
☐ region of country
☐ a local organization or group
☐ Other: _____

(12) When did the story take place? (pick 1)
☐ less than 2 months ago
☐ 2-6 months ago
☐ 7-12 months ago
☐ 1-2 years ago
☐ more than 2 years ago
☐ can't remember

(13) Where did the story take place?

Country

City

Neighborhood

(14) Your Sex
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

(15) Your Age
- ☐ Under 16
- ☐ 16-21
- ☐ 22-30
- ☐ 31-45
- ☐ 46-60
- ☐ Over 60

(16) May we contact you by SMS?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

(17) Your Mobile Phone Number

(18) Other information:

(anything else you want us to know)

(19) Scribe's Mobile Number

Appendix Five: Summary of Technology-Aided "Real-Time" Feedback Loops in International Philanthropy[38]**:**

In 2009 beneficiary feedback forced a Kenyan youth sports organization that was not serving its athletes well to reform over a six-month period. Ultimately, this continuous and transparent feedback triggered a chain of events that caused the original organization to implode and a new, more responsive organization to emerge, led by the one-time ignored community.

We found that a crucial first step was to explicitly **ask** for frequent and honest feedback (by email, the web, and word of mouth). The next step was to **reinforce** our request (e.g. by handing out bumper stickers like "1-800-How's my driving?" and hosting meetings with the community). Finally, transparency means giving this feedback **real weight** in our evaluations, and letting the community make the final call on whether to remove the organization from GlobalGiving. The most important lesson is that even when beneficiaries were granted **power over the organization**, local athletes continued to defend the organization's right to represent them until the moment a better alternative emerged. Likewise, true transparency has to be about sourcing **legitimate solutions** and **finding alternates** to dysfunctional institutions, not merely complaining about what's not working. Local community members often understand this better than anyone else, because they have to live with the consequences.

Key steps:
1. Ask for feedback
2. Ask again (reinforce the message)
3. Treat feedback as a worthy part of an evaluation
   a. Devise a system to filter out the positive-bias from the data, and increase the amount of unbiased feedback from adjacent sources
4. Let the community decide the fate of a questionable organization
   a. Complainers won't kill something that is a net positive benefit to them
5. Find alternatives that help the people benefit in the end

Appendix Six: Last thoughts
This whole approach to evaluation is meant to avoid creating a **whistleblower's dilemma:**

Imagine you are a mother in a village and you see that half the money sent to the local clinic is wasted, what do you do? You could tell someone from the funding agency when they visit and hope they get to the bottom of it. What do you think will happen? Assuming you can prove it and they believe you, what should they do? Should they pull out of that clinic? They typically don't have the power to replace the staff, and the courts are usually too messy to hold corrupt leaders accountable. In most cases the funder leaves and spends its money elsewhere. Now what? You were courageous and honest, and where half a functioning clinic once stood you have none. A lot of good that will do you, not to think of the type of local backlash closing a clinic would yield to you. Because they can't really hurt the funder, they attack you instead.

Transparency to most people is about as giving this person the ability to complain about the clinic, or giving the community the ability to complain about the funder. Transparency ought to

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[38] http://blog.globalgiving.org/2009/09/16/we-are-listening-real-time-feedback-loops/

be about systems that prevent this clinic from becoming corrupted in the first place. As a direct result of the broader way that local people see transparency, they tend to be "experts" at evaluating outsider's evaluations. Most will ask themselves, "how will my input impact the local corruption problems?" We could be using people's skepticism as a signal that we aren't addressing the root cause of the problem.

Does your M&E system serve the very individuals who provide the feedback?
Seeing the problem from the villager's perspective helps us understand how a different system for feedback can help. Most of the time organizations are measured against the goal of serving many people, not by how they serve one individual who might take the risk of talking about problems they see with an organization. He/she is just one person among the people. Under these circumstances the risk to the individual is only worth the reward (solving the problem) if the system makes it a top priority to actually solve the problem, not just direct resources elsewhere. This remains a dilemma for GlobalGiving. We can highlight gaps and failings, but other people allocate the money, so we can't guarantee to those courageous enough to provide feedback that the problem will get solved. The closest guarantee we can make is that (a) donors will know about it and will be allowed to reallocate the money elsewhere, and (b) those providing the feedback will always hear back from us, and sometimes receive a little bit of GG GiftCard money to allocate to a (better) project of his or her choice.

Multiply this situation by the thousands of grants to tens of thousands of organizations that the world tries to manage each year, and you see a systematic bias towards projects that accomplish "enough" of something to avoid getting punished, instead of a system for rewarding those that accomplish the most.

Why I really wanted to write this book:
It strikes me that **monitoring and evaluation** (M&E) is like a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. The bread represents the monitoring framework, and the filling, structured evaluations. What you put between two slices of bread will affect the quality of the sandwich, but international development is full of moldy bread. We learn too little about the world where we work and we learn it too slowly to act on what we do learn. We need "fresh bread" and a system to know when our bread is moldy. We need a feedback system that will work for every sandwich maker out there. With that in place, we can all build every sort of tasty sandwich and begin to have a meaningful discussion about what we are doing in communities. The world is a buffet and this book about making everything taste better.

I hope I have presented stories here that illustrate how we can improve M&E through a structured continuous storytelling process.

I called this book is the "Real Book" and not a "Methods Book" because it was written to be revised, expanded, truncated, filled in, and improvised with like Jazz. Hopefully it will spark more complete ideas in the future.

- Marc Maxson