

Module 7.5: Policy Briefs as a Communication Tool for Development Research

Training on “Multi-market models, Data Management and Policy Engagement for Agricultural & Livestock Sector Policy”

ILRI Policy and Foresight

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Outline

- Definition of a Policy Brief
- Types of policy briefs
- How Effective are they?
- What should a policy brief do?
- Characteristics of Policy briefs
- Steps in Developing a policy briefs
- Group Task

What is a Policy Brief?

- Is a short, to the point, jargon free document written to non-specialists
- Is a concise summary of a particular issue, the policy options to deal with it, and some recommendations on the best option.

For Who?

- Policy briefs are written for a variety of policy actors
- It is aimed at government policymakers and others who are interested in formulating or influencing policy.
- Exactly who a policy brief should be written for depends on the aim of the specific policy brief and the level of its application
- Finding the right policy actor to target is crucial to ensuring that it will be read

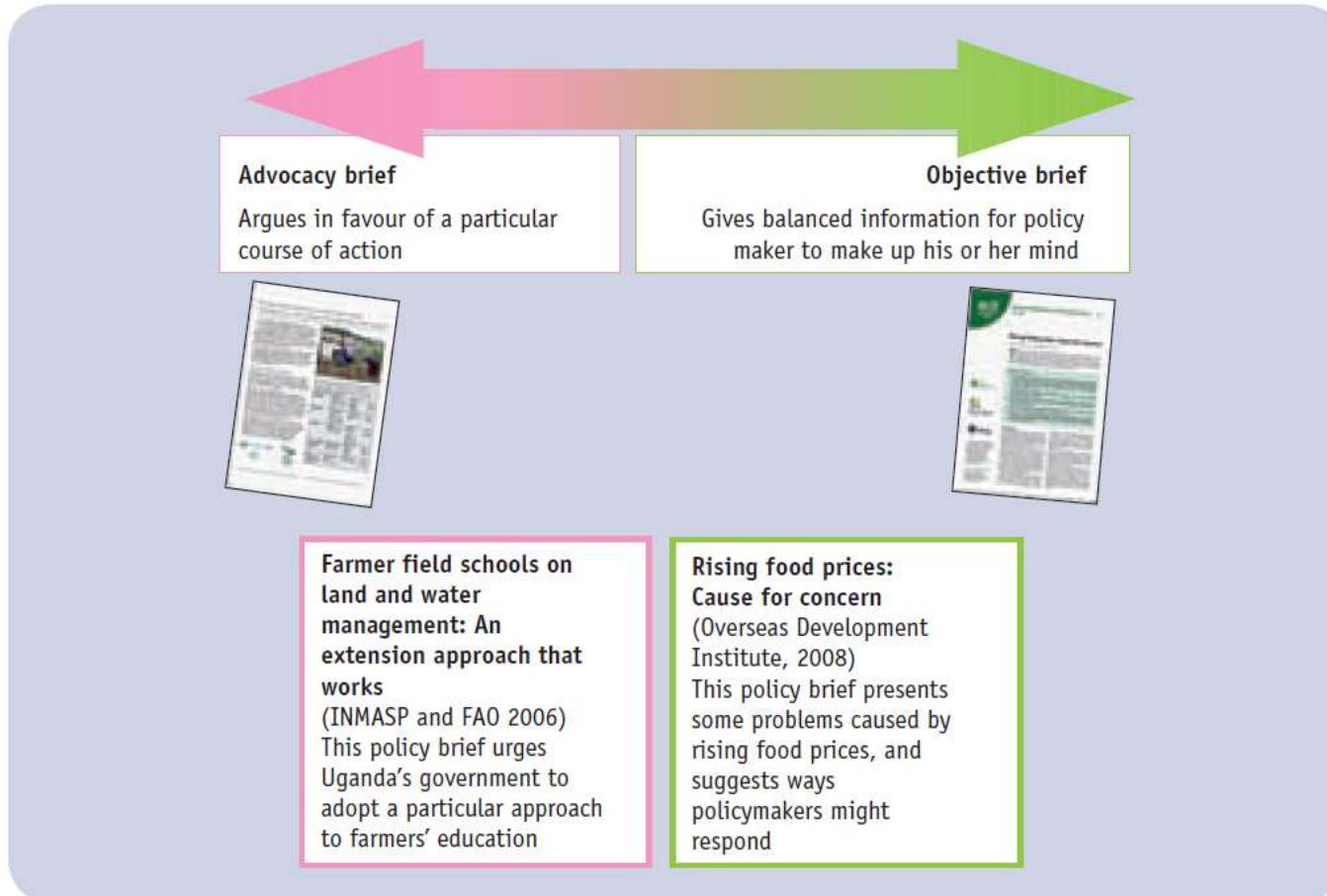
Policy Actors

- Public national level: members of parliament, local politicians, heads of state, civil servants,
- Regional Economic Communities/ Continental level
- Individuals or groups who have access to either public or private policy making processes
 - e.g. lobbyists, advisors to government, trade unions, NGOs, the media and Farmer's/ trader's associations

Types of Policy Briefs (1)

- There are **two basic types** of policy briefs:
 1. an **advocacy brief** argues in favour of a particular course of action.
 2. an **objective brief** gives balanced information for the policymaker to make up his or her mind.

Types of Policy Briefs (2)



Source: FAO,2011

What Should a Policy Brief do?

- A policy brief should:
 - Provide enough **background** for the reader to understand the problem.
 - Convince the reader that the problem must be addressed **urgently**.
 - Provide information about **alternatives** (in an **objective** brief).
 - Provide **evidence** to support one alternative (in an **advocacy** brief).
 - Stimulate the reader to make a **decision**.

How effective are the Policy Briefs?

- Policy actors are busy and do not have time to read full length academic papers
- On average, policy actors spend 30-60 minutes reading a policy brief (Jones and Walsh, 2008)
- Thus, Policy briefs are an effective way of bringing important research to the attention of policy actors because they can be read in a short amount of time
- Making research findings easily digestible increases the likelihood of research being read and acted upon

