



Stories that Change Our Lives—Learning Conversations

Many of us learn through stories—in fact, some of our best learning moments stay long in our memories because we experienced them through a story shared by a friend, a teacher or a favorite relative. These stories provoked our thinking. They were relevant to our lives. Through them, we saw the world differently. Some of us may have even changed our actions because of a few good stories. Learning Conversations are stories. They are short parables with many right answers. Learning Conversations are enjoyable to facilitate. They prompt discussion and inspire action, opening new vistas for villagers to help themselves.

Learning Conversations are simple, 30-minute group discussions.¹ A trained facilitator uses a 2- to 3-page Learning Conversation Guide to introduce thought-provoking ideas to a group on a specific topic relevant to the lives of its members. The Learning Conversation Guides contain a brief story or activity about a problem to solve. The group hears the problem and discusses possible solutions. The group then discusses how to apply the solutions to similar problems faced by their own members. At the end of the discussion, the members are encouraged to make a commitment to action.

However, more than addressing any one specific issue, Learning Conversations present the group a problem-solving process that allows them to explore any issue they choose to address. The process of identifying a problem or issue of concern, reflecting on its causes and consequences, considering possible solutions and motivating to action can be applied to whatever question is brought to or raised by the group. Members own the process and, thus, employ it to address evolving needs and concerns specific to their local context and experience. Because of the Learning Conversation methodology's simplicity, flexibility, and replicability, it is an excellent tool for institutions seeking to support their clients in behavior change.

Learning Conversations offer a number of benefits to organizations that use them:

- They represent a multipurpose tool that is easily disseminated at low cost.
- The process used to facilitate activities and discussions with groups is relevant to a variety of settings.
- They can be used with any group that comes together on a regular basis for a specific purpose.

The following are the Learning Conversation Guides in English:

- *Greatest Hits 1.2 – Solve Village Problems, Promote Peace and Civil Society, Link to Rights and Resources*
- *Increase Savings*
- *Increase Income*
- *HIV/AIDS and Malaria (forthcoming)*
- *Malaria (forthcoming)*

Freedom from Hunger plans to develop more Learning Conversations in response to identified needs by our partners and their clients.

¹ Freedom from Hunger and CRS India applied years of experience in adult education, group-based learning, and credit and savings systems to develop simple tools that would help local organizations foster self-help among the SHGs.

Example Learning Conversation: The Money Lender, Greatest Hits 1.2

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the Learning Conversation, participants will have:

- Identified ways the group can help members reduce costly debt
- Committed to assist members in reducing moneylender loans

PREPARATION

Before you go to the community to facilitate this Learning Conversation, be sure to:

- Make sure this topic is relevant to the group. You can ask, “Do villagers take loans from moneylenders?”
- Translate interest rates mentioned in the story into language group members understand.
- Read through the Learning Conversation
- Determine how you will help members feel comfortable to participate.
- Practice telling the stories in a lively way to a friend or co-worker.
- Remember to use pairs or small groups for better discussions.

1. Two Stories

The Story of Neela’s Group

Neela is a group member. The group gives loans to its members. Members pay 2% per month on each loan. Many group members, including Neela, use loans from the moneylender too. The money is fast and easy to get. He charges 10% per month. Some moneylenders loan seeds. For example Neela recently purchased 20 kilograms of seeds but could not pay cash. The shop owner told Neela she could pay back 24 kilograms after the harvest. Neela feels that all her money from the harvest goes to the moneylender. So little is left for her. She is not alone. Another member of her group had to give her land to the moneylender because she could not pay back a loan.

The Story of Gita’s Group

Gita is a group member too. Gita and her group members used to take expensive loans from the moneylender but they were losing their harvests and their land. Gita’s group decided that whenever a group member was thinking of taking a loan from the moneylender, she should stop, and come to the group to discuss her problem. Now Gita and her group always come to the group first when they have a problem and need a loan. The group lends its savings to members who need loans, and also helps members think of other solutions to their problems. Gita’s group has also taken a loan from the bank that has helped members stay away from the moneylender.

2. First Discussion

Invite the group to sit in pairs (2 people). Ask the following question:

“What do you think about when you heard these stories?”

Give the pairs 5 minutes to discuss. After 5 minutes bring everyone into one large group to share their ideas. Facilitate a lively discussion. Get as many members to talk as possible. Congratulate the group members for their good ideas.

3. Second Discussion

Invite members to sit in small groups of 3 to 4 people. Ask the following question:

“Based on what you learned from discussing the stories, what can we all do?”

Give the small groups 5 minutes to discuss. After 5 minutes bring everyone into one large group to share their ideas. Facilitate a lively discussion. Get as many members to share as possible. Congratulate the group members for their good ideas.

4. Commitment

Ask several members:

“How do you plan to use the ideas we discussed?”

Praise the members for their ideas. Ask everyone who will commit to try at least one idea to raise her hand. Invite everyone to applaud.

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