

## Story Gathering Guidance

Stand for Her Land (S4HL) gathers and shares stories which show impact, bring life to critical issues, motivate action, and amplify the voices of the people we aim to serve. We use photographs, video, and testimonials from women, men, and communities to explain how secure land rights for women can improve lives and livelihoods and prioritize actions to not do harm in our work.

When collecting stories, follow these best practices to collect good stories and protect the storyteller. You can learn more about how to ethically gather stories using the [Dignified Storytelling Handbook](#). Please read through this guide, and feel free to suggest any edits to Nicole ([nicolet@landesa.org](mailto:nicolet@landesa.org)).

**Please use this form to submit your stories to S4HL: <https://stand4herland.org/story-form/>**

This guide contains information on:

1. Whose story to collect
2. How to get good stories
3. Protecting the storyteller
4. Obtaining consent
5. Protecting yourself


### 1. Whose story to collect

- When thinking about story gathering, consider your goal. What do you want the reader to know or to do? How can you best illustrate this? Who is best placed to illustrate the impact you want to show? For example:
  - A mother with younger children is probably the best person to show you the impact on nutrition and on education etc.
  - A teacher or village elder in a community might be the best person to explain the impact on a community.
  - A partner might be the best person to illuminate the challenges and opportunities of our work.
  - A local police officer or village elder might be the best person to illuminate issues related to peace and security.

### 2. How to get good stories

- Establish a rapport - tell them about yourself, what your goals are, spend time to allow them to open up.
- Explain how important their experience is (“experience” can be a less intimidating word than “story”) and that sharing it empowers them to speak up and make a difference.

- Try to level the playing field. Sit on the same level. Do not wear sunglasses. Treat them as equals.
- Ask follow up questions. If a beneficiary says their life is better now that they have land, ask them how it is better. If they say they have more confidence in the future, ask them how and ask them what they mean by “more confidence.” The more details and specifics we have the better the story will be and the more it will “ring true” with our supporters.
- Respect their privacy. Don’t push them to talk about things they are uncomfortable discussing.
- Do not summarize what they are saying. Let their own voice come through in your notes or record the interview so you have a transcript to refer to. This will help each story sound authentic and more powerful.


 **Sample interview questions** for different types of subjects can be found [here](#).

### 3. Protect the storyteller


- At the beginning, make it clear that their experiences will be shared publicly with a global audience so they can choose what information to share.
- Take additional precautions and care for certain marginalized groups and Human Rights and Environmental Defenders who may be exposed to additional risk by sharing their story.
- Do not ask them to provide any information that could put them in danger. They can also keep their story anonymous.
- Do not ask beneficiaries to criticize government officials or government policy.
- Following the interview, be sure you ask local staff or partners if there is any information the beneficiary has provided that may be harmful to them if it were made public.

### 4. Obtain consent

- Reassure them that we will only use the story with their permission, and they can rescind that permission at any time during the interaction/interview or even after we have left. Leave them with contact details so they can reach us if they have any concerns about how we use or share their experience.

 **Resource Card** with Stand for Her Land staff contact information can be found [here](#).

- Explain to them explicitly that it is fine to say no. We will respect their right to refuse to share their story. No pressure.
- You must obtain consent from the person to be photographed and to share their story. Consent may be either verbal or written.

 **Consent form** with explanations of different consent requirements and sample interview questions can be found [here](#).

## 5. Protecting yourself

Research has shown that story gathering for journalists can [affect mental health](#). This shows us it is important to realize signs if you are being impacted negatively by story gathering and know self-care tips, [utilizing resources](#) when needed to support yourself.

### Signs of stress

- You're unable to engage in work as you normally would.
- You can't concentrate in a sustained way.
- You're on edge all the time.

### What to do

- Know your limits – do not engage in story collection if you feel you are being negatively impacted by engaging in the work in this way.
- Take breaks.
- Find a friend or colleague who is a good listener.
- Find a hobby, exercise, spend time with family and friends.
- Seek counseling if you feel overwhelmed.