Why is it Useful to Use Policy Briefs?

- Condensing findings into policy briefs reduces the potential for important research to be lost because the research is in a format that policy actors do not have time to access
- Policy briefs have the potential to reach large audiences through different networks because of their condensed format
- Research has found that a policy actor will pass a policy brief on to colleagues if they perceive themselves to be important (Benyon et al, 2012)
- This snowball effect, where a policy brief travel to an expanding circle of recipients, is only made possible because the research findings are in an accessible and transferable format.

Characteristics of a Policy Brief (1)

- **Focused** on achieving purpose
 - Language, design, argument, evidence...
- **Professional**
 - Not academic
 - Focus: what research findings mean, not how research was done
- Based on **evidence**
 - Rational argument
 - Show consequences of recommended action

Characteristics of a Policy Brief (2)

- **Limited**
 - Focus on a particular problem or issue
- **Succinct**
 - Short and sweet
 - 2 pages (700 words) to 8 pages (3000 words max)
- **Easy to understand**
 - Clear, simple language
 - No jargon

Steps in Developing a Policy Brief

Step One: Planning and Understanding your Audience (1)

- **The first question to answer is:** *what is the aim of my policy brief?*
 - The aim can range from changing policy to raising awareness of an issue.
 - The aim will determine who the correct actors to target are.
 - Figuring out who to target will shape everything from your choice of language to whether or not you present preferred policy options

Step One: Planning and Understanding your Audience (2)

- **The second question to answer is: What does a policy actor want from a policy brief?**
 - Policy actors want relevant solutions to policy problems
 - A policy brief should clearly lay out evidence informed solutions to a problem that a specific actor is interested in.
 - These solutions should be realistic, feasible within the current political climate and cost effective (French-Constant, 2014)
 - Understanding what a given policy actor wants, by putting yourself in their shoes, will help you write a more attractive policy brief

Step One: Planning and Understanding your Audience (3)

- Before starting to write a policy brief it is crucial to appreciate political realities, and any competing policy narratives, to ensure the best chance of achieving influence.
- Work through the 3 stage grid on the following page from left to right, to help you decide upon specific policy actors to target and the best way to navigate your chosen policy area

