

Stories-without-an-ending (SWE):

An adult education tool for dialogue and social change

Purpose of SWE : to engage community groups in discussion of various issues dealing with the health/well-being of women, children, adolescents

- to share new information/ideas with community members
- to strengthen their critical thinking skills to analyze both their past experience/knowledge and new information
- to promote community-wide consensus for change

SWE are based on an important principle of adult education :

« Individuals and groups must reflect on their past experiences, while analyzing new information to decide if and how they can integrate the new ideas into their existing strategies to promote family well-being ».

SWE use a *problem-posing approach which contrasts with a message-driven approach.*

Key characteristics of a SWE :

- uses a traditional communication tool found in most cultures ;
- describes a real-life situation ;
- encourages in depth discussion on « how new advice can be put into practice in their specific local contexts » for example, exclusive breastfeeding ;
- presents two different opinions on how to solve a given problem & participants express their ideas on what to do ;
- triggers horizontal dialogue and problem-solving between community actors during the session and afterwards with other community members ;
- promotes collective change in social norms, which strongly influence individual behavior.

« The stories-without-an-ending methodology captivates participants to discuss an issue with which they are familiar. Compared to many approaches, here nothing is imposed on participants. People are asked to weigh the pros and cons of alternative behaviors. People don't feel frustrated or criticized for their past beliefs and it makes them want to change. Many other methods impose ideas on people rather than making them think critically about their options. »

Sample Story-without-an-ending

Synopsis of the story : Two grandmothers meet in the market. Grandmother Fatou explains to her friend Maimouna that she is worried about her little grandson who has had diarrhea for several days and who is very weak. Maimouna explains that he is not eating and is sleeping a lot. Fatou tells her that she needs to encourage him to eat to help fight off his illness and to give him lots of fluids. Maimouna insists that « his stomach is tired and needs to rest » and « if we give him more fluids the diarrhea will increase ». Both maintain their positions and the story ends.

For each story a set of open-ended questions are developed to elicit discussion.

The guide is organized around three phases and 12 steps to develop and use SWE.

Phases and steps in the development and use of stories-without-a-ending

- ➔ **Phase ONE:** Collect information from community members on the issue to be addressed in the story
 - **Step 1:** define the issue to be addressed
 - **Step 2:** conduct community interviews on the topic
 - **Step 3:** analyze the information collected and organize it in the story planning worksheet
- ➔ **Phase TWO:** Write the problem-posing story and open-ended discussion questions
 - **Step 4:** Define the learning objectives for each story
 - **Step 5:** Identify a problematic or unresolved situation
 - **Step 6:** Describe the story characters and the context
 - **Step 7:** Write the problem-posing story (introduction, plot and ending)
 - **Step 8:** Pre-test the story with community members
 - **Step 9:** Develop a set of open-ended questions based on the experiential learning cycle
- ➔ **Phase THREE:** Present the story to a group and facilitate the discussion/ dialogue
 - **Step 10:** Plan the session with community partners
 - **Step 11:** Facilitate the group session using open-ended questions
 - **Step 12:** End the session so that the discussion continues

Grandmother Project - Change through Culture is an American non-profit organization and a Senegalese NGO. GMP is committed to promoting the well-being of women and children in the Global South by developing tools and programs that : build on positive cultural roles and values ; strengthen communication between generations ; and use communication/education methods that promote dialogue and critical thinking in order to promote change in social norms and at the same time empower communities to drive all aspects of their own development.