

Extension Approaches for Scaling out Livestock Production in Northern Lao PDR (EASLP)

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How to make Digital Stories for Livestock Production



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Introducing Digital Stories

What is a Digital Story?

A digital story can be a very powerful tool for extension. It is a story made using a digital camera and computer software, which can then be played on a DVD or a computer. A digital story uses a combination of written and spoken words, pictures and music. This combination allows much more information to be presented than by just writing, and in a very short and persuasive format.

A **digital case study** tells how a farming family is improving livestock management. It shows what they do, how they do it, and how it has affected their livelihood. A **technical digital story** gives instructions on how to implement livestock production improvements such as growing and feeding forages, livestock pens and housing, vaccination and health care, breeding or marketing.

What are Digital Stories for?

A Digital Story can be used to;

1. Show other farmers,
2. Inform managers and donors,
3. Train extension staff,
4. Give to the media (eg radio and TV) to promote improved livestock management practices.

Planning

Who is the digital story for?

Who is your digital story meant to influence? Are they women farmers? Poor farmers? Farmers of a particular ethnic group? Farmers who want to raise goats? You need to make the story about people similar to the farmers you want to influence (eg same ethnic group, poor farmer, woman farmer). You also need to make your digital story in the **same language** (both oral and written).



What do they need to know?

Is your digital story to show project donors how farmers are marketing their cattle? Maybe it is to show your colleagues some innovative things your farmers are doing? If your story is for farmers, is it to introduce a new idea like using forages, or to show technical details like how to de-worm and vaccinate livestock? These audiences will need to see different information. You have to decide on your audience and the best information to present to them.



Which farmer to choose?

Once you know your audience, you can think about who would be the best farmer to use. You need to think carefully about which farmers to select for digital stories. The farmer has to be gaining **significant benefits**. For example, maybe they have made enough profit to build a new house or buy a motorbike, or they have enough time to start other enterprises, or they are able to send the children to school. Perhaps they are doing some interesting things with livestock production (eg changing from breeding pigs to buying in and fattening pigs for the market or housing goats and using the manure to make fertiliser).

The farmer also needs to have **good examples** to photograph for the story. You may need to check that the farmer has good examples to show when you are setting up the interview.

Gathering Resources

Setting up the Interview and photo session

Once you have decided on a suitable farmer to interview, contact them to ask if they are willing to participate. Explain what a Digital Story is and what the topic for this one is. Tell them why you think they would be a good subject and who the audience is.

Explain what is involved (eg. interview, looking at their production techniques) and how long it will take (eg. 2 to 3 hours). Ask the farmer's permission to take photos and to record what they say.

Offer payment for their time if this is possible. Make an appointment to do the interview. You will be photographing them doing their usual livestock work, so you will need to come at the time of day these jobs are done.

Language

It is very important to use the farmer's language. You may need to find someone from the village to translate, or take another extension officer with you.

What to take to the Interview

1. At least two people: One to do the interview, one to take photos. You will also need a translator if you don't speak the same language as the farmer.
2. A digital camera (make sure the lens is clean, it has plenty of memory for photos, a charged battery and spare battery, and that your photographer knows how to use it!).
3. A recorder to record the farmer talking OR notepad and pens (be prepared to take careful notes of what the farmer says).
4. Payment or a gift for the farmer's time.



Doing an Interview

- **Always be polite** and start by thanking the farmer for assisting with making the digital story.
- **Have your list of questions** with you so that you can check that you have covered everything.
- However, don't just stick to the questions, be prepared to follow up if things are not clear or you notice something interesting (eg. Why did you do that? What happened then? Where did you get that idea/information?)
- **Ask the farmer to show you everything** they have done and the steps they have taken. Ask them to do their usual livestock jobs as you go:
 - ~ Walk around with them and look.
 - ~ Imagine that you are a farmer yourself and want to do this too – what would you need to know?
 - ~ Take photos as you go. Try to photograph the farmer doing the jobs. Ask him/her to pause for photographs so that you can get the best photograph you can.
 - ~ Be enthusiastic and positive to encourage the farmer to be frank.
- **When you have finished**, thank the farmer for their time and tell them you will ask them to check the digital story when you have



finished, before it is shown to other farmers. Give them the payment or a present.

What to ask the farmer

For a Digital Case Study:

Family information:

- ? Record the farmer's name, village, ethnic group, number of family members – children, men and women. Ask who does the labour.

Before they joined the project:

- ? Ask farmers about their livelihood situation before joining the project eg Livelihood condition of families, crops and animal production, labor, family income. What kind of problems did they have? Why did they decide to participate with project?

What they did:

- ? What activities did farmers do? (ie pasture growing, vaccination)
- ? How did they do each activity? (**show each step** from starting to the end).
- ? Did they do anything innovative, different or creative?
- ? What was their kip input, output and profit? (ie cost of buying, cost of raising/fattening, price received)

The benefits of what they did:

- ? What were the benefits? (Eg labour saving, time saving, increased income, reduced disease, able to keep more livestock, better education for children, investment)
- ? How have they spent the profit? (Eg build a new house, buy a motorbike etc)
- ? What changes did farmers make along the way to their livestock management?
- ? What kind of problems did they solve?

