PLACARD

How to become a climate chef and avoid disasters
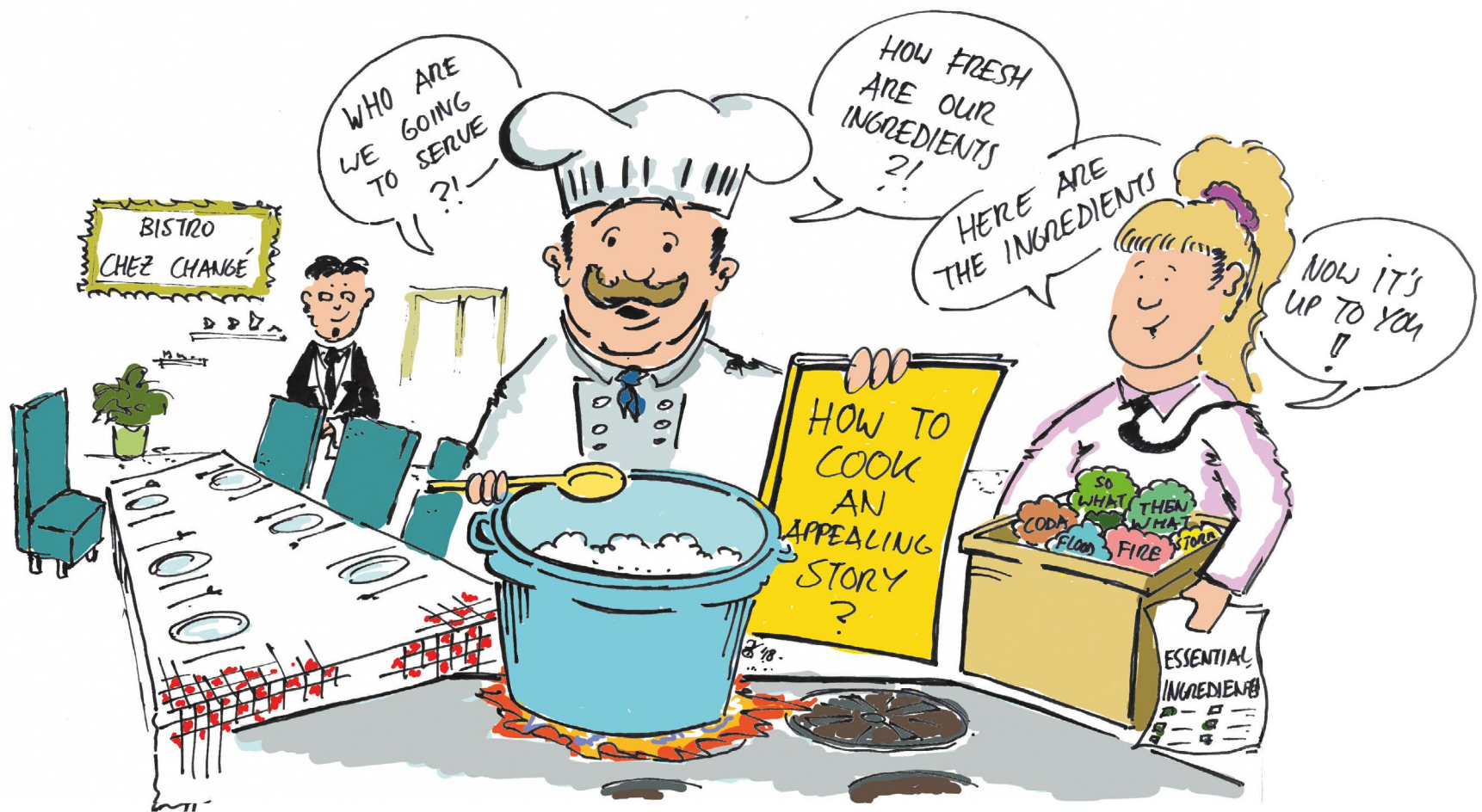
We are PLACARD

The link between the Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) communities seems obvious, but communication and collaboration between the two is still developing. A shared understanding of problems and possible solutions can help, which is where stories and narratives can play an important role. The aim of the recipe book is to help you to develop engaging stories and narratives to support you in fostering collaborations between the CCA and DRR communities for a range of purposes.

This recipe book is the result of a series of findings from studies and workshops where both communities participated to create a joint understanding:

- Narratives workshop Bonn, June 2016
- Narratives workshop Bonn, June 2017
- Narratives workshop Brussels, October 2017
- Narrative session during Adaptation Futures, June 2018, in Cape Town.

We also referred to scientific theories and literature on communication (see list of references on page 23).

Acknowledgements

Why a recipe book?

Hundreds of organisations and thousands of people are working day in, day out to help people to deal with the impacts of disasters and climate change. That includes YOU!

While working with people from diverse backgrounds such as agriculture, urban planning, water management, nature conservation, humanitarian aid, and civil protection, you may sometimes experience difficulties in motivating them to prepare and act upon these disaster and climate impacts, to make sure they suffer less and recover more easily. You may also struggle with getting people to collaborate with each other to create a more resilient society.

This recipe book for making stories can help you to get people engaged and work towards climate-proof and disaster resilient society.

Photo by Benutzer:DesTeufels – Über chwemmung des westlichen Einkaufzentrums in Wörgl (23. August 2005)
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:W%C3%B6rgl_hochwasser.jpg

Stories matter!

