USING SENSEMAKER® TO UNDERSTAND GIRLS' LIVES:

LESSONS LEARNT FROM GirlHub | MAY 2014

Over the past two years Girl Hub has been working with the innovative research methodology, SenseMaker®, to help generate girl-centred evidence. This brief gives a snapshot of what SenseMaker is, examples of Girl Hub's experiences in practice, and reflections on implementation.

WHAT IS SENSEMAKER®?

SenseMaker® is a narrative-based research methodology that enables the capture and analysis of a large quantity of stories in order to understand complex change. It is a form of meta analysis of qualitative data that bridges a gap between case studies and large-sample survey data. The approach offers a methodological breakthrough for recognising patterns and trends in perceptions, behaviours and relationships.

SenseMaker® draws upon anthropology, complexity theory and neuroscience. The methodology involves collecting large numbers of short stories that, together, create a nuanced picture of a given topic, in the same way that many pixels come together to produce a clear image. SenseMaker® can also assist with early recognition of weak signals of changing social dynamics, and with the identification of emerging or outlier factors that deviate from normal trends and patterns.

Girl Hub first used the methodology in Rwanda in 2011 as it aligns with the value that Girl Hub places on using research processes with girls at the centre – elevating their voices and recognising their expertise in their own lives. Using the SenseMaker® approach, storytellers conduct the primary analysis of their own stories, greatly reducing the potential for interpretive bias and encouraging stakeholder involvement.

"The way the questions were presented is very good because it lets the respondents decide on the story to share"
- Female respondent, Ethiopia

HOW DOES IT WORK?

THE STORY PROMPT

The SenseMaker® process starts with a story prompt. In Rwanda and Ethiopia, the story prompt used in initial pilots asked respondents to share a true story of their choosing about an experience in a girl's life. In Rwanda, Girl Hub has also asked caregivers for stories describing a moment or event when they felt encouraged or concerned about the situation for girls.

The open-ended nature of the prompt allows storytellers to share stories of their own choosing and enables researchers to collect narratives on the same topic from a variety of perspectives. Each respondent also gives his or her story a unique title. Following this, respondents convey the meaning of their stories through completing a series of analytical questions called the 'signification framework'.

SIGNIFICATION FRAMEWORK

The signification framework is a set of questions based on predefined topics of interest for investigation that allows the storyteller to analyse his or her own story. Girl Hub first developed these topics during participatory research with girls and continues to evolve them to address specific research questions. Patterns and linkages later emerge during the analytical process, making sense of the diverse and complex stories being shared.

THE FRAMEWORK IS BASED ON FOUR TYPES OF QUESTION:

1. TRIADS:

The corners of a triangle correspond with three elements that describe an overarching concept such as 'decision making' or 'behaviour types'. The storyteller places a mark within the triangle, based on how strongly they feel each element is present within their story. The diagram below illustrates a triad from Ethiopia.

In your story, a girl is…

OBEDIENT

INDEPENDENT   **VULNERABLE**
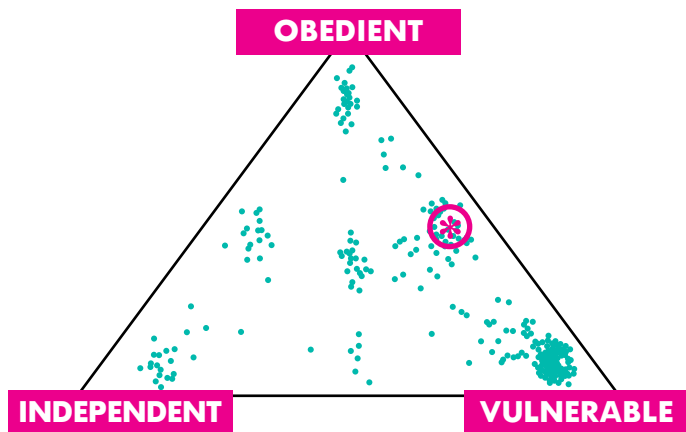
✳ LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