Planning for the future:

- ? What plans have the family made for the next year and beyond?
- ? How do they plan to help other families or villages?

For a Technical Digital Story:

Background information:

- ? Record the farmer's name, village, ethnic group, number of family members – children, men and women.

- ? How long has the farmer been doing this activity? Why did they start? What makes this a beneficial activity?

What tools, equipment or other inputs are needed for this activity?

- ? Did the farmer make these things? How long did it take and what materials did they use? Where did they find out how to do that? Did they do anything innovative or different? What would they do differently next time?
- ? Did the farmer buy these things? Where did they buy them? How much did they cost?
- ? What are the good points about these things? What are the bad points?

Do the activity, step-by-step.

- ? How does the farmer do the activity? Ask the farmer to **show each step** from starting to the end. Why do they do each step the way they do? Have they tried other ways? What happened?
- ? When is this activity done in the seasonal calendar? What has to be done before the farmer does this activity? What happens after this activity is done?

Taking Photos

Take plenty of photos while you are there: you could easily take up to 70 photos to choose from later. Ask the farmer if you can come back another day to take more photos if necessary (once you are making the digital story you might find you have missed something important). Try also to organize to come back in different seasons to take more photos as things change over time.



Good case study photos show the farmer and their activities

Things to photograph for a digital case study are:

- **Introductory photos** – the farmer’s village, house, family members.

- **'Before' photos** – livestock roaming free, animals in poor condition, farmer with only a few animals etc
- **'What the farmer did' photos** - the animals, pastures, animal housing, water systems, the farmer being active- preparing the soil, sowing forages, feeding livestock, cutting forages, vaccinating, collecting seed, collecting manure etc
- **Benefit photos** – the farmer building a new house, the farmer's children going to school, something the farmer bought with profits, livestock in good condition etc.

Remember to make sure the farmer is in most of the photos! Ask staff to step out of photos: it is the farmer the audience want to see.



Things to photograph for a Technical digital story include:

- The **tools and equipment** needed for the job (eg: vaccinating needles and syringe). They can be grouped together and laid out on a plain background to photograph, and photographed singly.
- The **details of packaging** to show farmers what to buy (eg. A vaccine bottle or package showing the label and the contents)
- The **details and finished item of structures** (eg. Pig or chicken housing). You might take photos of the whole structure, then the floor, walls and roof, and close-up photos of how they are held together).
- **The farmer working at the job.** Take wide photos showing the whole scene and close photos of details. For example you might take wide photos of the farmer catching an animal, then the farmers hands close-up holding the animal, then the farmers hands close-up holding the animal, then the hands vaccinating, showing where the needle goes).



Basic rules of good photography

Put your subject at ease – be careful not to scare the farmer with photography – use the zoom so you don't always have to be close.

Focus – hold the camera steady. Make sure your subject doesn't move suddenly. Check there is good light on the subject (turn the flash on).

Light the subject – stand with your back to the sun when taking the photo. Make sure the subject is not in shadow. Check that the subject has light on them - use the flash if in doubt.

Frame the subject – Be aware of what you are trying to say with your photo. The main subject should be the majority of the photo, and everything else in the photo should relate to that subject. Onlookers, for example, should not be included.

Making your Digital Story

Organise your information

- The information you have collected is in question and answer form. Now is the time to change it into story format.
- Remind yourself of the point of your story. What is your story about? When you can say what this story is about in one or two sentences, you are ready to organize the information you have so that it is all relevant. You will easily see that some of the information you have collected is just not needed to tell this story.
- For a Digital Case Study story, write out the information you have collected in the following sections:
 - Introduction** – use the family information to introduce the farmer's situation.
 - Before** – what the family did before making the changes.
 - What he/she did** – Outline what the farmer actually did, step-by-step. Include details about input/outputs and profits if the farmer has them.
 - Benefits** – the results and benefits for the family
 - Plans for the future.**
- For a Technical digital story, write out the information in the following sections:
 - Introduction** – briefly introduce the farmer and their experience with this particular aspect, especially the benefits it brings.
 - Materials and equipment** – write out the things a farmer needs to do this activity.



Step-by Step – how the activity is done.

Conclusion – what happens after the activity is done.

Tip! If there are other, equally good methods/ tools/equipment for doing the same thing, you could mention them also and take a photo of an example from another farmer or staff member.

- Aim to write no more than 300 words, or about 1 A4 page of script.
- Read the information out loud. How does it sound? You may need to change the words so that it doesn't sound too formal. Make it sound as though you are telling someone, not reading a report.
- Time your story. It should be about 3 minutes long. If it is too long, read through and cut out any extra information. A Farmer Case Study story should not have too much technical detail – leave this for a Technical story. Equally, a Technical story should show one aspect in detail, for example growing forages (preparing soil, sowing, weed control, harvesting) feeding livestock (harvesting, preparing forages, mixing rations, feeding to stock) vaccinating cattle/pigs/chickens or building livestock pens and housing.