Every event, every experience, every picture tells a story. Your story can be very different from that of the person sitting next to you because we see reality through the filter of our past experiences, our knowledge, values and world views. Through our individual experiences, we give meaning to what we call reality.

This explains why people tell so many different stories about the same event. No single event will appear in the same way to everyone, we all look at the same things in different ways and from different perspectives.

So, there are many stories!

In both disaster risk response and climate change adaptation, a rainbow of stories exists. Sometimes these stories are contradictory, leading to frustration, inaction or dispute.

We need fresh stories that link the many existing narratives, weaving a common thread, connecting around shared values – stories that merge our understanding, that help us to connect with each other and that inspire collaborations.

Stories that engage and bring people together! Stories that can help to overcome the disconnection between the DRR and CCA approaches. Stories are not only a way to communicate and understand reality, they can also inspire collective, and even transformative, action. Stories help to open our minds and hearts. We can connect with others through stories, and place disasters and climate change into our own context. Stories can touch us, move us and inspire us to act.

Stories make us care! When we are moved, we may feel a need to act upon that emotion. Stories can also help to create a sense of control.

In disaster risk response and climate change, stories – or narratives – help us to deal with the diversity of voices and knowledge. They help us to develop better solutions for disaster preparedness and resilience.

One thing is certain: stories matter – a lot!

Strategic narratives: Knowing and telling with a purpose

Everyone tells stories – we do it every day – but not always consciously, or with a specific purpose in mind.

For example, after an extreme event, many stories emerge about what happened and how people dealt with it. These stories are a rich source of knowledge. How communities describe these past experiences can tell us how these people might understand future events and how to prepare themselves. These storied ways of knowing are narratives.
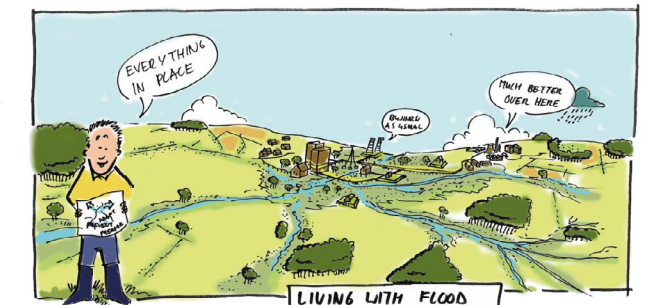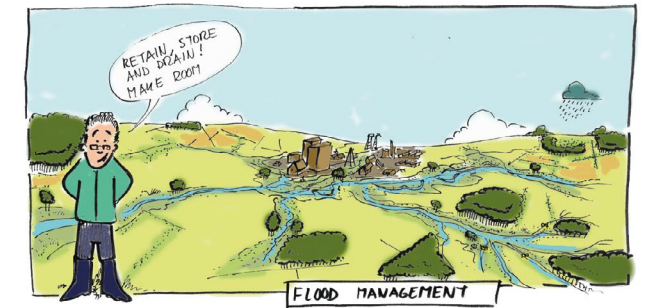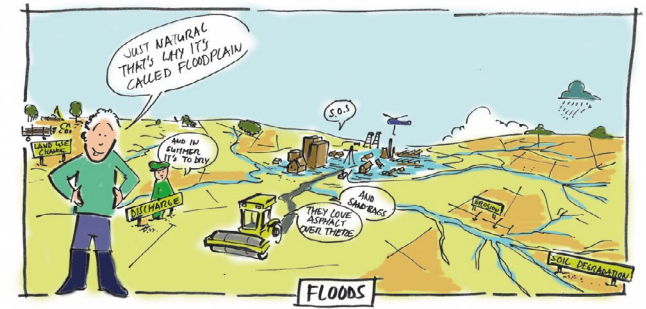
The origin of the word narrative illustrates the relationship between knowing – which comes from the Latin word *gnarus* – and telling – the English verb to narrate. A narrative refers to a 'spoken or written account of connected events, a story'.

When stories are told with a specific purpose in mind, we call them strategic narratives.

THE NARRATIVE

What's your story?

A recipe for engaging stories

Now, it is over to you to prepare your story to get your community better prepared for unusual weather phenomena!

Ideally, the construction of a new narrative is a 'social process or performance in action.' This means that the story emerges from a mutual understanding between speaker and listener. By building a narrative together, the narrative gains strength. But there are a few rules that a successful narrator should follow.

This recipe book provides you a recipe, i.e. an 'ingredient' list and instructions how to 'cook' an engaging story that can help you and your community to become well-equipped for heatwaves, floods or other weather extremes. In other words, it helps you to create a strategic tool to engage people and to encourage them to take preventive and preparatory actions in the context of disasters and the changing climate.

Our recipe book focuses on stories for DRR and CCA, but the guidelines are generic and thus can be applied in other fields too.

The structure of a story

The structure of a good story consists of different elements. We rely on the structure of the 'Six Basic Elements of storytelling' from Labov.

1. First, introduce what the story is about. Labov calls this 'the abstract'.

2. Then, describe who or what is involved, and where and when the situation takes place. Who, what, when and where? Labov calls this 'orientation'.

3. Third, illustrate the problem or challenges that need to be resolved. What happened? Labov calls this 'complicating action'.

4. Fourth, explain why this complicating action and the results matter. So what? Labov calls this 'evaluation'.

5. Fifth, introduce what happened to solve the complicating action. What happened in the end? Labov calls this component 'the result'.

