

Highlighting project impact: the underestimated power of personal stories

Background

- There is an increasing need to demonstrate project impact through rigorous evaluations in development cooperation (Kogen 2020)
- High costs of establishing a causal relationship between intervention and impact can be a challenge especially for smaller projects. Often too much data with too little power is taken → does not allow to draw meaningful conclusions (Kudrzycki 2018)

Aim

- Understanding project relevance and impact on personal lives of people involved in the organic cotton production in the intervention area.
- Create visibility for the project and sensibilizing for smallholders' reality

Our approach

- SysCom (System Comparison Trial in the Tropics) running since 2007 in India
- Storytelling: Personal stories & in-depth portraits of 11 people
- Non-scientific! Interviews with stakeholders along the organic cotton production in the Nimar valley, Madhya Pradesh (MP)
- Publishing on social media and in a booklet

Challenges associated

- How to let the people in the portraits „speak“?
- Communication in international development cooperation?
 - White saviorism: "pattern in which people of color in economically under-developed nations [/regions] that are majority non-white are denied agency and are seen as passive recipients of white benevolence"
 - Bias to positivity on project results

Outcomes

- Weekly publishing of stories on social media yielded high engagement rate of 6%
- Publishing of booklet framed the stories by information on the project and organic cotton
- Positive feedback from the organic cotton sector and consumers
- Strengthened connection with partners and donors and increased visibility



Figure 1: Cover page of the booklet and social media campaign «Faces of Organic Cotton» highlighting project impact in peoples' lives from personal stories



Figure 2: Salita Bhaware, organic cotton farmer. Participating in the project SysCom India, associated with Remei India Ltd. And portrayed in one of the stories


Learnings

- While storytelling approaches can not substitute rigorous impact assessment and evaluations it can be a valuable tool to highlight project impact in personal lives
- High quality images are paramount for successful communication
- Publishing attractive & interesting content on social media takes work, dedication, effort, creativity
- Story-telling is an underestimated tool for communicating project results

References

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