Stories of Change (SoC) Guidebook and Template

INTRODUCTION: Stories of Change to capture intangible changes and significant examples of innovation journeys in DeSIRA

DeSIRA projects are complex research and innovation projects and as such they ambition to generate several changes at different levels of the agricultural innovation systems in countries. In some cases, they are focused on innovation niches and experimental research work, but in other cases, they deploy multi-level and multi-dimensional activities to generate systemic changes.

The DeSIRA projects are multi-partner in nature. They experiment and put into practice multiple partnership patterns between researchers and other innovation actors, in highly diverse contexts, and while facing very complex problems.
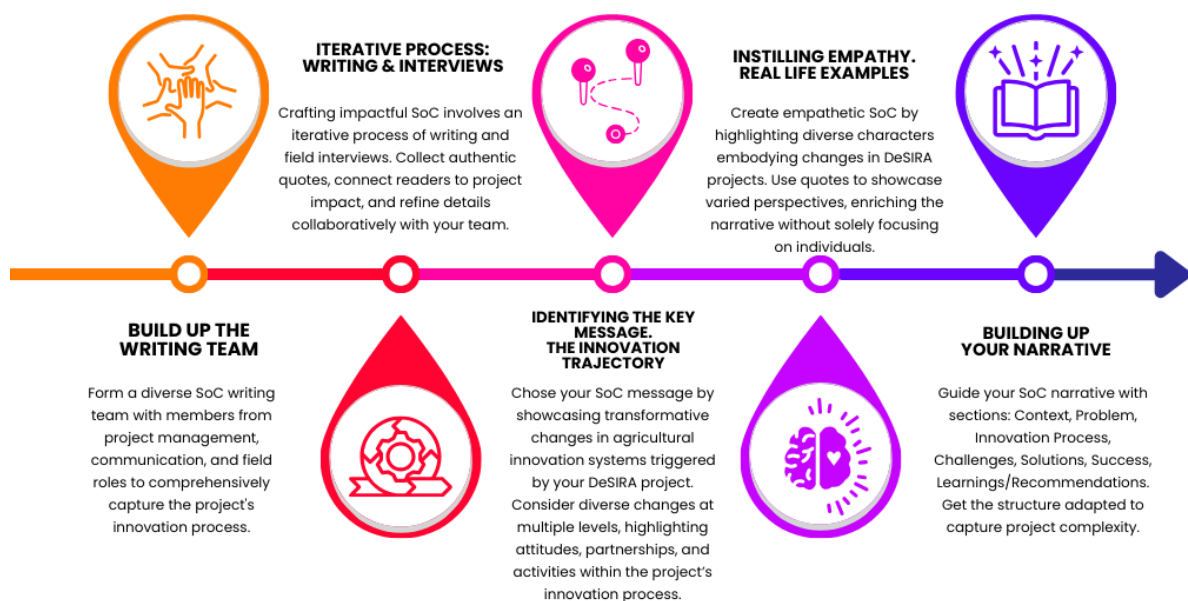
Stories of change (SoC) are a powerful tool **to illustrate and document significant changes that are triggered by DeSIRA projects**, in terms of behaviors, attitudes, knowledge, and practices, which often need to be more easily captured using quantitative metrics. SoC aim at identifying not only the changes that have occurred but also **the reasons and the processes leading to these changes** at various levels where projects intervene.

The SoC will help to capture the diversity of changes that were put in place to make research work for innovation, toward impacts in an era of complexity, emergency, and uncertainties.