6. And conclude with what this story means for the listener. Labov calls this 'the coda'.

Once these elements are carefully selected and processed, a story comes to life that can thoroughly move and engage people.

But before we begin: who will listen to your story?

Who do you want to be better equipped for disasters and the changing climate? Is it your family, your friends, your colleagues, or maybe farmers, companies, politicians...? In other words, who is the story for?

To create successful stories, it is important to know clearly who your audience is. What do these people care about? How do they perceive climate change or disasters? What are their experiences? You can use this information to make an appealing story that easily connects to what the listeners already know. The better you connect with their 'mental landscape', the more likely the story is to trigger action.

Why do you want to tell a story?
Why should your listeners care about the story?

- To make people aware of climate-related disasters?

- To help them understand that they can protect themselves?

- To inspire them to plant their garden to improve drainage and reduce flooding?

- To clarify that policymakers should put flood risk at the top of the policy agenda?

There can be many reasons why you want to tell a story. It is good to think about the purpose at the beginning because it helps you to create an engaging storyline.
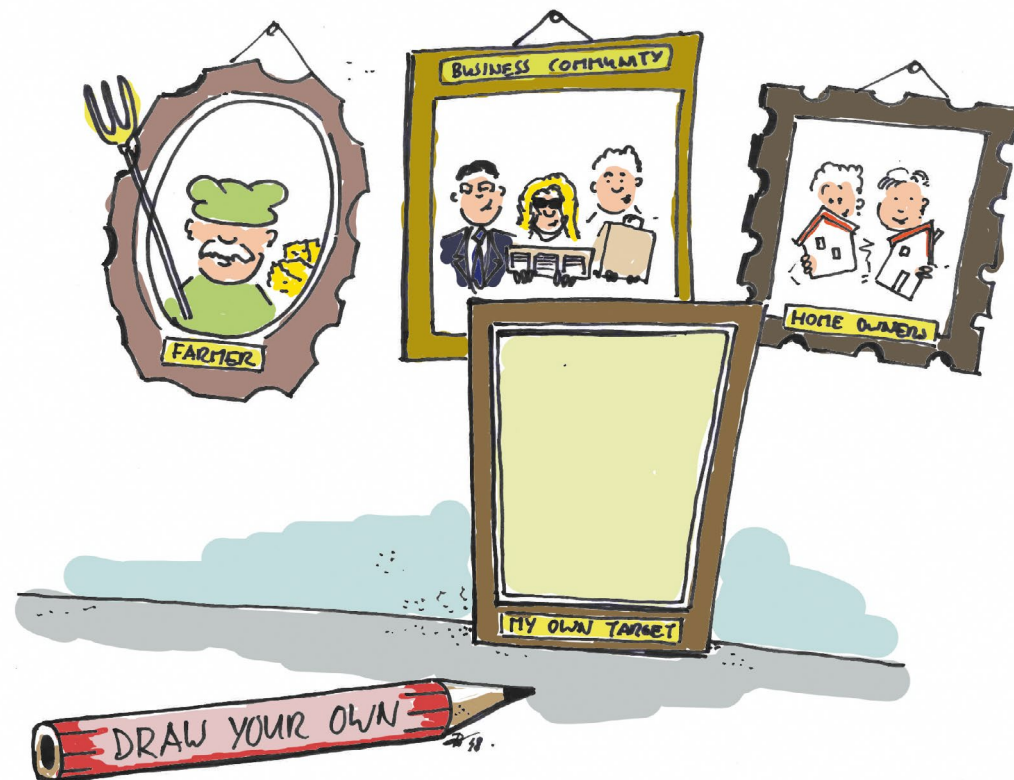
1. What is the story about? (the abstract)

Every good story starts with an introduction of what it will be about, to captures the listener's attention. This introduction focuses on:

- What is subject of the story?
- What is happening?
- Why should I keep listening or reading?
- Why should I care?

In this part you can:

- Define a topic that concerns listeners such as their family, safety, health, jobs, well-being, or quality of life. It can be helpful to ask yourself: What matters to them?
- Provide a brief summary of the story that follows.
- Create curiosity to encourage people to listen to the very end!

You can use sentences like:

"Did I ever tell you the story about when…"

"Did you know…?"