Putting the story together

When you are putting your story together, you will see that a digital story is a very powerful way of showing and telling. Make it short and to-the-point, so that your audience can get the information without getting bored, or sleepy! You don't have to say everything, because you have photos to show. You don't have to show everything, because you can say some things. It is the combination of pictures and written and spoken words that make it so powerful.

Open up the digital story making program on the computer (eg Microsoft Photo Story). Whichever program you are using will have its own step-by-step instructions to help you to:

- **Import pictures** – look at the story you have written and find the best pictures to show important aspects of the story. Import all of the pictures you think you might use (you can always delete them later). A 3 minute story usually has about 30 to 40 photos. Arrange them in order to match the story.
- Make sure the photos are in focus and have good contrast and light. Edit each photo so that they are all the best you can make them, for example by removing red eyes and cropping black areas if you have rotated photos to 'portrait' view. Keep photos at high resolution (2MB or more) for best quality.
- **Add headings** – type in headings on suitable photos, such as the title and place of the story on the opening photo, a thank-you to the farmer for participating and your name and date of producing the story on the last photo. **Be sure headings are in the language of your audience.**

- The story title should immediately ‘catch’ or interest your audience, and give the essence of what the story is about. For example: ‘Three Months for Pig Fattening – a farmers story of the benefits of growing fodder’, or ‘Fast Pig Fattening – how to grow, harvest and feed Stylo fodder to fatten pigs’.
- **Narrate the story** – speak the story you have written out into the computer’s microphone, making sure that the pictures change in time with the story. Speak slowly, very clearly and loudly when recording. Try to use the same tone and pitch for each photo, and always leave a short pause between photos. Some photos may not need any words at all. **The narration must be in the same language your audience uses.**
- **Edit the movement of photos** - Change the way the photos open and close, and the length of time they stay on the screen using the photo editing tools. Tips include choosing only one or two methods of moving from one photo to another, and setting the finishing position of the photo to focus on the most important element. If a photo has no narration to go with it, about **4 seconds** is long enough to see it properly. A photo with narration should stay on screen for a short pause before and after the words.
- **Add a soundtrack** – Background music is a special addition to a digital story which keeps peoples attention even when there are no words being spoken. If you can find a CD or recording on the Internet which relates to the people in the story, use that. The soundtrack should be soft and in the background, so that the audience can still hear the spoken words clearly.
- **Save your story in the appropriate format** – When you are working within the digital story making program, you are working with a project file (with Microsoft Photostory this is a wp3 file). The project file is editable, so that you can always go back and make changes.
- Once the story is finished you will need to save in non-editable formats according to how you want to share the story. If the story will be viewed by others on computer, then save in computer format (best quality is ‘Profile for computers – 4 – 1024 x 768’). If the story will be produced as a DVD, then save in DVD format (best quality for PAL DVD is 720 x 576).
- **Show your story to your colleagues** – make any changes necessary then save it to a DVD.

Tip! Save your project file frequently as you work. Putting your story together is very time consuming and it is easy to lose hours of work!

Check your digital story with the farmer

Sit down and watch the DVD with your farmer. Check all of the information with him/her. Make any changes necessary. Save the finished story to DVD and have copies made.

Your digital story is now ready to distribute!

Appendix 1:

Worksheet – Who is your story for?

This story is being made for (circle):

Farmers Elders Field Workers Management
Media

Donors Other _____

Where do they live? _____

Are they likely to have access to a DVD player? Yes/No

What ethnic group/s are they? _____

What language do they usually speak? _____

Do they confidently read and write? Yes /No

If yes, what script do they usually use? _____

Are they mostly: Men/Women/a mix of both?

What factors make it hard for them to implement changes?

What cultural aspects may be important in presenting information?

Appendix 2:
Worksheet – What do they need to know?

My audience's interest is in:

My audience wants to:

My audience needs to know:

My purpose in making this story is to:

This purpose would be best met by:

Overview/introductory information Technical/ 'how to' information

This information will be about:

Appendix 3:

Essential elements of an effective Digital Story

Equal focus is given to **planning** (clarifying the audience and the purpose), **gathering resources** (relevant information and good photographs) and **making the story** (technical editing).

Narration and written script are in the **language of the audience**. Narration is spoken in a friendly, personal way.

The technical production is good:

Photos represent the important messages of the story well. They are clear, focussed and have good contrast.

Headings are short and to-the-point. They improve the story, and are coloured and placed so that they are easy to read.

Transitions between photos have all been edited so that they are uniform and effective, not distracting. Photos focus in on the subject and have no black sections or large areas of irrelevant material. Photos stay on the screen for a minimum of 3 seconds.

Narration is loud and clear, with no background noise. Narration flows from photo to photo without varying in volume or pace.

Background music suits the theme, is low and not distracting.

The whole story is **no longer than 3 - 4 minutes**.

Every element of the story **fits the intended purpose**.

Every element of the story **suits the intended audience**.