STEP-BY-STEP Guidebook and Template

This is the template we propose you use for writing your story of change. Along this document you will find guidance to complete it:

*Please consider that as writers, you'll have the key role of crafting your project's Stories of Change (SoC), but you will not be left alone, **your cluster facilitator from the DeSIRA-LIFT team, will be your guiding companion** throughout this creative and analytical experience, providing support and insights at every step. Expect an iterative writing process. After having your first finished draft, there will be an **editing phase** to refine and polish the narrative.*

	Building up the writing team ● Writing your project's SoC is not an individual task. **Establish your writing team** by carefully selecting individuals from your project who provide a comprehensive understanding not only of its objectives and innovations processes but also of the field implementation. It's crucial to have a diverse team that can identify the key changes that, in your Story of Change, will illustrate the actual innovation trajectory of your project. ● **An ideal team** would be made up of **a member of the project's management team** to have the full view of the objectives and outcomes that characterize the innovation processes, a **member from the communication staff** to bring expertise in crafting engaging narratives and communicating impact effectively, and **someone actively engaged with stakeholders in the field**, for example, an innovation facilitator, to provide firsthand insights into the real-life experiences, challenges and successes of project implementation. This team will draft an initial narrative frame of your story: key elements, key messages, and key actors. You will find further guidance below.
	An iterative process between writing and conducting interviews of stakeholders ● In the process of crafting impactful SoC, *conducting interviews of stakeholders of the innovation process* will be a capital task. Based on your draft narrative frame, these interviews serve as the means to collect authentic quotes that document the reality of the project and bring it to life. They also enable connecting readers to the genuine impact of the project. Getting the view from the field will also help to better understand and present how the project evolved and how the innovation trajectory unfolded. It also depicts how stakeholders perceive and own the change(s). At the end of this document, we propose an interview guide to *harvest quotes and catch key elements of the project's innovation process.* ● Based on the draft narrative frame of your story and the first round of interviews on the field, you will share information among the writing team and together you'll refine and adjust the narrative frame and define which points you still need to dig up for outlining your SoC.
	Identifying the key message of your story ● Taking into account the refined narrative established in the previous step, identify or confirm the key message of your story. Your SoC will highlight **how** your DeSIRA project enables and triggers transformative changes within the agricultural innovation system. What is the innovation process that your project is bringing forward? ● Think about the question of **why** it makes sense to share this SoC with others, considering the target audience is broad and includes peer researchers, innovators and beneficiaries in your project, policymakers, donors and external organizations.

- Formulate this sentence to get it clear: «My SoC contributes to having a better comprehensive understanding of [specific **change** described on your SoC], in doing so it illustrates transformative impacts of research-driven agricultural innovation of DeSIRA projects.».

  Examples of changes:

  - Changes in attitude, mindset, and behavior that researchers and their partners had to undergo to be able to innovate differently.

  - Changes like research partners (NGOs, civil society, private sector).

  - Changes in terms of organizing the collaboration between partners, such as new partnership agreements with other actors (formal or informal, alliance, contracts, consortium, networks, etc.).

  - Changes in the nature of activities (more training, coaching, incubation, etc.).

  - Changes in the innovation models (more participatory, open, iterative, etc.).

  Note that in DeSIRA projects and due to their nature, change most often refers to various interrelated or correlated changes (those mentioned above, for instance) with some degree of causality (one change leads to another or happened because of a previous one) happening at various levels and with various intensities. The levels referred to are that of the innovation niches (grassroots, farmers, farmer communities), that of the Innovation Support Services and ecosystem (innovation facilitators, incubators, agencies, innovation platforms, local governments, etc.) and that of the Innovation System per se (government, international partners, donors, etc.).

  *Consider the fact that **your story illustrates the innovation trajectory in your project**: how it unfolded, what were the key steps and situations that provided progress and change.*

Instilling empathy:

- Remember that **Stories of change are human-centered**. You must create an empathetic connection with the readers through real-life examples. Given the multi-stakeholder nature of DeSIRA projects, changes are often interrelated and embodied by different characters engaged in discussions or contact with each other. These phenomena are particularly interesting as they characterize or underlie the described change. Complex processes may involve multiple characters, enriching the narrative. You'll need to identify the key **collective actors** through which you can communicate the main message of your story. See the example on our Community website that quotes different people to illustrate different processes. While **avoiding a purely personalized description**, you are encouraged to highlight diverse perspectives from different actors by using their "quotes".
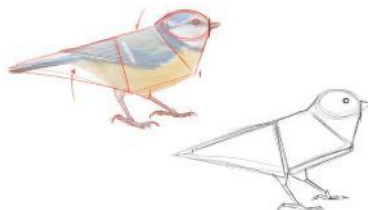
Building up your narrative

- **Keep it brief:** Stay within 1500-2000 words. Limiting the story length will force you to be concise. A short story will more easily keep the reader engaged, it will allow a focused understanding of the key message without overwhelming with excessive or accessory details. **Get focused on the key elements** that are "useful" and needed for explaining the change.