"Have you ever had the feeling…?"
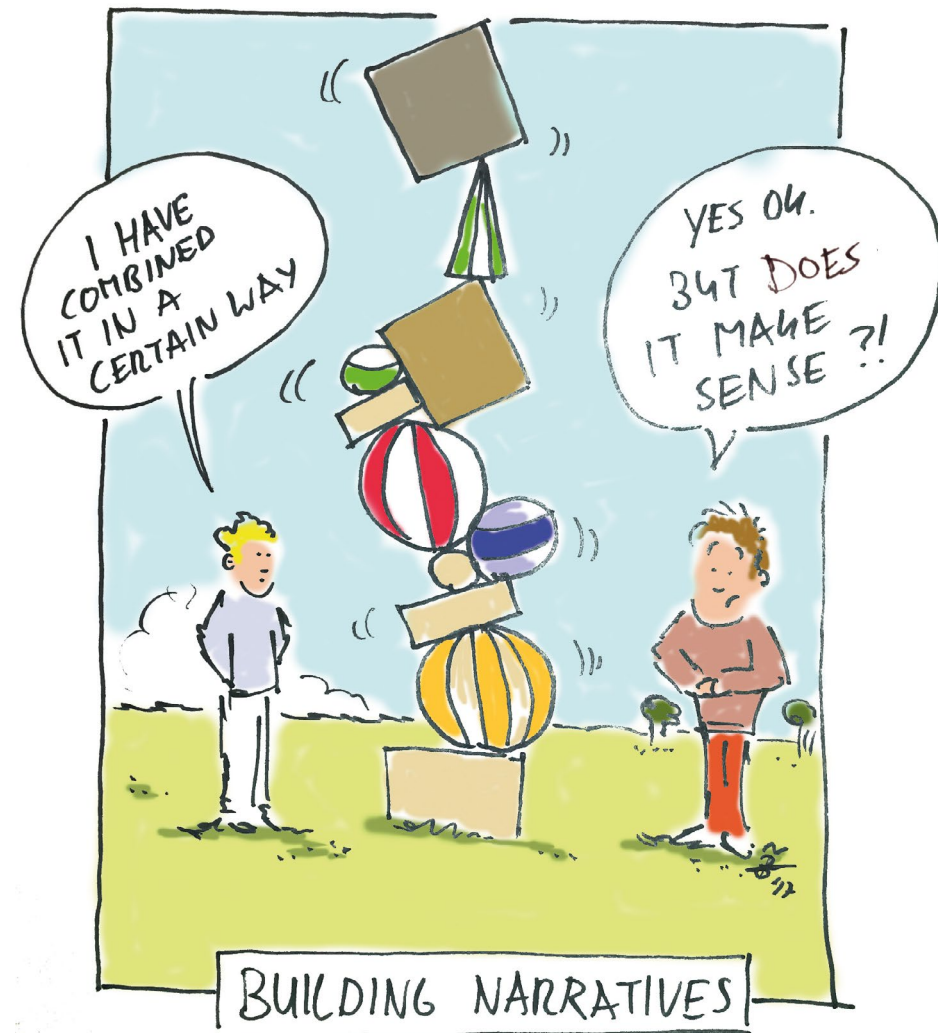
2. Who? When? Where? (the orientation)

Next, you introduce who takes part in the story, and when and where it takes place.

In this part, you can:

- Select or create the characters for your story: the protagonist(s). You could even think about bringing in a hero!

- Make your listener part of the story via the character. It often works well!

- It is better to tell a story about a real character, rather than inventing one. This will ease the listener into the shoes of the character and create empathy with the protagonist.

- Try to answer the following questions:
  - » Where does the story take place?
  - » When does the story take place?
  - » From whose perspective will you tell the story?
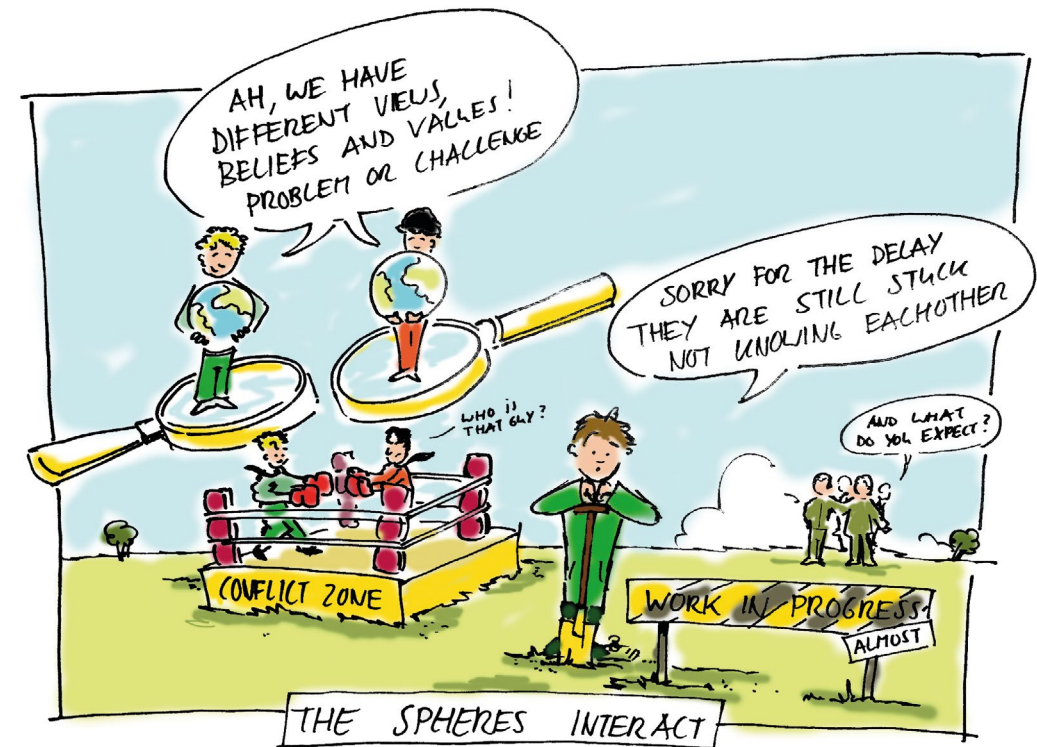
Tip 1: Talk about the present

Tell a story that matters here and now.

When people feel something is happening now, they are more willing to listen and act upon it. People will respond positively to stories that explore current problems and need immediate responses.

Climate change stories often make the mistake of talking about the likely future climate without a link to present time, and without referring to what people care about. However, it is always useful to create a connection to a date in the future, for example:

"In 2100, your children will be adults. We must work to give them a better future."
This narrative is built around what people care about, such as safety, comfort, or welfare.