Step One: Planning and Understanding your Audience (4)

	What you need to know	What you need to do	How to do it
The Policy Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What level of application your recommendations have• How Policy is made within the chosen issues area• Who has power to change or influence policy• If there is a problem with the current policy/ demand for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pick a policy level: local/ national/ Regional/Private• Understand the policy processes, the key players and timelines• Know the powerful policy actors and how to contact them• Pinpoint the gaps in current policy, look for window of opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask yourself who will be affected by the policy change• Research similar examples, explore the policy process from start to finish• Map out key players, look for missing link/ connections you can use or create• Road through current policy on the issue

Step One: Planning and Understanding your Audience (5)

	What you need to know	What you need to do	How to do it
Knowledge Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there are competing narratives • If there are obstacles to the uptake of your recommendations • Why the issue is particularly pertinent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish why your policy option is different and better • Identify cultural practices or widely held vies that may oppose your recommendations • Establish credibility, timeliness and legitimacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify alternative proposals from research institutions or policy makers • List reasons the public, groups or business may reject your proposals • Search the news, policy commitments and current government reviews
Network and Links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate similar campaigns or recommendations around the policy issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work through existing networks • Learn from successful actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build partnerships • Use informal contacts

Key things to consider when constructing a policy brief.

- To achieve its objectives, a policy brief should:

1. **Be short and to the point**

- It should focus on a particular problem or issue. Do not go into all the details. Instead, provide enough information for the reader to understand the issue and come to a decision.

2. **Be based on firm evidence**

- not just one or two experiments or a single year's experience. It should draw evidence from various sources – preferably from several different areas or organizations.

3. **Focus on meanings, not methods**

- Readers are interested in what you found and what you recommend. They do not need to know the details of your methodology.

4. **Relate to the big picture**

- The policy brief may build on context-specific findings, but it should draw conclusions that are more generally applicable.

Dissemination of a Policy Brief

- Ways through which policy briefs can be disseminated during advocacy efforts:
 - Posted online on the campaign or organisational website as a PDF;
 - Sent as a PDF to a partner/stakeholder email list;
 - Post in paper format to a partner/stakeholder mailing list;
 - Used as a supporting document for meetings/lobbying, presentations and press conferences;
 - Shared on social media feeds

Anne to start Here

Structure of a Policy Brief: An example

- Title
- Authors
- Summary
- Recommendation
- Background
- Body
- Evidence
- Examples (boxes)
- Tables and graphics
- Conclusions
- References
- Supporting information
- Acknowledgements

Designing Policy Briefs

- May use a template
- Titles: spice it up
- Sidebars: add depth
- Callouts
- Bulleted lists
- Graphics/photos

Template

- Preparation
- Executive summary
- Introduction
- Approaches and results
- Conclusion
- Implications and recommendations

Template

Preparation

- Who are you writing for and why?
- Decide on the key message and approach

Executive summary

- One or two-sentence overview to entice readers

Template

Introduction

- Why is the topic important?
- Why should people care?
- What were the goals of the research and overall findings?
- Aim: Create curiosity about the rest of the brief

Template

Approaches and results

- Summarise facts, issues and context
- Reduce detail to what reader needs to know
- Provide concrete facts or examples to support assertions

Conclusion

- Base on results
- Aim for concrete solutions

Template

Implications and recommendations

- Implications: What could happen
- Recommendations: What should happen
- State clearly what could/should happen next
- Both flow from conclusion
- Support both with evidence

Good Policy Briefs

- Short, a little repetitive (policy makers just scan so you want main points to stick)
- Use common terms
- Spell out acronyms
- Address a social problem
- Clearly state policy preference (why it is the best solution for the outlined problem)

Check Your Work

- Conduct 20-second test: what stands out?
- Is it as user friendly as possible?
- Remove jargon
- Limit statistics
- Check arguments, proof, persuasion

Group Task

- Form groups of four to five people, choose a group facilitator and a presenter
- Choose an issue that could be developed into a policy brief
- Identify the audience for the brief
- Note main points to include in the brief
- Draft an outline of the brief and list policy issues and policy recommendations.
- **Duration:** 90 minutes:

References

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