  Remember what was said during the training sessions:

  Get to the heart of the matter

- **Follow this structure:** Here are **the different sections** that you will develop for building up your narrative. Please consider that these part names won't be retained, the intent is that you replace them with informative titles that will ensure a reader-friendly experience through your story.

  1. Context
  2. Problem statement
  3. Innovation process (linked to your project's Theory of change)
     - Challenges (Crisis)
     - Solutions implemented (Adjustments)
     - Successes / Outcomes (Climax)
  4. Learnings and/or recommendations

NOTE: *While we are presenting a **simple linear structure for pedagogical purposes**, it's essential to acknowledge the inherent complexity of DeSIRA projects. Real-world projects often experience multifactor changes, usually requiring strategic readjustments and even moving backward and forward iteratively. Please use this suggested structure as a flexible guide, you are encouraged to adapt it to authentically capture the nuanced nature of your project's transformative journeys.*

1. **Context:** Begin by introducing the context which sets the scene of your story. In which country and region your story take place, what are the key features you need to highlight to help the reader get into your story? You may want to provide a brief overview of your DeSIRA project. Present the objective and approach you are using for making agricultural innovation work.

   Consider that after the title, the first sentences of your story are **your second critical hook** to keep your reader's attention. Think about **your opening lines** in such a way that they spark curiosity. Offer a glimpse into the story's essence,

and trigger readers to go further into the narrative that unfolds within your text.

2. **Problem statement:** Elaborate on the specific problems addressed by your DeSIRA project. Keep in mind the characters of your story, how do they embrace these problems? How do these problems represent a challenge for your characters? Enable your reader to step into the shoes of the main characters of your story. Provide the key details that allow empathy and resonate with the experience presented in your narrative.

3. **Innovation process:** Describe your project's unique approach to address the problem statement. What has been your project's role in providing levers that your characters have used or contributed to design for facing the challenges? Use plain and straightforward language, avoiding technical terms and academic jargon. Always think that your reader does not know your project and that you are writing for a diverse audience. Imagine explaining your project to someone unfamiliar with it and consider using relatable metaphors or analogies to explain complex concepts. Continuously ask yourself, «Would a random person understand what I'm trying to convey as a message?».
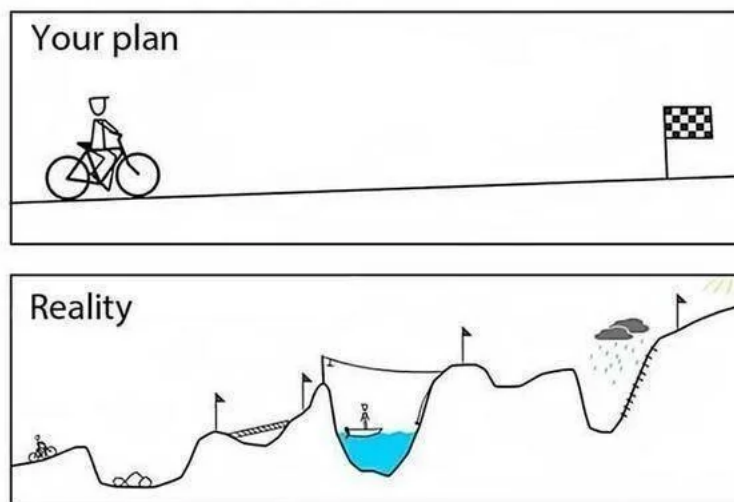
   a. **Challenges (Crisis):** Things never come out as they were planned initially, and adaptations are necessary. See for instance the webinar on "Innovating in unpredictable situations: constraints and opportunities for DeSIRA projects" on our Community Website. Discuss here critical crises/challenges faced during the implementation of your project. This could include unforeseen obstacles, external factors, or internal issues that require adaptive management. These events represent turning points for the project that enabled a positive learning outcome. Present the reasons that lead to the adaptation.