"What happens in 2100 depends on how we deal with climate change now. So, let's adapt to improve our future."
This narrative makes a connection between what we do today and the future – the future is brought back to present actions.

"We are the future" is said by children today.
The link between disasters and climate change is easier to make by using past disasters to illustrate the impacts, and explain that in future these events will happen more often or may be more severe due to climate change. This narrative has proved to be a successful way to bring together the climate change adaptation and the disaster risk reduction communities.
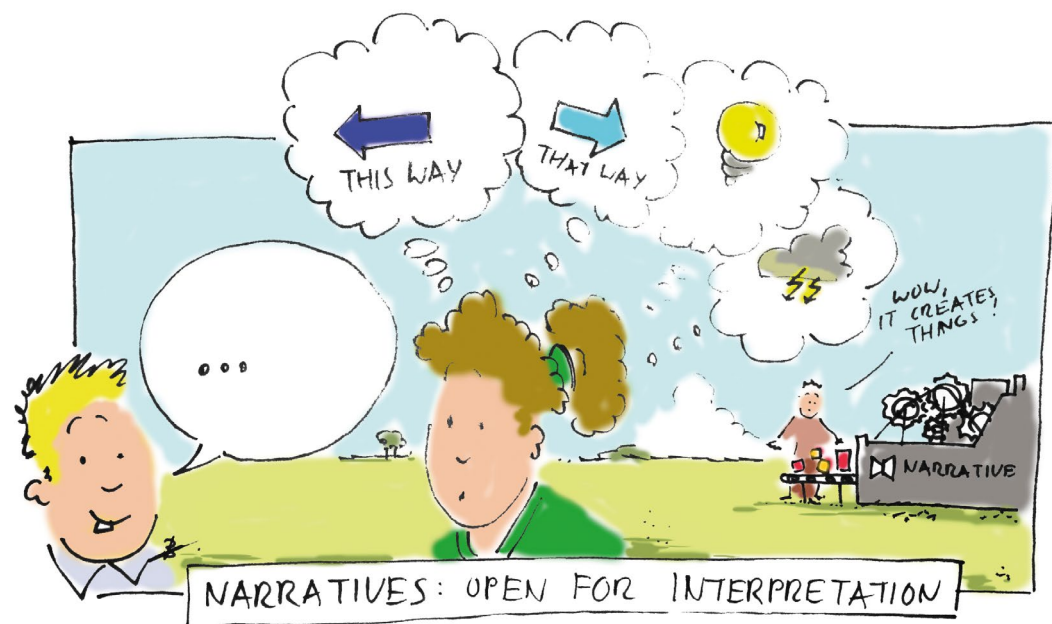
Tip 2: Bring in familiar context

You can easily create connections through familiarity, stories that take place in a context that is familiar to the listener. You can refer to historical events or to local or personal experiences. These create connections much more easily than stories about distant events. Bringing in familiar a context helps to keep the message alive and attract the attention of the listener.
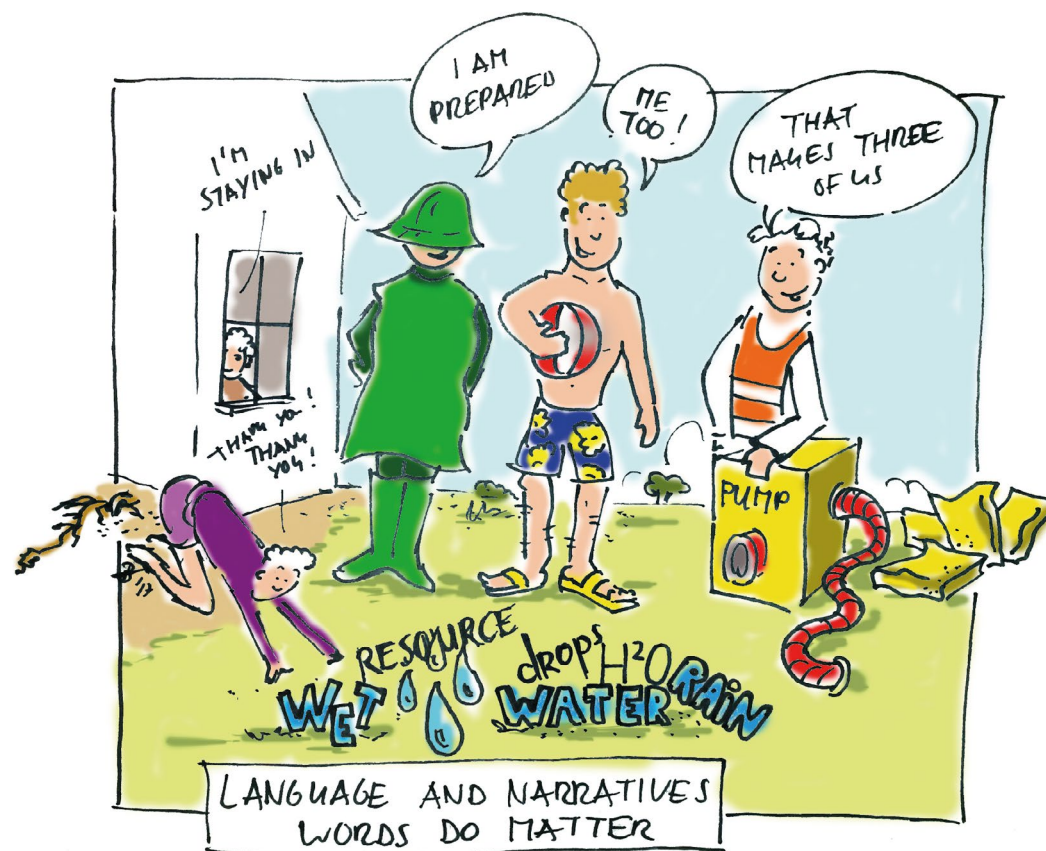
Contextualising sentences may help you to construct this part of your story:

"It was in 2009 when…"

"And still…

"In my street…"

"My neighbour once…"

Tip 3: Words do matter

When you tell your story, make sure that the listener understands the words in that particular context. The language should not be boring and flat, or stilted and formal. Consider your listener's language, and avoid jargon!