She was 14 years old and she was born and raised in a rural area. She was a student but her father agreed to give her to an old man through marriage. The girl was a clever student. She didn't know that it was her wedding. Even when she asked her parents about the preparations they were making, they told her it was some occasion. She suspected that it was something big. She went to school knowing that she was going to be married. She told her friend, whom she loved and trusted. Her friends brought the police and her teacher also advised the family. Then the family agreed to stop the wedding. So the girl was very happy and her friends were also happy.
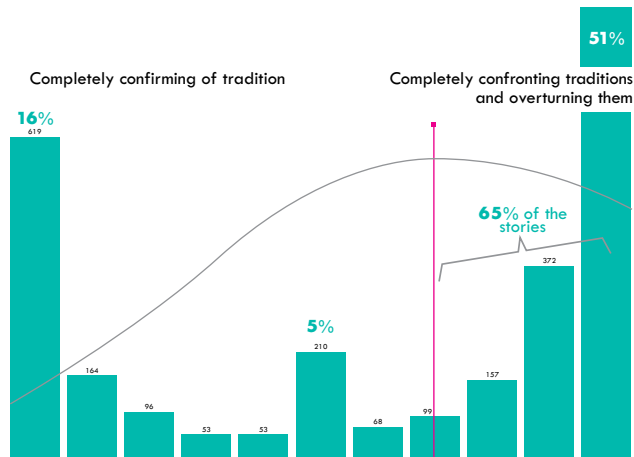*The girl continued her education.*

2. DYADS OR POLARITIES:

The storyteller locates their story on a spectrum between two extremes.

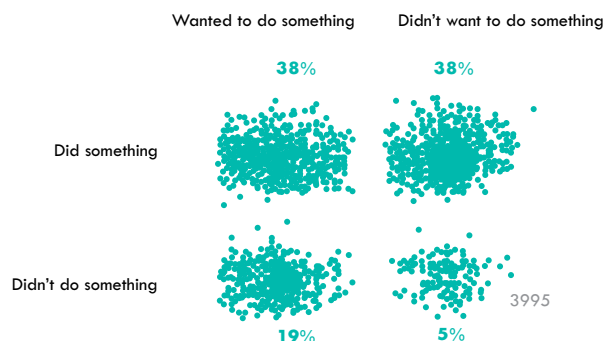**Your story shows behaviour or life path for girls that is…**

N/A ▪

Completely confirming of tradition | Confronting traditions and overturning them

Your story shows behaviour or life path for girls that is…

Completely confirming of tradition

Completely confronting traditions and overturning them

16% 619

65% of the stories

51%

5% 210

164   96   53   53   68   99   157   372

3. STONES:

The storyteller places a labelled 'stone' onto a grid or matrix where the storyteller feels it best fits in relation to their story. Below is an example from Rwanda.

In your story, a girl is…

	Wanted to do something	Didn't want to do something
Did something	38%	38%
Didn't do something	19%	5%

3995

4. MULTIPLE CHOICE AND DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS:

These questions are critical to allow for digging deeper into the patterns. For example, storytellers may be asked about the main topic of their story (marriage, education, etc.) or the main emotions that were present in their story (isolation, determination, etc.). These questions provide filters that are useful for disaggregation and further analysis.

The analytical software 'digests' the stories and presents the data in visual and quantifiable patterns. The ability to refer between patterns and stories and to probe individual narratives is one of the many useful functions of the SenseMaker® analytical software.

COLLECTION METHODS

Stories can be collected on paper or on a smartphone or tablet with an iOS or Android app. One of the benefits of using a mobile app for data collection is instant uploading of data that reduces the likelihood of data entry error. Girl Hub has also tested both one-on-one story collection and group collection, which can be more efficient in gathering multiple stories at once but is more suitable for respondents with high literacy levels.