   b. **Solutions implemented:** Remember the narrative structure found in fairy tales presented in our training: the main character always collaborates with others to devise strategies and overcome challenges. In this section, you will analyse and

illustrate how your project team, stakeholders, and partners worked together to implement effective solutions. Showcase instances where collaborative efforts led to innovative solutions.

c. **Climax/Success:** In this section, you present the changes highlighted on your SoC. Describe the positive outcomes that signify progress towards the project goals and mainly, the reasons and mechanisms that enabled these outcomes, particularly how the characters in your story have experienced these and own them. Describe interactions and conversations that took place with them, milestones and joint achievements. Remember that one of the SoC's added value is to be a tool to capture intangible phenomena. **Take the time to identify them and describe them comprehensively.** In this description, you will likely link challenges and successes. You may therefore consider articulating challenges and changes/solutions implemented (points presented just above) for the different outcomes if it makes them more understandable.

4. **Learnings and Recommendations:** Extracting Lessons. Come back to your key message: **why** it makes sense to share this SoC with others. Provide your practical insights about your SoC which offer learning opportunities and hints the way forward for your project. Don't forget to promote reflection on both positive results and circumstances where results were not achieved but led to important lessons.

● **After having written your Story:**

5. Find a **compelling title**. Think that the title is the main hook you have for capturing your readers' attention. It can be something surprising, an original metaphor, or a thought-provoking question that triggers curiosity.
6. Find **2 photos** that can illustrate your story (format: use high-resolution images 1280x720 pixels, and common high-quality formats .jpeg or .png).
7. Add **quotes** that you have harvested using boxes as a means to support your narrative.
8. In the same line, consider inserting **boxes** to single out a specific point of importance that may not directly or easily fit into your narrative but needs to be brought to the attention of the reader. This may be the specific role of a partner organization, a policy decision, or a particular event.

PROPOSAL OF INTERVIEW GUIDE:

First of all, present the *purpose of the interview (getting the views of stakeholders in the project about how it went and what changes it has brought) and ask the interviewee to introduce her/himself*.

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself and your role in the project?

Use some first *open questions* to build the confidence of the interviewee, show you are listening to what they have to say (and you are not steering the interview towards specific answers) and trigger their positive view of the project:

2. How has your experience been with the project so far?
3. What aspects of the project are you most passionate about?

Refine the **portrait of the interviewee**, with these questions you'll help set a nuanced testimony from your interviewee:

4. How long have you been involved in the project, and what motivated your participation?
5. Can you describe your key responsibilities within the project?
6. In your own words, how would you summarize the main objectives and goals of the project?

Harvesting quotes and spotting key elements of the project's innovation process:

● *Making it concrete:*
7. Could you share a **specific moment or experience** from the project that left a lasting impression on you?
8. Are there any personal **stories** or feedback from stakeholders that stand out to you?
9. Can you share a **success story** that reflects the positive outcomes of the project?

● *Depicting challenges:*
10. What **challenges** have you encountered during the project, and how did you address them?
11. In front of these challenges, were there **instances** where the project had to adapt its approach or strategy? How did you navigate these **adaptations**? How would you say the project team navigated these **adaptations**?

● *Analysing collaborations/partnerships:*
12. Could you talk about any significant **collaborations** or partnerships that contributed to the project's success? How did these collaborations enhance the overall impact of the project?
13. How have you witnessed the project **evolve**?

● *Innovation process and impact:*
14. Can you reflect on the **transformative** aspects of the project within the community?
15. From your perspective, how has the project **impacted** different stakeholders, including beneficiaries and the local community, but also other stakeholders such as researchers, service providers, traders, and policymakers at the local and national levels?

● *Learnings and recommendations:*
16. What did you **learn** from overcoming challenges in the project? And globally, what key learnings have you gained from your experience in the project?
17. What are your aspirations for **the future** of the project?
18. Is there **anything else** you would like to share or any thoughts you would like to add?