Language check

A language check can help you to find the best tone for your story:

- Are the words used familiar to your listener?

- Are the words specific and can one easily visualise the story?

- Are the words easy-to-grasp or are they jargon, scientific or complex language? Words like 'hazards', 'vulnerability', 'exposure' and 'adaptive capacity' may be considered hollow, technical and vague; 'loss data', 'structural and non-structural measures', 'socio-economic scenarios' may be meaningless or even disengaging.

- Avoid very long sentences.

- Is the language moralising or guilt-inducing? That should be avoided because it only works over a short term.

- Does the language relate to everyday experience?

- Do you use sufficient words that empower, such as achieve, hope, goodwill, harmony, freedom…?

- In DRR and CCA, the same words are used, but the meaning can be different. Our PLACARD team is developing an online tool to help you find the appropriate words and explain the various meanings. Find out more: bit.ly/PLACARD-words-matter

3. And what happened? (complicating action)

This element relates the events of the story and follows the "next... and then" structure. It is where you determine the genre of the story: is it going to be a thriller, science fiction, a comedy, a love story...?

Genre and framing of the story

Whether we call it tension, drama or conflict, a sense of struggle can keep the story alive. Within this struggle, the outcome can, in some cases, remain in doubt.

At this point, you should consider how to frame your story. Framing is important when people try to make sense of something and is a way of looking at reality. When framing, you select some aspects of the perceived reality and use them in your story. It helps the listener to recognise the meaning and connect with the tale. Framing sets the context of the story and guides the listener to a conclusion. Good framing helps to make sure that you do not lose your audience's interest. It helps to use descriptive, positive framing such as:

- Big society versus failed state.

- Awareness-raising versus fear-mongering.

- Enthusiastic teenagers versus a noisy group of kids.

- Disaster relief workers versus aid industry.

NARRATIVES AND FRAMING

Your listener's values

There is a specific set of universal intrinsic values that can be found among people, such as security, power, stimulation, benevolence (see figure). In addition, your listener uses specific intrinsic values to guide their behaviour. If you align your story with these values, there is a greater chance that the listener will start to act upon them.

In this part, you can:

- Balance data and emotions. Try to include some of your own emotions, passions and motivations in the story.

- Use examples and practices to demonstrate the struggle, rather than only talking about them.

- Consider your listener's values when framing – what are their ambitions and dreams? Aligning with your listener's values allows you to engage with your target group more easily.

- Use metaphors to explain your message. Metaphors are an effective way to introduce your message to a story. Metaphors help to attract attention, mentally visualise the message, and keep that message alive in the memory.

- Use humour. Humour is often a good way to draw attention and to keep people listening to your story.
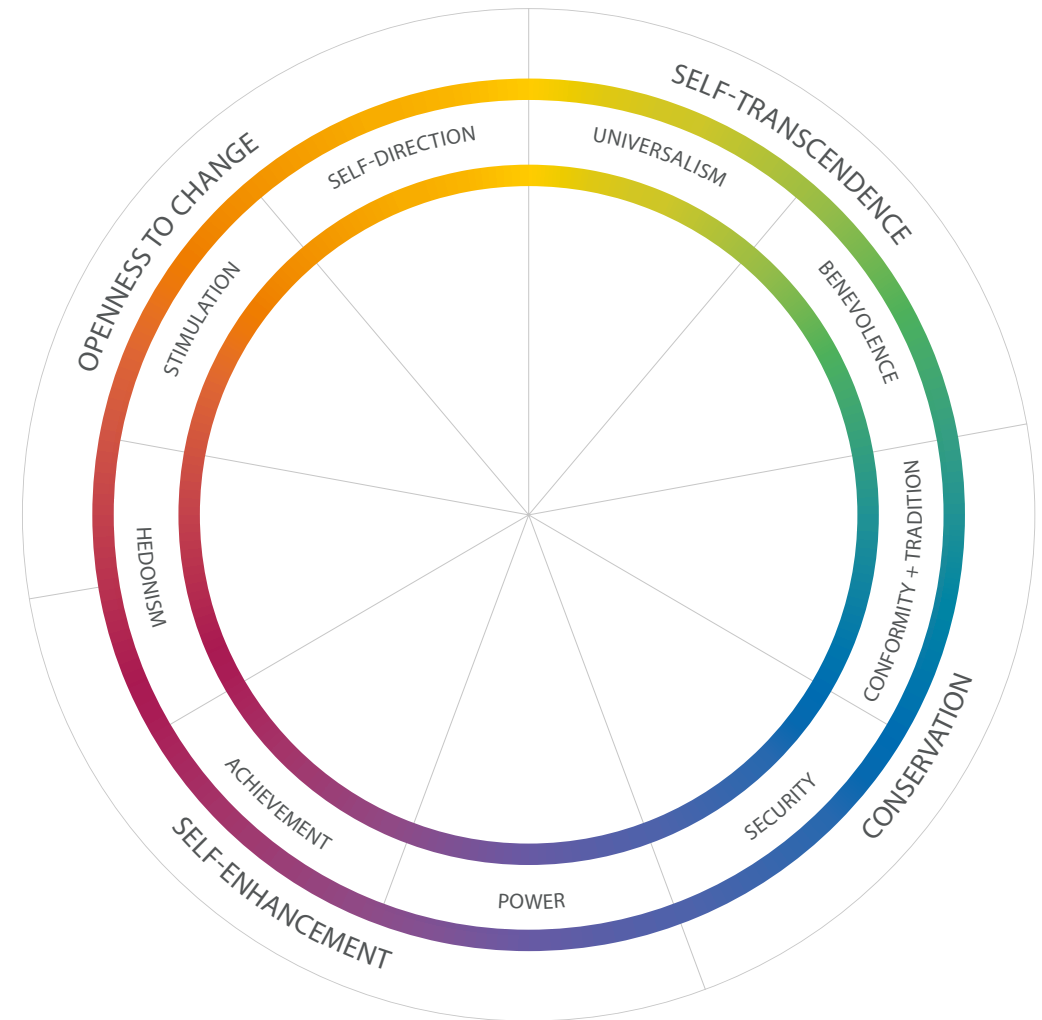