THE SOFTWARE

SenseMaker® uses two unique software applications for data entry and analysis. After developing the signification framework, an online data entry platform called Collector is created and assigned a specific project URL. For data collection with mobile devices where there is Internet access, data can be instantly entered and uploaded to the Collector site. If using paper-based collection, data will be entered manually and uploaded when the internet is available.

Once all story data has been uploaded, the SenseMaker® Explorer software contains a suite of tools for data analysis. The different tools allow for easy visual representation of data, which can also be exported as statistical data.

WHEN AND WHERE HAS GIRL HUB USED SENSEMAKER®?

In 2013, Girl Hub used hybrid data collection tools combining SenseMaker® with quantitative survey questions in Rwanda and Ethiopia for large-scale studies on societal attitudes and behaviours toward girls. The studies collected 2,700 stories from Ethiopia and 4,000 stories from Rwanda. In 2015, a second round of stories will be collected to analyse shifts in story patterns and survey responses in relation to exposure to Girl Hub activities.

Other examples of how Girl Hub has applied SenseMaker® include:

RWANDA

- Parental Perceptions of the '12+' mentorship programme for girls, November 2011 – February 2012. Sample: 389 girls and 1140 caregivers.
- Ni Nyampinga brand pilot study, 2013. The study served the dual purposes of determining whether SenseMaker® is useful for learning about attitudinal shifts relating to brand exposure and testing the viability of using iOS devices to capture stories in rural Rwanda. Sample: 143 girls

ETHIOPIA

- Pilot study to assess SenseMaker's® potential for use in Ethiopia, June – July 2012.
  Sample: 350 girls, boys and caregivers

FINDINGS EMERGING FROM ANALYSIS

Common themes emerging from the stories collected to date on girls' lives in Rwanda and Ethiopia include: the importance of education, prevalence of gender-based violence, rape, emotional and physical abuse, marriage and pregnancy, economic activity, and sexual and reproductive health choices.

RWANDA: 12+ STUDY

- The majority of stories were told about events that were common and harmful to girls; much fewer stories were 'common and good'.
- Many stories involved situations that were confronting rather than perpetuating traditions.
- The areas where girls and parents were viewed as having the most decision-making ability were education and health.
- The areas where boys/men had the most input were pregnancy and health, while they had the least input on work-related issues.

NI NYAMPINGA RESEARCH

- Girls were able to easily learn to use iPads and they found it to be a fun and enjoyable way to engage in data collection.
- Storytellers who had not heard of Ni Nyampinga did not tell stories about girls' confidence or stories about lasting improvement (those who had heard of Ni Nyampinga did).

TOLERANCE

There is a girl who got an unwanted pregnancy then her father beat her until leaders forbade him to beat the girl. Now, he no longer beats her and it has been a few days since she gave birth. At home, they gave her everything she wanted, she doesn't have a problem.

ETHIOPIA PILOT STUDY

- Half the stories were indexed as relating to girls' vulnerability and there were few stories about supportive friendships among girls, triangulating data from other sources on girls' social isolation.
- Storytellers in Ethiopia indicated that the two best ways to improve girls' lives were to increase their self-confidence and to improve girls' access to legal support.
- The emotions most commonly associated with stories about girls' lives were anger and sadness.

HOW THE STORIES HAVE INFLUENCED OUR PROGRAMMES

- Girl Hub has revised its advocacy and programme strategies to prioritise addressing violence against girls in Rwanda.
- The stories collected are being used to inform the storylines of a fictional behavioural change radio drama about the lives of teenage girls in Ethiopia, called Yegna.
- In Ethiopia, the SenseMaker® pilot also highlighted girls' migration as an emerging trend. The baseline study on attitudes and behaviours confirmed that migration is an increasingly important issue for girls in rural communities. As a result, Girl Hub Ethiopia is a partner on a multi-country research project to better understand girls' experiences of migration.