Image source: Schwartz, Universal Values

The devil is in the detail

- Use vivid details that help to build up the visualisation of the story in your listener's mind.

- Be careful in juggling with cause and effect. To keep the listener's attention, the events needs to follow one another in a logical way.

- Use a change in tone or direction, and sequencing. Suspense, curiosity and surprise always work well to trigger emotions. They are particularly useful in longer stories.

- Make sure that the story is culturally appropriate.
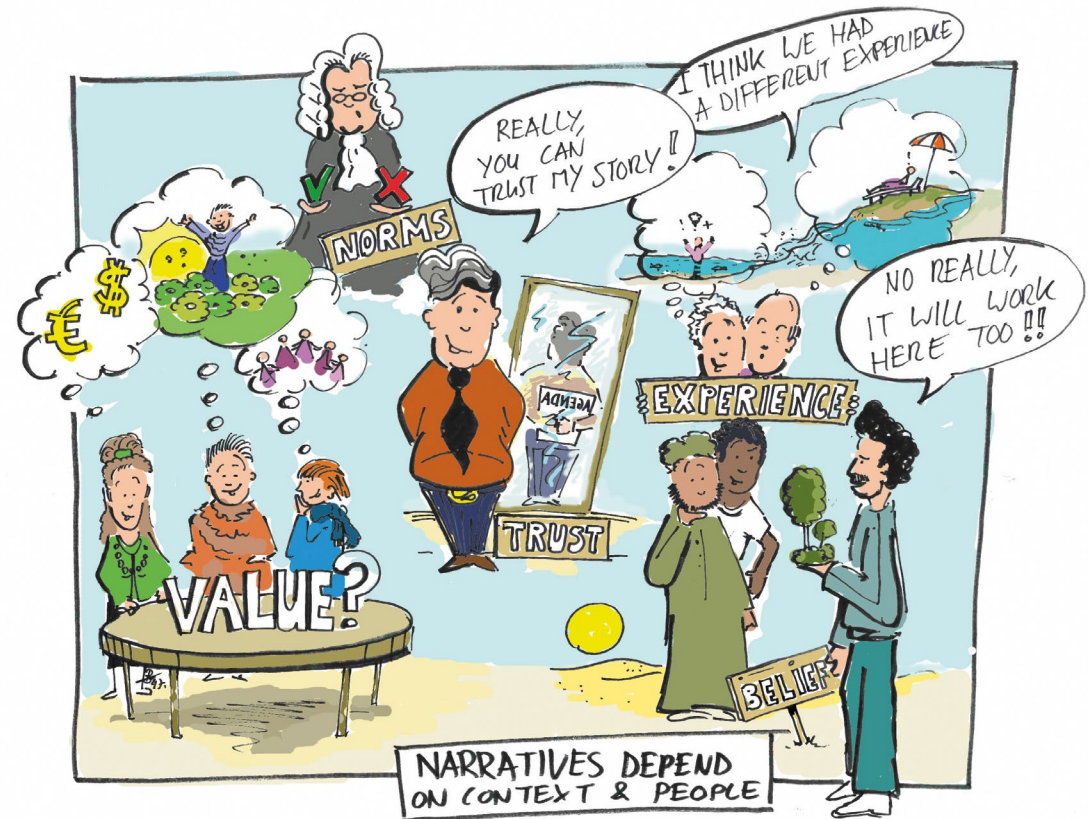
4. Why does it matter? (evaluation)

This is the critical part of the story. It justifies its recounting and reveals your perspective on the events being told. You should make clear why the story is worth telling. Here, you call for people to take responsibility for their actions.

Tip 1: Make your listeners agents of change!

People take ownership through telling them:

- "You matter!"
- "You can do something about it"
- "Your action makes a difference!"

In this part, you can:

Use lessons learned and practices from a local context or elsewhere to show the benefits.

5. What happened in the end? (the result)

The result describes how the story ends and how the conflicts, tensions or struggles are resolved. It is also the part of your story where you explain how life changed as a consequence of these specific actions.

In this part you can:

- Finish with a positive message! Fear can paralyse people and lead to inaction. You can appeal to the reader, for instance by sketching a positive future that the listener might dream of.

- Make clear that our actions are needed for a positive result.

- Make the storyline logical and easy to understand.

6. What does it all mean? (the coda)

This last part, the coda, summarises what the whole story means to the listener. It is the essence of the story. This is where the listener is moved to take action.

You can use the coda to introduce the moral of the story.

The coda also helps to create emotions. For instance, your story may make your listener enthusiastic or happy, satisfied or empowered...

In addition, the coda makes clear that your listener has the choice of taking a different path of action.

To have an impact, the coda has to be:

- Short.

- Logical and consistent.

- Easy to understand.
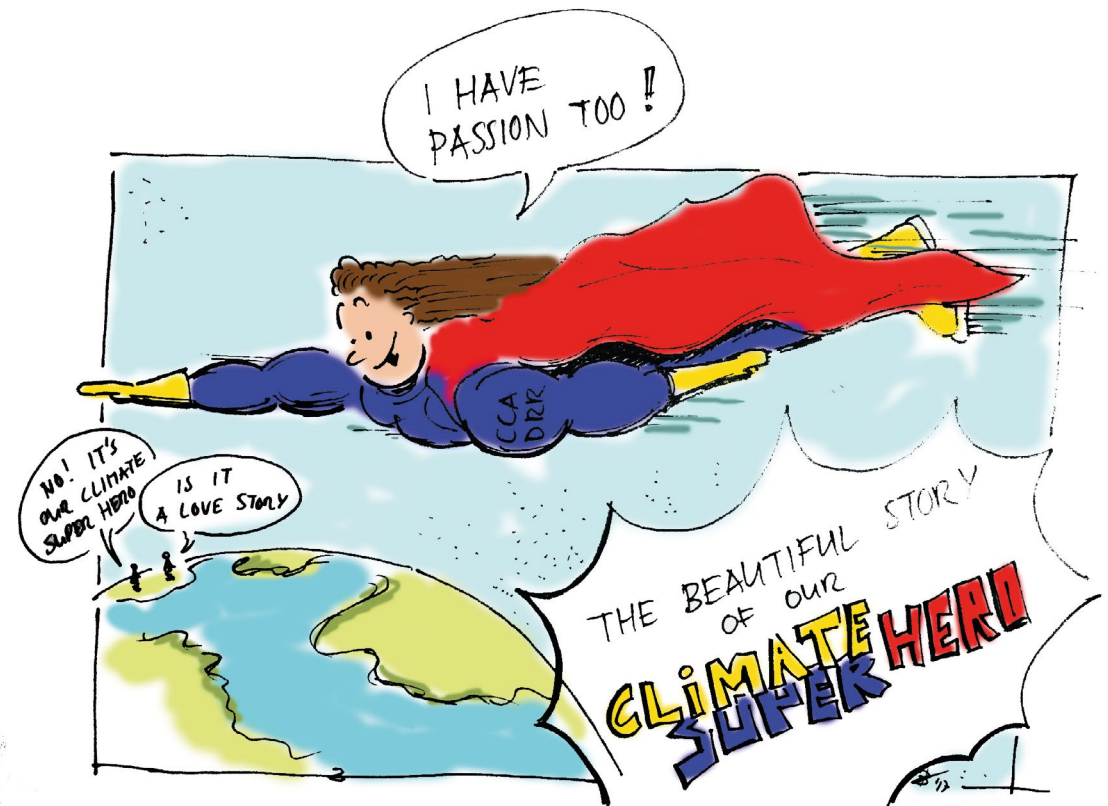
Who is going to tell the story?

Trust and credibility play a very important role when engaging people. Therefore, the story is best told by a trusted and credible person or organisation.

A person is perceived as trusted and credible when they are considered to be caring and empathetic, being dedicated and committed, having competence and expertise, and being honest and open. These characteristics make someone trustworthy and credible.

To look for trustworthy and credible storytellers, answer the following questions:

- What are the most trusted channels of communication in your community?

- Which people are trusted and considered as credible by your community?

- Is it you? Is it someone else? If it's the latter, you can make use of an intermediary – an ambassador or supporting actor – to tell the story.

Then the listener responds to your story...

While telling a story, you can observe initial reactions from the listener by reading their body language. People communicate: via their face, gestures and eye contact. Frowning, fake smiles, downward hand gestures, crossed arms and avoiding eye contact indicate a dislike of your story. This might mean that your story is not in line with the listener's frame or values. On the other hand, smiling, open eyes, hand palms facing upward, open gestures and good eye contact are signals that your story is well-appreciated.

When telling a story, you can:

- Try to read body language; and

- Be aware of your own open and empathic body language. People often start to mirror behaviour when in a conversation. So, if you keep your body language open, the listener may also open up.

If you notice the signs of negative body language while telling your story, you can ask the listener some questions to check his or her concerns. This may help to overcome the negative attitude and allow you to adjust the story, if needed.

References & further reading

Good luck with making new stories!

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About PLACARD

The PLAtform for Climate Adaptation and Risk reduction (PLACARD) is funded by the European Commission's Horizon 2020 research & innovation programme, Grant agreement No. 653255. PLACARD's mission is to foster exchange between the Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) communities.

Narratives is one of the topics for exchange between these two communities. This recipe book is the result of a series of findings from CCA and DRR studies and workshops where both communities participated to create a joint understanding.

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