RESPONSES TO THE METHODOLOGY

- Girl respondents were so keen on the process that they spontaneously volunteered to help recruit more storytellers (snowball sampling).
- Respondents appreciated having the choice and space to share something of importance to them, in their own words. They were also curious to hear others' stories so there is an opportunity to use data to inspire community conversations and shift social norms.
- For Girl Hub, the focus on girls' voices has an added benefit of contributing to increasing girls' agency and improving the perception of girls in society. The research process promotes greater acceptance that 'everyone has a story to tell' that is relevant and valuable.
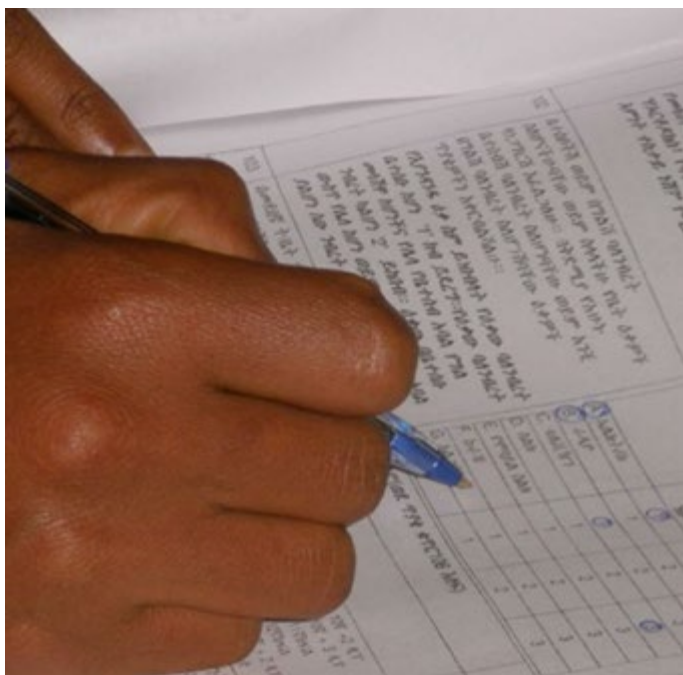
CHALLENGES

- Child protection. In inviting respondents to share stories of their choosing, some may use the opportunity to speak out about a trauma or abuse suffered by themselves, a friend or a family member. In such cases, Girl Hub follows the protocols of its Girl Safeguarding Policy.
- As this is a new methodology it has been challenging to find the right skill sets in country to manage and implement projects. An important element of piloting SenseMaker® in Rwanda and Ethiopia has been pairing local researchers with international experts to build in-country capacity for data collection and analysis.
- The story collection process requires interviewers to put aside certain qualitative research skills and refrain from asking probing questions that may bias the storyteller's responses to the signification framework.
- Ensuring that the signification framework is well understood by storytellers requires significant attention when pre-testing and refining the tool.

POVERTY

I was in school but later dropped out because my dad had died and mom didn't have enough means to cover my school fees. I am currently working on farms for money. I can't go back to school because my mom is an invalid, I am the one taking care of her and of the family; even my little siblings depend on me.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR SENSEMAKER® AT GIRL HUB

- Dissemination of the National Attitude Survey results in Rwanda and baseline study data on attitudes and behaviours in Ethiopia.
- Continuing to share stories back to girls and their communities to further validate, explain and challenge our analysis.
- Pilot SenseMaker® as a monitoring tool in the 12+ programming in Rwanda.
- Testing a new Android app for data collection, including audio capture of story narratives.
- Implementation of a study on girls' education and social exclusion in pastoralist communities in Ethiopia.

For more information on SenseMaker® visit:
http://www.sensemaker-suite.com
You can also access short videos on the theory behind the SenseMaker® methodology at the Cognitive Edge YouTube channel at:
https://www.youtube.com/user/CognitiveEdge